Garrison's Finish, A Romance of the Race−Course

W. B. M. Ferguson

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CHAPTER I. A SHATTERED IDOL.

As he made his way out of the paddock Garrison carefully tilted his bag of Durham into the curved rice−paper held between nicotine−stained finger and thumb, then deftly rolled his "smoke" with the thumb and forefinger, while tying the bag with practised right hand and even white teeth. Once his reputation had been as spotless as those teeth.

He smiled cynically as he shouldered his way through the slowly moving crowd−−that kaleidoscope of the humanities which congregate but do not blend; which coagulate wherever the trial of science, speed, and stamina serves as an excuse for putting fortune to the test.

It was a cynical crowd, a quiet crowd, a sullen crowd. Those who had won, through sheer luck, bottled their joy until they could give it vent in a safer atmosphere−−one not so resentful. For it had been a hard day for the field. The favorite beaten in the stretch, choked off, outside the money−−−−

Garrison gasped as the rushing simulacra of the Carter Handicap surged to his beating brain; that brain at bursting pressure. It had recorded so many things−−recorded faithfully so many, many things he would give anything to forget.

He was choking, smothering−−smothering with shame, hopelessness, despair. He must get away; get away to breathe, to think; get away out of it all; get away anywhere−−oblivion.

To the jibes, the sneers flung at him, the innuendos, the open insults, and worst of all, the sad looks of those few friends who gave their friendship without conditions, he was not indifferent, though he seemed so. God knows how he felt it at all. And all the more so because he had once been so high. Now his fall was so low, so pitifully low; so contemptible, so complete.

He knew what the action of the Jockey Club would be. The stewards would do only one thing. His license would be revoked. To−day had seen his finish. This, the ten−thousand dollar Carter Handicap, had seen his final slump to the bottom of the scale. Worse. It had seen him a pauper, ostracized; an unclean thing in the mouth of friend and foe alike. The sporting world was through with him at last. And when the sporting world is through−−

Again Garrison laughed harshly, puffing at his cigarette, dragging its fumes into his lungs in a fierce desire to finish his physical cataclysm with his moral. Yes, it had been his last chance. He, the popular idol, had been going lower and lower in the scale, but the sporting world had been loyal, as it always is to "class." He had been "class," and they had stuck to him.

Then when he began to go back−− No; worse. Not that. They said he had gone crooked. That was it. Crooked as Doyers Street, they said; throwing every race; standing in with his owner to trim the bookies, and they couldn't stand for that. Sport was sport. But they had been loyal. They had warned, implored, begged. What was the use soaking a pile by dirty work? Why not ride straight−−ride as he could, as he did, as it had been bred in him to? Any money, any honor was his. Instead−−

Garrison, stung to madness by retrospect, humped his way through the crowd at the gates of the Aqueduct. There was not a friendly eye in that crowd. He stuffed his ears with indifference. He would not bear their remarks as

they recognized him. He summoned all his nerve to look them in the face unflinchingly−−that nerve that had been frayed to ribbons.

And then he heard quick footsteps behind him; a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder, and he was twisted about like a chip. It was his stable owner, his face flushed with passion and drink. Waterbury was stingy of cash, but not of words.

"I've looked for you," he whipped out venomously, his large hands ravenous for something to rend. "Now I've caught you. Who was in with you on that dirty deal? Answer, you cur! Spit it out before the crowd. Was it me? Was it me?" he reiterated in a frenzy, taking a step forward for each word, his bad grammar coming equally to the fore.

The crowd surged back. Owner and jockey were face to face. "When thieves fall out!" they thought; and they waited for the fun. Something was due them. It came in a flash. Waterbury shot out his big fist, and little Garrison thumped on the turf with a bang, a thin streamer of blood threading its way down his gray−white face.

"You miserable little whelp!" howled his owner. "You've dishonored me. You threw that race, damn you! That's what I get for giving you a chance when you couldn't get a mount anywhere." His long pent−up venom was unleashed. "You threw it. You've tried to make me party to your dirty work−−me, me, me!"−−he thumped his heaving chest. "But you can't heap your filth on me. I'm done with you. You're a thief, a cur−−"

"Hold on," cut in Garrison. He had risen slowly, and was dabbing furtively at his nose with a silk red−and−blue handkerchief−−the Waterbury colors.

"Just a minute," he added, striving to keep his voice from sliding the scale. He was horribly calm, but his gray eyes were quivering as was his lip. "I didn't throw it. I−−I didn't throw it. I was sick. I−−I've been sick. I−−I−−−−" Then, for he was only a boy with a man's burdens, his lip began to quiver pitifully; his voice shrilled out and his words came tumbling forth like lava; striving to make up by passion and reiteration what they lacked in logic and coherency. "I'm not a thief. I'm not. I'm honest. I don't know how it happened. Everything became a blur in the stretch. You−−you've called me a liar, Mr. Waterbury. You've called me a thief. You struck me. I know you can lick me," he shrilled. "I'm dishonored−−down and out. I know you can lick me, but, by the Lord, you'll do it here and now! You'll fight me. I don't like you. I never liked you. I don't like your face. I don't like your hat, and here's your damn colors in your face." He fiercely crumpled the silk handkerchief and pushed it swiftly into Waterbury's glowering eye.

Instantly there was a mix−up. The crowd was blood−hungry. They had paid for sport of some kind. There would be no crooked work in this deal. Lustfully they watched. Then the inequality of the boy and the man was at length borne in on them, and it roused their stagnant sense of fair play.

Garrison, a small hell let loose, had risen from the turf for the third time! His face was a smear of blood, venom, and all the bandit passions. Waterbury, the gentleman in him soaked by the taint of a foisted dishonor and his fighting blood roused, waited with clenched fists. As Garrison hopped in for the fourth time, the older man feinted quickly, and then swung right and left savagely.

The blows were caught on the thick arm of a tan box−coat. A big hand was placed over Waterbury's face and he was given a shove backward. He staggered for a ridiculously long time, and then, after an unnecessary waste of minutes, sat down. The tan overcoat stood over him. It was Jimmy Drake, and the chameleonlike crowd applauded.

Jimmy was a popular book−maker with educated fists. The crowd surged closer. It looked as if the fight might change from bantam−heavy to heavy−heavy. And the odds were on Drake.

"If yeh want to fight kids," said the book−maker, in his slow, drawling voice, "wait till they're grown up. Mebbe then yeh'll change your mind."

Waterbury was on his feet now. He let loose some vitriolic verbiage, using Drake as the objective−point. He told him to mind his own business, or that he would make it hot for him. He told him that Garrison was a thief and cur; and that he would have no book−maker and tout−−

"Hold on," said Drake. "You're gettin' too flossy right there. When you call me a tout you're exceedin' the speed limit." He had an uncomfortable steady blue eye and a face like a snow−shovel. "I stepped in here not to argue morals, but to see fair play. If Billy Garrison's done dirt−−and I admit it looks close like it−−I'll bet that your stable, either trainer or owner, shared the mud−pie, all right−−"

"I've stood enough of those slurs," cried Waterbury, in a frenzy. "You lie."

Instantly Drake's large face stiffened like cement, and his overcoat was on the ground.

"That's a fighting word where I come from," he said grimly.

But before Drake could square the insult a crowd of Waterbury's friends swirled up in an auto, and half a dozen peacemakers, mutual acquaintances, together with two somnambulistic policemen, managed to preserve the remains of the badly shattered peace. Drake sullenly resumed his coat, and Waterbury was driven off, leaving a back draft of impolite adjectives and vague threats against everybody. The crowd drifted away. It was a fitting finish for the scotched Carter Handicap.

Meanwhile, Garrison, taking advantage of the switching of the lime− light from himself to Drake, had dodged to oblivion in the crowd.

"I guess I don't forget Jimmy Drake," he mused grimly to himself. "He's straight cotton. The only one who didn't give me the double− cross out and out. Bud, Bud!" he declared to himself, "this is sure the wind−up. You've struck bed−rock and the tide's coming in−−hard. You're all to the weeds. Buck up, buck up," he growled savagely, in fierce contempt. "What're you dripping about?" He had caught a tear burning its way to his eyes−−eyes that had never blinked under Waterbury's savage blows. "What if you are ruled off! What if you are called a liar and crook; thrown the game to soak a pile? What if you couldn't get a clotheshorse to run in a potato−race? Buck up, buck up, and plug your cotton pipe. They say you're a crook. Well, be one. Show 'em you don't care a damn. You're down and out, anyway. What's honesty, anyway, but whether you got the goods or ain't? Shake the bunch. Get out before you're kicked out. Open a pool−room like all the has−beens and trim the suckers right, left, and down the middle. Money's the whole thing. Get it. Don't mind how you do, but just get it. You'll be honest enough for ten men then. Anyway, there's no one cares a curse how you pan out−−"

He stopped, and his face slowly relaxed. The hard, vindictive look slowly faded from his narrowed eyes.

"Sis," he said softly. "Sis−−I was going without saying good−by. Forgive me."

He swung on his heel, and with hunched shoulders made his way back to Aqueduct. Waterbury's training−quarters were adjacent, and, after lurking furtively about like some hunted animal, Garrison summoned all his nerve and walked boldly in.

The only stable−boy about was one with a twisted mouth and flaming red hair, which he was always curling; a remarkably thin youth he was, addicted to green sweaters and sentimental songs. He was singing one now in a key entirely original with himself. "Red's" characteristic was that when happy he wore a face like a tomb−stone. When sad, the sentimental songs were always in evidence.

"Hello, Red!" said Garrison gruffly. He had been Red's idol once. He was quite prepared now, however, to see the other side of the curtain. He was no longer an idol to any one.

"Hello!" returned Red non−committally.

"Where's Crimmins?"

"In there." Red nodded to the left where were situated the stalls. "Gettin' Sis ready for the Belmont opening."

"Riding for him now?"

"Yeh. Promised a mount in th' next run−off. 'Bout time, I guess."

There was silence. Garrison pictured to himself the time when he had won his first mount. How long ago that was! Time is reckoned by events, not years. How glorious the future had seemed! He slowly seated himself on a box by the side of Red and laid a hand on the other's thin leg.

"Kid," he said, and his voice quivered, "you know I wish you luck. It's a great game−−the greatest game in the world, if you play it right." He blundered to silence as his own condition surged over him.

Red was knocking out his shabby heels against the box in an agony of confusion. Then he grew emboldened by the other's dejected mien. "No, I'd never throw no race," he said judicially. "It don't pay−−"

"Red," broke in Garrison harshly, "you don't believe I threw that race? Honest, I'm square. Why, I was up on Sis−−Sis whom I love, Red−− honest, I was sure of the race. Dead sure. I hadn't much money, but I played every cent I had on her. I lost more than any one. I lost−− everything. See," he ran on feverishly, glad of the opportunity to vindicate himself, if only to a stable−boy. "I guess the stewards will let the race stand, even if Waterbury does kick. Rogue won square enough."

"Yeh, because yeh choked Sis off in th' stretch. She could ha' slept home a winner, an' yeh know it, Billy," said Red, with sullen regret.

There was a time when he never would have dared to call Garrison by his Christian name. Disgrace is a great leveler. Red grew more conscious of his own rectitude.

"I ain't knockin' yeh, Billy," he continued, speaking slowly, to lengthen the pleasure of thus monopolizing the pulpit. "What have I to say? Yeh can ride rings round any jockey in the States−−at least, yeh could." And then, like his kind, Red having nothing to say, proceeded to say it.

"But it weren't your first thrown race, Billy. Yeh know that. I know how yeh doped it out. I know we ain't got much time to make a pile if we keep at th' game. Makin' weight makes yeh a lunger. We all die of th' hurry−up stunt. An' yeh're all right to your owner so long's yeh make good. After that it's twenty−three, forty−six, double time for yours. I know what th' game is when you've hit th' top of th' pile. It's a fast mob, an' yeh got to keep up with th' band−wagon. You're makin' money fast and spendin' it faster. Yeh think it'll never stop comin' your way. Yeh dip into everythin'. Then yeh wake up some day without your pants, and yeh breeze about to make th' coin again. There's a lot of wise eggs handin' out crooked advice−−they take the coin and you th' big stick. Yeh know, neither Crimmins or the Old Man was in on your deals, but yeh had it all framed up with outside guys. Yeh bled the field to soak a pile. See, Bill," he finished eloquently, "it weren't your first race."

"I know, I know," said Garrison grimly. "Cut it out. You don't understand, and it's no good talking. When you have reached the top of the pile, Red, you'll travel with as fast a mob as I did. But I never threw a race in my life.

That's on the level. Somehow I always get blind dizzy in the stretch, and it passed when I crossed the post. I never knew when it was coming on. I felt all right other times. I had to make the coin, as you say, for I lived up to every cent I made. No, I never threw a race−− Yes, you can smile, Red," he finished savagely. "Smile if your face wants stretching. But that's straight. Maybe I've gone back. Maybe I'm all in. Maybe I'm a crook. But there'll come a time, it may be one year, it may be a hundred, when I'll come back−− clean. I'll make good, and if you're on the track, Red, I'll show you that Garrison can ride a harder, straighter race than you or any one. This isn't my finish. There's a new deal coming to me, and I'm going to see that I get it."

Without heeding Red's pessimistic reply. Garrison turned on his heel and entered the stall where Sis, the Carter Handicap favorite, was being boxed for the coming Belmont opening.

Crimmins, the trainer, looked up sharply as Garrison entered. He was a small, hard man, with a face like an ice−pick and eyes devoid of pupils, which fact gave him a stony, blank expression. In fact, he had been likened once, by Jimmy Drake, to a needle with two very sharp eyes, and the simile was merited. But he was an excellent flesh handler; and Waterbury, an old ex−bookie, knew what he was about when he appointed him head of the stable.

"Hello, Dan!" said Garrison, in the same tone he had used to greet Red. He and the trainer had been thick, but it was a question whether that thickness would still be there. Garrison, alone in the world since he had run away from his home years ago, had no owner as most jockeys have, and Crimmins had filled the position of mentor. In fact, he had trained him, though Garrison's riding ability was not a foreign graft, but had been bred in the bone.

"Hello!" echoed Crimmins, coming forward. His manner was cordial, and Garrison's frozen heart warmed. "Of course you'll quit the game," ran on the trainer, after an exchange of commonalities. "You're queered for good. You couldn't get a mount anywhere. I ain't saying anything about your pulling Sis, 'cause there ain't no use now. But you've got me and Mr. Waterbury in trouble. It looked as if we were in on the deal. I should be sore on you, Garrison, but I can't be. And why? Because Dan Crimmins has a heart, and when he likes a man he likes him even if murder should come 'atween. Dan Crimmins ain't a welcher. You've done me as dirty a deal as one man could hand another, but instead of getting hunk, what does Dan Crimmins do? Why, he agitates his brain thinking of a way for you to make a good living, Bud. That's Dan Crimmins' way."

Garrison was silent. He did not try to vindicate himself. He had given that up as hopeless. He was thinking, oblivious to Crimmins' eulogy.

"Yeh," continued the upright trainer; "that's Dan Crimmins' way. And after much agitating of my brain I've hit on a good money−making scheme for you, Bud."

"Eh?" asked Garrison.

"Yeh." And the trainer lowered his voice. "I know a man that's goin' to buck the pool−rooms in New York. He needs a chap who knows the ropes−−one like you−−and I gave him your name. I thought it would come in handy. I saw your finish a long way off. This fellah's in the Western Union; an operator with the pool−room lines. You can run the game. It's easy. See, he holds back the returns, tipping you the winners, and you skin round and lay the bets before he loosens up on the returns. It's easy money; easy and sure."

Again Garrison was silent. But now a smile was on his face. He had been asking himself what was the use of honesty.

"What d'you say?" asked Crimmins, his head on one side, his small eyes calculating.

The smile was still twisting Garrison's lip. "I was going to light out, anyway," he answered slowly. "I'll answer you when I say good−by to Sis."

"All right. She's over there."

The handlers fell back in silence as Garrison approached the filly. He was softly humming the music−hall song, "Good−by, Sis." With all his faults, the handlers to a man liked Garrison. They knew how he had professed to love the filly, and now they sensed that he would prefer to say his farewell without an audience. Sis whinnied as Garrison raised her small head and looked steadily into her soft, dark eyes.

"Sis," he said slowly, "it's good−by. We've been pals, you and I; pals since you were first foaled. You're the only girl I have; the only sweetheart I have; the only one to say good−by to me. Do you care?"

The filly nuzzled at his shoulder. "I've done you dirt to−day," continued the boy a little unsteadily. "It was your race from the start. You know it; I know it. I can't explain now, Sis, how it came about. But I didn't go to do it. I didn't, girlie. You understand, don't you? I'll square that deal some day, Sis. I'll come back and square it. Don't forget me. I won't forget you−−I can't. You don't think me a crook, Sis? Say you don't. Say it," he pleaded fiercely, raising her head.

The filly understood. She lipped his face, whinnying lovingly. In a moment Garrison's nerve had been swept away, and, arms flung about the dark, arched neck, he was sobbing his heart out on the glossy coat; sobbing like a little child.

How long he stayed there, the filly nuzzling him like a mother, he did not know. It seemed as if he had reached sanctuary after an aeon of chaos. He had found love, understanding in a beast of the field. Where his fellow man had withheld, the filly had given her all and questioned not. For Sis, by Rex out of Reine, two−year filly, blooded stock, was a thoroughbred. And a thoroughbred, be he man, beast, or bird, does not welch on his hand. A stranger only in prosperity; a chum in adversity. He does not question; he gives.

"Well," said Crimmins, as Garrison slowly emerged from the stall, "you take the partin' pretty next your skin. What's your answer to the game I spoke of? Mulled it over? It don't take much thinking, I guess." He was paring his mourning fringed nails with great indifference.

"No, it doesn't take much thinking, Dan," agreed Garrison slowly, his eyes narrowed. "I'll rot first before I touch it."

"Yes?" The trainer raised his thick eyebrows and lowered his thin voice. "Kind of tony, ain't yeh? Beggars can't be choosers."

"They needn't be crooks, Dan. I know you meant it all right enough," said Garrison bitterly. "You think I'm crooked, and that I'd take anything−−anything; dirt of any kind, so long's there's money under it."

"Aw, sneeze!" said Crimmins savagely. Then he checked himself. "It ain't my game. I only knew the man. There's nothing in it for me. Suit yourself;" and he shrugged his shoulders. "It ain't Crimmins' way to hump his services on any man. Take it or leave it."

"You wanted me to go crooked, Dan," said Garrison steadily. "Was it friendship−−"

"Huh! Wanted you to go crooked?" flashed the trainer with a sneer. "What are y' talking about? Ain't yeh a welcher now? Ain't yeh crooked −−hair, teeth, an' skin?"

"You mean that, Dan?" Garrison's face was white. "You've trained me, and yet you, too, believe I was in on those lost races? You know I lost every cent on Sis−−"

"It ain't one race, it's six," snorted Crimmins. "It's Crimmins' way to agitate his brain for a friend, but it ain't his way to be a plumb fool. You can't shoot that bull con into me, Bud. I know you. I give you an offer, friend and friend. You turn it down and 'cuse me of making you play crooked. I'm done with you. It ain't Crimmins' way."

Billy Garrison eyed his former trainer and mentor steadily for a long time. His lip was quivering.

"Damn your way!" he said hoarsely at length, and turned on his heel. His hands were deep in his pockets, his shoulders hunched as he swung out of the stable. He was humming over and over the old music−hall favorite, "Good−by, Sis"−−humming in a desperate effort to keep his nerve. Billy Garrison had touched bottom in the depths.

CHAPTER II. THE HEAVY HAND OF FATE.

Garrison left Long Island for New York that night. When you are hard hit the soul suffers a reflex−action. It recoils to its native soil. New York was Garrison's home. He was a product of its sporting soil. He loved the Great White Way. But he had drunk in the smell, the intoxication of the track with his mother's milk. She had been from the South; the land of straight women, straight men, straight living, straight riding. She had brought blood−−good, clean blood−−to the Garrison−Loring entente cordiale−−a polite definition of a huge mistake.

From his mother Garrison had inherited his cool head, steady eye, and the intuitive hands that could compel horse−flesh like a magnet. From her he had inherited a peculiar recklessness and swift daring. From his father−−well, Garrison never liked to talk about his father. His mother was a memory; his father a blank. He was a good−looking, bad− living sprig of a straight family−tree. He had met his wife at the New Orleans track, where her father, an amateur horse−owner, had two entries. And she had loved him. There is good in every one. Perhaps she had discovered it in Garrison's father where no one else had.

Her family threw her off−−at least, when she came North with her husband, she gradually dropped out of her home circle; dropped of her own volition. Perhaps she was afraid that the good she had first discovered in her husband had been seen through a magnifying−glass. Her life with Garrison was a constant whirlwind of changing scene and fortune−−the perpetual merry−−or sorry−−go−round of a book−maker; going from track to track, and from bad to worse. His friends said he was unlucky; his enemies, that the only honest thing in him was his cough. He had incipient consumption. So Mrs. Garrison's life, such as it was, had been lived in a trunk−−when it wasn't held for hotel bills −−but she had lived out her mistake gamely.

When the boy came−−Billy−−she thought Heaven had smiled upon her at last. But it was only hell. Garrison loved his wife, for love is not a quality possessed only by the virtuous. Sometimes the worst man can love the most−−in his selfish way. And Garrison resented the arrival of Billy. He resented sharing his wife's affection with the boy.

In time he came to hate his son. Billy's education was chiefly constitutional. There wasn't the money to pay for his education for any length of time. His mother had to fight for it piecemeal. So he took his education in capsules; receiving a dose in one city and jumping to another for the next, according as a track opened.

He knew his father never cared for him, though his mother tried her best to gloze over the indifference of her husband. But Billy understood and resented it. He and his mother loved in secret. When she died, her mistake lived out to the best of her ability, young Garrison promptly ran away from his circulating home. He knew nothing of his father's people; nothing of his mother's. He was a young derelict; his inherent sense of honor and an

instinctive desire for cleanliness kept him off the rocks.

The years between the time he left home and the period when he won his first mount on the track, his natural birthright, Billy Garrison often told himself he would never care to look back upon. He was young, and he did not know that years of privation, of hardship, of semi− starvation−−but with an insistent ambition goading one on−−are not years to eliminate in retrospect. They are years to reverence.

He did not know that prosperity, not adversity, is the supreme test. And when the supreme test came; when the goal was attained, and the golden sun of wealth, fame, and honor beamed down upon him, little Billy Garrison was found wanting. He was swamped by the flood. He went the way of many a better, older, wiser man−−the easy, rose−strewn way, big and broad and scented, that ends in a bottomless abyss filled with bitter tears and nauseating regrets; the abyss called, "It might have been."

Where he had formerly shunned vice by reason of adversity and poverty making it appear so naked, revolting, unclean, foreign to his state, prosperity had now decked it out in her most sensuous, alluring garments. Red's moral diatribe had been correct. Garrison had followed the band−wagon to the finish, never asking where it might lead; never caring. He had youth, reputation, money−−he could never overdraw that account. And so the modern pied piper played, and little Garrison blindly danced to the music with the other fools; danced on and on until he was swallowed up in the mountain.

Then he awoke too late, as they all awake; awoke to find that his vigor had been sapped by early suppers and late breakfasts; his finances depleted by slow horses and fast women; his nerve frayed to ribbons by gambling. And then had come that awful morning when he first commenced to cough. Would he, could he, ever forget it?

Billy Garrison huddled down now in the roaring train as he thought of it. It was always before him, a demoniacal obsession−−that morning when he coughed, and a bright speck of arterial blood stood out like a tardy danger−signal against the white of his handkerchief; it was leering at him, saying: "I have been here always, but you have chosen to be blind."

Consumption−−the jockey's Old Man of the Sea−−had arrived at last. He had inherited the seeds from his father; he had assiduously cultivated them by making weight against all laws of nature; by living against laws of God and man. Now they had been punished as they always are. Nature had struck, struck hard.

That had been the first warning, and Garrison did not heed it. Instead of quitting the game, taking what little assets he had managed to save from the holocaust, and living quietly, striving for a cure, he kicked over the traces. The music of the pied piper was still in his ears; twisting his brain. He gritted his teeth. He would not give in. He would show that he was master. He would fight this insidious vitality vampire; fight and conquer.

Besides, he had to make money. The thought of going back to a pittance a year sickened him. That pittance had once been a fortune to him. But his appetite had not been gorged, satiated; rather, it had the resilience of crass youth; jumping the higher with every indulgence. It increased in ratio with his income. He had no one to guide him; no one to compel advice with a whip, if necessary. He knew it all. So he kept his curse secret. He would pile up one more fortune, retain it this time, and then retire. But nature had balked. The account−−youth, reputation, money−−was overthrown at last.

Came a day when in the paddock Dan Crimmins had seen that fleck of arterial blood on the handkerchief. Then Dan shared the secret. He commenced to doctor Garrison. Before every race the jockey had a drug. But despite it he rode worse than an exercise−boy; rode despicably. The Carter Handicap had finished his deal. And with it Garrison had lost his reputation.

He had done many things in his mad years of prosperity−−the mistakes, the faults of youth. But Billy Garrison was right when he said he was square. He never threw a race in his life. Horseflesh, the "game," was sacred to him. He had gone wild, but never crooked. But the world now said otherwise, and it is only the knave, the saint, and the fool who never heed what the world says.

And so at twenty−two, when the average young man is leaving college for the real taste of life, little Garrison had drained it to the dregs; the lees tasted bitter in his mouth.

For obvious reasons Garrison had not chosen his usual haven, the smoking−car, on the train. It was filled to overflowing from the Aqueduct track, and he knew that his name would be mentioned frequently and in no complimentary manner. His soul had been stripped bare, sensitive to a breath. It would writhe under the mild compassion of a former admirer as much as it would under the open jibes of his enemies. He had plenty of enemies. Every "is," "has−been," "would−be," "will−be" has enemies. It is well they have. Nothing is lost in nature. Enemies make you; not your friends.

Garrison had selected a car next to the smoker and occupied a seat at the forward end, his back to the engine. His hands were deep in his pockets, his shoulders hunched, his eyes staring straight ahead under the brim of his slouch−hat. His eyes were looking inward, not outward; they did not see his surroundings; they were looking in on the ruin of his life.

The present, the future, did not exist; only the past lived−−lived with all the animalism of a rank growth. He was too far in the depths to even think of reerecting his life's structure. His cough was troubling him; his brain throbbing, throbbing.

Then, imperceptibly, as Garrison's staring, blank eyes slowly turned from within to without, occasioned by a violent jolt of the train, something flashed across their retina; they became focused, and a message was wired to his brain. Instantly his eyes dropped, and he fidgeted uncomfortably in his seat.

He found he had been staring into a pair of slate−gray eyes; staring long, rudely, without knowing it. Their owner was occupying a seat three removed down the aisle. As he was seated with his back to the engine, he was thus confronting them.

She was a young girl with indefinite hair, white skin coated with tan, and a very steady gaze. She would always be remembered for her eyes. Garrison instantly decided that they were beautiful. He furtively peered up from under his hat. She was still looking at him fixedly without the slightest embarrassment.

Garrison was not susceptible to the eternal feminine. He was old with a boy's face. Yet he found himself taking snap−shots at the girl opposite. She was reading now. Unwittingly he tried to criticize every feature. He could not. It was true that they were far from being regular; her nose went up like her short upper lip; her chin and under lip said that she had a temper and a will of her own. He noted also that she had a mole under her left eye. But one always returned from the facial peregrinations to her eyes. After a long stare Garrison caught himself wishing that he could kiss those eyes. That threw him into a panic.

"Be sad, be sad," he advised himself gruffly. "What right have you to think? You're rude to stare, even if she is a queen. She wouldn't wipe her boots on you."

Having convinced himself that he should not think, Garrison promptly proceeded to speculate. How tall was she? He likened her flexible figure to Sis. Sis was his criterion. Then, for the brain is a queer actor, playing clown when it should play tragedian, Garrison discovered that he was wishing that the girl would not be taller than his own five feet two.

"As if it mattered a curse," he laughed contemptuously.

His eyes were transferred to the door. It had opened, and with the puff of following wind there came a crowd of men, emerging like specters from the blue haze of the smoker. They had evidently been "smoked out." Some of them were sober.

Garrison half−lowered his head as the crowd entered. He did not wish to be recognized. The men, laughing noisily, crowded into what seats were unoccupied. There was one man more than the available space, and he started to occupy the half−vacant seat beside the girl with the slate−colored eyes. He was slightly more than fat, and the process of making four feet go into two was well under way when the girl spoke.

"Pardon me, this seat is reserved."

"Don't look like it," said Behemoth.

"But I say it is. Isn't that enough?"

"Full house; no reserved seats," observed the man placidly, squeezing in.

The girl flashed a look at him and then was silent. A spot of red was showing through the tan on her cheek; Garrison was watching her under his hat−brim. He saw the spot on her cheeks slowly grow and her eyes commence to harden. He saw that she was being annoyed surreptitiously and quietly. Behemoth was a Strephon, and he thought that he had found his Chloe.

Garrison pulled his hat well down over his face, rose negligently, and entered the next car. He waited there a moment and then returned. He swung down the aisle. As he approached the girl he saw her draw back. Strephon's foot was deliberately pressing Chloe's.

Garrison avoided a scene for the girl's sake. He tapped the man on the shoulder.

"Pardon me. My seat, if you please. I left it for the smoker."

The man looked up, met Garrison's cold, steady eyes, rose awkwardly, muttered something about not knowing it was reserved, and squeezed in with two of his companions farther down the aisle.

Garrison sat down without glancing at the girl. He became absorbed in the morning paper−−twelve hours old.

Silence ensued. The girl had understood the fabrication instantly. She waited, her antagonism roused, to see whether Garrison would try to take advantage of his courtesy. When he was entirely oblivious of her presence she commenced to inspect him covertly out of the corners of her gray eyes. After five minutes she spoke.

"Thank you," she said simply. Her voice was soft and throaty.

Garrison absently raised his hat and was about to resume the defunct paper when he was interrupted. A hand reached over the back of the seat, and before he had thought of resistance, he was flung violently down the aisle.

He heard a great laugh from the Behemoth's friends. He rose slowly, his fighting blood up. Then he became aware that his ejector was not one of the crowd, but a newcomer; a tall man with a fierce white mustache and imperial; dressed in a frock coat and wide, black slouch hat. He was talking.

"How dare you insult my daughter, suh?" he thundered. "By thunder, suh, I've a good mind to make you smart right proper for your lack of manners, suh! How dare you, suh? You−−you contemptible little−−little snail, suh! Snail, suh!" And quite satisfied at thus selecting the most fitting word, glaring fiercely and twisting his white mustache and imperial with a very martial air, he seated himself majestically by his daughter.

Garrison recognized him. He was Colonel Desha, of Kentucky, whose horse, Rogue, had won the Carter Handicap through Garrison's poor riding of the favorite, Sis. His daughter was expostulating with him, trying to insert the true version of the affair between her father's peppery exclamations of "Occupying my seat!" "I saw him raise his hat to you!" "How dare he?" "Complain to the management against these outrageous flirts!" Abominable manners!" etc., etc.

Meanwhile Garrison had silently walked into the smoker. He tried to dismiss the incident from his mind, but it stuck; stuck as did the girl's eyes.

At the next station a newsboy entered the car. Garrison idly bought a paper. It was full of the Carter Handicap, giving both Crimmins' and Waterbury's version of the affair. Public opinion, it seemed, was with them. They had protested the race. It had been thrown, and Garrison's dishonor now was national.

There was a column of double−leaded type on the first page, run in after the making up of the paper's body, and Garrison's bitter eyes negligently scanned it. But at the first word he straightened up as if an electric shock had passed through him.

"Favorite for the Carter Handicap Poisoned," was the great, staring title. The details were meager; brutally meager. They were to the effect that some one had gained access to the Waterbury stable and had fed Sis strychnine.

Garrison crumpled up the paper and buried his face in his hands, making no pretense of hiding his misery. She had been more than a horse to him; she had been everything.

"Sis−−Sis," he whispered over and over again, the tears burning to his eyes, his throat choking: "I didn't get a chance to square the deal. Sis−−Sis it was good−by−−good−by forever."

CHAPTER III. BEGINNING A NEW LIFE.

On arriving at the Thirty−fourth Street ferry Garrison idly boarded a Forty−second Street car, drifting aimlessly with the main body of Long Island passengers going westward to disintegrate, scatter like the fragments of a bursting bomb, at Broadway. A vague sense of proprietorship, the kiss of home, momentarily smoothed out the wrinkles in his soul as the lights of the Great White Way beamed down a welcome upon him. Then it was slowly borne in on him that, though with the crowd, he was not of it. His mother, the great cosmopolitan city, had repudiated him. For Broadway is a place for presents or futures; she has no welcome for pasts. With her, charity begins at home−−and stays there.

Garrison drifted hither and thither with every cross eddy of humanity, and finally dropped into the steady pulsating, ever−moving tide on the west curb going south−−the ever restless tide that never seems to reach the open sea. As he passed one well−known café after another his mind carried him back over the waste stretch of "It might have been" to the time when he was their central figure. On every block he met acquaintances who had even toasted him−−with his own wine; toasted him as the kingpin. Now they either nodded absently or became suddenly vitally interested in a show−window or the new moon.

All sorts and conditions of men comprised that list of former friends, and not one now stepped out and wrung his

hand; wrung it as they had only the other day, when they thought he would retrieve his fortunes by pulling off the Carter Handicap. They did not wring it now, for there was nothing to wring out of it. Now he was not only hopelessly down in the muck of poverty, but hopelessly dishonored. And gentlemanly appearing blackguards, who had left all honesty in the cradle, now wouldn't for the world be seen talking on Broadway to little Billy Garrison, the horribly crooked jockey.

It wouldn't do at all. First, because their own position was so precarious that a breath would send it tottering. Secondly, because Billy might happen to inconveniently remember all the sums of money he had "loaned" them time and again. Actual necessity might tend to waken his memory. For they had modernized the proverb into: "A friend in need is a friend to steer clear of."

A lesson in mankind and the making had been coming to Garrison, and in that short walk down Broadway he appreciated it to the uttermost.

"Think I had the mange or the plague," he mused grimly, as a plethoric ex−alderman passed and absent−mindedly forgot to return his bow−−an alderman who had been tipped by Garrison in his palmy days to a small fortune. "What if I had thrown the race?" he ran on bitterly. "Many a jockey has, and has lived to tell it. No, there's more behind it all than that. I've passed sports who wouldn't turn me down for that. But I suppose Bender" (the plethoric alderman) "staked a pot on Sis, she being the favorite and I up. And when he loses he forgets the times I tipped him to win. Poor old Sis!" he added softly, as the fact of her poisoning swept over him. "The only thing that cared for me−−gone! I'm down on my luck−−hard. And it's not over yet. I feel it in the air. There's another fall coming to me."

He shivered through sheer nervous exhaustion, though the night was warm for mid−April. He rummaged in his pocket.

"One dollar in bird−seed," he mused grimly, counting the coins under the violet glare of a neighboring arc light. "All that's between me and the morgue. Did I ever think it would come to that? Well, I need a bracer. Here goes ten for a drink. Can only afford bar whisky."

He was standing on the corner of Twenty−fifth Street, and unconsciously he turned into the café of the Hoffman House. How well he knew its every square inch! It was filled with the usual sporting crowd, and Garrison entered as nonchalantly as if his arrival would merit the same commotion as in the long ago. He no longer cared. His depression had dropped from him. The lights, the atmosphere, the topics of conversation, discussion, caused his blood to flow like lava through his veins. This was home, and all else was forgotten. He was not the discarded jockey, but Billy Garrison, whose name on the turf was one to conjure with.

And then, even as he had awakened from his dream on Broadway, he now awoke to an appreciation of the immensity of his fall from grace. He knew fully two−thirds of those present. Some there were who nodded, some kindly, some pityingly. Some there were who cut him dead, deliberately turning their backs or accurately looking through the top of his hat.

Billy's square chin went up to a point and his under lip came out. He would not be driven out. He would show them. He was as honest as any there; more honest than many; more foolish than all. He ordered a drink and seated himself by a table, indifferently eyeing the shifting crowd through the fluttering curtain of tobacco−smoke.

The staple subject of conversation was the Carter Handicap, and he sensed rather than noted the glances of the crowd as they shifted curiously to him and back again. At first he pretended not to notice them, but after a certain length of time his oblivion was sincere, for retrospect came and claimed him for its own.

He was aroused by footsteps behind him; they wavered, stopped, and a large hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Hello, kid! You here, too?"

He looked up quickly, though he knew the voice. It was Jimmy Drake, and he was looking down at him, a queer gleam in his inscrutable eyes. Garrison nodded without speaking. He noticed that the book−maker had not offered to shake hands, and the knowledge stung. The crowd was watching them curiously, and Drake waved off, with a late sporting extra he carried, half a dozen invitations to liquidate.

"Kid," he said, lowering his voice, his hand still on Garrison's shoulder, "what did you come here for? Why don't you get away? Waterbury may be here any minute."

"What's that to me?" spat out Billy venomously. "I'm not afraid of him. No call to be."

Drake considered, the queer look still in his eyes.

"Don't get busty, kid. I don't know how you ever come to do it, but it's a serious game, a dirty game, and I guess it may mean jail for you, all right."

"What do you mean?" Garrison's pinched face had gone slowly white. A vague premonition of impending further disaster possessed him, amounting almost to an obsession. "What do you mean, Jimmy?" he reiterated tensely.

Drake was silent, still scrutinizing him.

"Kid," he said finally, "I don't like to think it of you−−but I know what made you do it. You were sore on Waterbury; sore for losing. You wanted to get hunk on something. But I tell you, kid, there's no deal too rotten for a man who poisons a horse−−"

"Poisons a horse," echoed Garrison mechanically. "Poisons a horse. Good Lord, Drake!" he cried fiercely, in a sudden wave of passion and understanding, jumping from his chair, "you dare to say that I poisoned Sis! You dare−−"

"No, I don't. The paper does."

"The paper lies! Lies, do you hear? Let me see it! Let me see it! Where does it say that? Where, where? Show it to me if you can! Show it to me−−"

His eyes slowly widened in horror, and his mouth remained agape, as he hastily scanned the contents of an article in big type on the first page. Then the extra dropped from his nerveless fingers, and he mechanically seated himself at the table, his eyes vacant. To his surprise, he was horribly calm. Simply his nerves had snapped; they could torture him no longer by stretching.

"It's not enough to have−−have her die, but I must be her poisoner," he said mechanically.

"It's all circumstantial evidence, or nearly so," added Drake, shifting from one foot to the other. "You were the only one who would have a cause to get square. And Crimmins says he gave you permission to see her alone. Even the stable−hands say that. It looks bad, kid. Here, don't take it so hard. Get a cinch on yourself," he added, as he watched Garrison's blank eyes and quivering face.

"I'm all right. I'm all right," muttered Billy vaguely, passing a hand over his throbbing temples.

Drake was silent, fidgeting uneasily.

"Kid," he blurted out at length, "it looks as if you were all in. Say, let me be your bank−roll, won't you? I know you lost every cent on Sis, no matter what they say. I'll give you a blank check, and you can fill it out−−"

"No, thanks, Jimmy."

"Don't be touchy, kid. You'd do the same for me−−"

"I mean it, Drake. I don't want a cent. I'm not hard up. Thanks all the same." Garrison's rag of honor was fluttering in the wind of his pride.

"Well," said Drake, finally and uncomfortably, "if you ever want it, Billy, you know where to come for it. I want to go down on the books as your friend, hear? Mind that. So−long."

"So−long, Jimmy. And I won't forget your stand."

Garrison continued staring at the floor. This, then, was the reason why the sporting world had cut him dead; for a horse−poisoner is ranked in the same category as that assigned to the horse−stealer of the Western frontier. There, a man's horse is his life; to the turfman it is his fortune−−one and the same. And so Crimmins had testified that he had permitted him, Garrison, to see Sis alone!

Yes, the signals were set dead against him. His opinion of Crimmins had undergone a complete revolution; first engendered by the trainer offering him a dishonorable opportunity of fleecing the New York pool− rooms; now culminated by his indirect charge.

Garrison considered the issue paramount. He was furious, though so seemingly indifferent. Every ounce of resentment in his nature had been focused to the burning−point. Now he would not leave New York. Come what might, he would stand his ground. He would not run away. He would fight the charge; fight Waterbury, Crimmins−−the world, if necessary. And mingled with the warp and woof of this resolve was another; one that he determined would comprise the color−scheme of his future existence; he would ferret out the slayer of Sis; not merely for his own vindication, but for hers. He regarded her slayer as a murderer, for to him Sis had been more than human.

Garrison came to himself by hearing his name mentioned. Behind him two young men were seated at a table, evidently unaware of his identity, for they were exchanging their separate views on the running of the Carter Handicap and the subsequent poisoning of the favorite.

"And I say," concluded the one whose nasal twang bespoke the New Englander; "I say that it was a dirty race all through."

"One paper hints that the stable was in on it; wanted to hit the bookies hard," put in his companion diffidently.

"No," argued the wise one, some alcohol and venom in his syllables, "Waterbury's all right. He's a square sport. I know. I ought to know, for I've got inside information. A friend of mine has a cousin who's married to the brother of a friend of Waterbury's aunt's half−sister. So I ought to know. Take it from me," added this Bureau of Inside Information, beating the table with an insistent fist; "it was a put− up job of Garrison's. I'll bet he made a mint on it. All these jockeys are crooked. I may be from Little Falls, but I know. You can't fool me. I've been following Garrison's record−−"

"Then what did you bet on him for?" asked his companion mildly.

"Because I thought he might ride straight for once. And being up on Sis, I thought he couldn't help but win. And so I plunged−−heavy. And now, by Heck! ten dollars gone, and I'm mad; mad clear through. Sis was a corker, and ought to have had the race. I read all about her in the Little Falls /Daily Banner/. I'd just like to lay hands on that Garrison−−a miserable little whelp; that's what he is. He ought to have poisoned himself instead of the horse. I hope Waterbury'll do him up. I'll see him about it."

Garrison slowly rose, his face white, eyes smoldering. The devil was running riot through him. His resentment had passed from the apathetic stage to the fighting. So this was the world's opinion of him! Not only the world, but miserable wastrels of sports who "plunged heavy" with ten dollars! His name was to be bandied in their unclean mouths! He, Billy Garrison, former premier jockey, branded as a thing beyond redemption! He did not care what might happen, but he would kill that lie here and now. He was glad of the opportunity; hungry to let loose some of the resentment seething within him.

The Bureau of Inside Information and his companion looked up as Billy Garrison stood over them, hands in pockets. Both men had been drinking. Drake and half the café's occupants had drifted out.

"Which of you gentlemen just now gave his opinion of Billy Garrison?" asked the jockey quietly.

"I did, neighbor. Been roped in, too?" Inside Information splayed out his legs, and, with a very blasé air, put his thumbs in the armholes of his execrable vest. He owned a rangy frame and a loose mouth. He was showing the sights of Gotham to a friend, and was proud of his knowledge. But he secretly feared New York because he did not know it.

"Oh, it was you?" snapped Garrison venomously. "Well, I don't know your name, but mine's Billy Garrison, and you're a liar!" He struck Inside Information a whack across the face that sent him a tumbled heap on the floor.

There is no one so dangerous as a coward. There is nothing so dangerous as ignorance. The New Englander had heard much of Gotham's undercurrent and the brawls so prevalent there. He had heard and feared. He had looked for them, fascination in his fear, but till the present had never experienced one. He had heard that sporting men carried guns and were quick to use them; that when the lie was passed it meant the hospital or the morgue. He was thoroughly ignorant of the ways of a great city, of the world; incapable of meeting a crisis; of apportioning it at its true value. And so now he overdid it.

As Garrison, a contemptuous smile on his face, turned away, and started to draw a handkerchief from his hip pocket, the New Englander, thinking a revolver was on its way, scrambled to his feet, wildly seized the heavy spirit−bottle, and let fly at Garrison's head. There was whisky, muscle, sinew, and fear behind the shot.

As Billy turned about to ascertain whether or not his opponent meant fight by rising from under the table, the heavy bottle landed full on his temple. He crumpled up like a withered leaf, and went over on the floor without even a sigh.

It was two weeks later when Garrison regained full consciousness; opened his eyes to gaze upon blank walls, blank as the ceiling. He was in a hospital, but he did not know it. He knew nothing. The past had become a blank. An acute attack of brain−fever had set in, brought on by the excitement he had undergone and finished by the smash from the spirit−bottle.

There followed many nights when doctors shook their heads and nurses frowned; nights when it was thought little Billy Garrison would cross the Great Divide; nights when he sat up in the narrow cot, his hands clenched as if holding the reins, his eyes flaming as in his feverish imagination he came down the stretch, fighting for every inch of the way; crying, pleading, imploring: "Go it, Sis; go it! Take the rail! Careful, careful! Now−−now let her out; let her out! Go, you cripple, go−−" All the jargon of the turf.

He was a physical, nervous wreck, and the doctors said that he couldn't last very long, for consumption had him. It was only a matter of time, unless a miracle happened. The breath of his life was going through his mouth and nostrils; the breath of his lungs.

No one knew his name at the hospital, not even himself. There was nothing to identify him by. For Garrison, after the blow that night, had managed to crawl out to the sidewalk like a wounded beast striving to find its lair and fighting to die game.

There was no one to say him nay, no friend to help him. And hotel managements are notoriously averse to having murder or assault committed in their house. So when they saw that Garrison was able to walk they let him go, and willingly. Then he had collapsed, crumpled in a heap on the sidewalk.

A policeman had eventually found him, and with the uncanny acumen of his ilk had unerringly diagnosed the case as a "drunk." From the stationhouse to Bellevue, Garrison had gone his weary way, and from there, when it was finally discovered he was neither drunk nor insane, to Roosevelt Hospital. And no one knew who or what he was, and no one cared overmuch. He was simply one of the many unfortunate derelicts of a great city.

It was over six months before he left the hospital, cured so far as he could be. The doctors called his complaint by a learned and villainously unpronounceable name, which, interpreted by the Bowery, meant that Billy Garrison "had gone dippy."

But Garrison had not. His every faculty was as acute as it ever had been. Simply, Providence had drawn an impenetrable curtain over his memory, separating the past from the present; the same curtain that divides our presents from our futures. He had no past. It was a blank, shot now and then with a vague gleam of things dead and gone.

This oblivion may have been the manifestation of an all−wise Almighty. Now, at least, he could not brood over past mistakes, though, unconsciously, he might have to live them out. Life to him was a new book, not one mark appeared on its clean pages. He did not even know his name−−nothing.

From the "W. G." on his linen he understood that those were his initials, but he could not interpret them; they stood for nothing. He had no letters, memoranda in his pockets, bearing his name. And so he took the name of William Good. Perhaps the "William" came to him instinctively; he had no reason for choosing "Good."

Garrison left the hospital with his cough, a little money the superintendent had kindly given to him, and his clothes; that was all.

Handicapped as he was, harried by futile attempts of memory to fathom his identity, he was about to renew the battle of life; not as a veteran, one who has earned promotion, profited by experience, but as a raw recruit.

The big city was no longer an old familiar mother, whose every mood and whimsy he sensed unerringly; now he was a stranger. The streets meant nothing to him. But when he first turned into old Broadway, a vague, uneasy feeling stirred within him; it was a memory struggling like an imprisoned bird to be free. Almost the first person he met was Jimmy Drake. Garrison was about to pass by, oblivious, when the other seized him by the arm.

"Hello, Billy! Where did you drop from−−"

"Pardon me, you have made a mistake." Garrison stared coldly, blankly at Drake, shook free his arm, and passed on.

"Gee, what a cut!" mused the book−maker, staring after the rapidly retreating figure of Garrison. "The frozen mitt for sure. What's happened now? Where's he been the past six months? Wearing the same clothes, too! Well, somehow I've queered myself for good. I don't know what I did or didn't. But I'll keep my eye on him, anyway." To cheer his philosophy, Drake passed into the Fifth Avenue for a drink.

CHAPTER IV. A READY−MADE HEIR.

Garrison had flattered himself that he had known adversity in his time, but in the months succeeding his dismissal from the hospital he qualified for a post−graduate course in privation. He was cursed with the curse of the age; it was an age of specialties, and he had none. His only one, the knowledge of the track, had been buried in him, and nothing tended to awaken it.

He had no commercial education; nothing but the /savoir−faire/ which wealth had given to him, and an inherent breeding inherited from his mother. By reason of his physique he was disbarred from mere manual labor, and that haven of the failure−−the army.

So Garrison joined the ranks of the Unemployed Grand Army of the Republic. He knew what it was to sleep in Madison Square Park with a newspaper blanket, and to be awakened by the carol of the touring policemen. He came to know what it meant to stand in the bread−line, to go the rounds of the homeless "one−night stands."

He came perilously near reaching the level of the sodden. His morality had suffered with it all. Where in his former days of hardship he had health, ambition, a goal to strive for, friends to keep him honest with himself, now he had nothing. He was alone; no one cared.

If he had only taken to the track, his passion−−legitimate passion−− for horse−flesh would have pulled him through. But the thought that he ever could ride never suggested itself to him.

He had no opportunity of inhaling the track's atmosphere. Sometimes he wondered idly why he liked to stop and caress every stray horse. He could not know that those same hands had once coaxed thoroughbreds down the stretch to victory. His haunts necessarily kept him from meeting with those whom he had once known. The few he did happen to meet he cut unconsciously as he had once cut Jimmy Drake.

And so day by day Garrison's morality suffered. It is so easy for the well−fed to be honest. But when there is the hunger cancer gnawing at one's vitals, not for one day, but for many, then honesty and dishonesty cease to be concrete realities. It is not a question of piling up luxuries, but of supplying mere necessity.

And day by day as the hunger cancer gnawed at Garrison's vitals it encroached on his original stock of honesty. He fought every minute of the day, but he grimly foresaw that there would come a time when he would steal the first time opportunity afforded.

Day by day he saw the depletion of his honor. He was not a moralist, a saint, a sinner. Need sweeps all theories aside; in need's fierce crucible they are transmuted to concrete realities. Those who have never known what it is to be thrown with Garrison's handicap on the charity of a great city will not understand. But those who have ever tasted the bitter crust of adversity will. And it is the old blatant advice from the Seats of the Mighty: "Get a job." The old answer from the hopeless undercurrent: "How?"

There came a day when the question of honesty or dishonesty was put up to Garrison in a way he had not foreseen. The line was drawn distinctly; there was no easy slipping over it by degrees, unnoticed.

The toilet facilities of municipal lodging−houses are severely crude and primitive. For the sake of sanitation, the

whilom lodger's clothes are put in a net and fumigated in a germ−destroying temperature. The men congregate together in one long room, in various stages of pre− Adamite costumes, and the shower is turned upon them in numerical rotation.

This public washing was one of the many drawbacks to public charity which Garrison shivered at. As the warm weather set in he accordingly took full advantage of the free baths at the Battery. On his second day's dip, as he was leaving, a man whom he had noticed intently scanning the bathers tapped him on the arm.

He was shaped like an olive, with a pair of shrewd gray eyes, and a clever, clean−shaven mouth. He was well−dressed, and was continually probing with a quill tooth−pick at his gold−filled front teeth, evidently desirous of excavating some of the precious metal.

"My name's Snark−−Theobald D. Snark," he said shortly, thrusting a card into Garrison's passive hand. "I am an eminent lawyer, and would be obliged if you would favor me with a five minutes' interview in my office−−American Tract Building."

"Don't know you," said Garrison blandly.

"You'll like me when you do," supplemented the eminent lawyer coolly. "Merely a matter of business, you understand. You look as if a little business wouldn't hurt you."

"Feel worse," added Billy mildly, inspecting his crumpled outfit.

He was very hungry. He caught eagerly at this quondam opening. Perhaps it would be the means of starting him in some legitimate business. Then a wild idea came to him, and slowly floated away again as he remembered that Mr. Snark had agreed that he did not know him. But while it lasted, the idea had been a thrilling one for a penniless, homeless wanderer. It had been: Supposing this lawyer knew him? Knew his real identity, and had tracked him down for clamoring relatives and a weeping father and mother? For to Garrison his parents might have been criminals or millionaires so far as he remembered.

The journey to Nassau Street was completed in silence, Mr. Snark centering all his faculties on his teeth, and Garrison on the probable outcome of this chance meeting.

The eminent lawyer's office was in a corner of the fifth shelf of the American Tract Building bookcase. It was unoccupied, Mr. Snark being so intelligent as to be able to dispense with the services of office− boy and stenographer; it was small but cozy. Offices in that building can be rented for fifteen dollars per month.

After the eminent lawyer had fortified himself from a certain black bottle labeled "Poison: external use only," which sat beside the soap− dish in the little towel−cabinet, he assumed a very preoccupied and highly official mien at his roller−top desk, where he became vitally interested in a batch of letters, presumably that morning's mail, but which in reality bore dates ranging back to the past year.

Then the eminent lawyer delved importantly into an empty letter−file; emerged after ten minutes' study in order to give Blackstone a few thoroughly familiar turns, opened the window further to cool his fevered brain, lit a highly athletic cigar, crossed his legs, and was at last at leisure to talk business with Garrison, who had almost fallen asleep during the business rush.

"What's your name?" he asked peremptorily.

Ordinarily Garrison would have begged him to go to a climate where thermometers are not in demand, but now he was hungry, and wanted a job, so he answered obediently: "William Good."

"Good, William," said the eminent lawyer, smiling at himself in the little mirror of the towel−cabinet. He understood that he possessed a thin vein of humor. Necessary quality for an eminent lawyer. "And no occupation, I presume, and no likelihood of one, eh?"

Garrison nodded.

"Well"−−and Mr. Snark made a temple of worship from his fat fingers, his cigar at right angles, his shrewd gray eyes on the ceiling−−"I have a position which I think you can fill. To make a long story short, I have a client, a very wealthy gentleman of Cottonton, Virginia; name of Calvert−−Major Henry Clay Calvert. Dare say you've heard of the Virginia Calverts," he added, waving the rank incense from the athletic cigar.

He had only heard of the family a week or two ago, but already he persuaded himself that their reputation was national, and that his business relations with them dated back to the Settlement days.

Garrison found occasion to say he'd never heard of them, and the eminent lawyer replied patronizingly that "we all can't be well− connected, you know." Then he went on with his short story, which, like all short stories, was a very long one.

"Now it appears that Major Calvert has a nephew somewhere whom he has never seen, and whom he wishes to recognize; in short, make him his heir. He has advertised widely for him during the past few months, and has employed a lawyer in almost every city to assist in this hunt for a needle in a haystack. This nephew's name is Dagget−−William C. Dagget. His mother was a half−sister of Major Calvert's. The search for this nephew has been going on for almost a year−−since Major Calvert heard of his brother−in−law's death−−but the nephew has not been found."

The eminent lawyer cleared his throat eloquently and relighted the athletic cigar, which had found occasion to go out.

"It will be a very fine thing for this nephew," he added speculatively. "Very fine, indeed. Major Calvert has no children, and, as I say, the nephew will be his heir−−if found. Also the lawyer who discovers the absent youth will receive ten thousand dollars. Ten thousand dollars is not a sum to be sneezed at, Mr. Good. Not to be sneezed at, sir. Not to be sneezed at," thundered the eminent lawyer forensically.

Garrison agreed. He would never think of sneezing at it, even if he was subject to that form of recreation. But what had that to do with him?

The eminent lawyer attentively scrutinized the blue streamer from his cigar.

"Well, I've found him at last. You are he, Mr. Good. Mr. Good, my heartiest congratulations, sir." And Mr. Snark insisted upon shaking the bewildered Garrison impressively by the hand.

Garrison's head swam. Then his wild dream had come true! His identity had been at last discovered! He was not the offspring of some criminal, but the scion of a noble Virginia house! But Mr. Snark was talking again.

"You see," he began slowly, focusing an attentive eye on Garrison's face, noting its every light and shade, "this nice old gentleman and his wife are hard up for a nephew. You and I are hard up for money. Why not effect a combination? Eh, why not? It would be sinful to waste such an opportunity of doing good. In you I give them a nice, respectable nephew, who is tired of reaping his wild oats. You are probably much better than the original. We are all satisfied. I do everybody a good turn by the exercise of a little judgment."

Garrison's dream crumbled to ashes.

"Oh!" he said blankly, "you−−you mean to palm me off as the nephew?"

"Exactly, my son, the long−lost nephew. You are fitted for the role. They haven't ever seen the original, and then, by chance, you have a birthmark, shaped like a spur, beneath your right collar−bone. Oh, yes, I marked it while you were bathing. I've hunted the baths in the chance of finding a duplicate, for I could not afford to run the risks of advertising.

"It seems this nephew has a similar mark, his mother having mentioned it once in a letter to her brother, and it is the only means of identification. Luck is with us, Mr. Good, and of course you will take full advantage of it. As a side bonus you can pay me twenty−five thousand or so when you come into the estate on your uncle's death."

The eminent lawyer, his calculating eye still on Garrison, then proceeded with much forensic ability and virile imagination to lay the full beauties of the "cinch" before him.

"But supposing the real nephew shows up?" asked Garrison hesitatingly, after half an hour's discussion.

"Impossible. I am fully convinced he's dead. Possession is nine points of the law, my son. If he should happen to turn up, which he won't, why, you have only to brand him as a fraud. I'm a kind−hearted man, and I merely wish Major Calvert to have the pleasure of killing fatted calf for one instead of a burial. I'm sure the real nephew is dead. Anyway, the search will be given up when you are found."

"But about identification?"

"Oh, the mark's enough, quite enough. You've never met your kin, but you can have very sweet, childish recollections of having heard your mother speak of them. I know enough of old Calvert to post you on the family. You've lived North all your life. We'll fix up a nice respectable series of events regarding how you came to be away in China somewhere, and thus missed seeing the advertisement.

"We'll let my discovery of you stand as it is, only we'll substitute the swimming−pool of the New York Athletic Club in lieu of the Battery. The Battery wouldn't sound good form. Romanticism always makes truth more palatable. Trust me to work things to a highly artistic and flawless finish. I can procure any number of witnesses−− at so much per head−−who have time and again distinctly heard your childish prattle regarding dear Uncle and Aunty Calvert.

"I'll wire on that long−lost nephew has been found, and you can proceed to lie right down in your ready−made bed of roses. There won't be any thorns. Bit of a step up from municipal lodging−houses, eh?"

Garrison clenched his hands. His honor was in the last ditch. The great question had come; not in the guise of a loaf of bread, but this. How long his honor put up a fight he did not know, but the eminent lawyer was apparently satisfied regarding the outcome, for he proceeded very leisurely to read the morning paper, leaving Garrison to his thoughts.

And what thoughts they were! What excuses he made to himself−−poor hostages to a fast−crumbling honor! Only the exercise of a little subterfuge and all this horrible present would be a past. No more sleeping in the parks, no more of the hunger cancer. He would have a name, friends, kin, a future. Something to live for. Some one to care for; some one to care for him. And he would be all that a nephew should be; all that, and more. He would make all returns in his power.

He had even reached the point when he saw in the future himself confessing the deception; saw himself forgiven and being loved for himself alone. And he would confess it all−−his share, but not Snark's. All he wanted was a start in life. A name to keep clean; traditions to uphold, for he had none of his own. All this he would gain for a

little subterfuge. And perhaps, as Snark had acutely pointed out, he might be a better nephew than the original. He would be.

When a man begins to compromise with dishonesty, there is only one outcome. Garrison's rag of honor was hauled down. He agreed to the deception. He would play the role of William C. Dagget, the lost nephew.

When he made his intention known, the eminent lawyer nodded as if to say that Garrison wasted an unnecessary amount of time over a very childish problem, and then he proceeded to go into the finer points of the game, building up a life history, supplying dates, etc. Then he sent a wire to Major Calvert. Afterward he took Garrison to his first respectable lunch in months and bought him an outfit of clothes. On their return to the corner nook, fifth shelf of the bookcase, a reply was awaiting them from Major Calvert. The long−lost nephew, in company with Mr. Snark, was to start the next day for Cottonton, Virginia. The telegram was warm, and commended the eminent lawyer's ability.

"Son," said the eminent lawyer dreamily, carefully placing the momentous wire in his pocket, "a good deed never goes unrewarded. Always remember that. There is nothing like the old biblical behest: 'Let us pray.' You for your bed of roses; me for−−for−−−−" mechanically he went to the small towel−cabinet and gravely pointed the unfinished observation with the black bottle labeled "Poison."

"To the long−lost nephew, Mr. William C. Dagget. To the bed of roses. And to the eminent lawyer, Theobald D. Snark, Esq., who has mended a poor fortune with a better brain. Gentlemen," he concluded grandiloquently, slowly surveying the little room as if it were an overcrowded Colosseum−−"gentlemen, with your permission, together with that of the immortal Mr. Swiveller, we will proceed to drown it in the rosy. Drown it in the rosy, gentlemen." And so saying, Mr. Snark gravely tilted the black bottle ceilingward.

The following evening, as the shadows were lengthening, Garrison and the eminent lawyer pulled into the neat little station of Cottonton. The good−by to Gotham had been said. It had not been difficult for Garrison to say good−by. He was bidding farewell to a life and a city that had been detestable in the short year he had known it. The lifetime spent in it had been forgotten. But with it all he had said good−by to honor. On the long train trip he had been smothering his conscience, feebly awakened by the approaching meeting, the touch of new clothes, and the prospect of a consistently full stomach. He even forgot to cough once or twice.

But the conscience was only feebly awakened. The eminent lawyer had judged his client right. For as one is never miserly until one has acquired wealth, so Garrison was loath to vacate the bed of roses now that he had felt how exceedingly pleasant it was. To go back to rags and the hunger cancer and homelessness would be hard; very hard even if honor stood at the other end.

"There they are−−the major and his wife," whispered Snark, gripping his arm and nodding out of the window to where a tall, clean−shaven, white−haired man and a lady who looked the thoroughbred stood anxiously scanning the windows of the cars. Drawn up at the curb behind them was a smart two−seated phaeton, with a pair of clean−limbed bays. The driver was not a negro, as is usually the case in the South, but a tight−faced little man, who looked the typical London cockney that he was.

Garrison never remembered how he got through his introduction to his "uncle" and "aunt." His home−coming was a dream. The sense of shame was choking him as Major Calvert seized both hands in a stone−crushed grip and looked down upon him, steadily, kindly, for a long time.

And then Mrs. Calvert, a dear, middle−aged lady, had her arms about Garrison's neck and was saying over and over again in the impulsive Southern fashion: "I'm so glad to see you, dear. You've your mother's own eyes. You know she and I were chums."

Garrison had choked, and if the eminent lawyer's wonderful vocabulary and eloquent manner had not just then intervened, Garrison then and there would have wilted and confessed everything. If only, he told himself fiercely, Major Calvert and his wife had not been so courteous, so trustful, so simple, so transparently honorable, incapable of crediting a dishonorable action to another, then perhaps it would not have been so difficult.

The ride behind the spanking bays was all a dream; all a dream as they drove up the long, white, wide Logan Pike under the nodding trees and the soft evening sun. Everything was peaceful−−the blue sky, the waving corn−fields, the magnolia, the songs of the homing birds. The air tasted rich as with great breaths he drew it into his lungs. It gave him hope. With this air to aid him he might successfully grapple with consumption.

Garrison was in the rear seat of the phaeton with Mrs. Calvert, mechanically answering questions, giving chapters of his fictitious life, while she regarded him steadily with her grave blue eyes. Mr. Snark and the major were in the middle seat, and the eminent lawyer was talking a veritable blue streak, occasionally flinging over his shoulder a bolstering remark in answer to one of Mrs. Calvert's questions, as his quick ear detected a preoccupation in Garrison's tones, and he sensed that there might be a sudden collapse to their rising fortunes. He was in a very good humor, for, besides the ten thousand, and the bonus he would receive from Garrison on the major's death, he had accepted an invitation to stay the week end at Calvert House.

Garrison's inattention was suddenly swept away by the clatter of hoofs audible above the noise contributed by the bays. A horse, which Garrison instinctively, and to his own surprise, judged to be a two− year−old filly, was approaching at a hard gallop down the broad pike. Her rider was a young girl, hatless, who now let loose a boyish shout and waved a gauntleted hand. Mrs. Calvert, smilingly, returned the hail.

"A neighbor and a lifelong friend of ours," she said, turning to Garrison. "I want you to be very good friends, you and Sue. She is a very lovely girl, and I know you will like her. I want you to. She has been expecting your coming. I am sure she is anxious to see what you look like."

Garrison made some absent−minded, commonplace answer. His eyes were kindling strangely as he watched the oncoming filly. His blood was surging through him. Unconsciously, his hands became ravenous for the reins. A vague memory was stirring within him. And then the girl had swung her mount beside the carriage, and Major Calvert, with all the ceremonious courtesy of the South, had introduced her.

She was a slim girl, with a wealth of indefinite hair, now gold, now bronze, and she regarded Garrison with a pair of very steady gray eyes. Beautiful eyes they were; and, as she pulled off her gauntlet and bent down a slim hand from the saddle, he looked up into them. It seemed as if he looked into them for ages. Where had he seen them before? In a dream? And her name was Desha. Where had he heard that name? Memory was struggling furiously to tear away the curtain that hid the past.

"I'm right glad to see you," said the girl, finally, a slow blush coming to the tan of her cheek. She slowly drew away her hand, as, apparently, Garrison had appropriated it forever.

"The honor is mine," returned Garrison mechanically, as he replaced his hat. Where had he heard that throaty voice?

CHAPTER V. ALSO A READY−MADE HUSBAND.

A week had passed−−a week of new life for Garrison, such as he had never dreamed of living. Even in the heyday of his fame, forgotten by him, unlimited wealth had never brought the peace and content of Calvert House. It seemed as if his niche had long been vacant in the household, awaiting his occupancy, and at times he had difficulty in realizing that he had won it through deception, not by right of blood.

The prognostications of the eminent lawyer, Mr. Snark, to the effect that everything would be surprisingly easy, were fully realized. To the major and his wife the birthmark of the spur was convincing proof; and, if more were needed, the thorough coaching of Snark was sufficient.

More than that, a week had not passed before it was made patently apparent to Garrison, much to his surprise and no little dismay, that he was liked for himself alone. The major was a father to him, Mrs. Calvert a mother in every sense of the word. He had seen Sue Desha twice since his "home−coming," for the Calvert and Desha estates joined.

Old Colonel Desha had eyed Garrison somewhat queerly on being first introduced, but he had a poor memory for faces, and was unable to connect the newly discovered nephew of his neighbor and friend with little Billy Garrison, the one−time premiere jockey, whom he had frequently seen ride.

The week's stay at Calvert House had already begun to show its beneficial effect upon Garrison. The regular living, clean air, together with the services of the family doctor, were fighting the consumption germs with no little success. For it had not taken the keen eye of the major nor the loving one of the wife very long to discover that the tuberculosis germ was clutching at Garrison's lungs.

"You've gone the pace, young man," said the venerable family doctor, tapping his patient with the stethoscope. "Gone the pace, and now nature is clamoring for her long−deferred payment."

The major was present, and Garrison felt the hot blood surge to his face, as the former's eyes were riveted upon him.

"Youth is a prodigal spendthrift," put in the major sadly. "But isn't it hereditary, doctor? Perhaps the seed was cultivated, not sown, eh?"

"Assiduously cultivated," replied Doctor Blandly dryly. "You'll have to get back to first principles, my boy. You've made an oven out of your lungs by cigarette smoke. You inhale? Of course. Quite the correct thing. Have you ever blown tobacco smoke through a handkerchief? Yes? Well, it leaves a dark−brown stain, doesn't it? That's what your lungs are like−−coated with nicotine. Your wind is gone. That is why cigarettes are so injurious. Not because, as some people tell you, they are made of inferior tobacco, but because you inhale them. That's where the danger is. Smoke a pipe or cigar, if smoke you must; those you don't inhale. Keep your lungs for what God intended them for−−fresh air. Then, your vitality is nearly bankrupt. You've made an old curiosity−shop out of your stomach. You require regular sleep−−tons of it−−−−"

"But I'm never sleepy," argued Garrison, feeling very much like a schoolboy catechised by his master. "When I wake in the morning, I awake instantly, every faculty alert−−"

"Naturally," grunted the old doctor. "Don't you know that is proof positive that you have lived on stimulants? It is artificial. You should be drowsy. I'll wager the first thing you do mornings is to roll a smoke; eh? Exactly. Smoke on an empty stomach! That's got to be stopped. It's the simple life for you. Plenty of exercise in the open air; live, bathe, in sunshine. It is the essence of life. I think, major, we can cure this young prodigal of yours. But he must obey me−− implicitly."

Subsequently, Major Calvert had, for him, a serious conversation with Garrison.

"I believe in youth having its fling," he said kindly, in conclusion; "but I don't believe in flinging so far that you cannot retrench safely. From Doctor Blandly's statements, you seem to have come mighty near exceeding the speed limit, my boy."

He bent his white brows and regarded Garrison steadily out of his keen eyes, in which lurked a fund of potential understanding.

"But sorrow," he continued, "acts on different natures in different ways. Your mother's death must have been a great blow to you. It was to me." He looked fixedly at his nails. "I understand fully what it must mean to be thrown adrift on the world at the age you were. I don't wish you ever to think that we knew of your condition at the time. We didn't−−not for a moment. I did not learn of your mother's death until long afterward, and only of your father's by sheer accident. But we have already discussed these subjects, and I am only touching on them now because I want you, as you know, to be as good a man as your mother was a woman; not a man like your father was. You want to forget that past life of yours, my boy, for you are to be my heir; to be worthy of the name of Calvert, as I feel confident you will. You have your mother's blood. When your health is improved, we will discuss more serious questions, regarding your future, your career; also−−your marriage." He came over and laid a kindly hand on Garrison's shoulder.

And Garrison had been silent. He was in a mental and moral fog. He guessed that his supposed father had not been all that a man should be. The eminent lawyer, Mr. Snark, had said as much. He knew himself that he was nothing that a man should be. His conscience was fully awakened by now. Every worthy ounce of blood he possessed cried out for him to go; to leave Calvert House before it was too late; before the old major and his wife grew to love him as there seemed danger of them doing.

He was commencing to see his deception in its true light; the crime he was daily, hourly, committing against his host and hostess; against all decency. He had no longer a prop to support him with specious argument, for the eminent lawyer had returned to New York, carrying with him his initial proceeds of the rank fraud−−Major Calvert's check for ten thousand dollars.

Garrison was face to face with himself; he was beginning to see his dishonesty in all its hideous nakedness. And yet he stayed at Calvert House; stayed on the crater of a volcano, fearing every stranger who passed, fearing to meet every neighbor; fearing that his deception must become known, though reason told him such fear was absurd. He stayed at Calvert House, braving the abhorrence of his better self; stayed not through any appreciation of the Calvert flesh−pots, nor because of any monetary benefits, present or future. He lived in the present, for the hour, oblivious to everything.

For Garrison had fallen in love with his next−door neighbor, Sue Desha. Though he did not know his past life, it was the first time he had understood to the full the meaning of the ubiquitous, potential verb "to love." And, instead of bringing peace and content−−the whole gamut of the virtues−−hell awoke in little Billy Garrison's soul.

The second time he had seen her was the day following his arrival, and when he had started on Doctor Blandly's open−air treatment.

"I'll have a partner over to put you through your paces in tennis," Mrs. Calvert had said, a quiet twinkle in her eye. And shortly afterward, as Garrison was aimlessly batting the balls about, feeling very much like an overgrown schoolboy, Sue Desha, tennis−racket in hand, had come up the drive.

She was bareheaded, dressed in a blue sailor costume, her sleeves rolled high on her firm, tanned arms. She looked very businesslike, and was, as Garrison very soon discovered.

Three sets were played in profound silence, or, rather, the girl made a spectacle out of Garrison. Her services were diabolically unanswerable; her net and back court game would have merited the earnest attention of an expert, and Garrison hardly knew where a racket began or ended.

At the finish he was covered with perspiration and confusion, while his opponent, apparently, had not begun to warm up. By mutual consent, they occupied a seat underneath a spreading magnolia−tree, and then the girl insisted upon Garrison resuming his coat. They were like two children.

"You'll get cold; you're not strong," said the girl finally, with the manner of a very old and experienced mother. She was four years younger than Garrison. "Put it on; you're not strong. That's right. Always obey."

"I am strong," persisted Garrison, flushing. He felt very like a schoolboy.

The girl eyed him critically, calmly.

"Oh, but you're not; not a little bit. Do you know you're very−−very−− rickety? Very rickety, indeed."

Garrison eyed his flannels in visible perturbation. They flapped about his thin, wiry shanks most disagreeably. He was painfully conscious of his elbows, of his thin chest. Painfully conscious that the girl was physical perfection, he was a parody of manhood. He looked up, with a smile, and met the girl's frank eyes.

"I think rickety is just the word," he agreed, spanning a wrist with a finger and thumb.

"You cannot play tennis, can you?" asked the girl dryly. "Not a little, tiny bit."

"No; not a little bit."

"Golf?" Head on one side.

"Not guilty."

"Swim?"

"Gloriously. Like a stone."

"Run?" Head on the other side.

"If there's any one after me."

"Ride? Every one rides down this−away, you know."

A sudden vague passion mouthed at Garrison's heart. "Ride?" he echoed, eyes far away. "I−−I think so."

"Only think so! Humph!" She swung a restless foot. "Can't you do anything?"

"Well," critically. "I think I can eat, and sleep−−−−"

"And talk nonsense. Let me see your hand." She took it imperiously, palm up, in her lap, and examined it critically, as if it were the paw of some animal. "My! it's as small as a woman's!" she exclaimed, in dismay. "Why, you could wear my glove, I believe." There was one part disdain to three parts amusement, ridicule, in her throaty voice.

"It is small," admitted Garrison, eyeing it ruefully. "I wish I had thought of asking mother to give me a bigger one. Is it a crime?"

"No; a calamity." Her foot was going restlessly. "I like your eyes," she said calmly, at length.

Garrison bowed. He was feeling decidedly uncomfortable. He had never met a girl like this. Nothing seemed sacred to her. She was as frank as the wind, or sun.

"You know," she continued, her great eyes half−closed, "I was awfully anxious to see you when I heard you were coming home−−−−"

"Why?"

She turned and faced him, her grey eyes opened wide. "Why? Isn't one always interested in one's future husband?"

It was Garrison who was confused. Something caught at his throat. He stammered, but words would not come. He laughed nervously.

"Didn't you know we were engaged?" asked the girl, with childlike simplicity and astonishment. "Oh, yes. How superb!"

"Engaged? Why−−why−−−−"

"Of course. Before we were born. Your uncle and aunt and my parents had it all framed up. I thought you knew. A cut−and−dried affair. Are you not just wild with delight?"

"But−−but," expostulated Garrison, his face white, "supposing the real me−−I mean, supposing I had not come home? Supposing I had been dead?"

"Why, then," she replied calmly, "then, I suppose, I would have a chance of marrying some one I really loved. But what is the use of supposing? Here you are, turned up at the last minute, like a bad penny, and here I am, very much alive. Ergo, our relatives' wishes respectfully fulfilled, and−−connubial misery /ad libitum/. /Mes condolences/. If you feel half as bad as I do, I really feel sorry for you. But, frankly, I think the joke is decidedly on me."

Garrison was silent, staring with hard eyes at the ground. He could not begin to analyze his thoughts.

"You are not complimentary, at all events," he said quietly at length.

"So every one tells me," she sighed.

"I did not know of this arrangement," he added, looking up, a queer smile twisting his lips.

"And now you are lonesomely miserable, like I am," she rejoined, crossing a restless leg. "No doubt you left your ideal in New York. Perhaps you are married already. Are you?" she cried eagerly, seizing his arm.

"No such good luck−−for you," he added, under his breath.

"I thought so," she sighed resignedly. "Of course no one would have you. It's hopeless."

"It's not," he argued sharply, his pride, anger in revolt. He, who had no right to any claim. "We're not compelled to marry each other. It's a free country. It is ridiculous, preposterous."

"Oh, don't get so fussy!" she interrupted petulantly. "Don't you think I've tried to kick over the traces? And I've had more time to think of it than you−−all my life. It is a family institution. Your uncle pledged his nephew, if he should have one, and my parents pledged me. We are hostages to their friendship. They wished to show how much they cared for one another by making us supremely miserable for life. Of course, I spent my life in arranging how you should look, if you ever came home−−which I devoutly hoped you wouldn't. It wouldn't be so difficult, you see, if you happened to match my ideals. Then it would be a real love−feast, with parents' blessings and property thrown in to boot."

"And then I turned up−−a little, under−sized, nothingless pea, instead of the regular patented, double−action, stalwart Adonis of your imagination," added Garrison dryly.

"How well you describe yourself!" said the girl admiringly.

"It must be horrible!" he condoled half−cynically.

"And of course you, too, were horribly disappointed?" she added, after a moment's pause, tapping her oxford with tennis−racket.

Garrison turned and deliberately looked into her gray eyes.

"Yes; I am−−horribly," he lied calmly. "My ideal is the dark, quiet girl of the clinging type."

"She wouldn't have much to cling to," sniffed the girl. "We'll be miserable together, then. Do you know, I almost hate you! I think I do. I'm quite sure I do."

Garrison eyed her in silence, the smile on his lips. She returned the look, her face flushed.

"Miss Desha−−"

'You'll have to call me Sue. You're Billy; I'm Sue. That's one of the minor penalties. Our prenatal engagement affords us this charming familiarity," she interrupted scathingly.

"Sue, then. Sue," continued Garrison quietly, "from your type, I thought you fashioned of better material. Now, don't explode−−yet a while. I mean property and parents' blessing should not weigh a curse with you. Yes; I said curse−−damn, if you wish. If you loved, this burlesque engagement should not stand in your way. You would elope with the man you love, and let property and parents' blessings−−−−"

"That would be a good way for you to get out of the muddle unscathed, wouldn't it?" she flashed in. "How chivalrous! Why don't you elope with some one−−the dark, clinging girl−−and let me free? You want me to suffer, not yourself. Just like you Yankees−−cold−blooded icicles!"

Garrison considered. "I never thought of that, honestly!" he said, with a laugh. "I would elope quick enough, if I had only myself to consider."

"Then your dark, clinging girl is lacking in the very virtues you find so woefully missing in me. She won't take a risk. I cannot say I blame her," she added, scanning the brooding Garrison.

He laughed good−humoredly. "How you must detest me! But cheer up, my sister in misery! You will marry the man you love, all right. Never fear."

"Will I?" she asked enigmatically. Her eyes were half−shut, watching Garrison's profile. "Will I, soothsayer?"

He nodded comprehensively, bitterly.

"You will. One of the equations of the problem will be eliminated, and thus will be found the answer."

"Which?" she asked softly, heel tapping gravel.

"The unnecessary one, of course. Isn't it always the unnecessary one?"

"You mean," she said slowly, "that you will go away?"

Garrison nodded.

"Of course," she added, after a pause, "the dark, clinging girl is waiting?"

"Of course," he bantered.

"It must be nice to be loved like that." Her eyes were wide and far away. "To have one renounce relatives, position, wealth−−all, for love. It must be very nice, indeed."

Still, Garrison was silent. He had cause to be.

"Do you think it is right, fair," continued the girl slowly, her brow wrinkled speculatively, "to break your uncle's and aunt's hearts for the sake of a girl? You know how they have longed for your home− coming. How much you mean to them! You are all they have. Don't you think you are selfish−−very selfish?"

"I believe the Bible says to leave all and cleave unto your wife," returned Garrison.

"Yes. But not your intended wife."

"But, you see, she is of the cleaving type."

"And why this hurry? Aren't you depriving your uncle and aunt unnecessarily early?"

"But it is the only answer, as you pointed out. You then would be free."

He did not know why he was indulging in this repartee. Perhaps because the situation was so novel, so untenable. But a strange, new force was working in him that day, imparting a peculiar twist to his humor. He was hating himself. He was hopeless, cynical, bitter.

If he could have laid hands upon that eminent lawyer, Mr. Snark, he would have wrung his accomplished neck to the best of his ability. He, Snark, must have known about this prenatal engagement. And his bitterness, his hopelessness, were all the more real, for already he knew that he cared, and cared a great deal, for this curious girl with the steady gray eyes and wealth of indefinite hair; cared more than he would confess even to himself. It seemed as if he always had cared; as if he had always been looking into the depths of those great gray eyes. They were part of a dream, the focusing−point of the misty past −−forever out of focus.

The girl had been considering his answer, and now she spoke.

"Of course," she said gravely, "you are not sincere when you say your primal reason for leaving would be in order to set me free. Of course you are not sincere."

"Is insincerity necessarily added to my numerous physical infirmities?" he bantered.

"Not necessarily. But there is always the love to make a virtue of necessity−−especially when there's some one waiting on necessity."

"But did I say that would be my primal reason for leaving−−setting you free? I thought I merely stated it as one of the following blessings attendant on virtue."

"Equivocation means that you were not sincere. Why don't you go, then?"

"Eh?" Garrison looked up sharply at the tone of her voice.

"Why don't you go? Hurry up! Reward the clinging girl and set me free."

"Is there such a hurry? Won't you let me ferret out a pair of pajamas, to say nothing of good−bys?"

"How silly you are!" she said coldly, rising. "The question, then, rests entirely with you. Whenever you make up your mind to go−−"

"Couldn't we let it hang fire indefinitely? Perhaps you could learn to love me. Then there would be no need to go." Garrison smiled deliberately up into her eyes, the devil working in him.

Miss Desha returned his look steadily. "And the other girl−−the clinging one?" she asked calmly.

"Oh, she could wait. If we didn't hit it off, I could fall back on her. I would hate to be an old bachelor."

"No; I don't think it would be quite a success," said the girl critically. "You see, I think you are the most detestable person I ever met. I really pity the other girl. It's better to be an old bachelor than to be a young−−cad."

Garrison rose slowly.

CHAPTER VI. "YOU'RE BILLY GARRISON."

"And what is a cad?" he asked abstractedly.

"One who shames his birth and position by his breeding."

"And no question of dishonesty enters into it?" He could not say why he asked. "It is not, then, a matter of moral ethics, but of mere−− well−−−−"

"Sensitiveness," she finished dryly. "I really think I prefer rank dishonesty, if it is offset by courtesy and good breeding. You see, I am not at all moral."

Here Mrs. Calvert made her appearance, with a book and sunshade. She was a woman whom a sunshade completed.

"I hope you two have not been quarreling," she observed. "It is too nice a day for that. I was watching the slaughter of the innocents on the tennis−court. Really, you play a wretched game, William."

"So I have been informed," replied Garrison. "It is quite a relief to have so many people agree with me for once."

"In this instance you can believe them," commented the girl. She turned to Mrs. Calvert. "Whose ravings are you going to listen to now?" she asked, taking the book Mrs. Calvert carried.

"A matter of duty," laughed the older woman. "No; it's not a novel. It came this morning. The major wishes me to assimilate it and impart to him its nutritive elements−−if it contains any. He is so miserably busy−−doing nothing, as usual. But it is a labor of love. If we women are denied children, we must interest ourselves in other things."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, with interest; "it's the years record of the track!" She was thumbing over the leaves. "I'd love to read it! May I when you've done? Thank you. Why, here's Sysonby, Gold Heels, The Picket−−dear old Picket! Kentucky's pride! And here's Sis. Remember Sis? The Carter Handicap−−"

She broke off suddenly and turned to the silent Garrison. "Did you go much to the track up North?" She was looking straight at him.

"I−−I−−that is−−why, yes, of course," he murmured vaguely. "May I see it?"

He took the book from her unwilling hand. A full−page photograph of Sis was confronting him. He studied it long and carefully, passing a troubled hand nervously over his forehead.

"I−−I think I've seen her," he said, at length, looking up vacantly. "Somehow, she seems familiar."

Again he fell to studying the graceful lines of the thoroughbred, oblivious of his audience.

"She is a Southern horse," commented Mrs. Calvert. "Rather she was. Of course you−all heard of her poisoning? It never said whether she recovered. Do you know?"

Garrison glanced up quickly, and met Sue Desha's unwavering stare.

"Why, I believe I did hear that she was poisoned, or something to that effect, now that you mention it." His eyes were still vacant.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost," laughed Sue, her eyes on the magnolia−tree.

He laughed somewhat nervously. "I−−I've been thinking."

"Is the major going in for the Carter this year?" asked the girl, turning to Mrs. Calvert. "Who will he run−−Dixie?"

"I think so. She is the logical choice." Mrs. Calvert was nervously prodding the gravel with her sunshade. "Sometimes I wish he would give up all ideas of it."

"I think father is responsible for that. Since Rogue won the last Carter, father is horse−mad, and has infected all his neighbors."

"Then it will be friend against friend," laughed Mrs. Calvert. "For, of course, the colonel will run Rogue again this year−−"

'I−−I don't think so." The girl's face was sober. "That is," she added hastily, "I don't know. Father is still in New York. I think his initial success has spoiled him. Really, he is nothing more than a big child." She laughed affectedly. Mrs. Calvert's quiet, keen eyes were on her.

"Racing can be carried to excess, like everything," said the older woman, at length. "I suppose the colonel will bring home with him this Mr. Waterbury you were speaking of?"

The girl nodded. There was silence, each member of the trio evidently engrossed with thoughts that were of moment.

Mrs. Calvert was idly thumbing over the race−track annual. "Here is a page torn out," she observed absently. "I wonder what it was? A thing like that always piques my curiosity. I suppose the major wanted it for reference. But then he hasn't seen the book yet. I wonder who wanted it? Let me−−yes, it's ended here. Oh, it must have been the photograph and record of that jockey, Billy Garrison! Remember him? What a brilliant career he had! One never hears of him nowadays. I wonder what became of him?"

"Billy Garrison?" echoed Garrison slowly, "Why−−I−−I think I've heard of him−−"

He was cut short by a laugh from the girl. "Oh, you're good! Why, his name used to be a household word. You should have heard it. But, then, I don't suppose you ever went to the track. Those who do don't forget."

Mrs. Calvert walked slowly away. "Of course you'll stay for lunch, Sue," she called back. "And a canter might get up an appetite. William, I meant to tell you before this that the major has reserved a horse for your use. He is mild and thoroughly broken. Crimmins will show him to you in the stable. You must learn to ride. You'll find riding−clothes in your room, I think. I recommend an excellent teacher in Sue. Good−by, and don't get thrown."

"Are you willing?" asked the girl curiously.

Garrison's heart was pounding strangely. His mouth was dry. "Yes, yes," he said eagerly.

The tight−faced cockney, Crimmins, was in the stable when Garrison, in riding−breeches, puttee leggings, etc., entered. Four names were whirling over and over in his brain ever since they had been first mentioned. Four names−−Sis, Waterbury, Garrison, and Crimmins. He did not know whey they should keep recurring with such maddening persistency. And yet how familiar they all seemed!

Crimmins eyed him askance as he entered.

"Goin' for a canter, sir? Ho, yuss; this 'ere is the 'orse the master said as 'ow you were to ride, sir. It don't matter which side yeh get on. 'E's as stiddy−goin' as a alarum clock. Ho, yuss. I calls 'im Waterbury Watch−−partly because I 'appen to 'ave a brother wot's trainer for Mr. Waterbury, the turfman, sir."

Crimmins shifted his cud with great satisfaction at this uninterrupted flow of loquacity and brilliant humor. Garrison was looking the animal over instinctively, his hands running from hock to withers and back again.

"How old is he?" he asked absently.

"Three years, sir. Ho, yuss. Thoroughbred. Cast−off from the Duryea stable. By Sysonby out of Hamburg Belle. Won the Brighton Beach overnight sweepstakes in nineteen an' four. Ho, yuss. Just a little off his oats, but a bloomin' good 'orse."

Garrison turned, speaking mechanically. "I wonder do you think I'm a fool! Sysonby himself won the Brighton sweepstakes in nineteen−four. It was the beginning of his racing career, and an easy win. This animal here is a plug; an out−and−out plug of the first water. He never saw Hamburg Belle or Sysonby−−they never mated. This plug's a seven−year−old, and he couldn't do seven furlongs in seven weeks. He never was class, and never could be. I don't want to ride a cow, I want a horse. Give me that two−year−old black filly with the big shoulders.

Whose is she?"

Crimmins shifted the cud again to hide his astonishment at Garrison's sudden /savoir−faire/.

"She's wicked, sir. Bought for the missus, but she ain't broken yet."

"She hasn't been handled right. Her mouth's hard, but her temper's even. I'll ride her," said Garrison shortly.

"Have to wear blinkers, sir."

"No, I won't. Saddle her. Hurry up. Shorten the stirrup. There, that's right. Stand clear."

Crimmins eyed Garrison narrowly as he mounted. He was quite prepared to run with a clothes−basket to pick up the remains. But Garrison was up like a feather, high on the filly's neck, his shoulders hunched. The minute he felt the saddle between his knees he was at home again after a long, long absence. He had come into his birthright.

The filly quivered for a moment, laid back her ears, and then was off.

"Cripes!" ejaculated the veracious Crimmins, as wide−eyed he watched the filly fling gravel down the drove, " 'e's got a seat like Billy Garrison himself. 'E can ride, that kid. An' 'e knows 'orse−flesh. Blimy if 'e don't! If Garrison weren't down an' out I'd be ready to tyke my Alfred David it were 'is bloomin' self. An' I thought 'e was a dub! Ho, yuss−−me!"

Moralizing on the deceptiveness of appearances, Crimmins fortified himself with another slab of cut−plug.

Miss Desha, up on a big bay gelding with white stockings, was waiting on the Logan Pike, where the driveway of Calvert House swept into it.

"Do you know that you're riding Midge, and that she's a hard case?" she said ironically, as they cantered off together. "I'll bet you're thrown. Is she the horse the major reserved for you? Surely not."

"No," said Garrison plaintively, "they picked me out a cow−−a nice, amiable cow; speedy as a traction−engine, and with as much action. This is a little better."

The girl was silent, eyeing him steadily through narrowed lids.

"You've never ridden before?"

"Um−m−m," said Garrison; "why, yes, I suppose so." He laughed in sudden joy. "It feels so good," he confided.

"You remind me of a person in a dream," she said, after a little, still watching him closely. "Nothing seems real to you−−your past, I mean. You only think you have done this and that."

He was silent, biting his lip.

"Come on, I'll race you," she cried suddenly. "To that big poplar down there. See it? About two furlongs. I'll give you twenty yards' start. Don't fall off."

"I gave, never took, handicaps." The words came involuntarily to Garrison's surprise. "Come on; even up," he added hurriedly. "Ready?"

"Yes. Let her out."

The big bay gelding was off first, with the long, heart−breaking stride that eats up the ground. The girl's laugh floated back tantalizingly over her shoulder. Garrison hunched in the saddle, a smile on his lips. He knew the quality of the flesh under him, and that it would not be absent at the call.

"Tote in behind, girlie. He got the jump on you. That's it. Nip his heels." The seconds flew by like the trees; the big poplar rushed up. "Now, now. Make a breeze, make a breeze," sang out Garrison at the quarter minute; and like a long, black streak of smoke the filly hunched past the gelding, leaving it as if anchored. It was the old Garrison finish which had been track−famous once upon a time, and as Garrison eased up his hard−driven mount a queer feeling of exultation swelled his heart; a feeling which he could not quite understand.

"Could I have been a jockey once?" he kept asking himself over and over. "I wonder could I have been! I wonder!"

The next moment the gelding had ranged up alongside.

"I'll bet that was close to twenty−four, the track record," said Garrison unconsciously. "Pretty fair for dead and lumpy going, eh? Midge is a comer, all right. Good weight−carrying sprinter. I fancy that gelding. Properly ridden he would have given me a hard ride. We were even up on weight."

"And so you think I cannot ride properly!" added the girl quietly, arranging her wind−blown hair.

"Oh, yes. But women can't really ride class, you know. It isn't in them."

She laughed a little. "I'm satisfied now. You know I was at the Carter Handicap last year."

"Yes?" said Garrison, unmoved. He met her eyes fairly.

"Yes, you know Rogue, father's horse, won. They say Sis, the favorite, had the race, but was pulled in the stretch." She was smiling a little.

"Indeed?" murmured Garrison, with but indifferent interest.

She glanced at him sharply, then fell to pleating the gelding's mane. "Um−m−m," she added softly. "Billy Garrison, you know, rode Sis."

"Oh, did he?"

"Yes. And, do you know, his seat was identical with yours?" She turned and eyed him steadily.

"I'm flattered."

"Yes," she continued dreamily, the smile at her lips; "it's funny, of course, but Billy Garrison used to be my hero. We silly girls all have one."

"Oh, well," observed Garrison, "I dare say any number of girls loved Billy Garrison. Popular idol, you know−−−−"

"I dare say," she echoed dryly. "Possibly the dark, clinging kind."

He eyed her wonderingly, but she was looking very innocently at the peregrinating chipmunk.

"And it was so funny," she ran on, as if she had not heard his observation nor made one herself. "Coming home in the train from the Aqueduct the evening of the handicap, father left me for a moment to go into the smoking−car. And who do you think should be sitting opposite me, two seats ahead, but−− Who do you think?" Again she turned and held his eyes.

"Why−−some long−lost girl−chum, I suppose," said Garrison candidly.

She laughed; a laugh that died and was reborn and died again in a throaty gurgle. "Why, no, it was Billy Garrison himself. And I was being annoyed by a beast of a man, when Mr. Garrison got up, ordered the beast out of the seat beside me, and occupied it himself, saying it was his. It was done so beautifully. And he did not try to take advantage of his courtesy in the least. And then guess what happened." Still her eyes held his.

"Why," answered Garrison vaguely, "er−−let me see. It seems as if I had heard of that before somewhere. Let me see. Probably it got into the papers−− No, I cannot remember. It has gone. I have forgotten. And what did happen next?"

"Why, father returned, saw Mr. Garrison raise his hat in answer to my thanks, and, thinking he had tried to scrape an acquaintance with me, threw him out of the seat. He did not recognize him."

"That must have been a little bit tough on Garrison, eh?" laughed Garrison idly. "Now that you mention it, it seems as if I had heard it."

"I've always wanted to apologize to Mr. Garrison, though I do not know him−−he does not know me," said the girl softly, pleating the gelding's mane at a great rate. "It was all a mistake, of course. I wonder−−I wonder if−−if he held it against me!"

"Oh, very likely he's forgotten all about it long ago," said Garrison cheerfully.

She bit her lip and was silent. "I wonder," she resumed, at length, "if he would like me to apologize and thank him−−" She broke off, glancing at him shyly.

"Oh, well, you never met him again, did you?" asked Garrison. "So what does it matter? Merely an incident."

They rode a furlong in absolute silence. Again the girl was the first to speak. "It is queer," she moralized, "how fate weaves our lives. They run along in threads, are interwoven for a time with others, dropped, and then interwoven again. And what a pattern they make!"

"Meaning?" he asked absently.

She tapped her lips with the palm of her little gauntlet.

"That I think you are absurd."

"I?" He started. "How? Why? I don't understand. What have I done now?"

"Nothing. That's just it."

"I don't understand."

"No? Um−m−m, of course it is your secret. I am not trying to force a confidence. You have your own reasons for not wishing your uncle and aunt to know. But I never believed that Garrison threw the Carter Handicap. Never, never, never. I−−I thought you could trust me. That is all."

"I don't understand a word−−not a syllable," said Garrison restlessly. "What is it all about?"

The girl laughed, shrugging her shoulders. "Oh, nothing at all. The return of a prodigal. Only I have a good memory for faces. You have changed, but not very much. I only had to see you ride to be certain. But I suspected from the start. You see, I admit frankly that you once were my hero. There is only one Billy Garrison."

"I don't see the moral to the parable." He shook his head hopelessly.

"No?" She flushed and bit her lip. "William C. Dagget, you're Billy Garrison, and you know it!" she said sharply, turning and facing him. "Don't try to deny it. You are, are, are! I know it. You took that name because you didn't wish your relatives to know who you were. Why don't you 'fess up? What is the use of concealing it? You've nothing to be ashamed of. You should be proud of your record. I'm proud of it. Proud−−that−−that−−well, that I rode a race with you to−day. You're hiding your identity; afraid of what your uncle and aunt might say−− afraid of that Carter Handicap affair. As if we didn't know you always rode as straight as a string." Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes flashing.

Garrison eyed her steadily. His face was white, his breath coming hot and hard. Something was beating−−beating in his brain as if striving to jam through. Finally he shook his head.

"No, you're wrong. It's a case of mistaken identity. I am not Garrison."

Her gray eyes bored into his. "You really mean that−−Billy?"

"I do."

"On your word of honor? By everything you hold most sacred? Take your time in answering."

"It wouldn't matter if I waited till the resurrection. I can't change myself. I'm not Garrison. Faith of a gentleman, I'm not. Honestly, Sue." He laughed a little nervously.

Again her gray eyes searched his. She sighed. "Of course I take your word."

She fumbled in her bosom and brought forth a piece of paper, carefully smoothing out its crumpled surface. Without a word she handed it to Garrison, and he spread it out on his filly's mane. It was a photograph of a jockey−−Billy Garrison. The face was more youthful, care−free. Otherwise it was a fair likeness.

"You'll admit it looks somewhat like you," said Sue, with great dryness.

Garrison studied it long and carefully. "Yes−−I do," he murmured, in a perplexed tone. "A double. Funny, isn't it? Where did you get it?" She laughed a little, flushing.

"I was silly enough to think you were one and the same, and that you wished to conceal your identity from your relatives. So I made occasion to steal it from the book your aunt was about to read. Remember? It was the leaf she thought the major had abstracted."

"I must thank you for your kindness, even though it went astray. May I have it?"

"Ye−es. And you are sure you are not the original?"

"I haven't the slightest recollection of being Billy Garrison," reiterated Billy Garrison, wearily and truthfully.

The ride home was mostly one of silence. Both were thinking. As they came within sight of Calvert House the girl turned to him:

"There is one thing you can do−−ride. Like glory. Where did you more than learn?"

"Must have been born with me."

"What's bred in the bone will come out in the blood," she quoted enigmatically. She was smiling in a way that made Garrison vaguely uncomfortable.

CHAPTER VII. SNARK SHOWS HIS FANGS.

Alone in his room that night Garrison endeavored to focus the stray thoughts, suspicions that the day's events had set running through his brain. All Sue Desha had said, and had meant without saying, had been photographed on the sensitized plate of his memory−−that plate on which the negatives of the past were but filmy shadows. Now, of them all, the same Garrison was on the sky−line of his imagination.

Could it be possible that Billy Garrison and he were one and the same? And then that incident of the train. Surely he had heard it before, somewhere in the misty long ago. It seemed, too, as if it had occurred coincidently with the moment he had first looked into those gray eyes. He laughed nervously to himself.

"If I was Garrison, whoever he was, I wonder what kind of a person I was! They speak of him as if he had been some one−− And then Mrs. Calvert said he had disappeared. Perhaps I am Garrison."

Nervously he brought forth the page from the race−track annual Sue had given him, and studied it intently. "Yes, it does look like me. But it may be only a double; a coincidence." He racked his brain for a stray gleam of retrospect, but it was not forthcoming. "It's no use," he sighed wearily, "my life began when I left the hospital. And if I was Garrison, surely I would have been recognized by some one in New York.

"Hold on," he added eagerly, "I remember the first day I was out a man caught me by the arm on Broadway and said: 'Hello, Billy!' Let me think. This Garrison's name was Billy. The initials on my underwear were W. G.−−might be William Garrison instead of the William Good I took. But if so, how did I come to be in the hospital without a friend in the world? The doctors knew nothing of me. Haven't I any parents or relatives−−real relatives, not the ones I am imposing on?"

He sat on the bed endeavoring to recall some of his past life; even the faintest gleam. Then absently he turned over the photograph he held. On the reserve side of the leaf was the record of Billy Garrison. Garrison studied it eagerly.

"Born in eighty−two. Just my age, I guess−−though I can't swear how old I am, for I don't know. Stable−boy for James R. Keene. Contract bought by Henry Waterbury. Highest price ever paid for bought−up contract. H'm! Garrison was worth something. First win on the Gravesend track when seventeen. A native of New York City. H'm! Rode two Suburban winners; two Brooklyn Handicaps; Carter Handicap; the Grand Prix, France; the Metropolitan Handicap; the English Derby−− Oh, shucks! I never did all those things; never in God's world," he grunted wearily. "I wouldn't be here if I had. It's all a mistake. I knew it was. Sue was kidding me. And yet−−they say the real Billy Garrison has disappeared. That's funny, too."

He took a few restless paces about the room. "I'll go down and pump the major," he decided finally. "Maybe unconsciously he'll help me to remember. I'm in a fog. He ought to know Garrison. If I am Billy Garrison−−then by my present rank deception I've queered a good record. But I know I'm not. I'm a nobody. A dishonest nobody to boot."

Major Calvert was seated by his desk in the great old−fashioned library, intently scanning various racing−sheets and the multitudinous data of the track. A greater part of his time went to the cultivation of his one hobby−−the track and horses−−for by reason of his financial standing, having large cotton and real−estate holdings in the State, he could afford to use business as a pastime.

He spent his mornings and afternoons either in his stables or at the extensive training−quarters of his stud, where he was as indefatigable a rail−bird as any pristine stable−boy.

A friendly rivalry had long existed between his neighbor and friend, Colonel Desha, and himself in the matter of horse−flesh. The colonel was from Kentucky−−Kentucky origin−−and his boast was that his native State could not be surpassed either in regard to the quality of its horses or women. And, though chivalrous, the colonel always mentioned "women" last.

"Just look at Rogue and my daughter, Sue, suh," he was wont to say with pardonable pride. "Thoroughbreds both, suh."

It was a matter of record that the colonel, though less financially able, was a better judge of horses than his friend and rival, the major, and at the various county meets it was Major Calvert who always ran second to Colonel Desha's first.

The colonel's faith in Rogue had been vindicated at the last Carter Handicap, and his owner was now stimulating his ambition for higher flights. And thus far, the major, despite all his expenditures and lavish care, could only show one county win for his stable. His friend's success had aroused him, and deep down in his secret heart he vowed he would carry off the next prize Colonel Desha entered for, even if it was one of the classic handicaps itself.

Dixie, a three−year−old filly whom he had recently purchased, showed unmistakable evidences of winning class in her try−outs, and her owner watched her like a hawk, satisfaction in his heart, biding the time when he might at last show Kentucky that her sister State, Virginia, could breed a horse or two.

"I'll keep Dixie's class a secret," he was wont to chuckle to himself, as, perched on the rail in all sorts of weather, he clicked off her time. "I think it is the Carter my learned friend will endeavor to capture again. I'm sure Dixie can give Rogue five seconds in seven furlongs−−and a beating. That is, of course," he always concluded, with good−humored vexation, "providing the colonel doesn't pick up in New York an animal that can give Dixie ten seconds. He has a knack of going from better to best."

Now Major Calvert glanced up with a smile as Garrison entered.

"I thought you were in bed, boy. Leave late hours to age. You're looking better these days. I think Doctor Blandly's open−air physic is first−rate, eh? By the way, Crimmins tells me you were out on Midge to−day, and that you ride−−well, like Billy Garrison himself. Of course he always exaggerates, but you didn't say you could ride at all. Midge is a hard animal." He eyed Garrison with some curiosity. "Where did you learn to ride? I thought you had had no time nor means for it."

"Oh, I merely know a horse's tail from his head," laughed Garrison indifferently. "Speaking of Garrison, did you ever see him ride, major?"

"How many times have I asked you to say uncle, not major?" reproved Major Calvert. "Don't you feel as if you were my nephew, eh? If there's anything I've left undone−−"

"You've been more than kind," blurted out Garrison uncomfortably. "More than good−−uncle." He was hating himself. He could not meet the major's kindly eyes.

"Tut, tut, my boy, no fine speeches. Apropos of this Garrison, why are you so interested in him? Wish to emulate him, eh? Yes, I've seen him ride, but only once, when he was a bit of a lad. I fancy Colonel Desha is the one to give you his merits. You know Garrison's old owner, Mr. Waterbury, is returning with the colonel. He will be his guest for a week or so."

"Oh," said Garrison slowly. "And who is this Garrison riding for now?"

"I don't know. I haven't followed him. It seems as if I heard there was some disagreement or other between him and Mr. Waterbury; over that Carter Handicap, I think. By the way, if you take an interest in horses, and Crimmins tells me you have an eye for class, you rascal, come out to the track with me to−morrow. I've got a filly which I think will give the colonel's Rogue a hard drive. You know, if the colonel enters for the next Carter, I intend to contest it with him−− and win." He chuckled.

"Then you don't know anything about this Garrison?" persisted Garrison slowly.

"Nothing more than I've said. He was a first−class boy in his time. A boy I'd like to have seen astride of Dixie. Such stars come up quickly and disappear as suddenly. The life's against them, unless they possess a hard head. But Mr. Waterbury, when he arrives, can, I dare say, give you all the information you wish. By the way," he added, a twinkle in his eye, "what do you think of the colonel's other thoroughbred? I mean Miss Desha?"

Garrison felt the hot blood mounting to his face. "I−−I−−that is, I−−I like her. Very much indeed." He laughed awkwardly, his eyes on the parquet floor.

"I knew you would, boy. There's good blood in that girl−−the best in the States. Perhaps a little odd, eh? But, remember, straight speech means a straight mind. You see, the families have always been all in all to each other; the colonel is a school−chum of mine−−we're never out of school in this world−−and my wife was a nursery−chum of Sue's mother−−she was killed on the hunting−field ten years ago. Your aunt and I have always regarded the girl as our own. God somehow neglected to give us a chick−−probably we would have neglected Him for it. We love children. So we've cottoned all the more to Sue."

"I understand that Sue and I are intended for each other," observed Garrison, a half−cynical smile at his lips.

"God bless my soul! How did you guess?"

"Why, she said so."

Major Calvert chuckled. "God bless my soul again! That's Sue all over. She'd ask the devil himself for a glass of water if she was in the hot place, and insist upon having ice in it. 'Pon my soul she would. And what does she think of you? Likes you, eh?"

"No, she doesn't," replied Garrison quietly.

"Tell you as much, eh?"

"Yes."

Again Major Calvert chuckled. "Well, she told me different. Oh, yes, she did, you rascal. And I know Sue better than you do. Family wishes wouldn't weigh with her a particle if she didn't like the man. No, they wouldn't. She isn't the kind to give her hand where her heart isn't. She likes you. It remains with you to make her love you."

"And that's impossible," added Garrison grimly to himself. "If she only knew! Love? Lord!"

"Wait a minute," said the major, as Garrison prepared to leave. "Here's a letter that came for you to−day. It got mixed up in my mail by accident." He opened the desk−drawer and handed a square envelope to Garrison, who took it mechanically. "No doubt you've a good many friends up North," added the major kindly. "Have 'em down here for as long as they can stay. Calvert House is open night and day. I do not want you to think that because you are here you have to give up old friends. I'm generous enough to share you with them, but−−no elopements, mind."

"I think it's merely a business letter," replied Garrison indifferently, hiding his burning curiosity. He did not know who his correspondent could possibly be. Something impelled him to wait until he was alone in his room before opening it. It was from the eminent lawyer, Theobald D. Snark.

"BELOVED IMPOSTOR: '/Ars longa, vita brevis/,' as the philosopher has truly said, which in the English signifies that I cannot afford to wait for the demise of the reverend and guileless major before I garner the second fruits of my intelligence. Ten thousand is a mere pittance in New York−−one's appetite develops with cultivation, and mine has been starved for years−−and I find I require an income. Fifty a week or thereabouts will come in handy for the present. I know you have access to the major's pocketbook, it being situated on the same side as his heart, and I will expect a draft by following mail. He will be glad to indulge the sporting blood of youth. If I cannot share the bed of roses, I can at least fatten on the smell. I would have to be compelled to tell the major what a rank fraud and unsurpassed liar his supposed nephew is. So good a liar that he even imposed upon me. Of course I thought you were the real nephew, and it horrifies me to know that you are a fraud. But, remember, silence is golden. If you feel any inclination of getting fussy, remember that I am a lawyer, and that I can prove I took your claim in good faith. Also, the Southerners are notoriously hot−tempered, deplorably addicted to firearms, and I don't think you would look a pretty sight if you happened to get shot full of buttonholes."

The letter was unsigned, typewritten, and on plain paper. But Garrison knew whom it was from. It was the eminent lawyer's way not to place damaging evidence in the hands of a prospective enemy.

"This means blackmail," commented Garrison, carefully replacing the letter in its envelope. "And it serves me right. I wonder do I look silly. I must; for people take me for a fool."

CHAPTER VIII. THE COLONEL'S CONFESSION.

Garrison did not sleep that night. His position was clearly credited and debited in the ledger of life. He saw it; saw that the balance was against him. He must go−−but he could not, would not. He decided to take the cowardly, half−way measure. He had not the courage for renunciation. He would stay until this pot of contumacious fact came to the boil, overflowed, and scalded him out.

He was not afraid of the eminent Mr. Snark. Possession is in reality ten−tenths of the law. The lawyer had cleverly proven his−−Garrison's −−claim. He would be still more clever if he could disprove it. A lie can never be branded truth by a liar. How could he disprove it? How could his shoddy word weigh against Garrison's, fashioned from the whole cloth and with loyalty, love on Garrison's side?

No, the letter was only a bluff. Snark would not run the risk of publicly smirching himself−−for who would believe his protestations of innocency?−−losing his license at the bar together with the certainty of a small

fortune, for the sake of over−working a tool that might snap in his hand or cut both ways. So Garrison decided to disregard the letter.

But with Waterbury it was a different proposition. Garrison was unaware what his own relations had been with his former owner, but even if they had been the most cordial, which from Major Calvert's accounts they had not been, that fact would not prevent Waterbury divulging the rank fraud Garrison was perpetrating.

The race−track annual had said Billy Garrison had followed the ponies since boyhood. Waterbury would know his ancestry, if any one would. It was only a matter of time until exposure came, but still Garrison determined to procrastinate as long as possible. He clung fiercely, with the fierce tenacity of despair, to his present life. He could not renounce it all−−not yet.

Two hopes, secreted in his inner consciousness, supported indecision. One: Perhaps Waterbury might not recognize him, or perhaps he could safely keep out of his way. The second: Perhaps he himself was not Billy Garrison at all; for coincidence only said that he was, and a very small modicum of coincidence at that. This fact, if true, would cry his present panic groundless.

On the head of conscience, Garrison did not touch. He smothered it. All that he forced himself to sense was that he was "living like a white man for once"; loving as he never thought he could love.

The reverse, unsightly side of the picture he would not so much as glance at. Time enough when he was again flung out on that merciless, unrecognizing world he had come to loathe; loathe and dread. When that time came it would taste exceeding bitter in his mouth. All the more reason, then, to let the present furnish sweet food for retrospect; food that would offset the aloes of retribution. Thus Garrison philosophized.

And, though but vaguely aware of the fact, this philosophy of procrastination (but another form of selfishness) was the spawn of a supposition; the supposition that his love for Sue Desha was not returned; that it was hopeless, absurd. He was not injuring her. He was the moth, she the flame. He did not realize that the moth can extinguish the candle.

He had learned some of life's lessons, though the most difficult had been forgotten, but he had yet to understand the mighty force of love; that it contains no stagnant quality. Love, reciprocal love, uplifts. But there must be that reciprocal condition to cling to. For love is not selfishness on a grand scale, but a glorified pride. And the fine differentiation between these two words is the line separating the love that fouls from the love that cleanses.

And even as Garrison was fighting out the night with his sleepless thoughts, Sue Desha was in the same restless condition. Mr. Waterbury had arrived. His generous snores could be heard stalking down the corridor from the guest−chamber. He was of the abdominal variety of the animal species, eating and sleeping his way through life, oblivious of all obstacles.

Waterbury's ancestry was open to doubt. It was very vague; as vague as his features. It could not be said that he was brought up by his hair because he hadn't any to speak of. But the golden flood of money he commanded could not wash out certain gutter marks in his speech, person, and manner. That such an inmate should eat above the salt in Colonel Desha's home was a painful acknowledgment of the weight of necessity.

What the necessity was, Sue sensed but vaguely. It was there, nevertheless, almost amounting to an obsession. For when the Desha and Waterbury type commingle there is but the one interpretation. Need of money or clemency in the one case; need of social introduction or elevation through kinship in the other.

The latter was Waterbury's case. But he also loved Sue−−in his own way. He had met her first at the Carter Handicap, and, as he confided to himself: "She was a spanking filly, of good stock, and with good straight legs."

His sincere desire to "butt into the Desha family" he kept for the moment to himself. But as a preliminary maneuver he had intimated that a visit to the Desha home would not come in amiss. And the old colonel, for reasons he knew and Waterbury knew, thought it would be wisest to accede.

Perhaps now the colonel was considering those reasons. His room was next that of his daughter, and in her listening wakefulness she had heard him turn restlessly in bed. Insomnia loves company as does misery. Presently the colonel arose, and the strong smell of Virginia tobacco and the monotonous pad, pad of list slippers made themselves apparent.

Sue threw on a dressing−gown and entered her father's room. He was in a light green bathrobe, his white hair tousled like sea−foam as he passed and repassed his gaunt fingers through it.

"I can't sleep," said the girl simply. She cuddled in a big armchair, her feet tucked under her.

He put a hand on her shoulder. "I can't, either," he said, and laughed a little, as if incapable of understanding the reason. "I think late eating doesn't agree with me. It must have been the deviled crab."

"Mr. Waterbury?" suggested Sue.

"Eh?" Then Colonel Desha frowned, coughed, and finally laughed. "Still a child, I see," he added, with a deprecating shake of the head. "Will you ever grow up?"

"Yes−−when you recognize that I have." She pressed her cheek against the hand on her shoulder.

Sue practically managed the entire house, looking after the servants, expenses, and all, but the colonel always referred to her as "my little girl." He was under the amiable delusion that time had left her at the ten−mile mark, never to return.

This was one of but many defects in his vision. He was oblivious of materialistic facts. He was innocent of the ways of finance. He had come of a prodigal race of spenders, not accumulators. Away back somewhere in the line there must have existed what New Englanders term a "good provider," but that virtue had not descended from father to son. The original vast Desha estates decreased with every generation, seldom a descendant making even a spasmodic effort to replenish them. There was always a mortgage or sale in progress. Sometimes a lucrative as well as love−marriage temporarily increased the primal funds, but more often the opposite was the case.

The Deshas, like all true Southerners, believed that love was the only excuse for marriage; just as most Northerners believe that labor is the only excuse for living. And so the colonel, with no business incentive, acumen, or adaptability, and with the inherited handicap of a luxurious living standard, made a brave onslaught on his patrimony.

What the original estate was, or to what extent the colonel had encroached upon it, Sue never rightly knew. She had been brought up in the old faith that a Southerner is lord of the soil, but as she developed, the fact was forced home upon her that her father was not materialistic, and that ways and means were.

Twice yearly their Kentucky estate yielded an income. As soon as she understood affairs, Sue took a stand which could not be shaken, even if the easy−going mooning colonel had exerted himself to that extent. She insisted upon using one−half the yearly income for household expenses; the other the colonel could fritter away as he chose upon his racing−stable and his secondary hobby−−an utterly absurd stamp collection.

Only each household knows how it meets the necessity of living. It is generally the mother and daughter, if there be one, who comprise the inner finance committee. Men are only Napoleons of finance when the market is strong

and steady. When it becomes panicky and fluctuates and resolves itself into small unheroic deals, woman gets the job. For the world is principally a place where men work for the pleasures and woman has to cringe for the scraps. It may seem unchivalrous, but true nevertheless.

Only Sue knew how she compelled one dollar to bravely do the duty of two. Appearances are never so deceitful as in the household where want is apparently scorned. Sue was of the breed who, if necessary, could raise absolute pauperism to the peerage. And if ever a month came in which she would lie awake nights, developing the further elasticity of currency, certainly her neighbors knew aught of it, and her father least of all.

The colonel recommenced his pacing. Sue, hands clasped around knees, watched him with steady, unwinking eyes.

"It's not the deviled crab, daddy," she said quietly, at length. "It's something else. 'Fess up. You're in trouble. I feel it. Sit down there and let me go halves on it. Sit down."

Colonel Desha vaguely passed a hand through his hair, then, mechanically yielding to the superior strength and self−control of his daughter, eased himself into an opposite armchair.

"Oh, no, you're quite wrong, quite wrong," he reiterated absently. "I'm only tired. Only tired, girlie. That's all. Been very busy, you know." And he ran on feverishly, talking about Waterbury, weights, jockeys, mounts−−all the jargon of the turf. The dam of his mind had given way, and a flood of thoughts, hopes, fears came rioting forth unchecked, unthinkingly.

His eyes were vacant, a frown dividing his white brows, the thin hand on the table closing and relaxing. He was not talking to his daughter, but to his conscience. It was the old threadbare, tattered tale−−spawn of the Goddess fortune; a thing of misbegotten hopes and desires.

The colonel, swollen with the winning of the Carter Handicap, had conceived the idea that he was possessor of a God−given knowledge of the "game." And there had been many to sustain that belief. Now, the colonel might know a horse, but he did not know the law of averages, of chance, nor did he even know how his fellow man's heart is fashioned. Nor that track fortunes are only made by bookies or exceptionally wealthy or brainy owners; that a plunger comes out on top once in a million times. That the track, to live, must bleed "suckers" by the thousand, and that he, Colonel Desha, was one of the bled.

He was on the wrong side of the table. The Metropolitan, Brooklyn, Suburban, Brighton, Futurity, and a few minor meets served to swamp the colonel. What Waterbury had to do with the case was not clear. The colonel had taken his advice time and time again only to lose. But the Kentucky estate had been sold, and Mr. Waterbury held the mortgage of the Desha home. And then, his mind emptied of its poison, the colonel slowly came to himself.

"What−−what have I been saying?" he cried tensely. He attempted a laugh, a denial; caught his daughter's eyes, looked into them, and then buried his face in his quivering hands.

Sue knelt down and raised his head.

"Daddy, is that−−all?" she asked steadily.

He did not answer. Then, man as he was, the blood came sweeping to face and neck.

"I mean," added the girl quietly, her eyes, steady but very kind, holding his, "I had word from the National this morning saying that our account, the−−the balance, was overdrawn−−"

"Yes−−I drew against it," whispered Colonel Desha. He would not meet her eyes; he who had looked every man in the face. The fire caught him again. "I had to, girlie, I had to," he cried over and over again. "I intended telling you. We'll make it up a hundred times over. It was my only chance. It's all up on the books−−up on The Rogue. He'll win the Carter as sure as there's a God in heaven. It's a ten−thousand stake, and I've had twenty on him−−the balance−−your balance, girlie. I can pay off Waterbury−−" The fire died away as quickly. Somehow in the stillness of the room, against the look in the girl's eyes, words seemed so pitifully futile, so blatant, so utterly trivial.

Sue's face was averted, eyes on floor, hands tensely clasping those of her father. Absolute stillness held the room. The colonel was staring at the girl's bent head.

"It's−−it's all right, girlie. All right, don't fret," he murmured thickly. "The Rogue will win−−bound to win. You don't understand−− you're only a girl−−only a child−−−−"

"Of course, Daddy," agreed Sue slowly, wide−eyed. "I'm only a child. I don't understand."

But she understood more than her father. She was thinking of Billy Garrison.

CHAPTER IX. A BREATH OF THE OLD LIFE.

Major Calvert's really interested desire to see his pseudo nephew astride a mount afforded Garrison the legitimate opportunity of keeping clear of Mr. Waterbury for the next few days. The track was situated some three miles from Calvert House−−a modern racing−stable in every sense of the word−−and early the next morning Garrison started forth, accompanied by the indefatigable major.

Curiosity was stirring in the latter's heart. He had long been searching for a fitting rider for the erratic and sensitive Dixie−− whimsical and uncertain of taste as any woman−−and though he could not bring himself to believe in Crimmins' eulogy of Garrison's riding ability, he was anxious to ascertain how far the trainer had erred.

Crimmins was not given to airing his abortive sense of humor overmuch, and he was a sound judge of horse and man. If he was right−−but the major had to laugh at such a possibility. Garrison to ride like that! He who had confessed he had never thrown a leg over a horse before! By a freak of nature he might possess the instinct but not the ability.

Perhaps he even might possess the qualifications of an exercise−boy; he had the build−−a stripling who possessed both sinew and muscle, but who looked fatty tissue. But the major well knew that it is one thing to qualify as an exercise−boy and quite another to toe the mark as a jockey. For the former it is only necessary to have good hands, a good seat in the saddle, and to implicitly obey a trainer's instructions. No initiative is required. But it is absolutely essential that a boy should own all these adjuncts and many others−−quickness of perception, unlimited daring, and alertness to make a jockey. No truer summing up of the necessary qualifications is there than the old and famous "Father Bill" Daly's doggerel and appended note:

"Just a tinge of wickedness, With a touch of devil−may−care; Just a bit of bone and meat, With plenty of nerve to dare. And, on top of all things−−he must be a tough kid."

And "Father Bill" Daly ought to know above all others, for he has trained more famous jockeys than any other man in America.

There are two essential points in the training of race−horses−−secrecy and ability. Crimmins possessed both, but the scheduled situation of the Calvert stables rendered the secret "trying out" of racers before track entry

unnecessary. It is only fair to state that if Major Calvert had left his trainer to his own judgment his stable would have made a better showing than it had. But the major's disposition and unlimited time caused him more often than not to follow the racing paraphrase: "Dubs butt in where trainers fear to tread."

He was so enthusiastic and ignorant over horses that he insisted upon campaigns that had only the merit of good intentions to recommend them. Some highly paid trainers throw up their positions when their millionaire owners assume the role of dictator, but Crimmins very seldom lost his temper. The major was so boyishly good−hearted and bull−headed that Crimmins had come to view his master's racing aspirations almost as an expensive joke.

However, it seemed that the Carter Handicap and the winning by his very good friend and neighbor, Colonel Desha, had stuck firmly in Major Calvert's craw. He promised to faithfully follow his trainer's directions and leave for the nonce the preparatory training entirely in his hands.

It was decided now that Garrison should try out the fast black filly Dixie, just beginning training for the Carter. She had a hundred and twenty−five pounds of grossness to boil down before making track weight, but the opening spring handicap was five months off, and Crimmins believed in the "slow and sure" adage. Major Calvert, his old weather−beaten duster fluttering in the wind, took his accustomed perch on the rail, while Garrison prepared to get into racing−togs.

The blood was pounding in Garrison's heart as he lightly swung up on the sleek black filly. The old, nameless longing, the insistent thought that he had done all this before−−to the roar of thousands of voices−−possessed him.

Instinctively he understood his mount; her defects, her virtues. Instinctively he sensed that she was not a "whip horse." A touch of the whalebone and she would balk−−stop dead in her stride. He had known such horses before, generally fillies.

As soon as Garrison's feet touched stirrups all the condensed, colossal knowledge of track and horse−flesh, gleaned by the sweating labor of years, came tingling to his finger−tips. Judgment, instinct, daring, nerve, were all his; at his beck and call; serving their master. He felt every inch the veteran he was−−though he knew it not. It was not a freak of nature. He had worked, worked hard for knowledge, and it would not be denied. He felt as he used to feel before he had "gone back."

Garrison took Dixie over the seven furlongs twice, and in a manner, despite her grossness, the mare had never been taken before. She ran as easily, as relentlessly, without a hitch or break, as fine−spun silk slips through a shuttle. She was high−strung, sensitive to a degree, but Garrison understood her, and she answered his knowledge loyally.

It was impressive riding to those who knew the filly's irritability, uncertainty. Clean−cut veteran horsemanship, with horse and rider as one; a mechanically precise pace, heart−breaking for a following field. The major slowly climbed off the rail, mechanically eyeing his watch. He was unusually quiet, but there was a light in his eyes that forecasted disaster for his very good friend and neighbor, Colonel Desha, and The Rogue. It is even greater satisfaction, did we but acknowledge it, to turn the tables on a friend than on a foe.

"Boy," he said impressively, laying a hand on Garrison's shoulder and another on Dixie's flank, "I've been looking for some one to ride Dixie in the Carter−−some one who could ride; ride and understand. I've found that some one in my nephew. You'll ride her−−ride as no one else can. God knows how you learned the game−−I don't. But know it you do. Nor do I pretend to know how you understand the filly. I don't understand it at all. It must be a freak of nature."

"Ho, yuss!" added Crimmins quietly, his eye on the silent Garrison. "Ho, yuss! It must be a miracle. But I tell you, major, it ain't no miracle. It ain't. That boy 'as earned 'is class. 'E could understand any 'orse. 'E's earned 'is class. It don't come to a chap in the night. 'E's got to slave f'r it−−slave 'ard. Ho, yuss! Your neffy can ride, an' 'e can s'y wot 'e likes, but if 'e ain't modeled on Billy Garrison 'isself, then I'm a bloomin' bean−eating Dutchman! 'E's th' top spit of Garrison−−th' top spit of 'im, or may I never drink agyn!"

There was sincerity, good feeling, and force behind the declaration, and the major eyed Garrison intently and with some curiosity.

"Come, haven't you ridden before, eh?" he asked good−humoredly. "It's no disgrace, boy. Is it hard−won science, as Crimmins says, or merely an unbelievable and curious freak of nature, eh?"

Garrison looked the major in the eye. His heart was pounding.

"If I've ever ridden a mount before−−I've never known it," he said, with conviction and truth.

Crimmins shook his head in hopeless despair. The major was too enthusiastic to quibble over how the knowledge was gained. It was there in overflowing abundance. That was enough. Besides, his nephew's word was his bond. He would as soon think of doubting the Bible.

For the succeeding days Garrison and the major haunted the track. It was decided that the former should wear his uncle's colors in the Carter, and he threw himself into the training of Dixie with all his painstaking energy and knowledge.

He proved a valuable adjunct to Crimmins; rank was waived in the stables, and a sincere regard sprang up between master and man, based on the fundamental qualities of real manhood and a mutual passion for horse−flesh. And if the acid little cockney suspected that Garrison had ever carried a jockey's license or been track−bred, he respected the other's silence, and refrained from broaching the question again.

Meanwhile, to all appearances, things were running in the harmonious groove over at the Desha home. Since the night of Mr. Waterbury's arrival Sue had not mentioned the subject of the overdrawn balance, and the colonel had not. If the girl thought her father guilty of a slight breach of honor, no hint of it was conveyed either in speech or manner.

She was broad−minded−−the breadth and depth of perfect health and a clean heart. If she set up a high standard for herself, it was not to measure others by. The judgment of man entered into no part of her character; least of all, the judgment of a parent.

As for the colonel, it was apparent that he was not on speaking terms with his conscience. It made itself apparent in countless foolish little ways; in countless little means of placating his daughter−−a favorite book, a song, a new saddle. These votive offerings were tendered in subdued silence fitting to the occasion, but Sue always lauded them to the skies. Nor would she let him see that she understood the contrition working in him. To Colonel Desha she was no longer "my little girl," but "my daughter." Very often we only recognize another's right and might by being in the wrong and weak ourselves.

Every spare minute of his day−−and he had many−−the colonel spent in his stables superintending the training of The Rogue. He was infinitely worse than a mother with her first child. If the latter acts as if she invented maternity, one would have thought the colonel had fashioned the gelding as the horse of Troy was fashioned.

The Rogue's success meant everything to him−−everything in the world. He would be obliged to win. Colonel Desha was not one who believed in publishing a daily "agony column." He could hold his troubles as he could his

drink−−like a gentleman. He had not intended that Sue should be party to them, but that night of the confession they had caught him unawares. And he played the host to Mr. Waterbury as only a Southern gentleman can.

That the turfman had motives other than mere friendship and regard when proffering his advice and financial assistance, the colonel never suspected. It was a further manifestation of his childish streak and his ignorance of his fellow man. His great fault was in estimating his neighbor by his own moral code. It had never occurred to him that Waterbury loved Sue, and that he had forced his assistance while helping to create the necessity for that assistance, merely as a means of lending some authority to his suit. But Waterbury possessed many likable qualities; he had stood friend to Colonel Desha, whatever his motives, and the latter honored him on his own valuation.

Fear never would have given the turfman the entrée to the Desha home; only friendship. Down South hospitality is sacred. When one has succeeded in entering a household he is called kin. A mutual trust and bond of honor exist between host and guest. The mere formula; "So−and− So is my guest," is a clean bill of moral health. Therefore, in whatever light Sue may have regarded Mr. Waterbury, her treatment of him was uniformly courteous and kindly.

Necessarily they saw much of each other. The morning rides, formerly with Garrison, were now taken with Mr. Waterbury. This was owing partly to the former's close application to the track, partly to the courtesy due guest from hostess whose father is busily engaged, and in the main to a concrete determination on Sue's part. This intimacy with Sue Desha was destined to work a change in Waterbury.

He had come unworthy to the Desha home. He acknowledged that to himself. Come with the purpose of compelling his suit, if necessary. His love had been the product of his animalistic nature. It was a purely sensual appeal. He had never known the true interpretation of love; never experienced the society of a womanly woman. But it is in every nature to respond to the highest touch; to the appeal of honor. When trust is reposed, fidelity answers. It did its best to answer in Waterbury's case. His better self was slowly awakening.

Those days were wonderful, new, happy days for Waterbury. He was received on the footing of guest, good comrade. He was fighting to cross the line, searching for the courage necessary−−he who had watched without the flicker of an eyelash a fortune lost by an inch of horse−flesh. And if the girl knew, she gave no sign.

As for Garrison, despite his earnest attention to the track, those were unhappy days for him. He thought that he had voluntarily given up Sue's society; given it up for the sake of saving his skin; for the fear of meeting Waterbury. Time and time again he determined to face the turfman and learn the worst. Cowardice always stepped in. Presently Waterbury would leave for the North, and things then would be as they had been.

He hated himself for his cowardice; for his compromise with self− respect. It was not that he valued Sue's regard so lightly. Rather he feared to lose the little he had by daring all. He did not know that Sue had given him up. Did not know that she was hurt, mortally hurt; that her renunciation had not been necessary; that he had not given her the opportunity. He had stayed away, and she wondered. There could be but the one answer. He must hate this tie between them; this parent−fostered engagement. He was thinking of the girl he had left up North. Perhaps it was better for her, she argued, that she had determined upon renunciation.

Obviously Major Calvert and his wife noticed the breach in the Garrison−Desha entente cordiale. They credited it to some childish quarrel. They were wise in their generation. Old heads only muddle young hearts. To confer the dignity of age upon the differences of youth but serves to turn a mole−hill into a mountain.

But one memorable evening, when the boyish and enthusiastic major and Garrison returned from an all−day session at the track, they found Mrs. Calvert in a very quiet and serious mood, which all the major's cajolery could not penetrate. And after dinner she and the major had a peace conference in the library, at the termination of

which the doughty major's feathers were considerably agitated.

Mrs. Calvert's good nature was not the good nature of the faint− hearted or weak−kneed. She was never at loss for words, nor the spirit to back them when she considered conditions demanded them. Subsequently, when his wife retired, the major, very red in the face, called Garrison into the room.

"Eh, demmit, boy," he began, fussing up and down, "I've noticed, of course, that you and Sue don't pull in the same boat. Now, I thought it was due to a little tiff, as soon straightened as tangled, when pride once stopped goading you on. But your aunt, boy, has other ideas on the subject which she had been kindly imparting to me. And it seems that I'm entirely to blame. She says that I've caused you to neglect Sue for Dixie. Eh, boy, is that so?" He paused, eyeing Garrison in distress.

"No, it is not," said Garrison heavily. "It is entirely my fault."

The major heartily sighed his relief.

"Eh, demmit, I said as much to your aunt, but she knows I'm an old sinner, and she has her doubts. I told her if you could neglect Sue for Dixie your love wasn't worth a rap. I knew there was something back of it. Well, you must go over to−night and straighten it out. These little tiffs have to be killed early−−like spring chickens. Sue has her dander up, I tell you. She met your aunt to−day. Said flatly that she had broken the engagement; that it was final−−"

"Oh, she did?" was all Garrison could find to interrupt with.

"Eh, demmit; pride, boy, pride," said the major confidently. "Now, run along over and apologize; scratch humble gravel−−clear down to China, if necessary. And mind you do it right proper. Some people apologize by saying: 'If I've said anything I'm sorry for, I'm glad of it.' Eh, demmit, remember never to compete for the right with a woman. Women are always right. Man shouldn't be his own press−agent. It's woman's position−−and delight. She values man on her own valuation−−not his. Women are illogical−−that's why they marry us."

The major concluded his advice by giving Garrison a hearty thump on the back. Then he prepared to charge his wife's boudoir; to resume the peace conference with right on his side for the nonce.

Garrison slowly made his way down−stairs. His face was set. He knew his love for Sue was hopeless; an absurdity, a crime. But why had she broken the engagement? Had Waterbury said anything? He would go over and face Waterbury; face him and be done with it. He was reckless, desperate. As he descended the wide veranda steps a man stepped from behind a magnolia−tree shadowing the broad walk. A clear three−quarter moon was riding in the heavens, and it picked out Garrison's thin set face.

The man swung up, and tapped him on the shoulder. "Hello, Bud!"

It was Dan Crimmins.

CHAPTER X. "THEN I WAS NOT HONEST."

Garrison eyed him coldly, and was about to pass when Crimmins barred his way.

"I suppose when you gets up in the world, it ain't your way to know folks you knew before, is it?" he asked gently. "But Dan Crimmins has a heart, an' it ain't his way to shake friends, even if they has money. It ain't Crimmins' way."

"Take your hand off my shoulder," said Garrison steadily.

The other's black brows met, but he smiled genially.

"It don't go, Bud. No, no." He shook his head. "Try that on those who don't know you. I know you. You're Billy Garrison; I'm Dan Crimmins. Now, if you want me to blow in an' tell the major who you are, just say so. I'm obligin'. It's Crimmins' way. But if you want to help an old friend who's down an' out, just say so. I'm waitin'."

Garrison eyed him. Crimmins? Crimmins? The name was part of his dream. What had he been to this man? What did this man know?

"Take a walk down the pike," suggested the other easily. "It ain't often you have the pleasure of seein' an old friend, an' the excitement is a little too much for you. I know how it is," he added sympathetically. He was closely watching Garrison's face.

Garrison mechanically agreed, wondering.

"It's this way," began Crimmins, once the shelter of the pike was gained. "I'm Billy Crimmins' brother−−the chap who trains for Major Calvert. Now, I was down an' out−−I guess you know why−−an' so I wrote him askin' for a little help. An' he wouldn't give it. He's what you might call a lovin', confidin', tender young brother. But he mentioned in his letter that Bob Waterbury was here, and he asked why I had left his service. Some things don't get into the papers down here, an' it's just as well. You know why I left Waterbury. Waterbury−−−−!"

Here Crimmins carefully selected a variety of adjectives with which to decorate the turfman. He also spoke freely about the other's ancestors, and concluded with voicing certain dark convictions regarding Mr. Waterbury's future.

Garrison listened blankly. "What's all this to me?" he asked sharply. "I don't know you nor Mr. Waterbury."

"Hell you don't!" rapped out Crimmins. "Quit that game. I may have done things against you, but I've paid for them. You can't touch me on that count, but I can touch you, for I know you ain't the major's nephew−−no more than the Sheik of Umpooba. I'm ashamed of you. Tryin' on a game like that with your old trainer, who knows you−−"

Garrison caught him fiercely by the arm. His old trainer! Then he was Billy Garrison. Memory was fighting furiously. He was on fire. "Billy Garrison, Billy Garrison, Billy Garrison," he repeated over and over, shaking Crimmins like a reed. "Go on, go on, go on," he panted. "Tell me what you know about me. Go on, go on. Am I Garrison? Am I? Am I?"

Then, holding the other as in a vise, the thoughts that had been writhing in his mind for so long came hurtling forth. At last here was some one who knew him. His old trainer. What better friend could he need?

He panted in his frenzy. The words came tripping over one another, smothering, choking. And Crimmins with set face listened; listened as Garrison went over past events; events since that memorable morning he had awakened in the hospital with the world a blank and the past a blur. He told all−−all; like a little child babbling at his mother's knee.

"Why did I leave the track? Why? Why?" he finished in a whirlwind of passion. "What happened? Tell me. Say I'm honest. Say it, Crimmins; say it. Help me to get back. I can ride−−ride like glory. I'll win for you−−anything. Anything to get me out of this hell of deceit, nonentity namelessness. Help me to square myself. I'll make a name nobody'll be ashamed of−−" His words faded away. Passion left him weak and quivering.

Crimmins judicially cleared his throat. There was a queer light in his eyes.

"It ain't Dan Crimmins' way to go back on a friend," he began, laying a hand on Garrison's shoulder. "You don't remember nothing, all on account of that bingle you got on the head. But it was Crimmins that made you, Bud. Sweated over you like a father. It was Crimmins who got you out of many a tight place, when you wouldn't listen to his advice. I ain't saying it wasn't right to skip out after you'd thrown every race and the Carter; after poisoning Sis−−"

"Then−−I−−was−−not−−honest?" asked Garrison. He was horribly quiet.

"Emphatic'ly no," said Crimmins sadly. He shook his head. "And you don't remember how you came to Dan Crimmins the night you skipped out and you says: 'Dan, Dan, my only friend, tried and true, I'm broke.' Just like that you says it. And Dan says, without waitin' for you to ask; he says: 'Billy, you and me have been pals for fifteen years; pals man and boy. A friend is a friend, and a man who's broke don't want sympathy−−he needs money. Here's three thousand dollars−−all I've got. I was going to buy a home for the old mother, but friendship in need comes before all. It's yours. Take it. Don't say a word. Crimmins has a heart, and it's Dan Crimmins' way. He may suffer for it, but it's his way.' That's what he says."

"Go on," whispered Garrison. His eyes were very wide and vacant.

Crimmins spat carefully, as if to stimulate his imagination.

"No, no, you don't remember," he mused sadly. "Now you're tooting along with the high rollers. But I ain't kickin'. It's Crimmins' way never to give his hand in the dark, but when he does give it−−for life, my boy, for life. But I was thinkin' of the wife and kids you left up in Long Island; left to face the music. Of course I stood their friend as best I could−−"

"Then−−I'm married?" asked Garrison slowly. He laughed−−a laugh that caused the righteous Crimmins to wince. The latter carefully wiped his eyes with a handkerchief that had once been white.

"Boy, boy!" he said, in great agony of mind. "To think you've gone and forgot the sacred bond of matrimony! I thought at least you would have remembered that. But I says to your wife, I says: 'Billy will come back. He ain't the kind to leave you an' the kids go to the poorhouse, all for the want of a little gumption. He'll come back and face the charges−−"

"What charges?" Garrison did not recognize his own voice.

"Why, poisoning Sis. It's a jail offense," exclaimed Crimmins.

"Indeed," commented Garrison.

Again he laughed and again the righteous Crimmins winced. Garrison's gray eyes had the glint of sun shining on ice. His mouth looked as it had many a time when he fought neck−and−neck down the stretch, snatching victory by sheer, condensed, bulldog grit. Crimmins knew of old what that mouth portended, and he spoke hurriedly.

"Don't do anything rash, Bud. Bygones is bygones, and, as the Bible says: 'Circumstances alters cases,' and−−"

"Then this is how I stand," cut in Garrison steadily, unheeding the advice. He counted the dishonorable tally on his fingers. "I'm a horse−poisoner, a thief, a welcher. I've deserted my wife and family. I owe you−−how much?"

"Five thousand," said Crimmins deprecatingly, adding on the two just to show he had no hard feelings.

"Good," said Garrison. He bit his knuckles; bit until the blood came. "Good," he said again. He was silent.

"I ain't in a hurry," put in Crimmins magnanimously. "But you can pay it easy. The major−−"

"Is a gentleman," finished Garrison, eyes narrowed. "A gentleman whom I've wronged−−treated like−−" He clenched his hands. Words were of no avail.

"That's all right," argued the other persuasively. "What's the use of gettin' flossy over it now? Ain't you known all along, when you put the game up on him, that you wasn't his nephew; that you were doin' him dirt?"

"Shut up," blazed Garrison savagely. "I know−−what I've done. Fouled those I'm not fit to grovel to. I thought I was honest−−in a way. Now I know I'm the scum I am−−"

"You don't mean to say you're goin' to welch again?" asked the horrified Crimmins. "Goin' to tell the major−−"

"Just that, Crimmins. Tell them what I am. Tell Waterbury, and face that charge for poisoning his horse. I may have been what you say, but I'm not that now. I'm not," he reiterated passionately, daring contradiction. "I've sneaked long enough. Now I'm done with it−−"

"See here," inserted Crimmins, dangerously reasonable, "your little white−washing game may be all right to you, but where does Dan Crimmins come in and sit down? It ain't his way to be left standing. You splittin' to the major and Waterbury? They'll mash your face off! And where's my five thousand, eh? Where is it if you throw over the bank?"

"Damn your five thousand!" shrilled Garrison, passion throwing him. "What's your debt to what I owe? What's money? You say you're my friend. You say you have been. Yet you come here to blackmail me−−yes, that's the word I used, and the one I mean. Blackmail. You want me to continue living a lie so that I may stop your mouth with money. You say I'm married. But do you wish me to go back to my wife and children, to try to square myself before God and them? Do you wish me to face Waterbury, and take what's coming to me? No, you don't, you don't. You lie if you say you do. It's yourself−−yourself you're thinking of. I'm to be your jackal. That's your friendship, but I say if that's friendship, Crimmins, then to the devil with it, and may God send me hatred instead!" He choked with the sheer smother of his passion.

Crimmins was breathing heavily. Then passion marked him for the thing he was. Garrison saw confronting him not the unctuous, plausible friend, but a hunted animal, with fear and venom showing in his narrowed eyes. And, curiously enough, he noticed for the first time that the prison pallor was strong on Crimmins' face, and that the hair above his outstanding ears was clipped to the roots.

Then Crimmins spoke; through his teeth, and very slowly: "So you'll go to Waterbury, eh?" And he nodded the words home. "You−−little cur, you −−you little misbegotten bottle of bile! What are you and your hypocrisies to me? You don't know me, you don't know me." He laughed, and Garrison felt repulsion fingering his heart. Then the former trainer shot out a clawing, ravenous hand. "I want that money−−want it quick!" he spat, taking a step forward. "You want hatred, eh? Well, hatred you'll have, boy. Hatred that I've always given you, you miserable, puling, lily−livered spawn of a−−"

Garrison blotted out the insult to his mother's memory with his knuckles. "And that's for your friendship," he said, smashing home a right cross.

Crimmins arose very slowly from the white road, and even thought of flicking some of the fine dust from his coat. He was smiling. The moon was very bright. Crimmins glanced up and down the deserted pike. From the distant town a bell chimed the hour of eight. He had twenty pounds the better of the weights, but he was taking no

chances. For Garrison, all his wealth of hard−earned fistic education roused, was waiting; waiting with the infinite patience of the wounded cougar.

Crimmins looked up and down the road again. Then he came in, a black− jack clenched until the veins in his hand ridged out purple and taut as did those in his neck. A muscle was beating in his wooden cheek. He struck savagely. Garrison side−stepped, and his fist clacked under Crimmins' chin. Neither spoke. Again Crimmins came in.

A great splatter of hoof−beats came from down the pike, sounding like the vomitings of a Gatling gun. A horse streaked its way toward them. Crimmins darted into the underbrush bordering the pike. The horse came fast. It flashed past Garrison. Its rider was swaying in the saddle; swaying with white, tense face and sawing hands. The eyes were fixed straight ahead, vacant. A broken saddle−girth flapped raggedly. Garrison recognized the fact that it was a runaway, with Sue Desha up.

Another horse followed, throwing space furiously. It was a big bay gelding. As it drew abreast of Garrison, standing motionless in the white road, it shied. Its rider rocketed over its head, thudded on the ground, heaved once or twice, and then lay very still. The horse swept on. As it passed, Garrison swung beside it, caught its pace for an instant, and then eased himself into the saddle. Then he bent over and rode as only he could ride. It was a runaway handicap. Sue's life was the stake, and the odds were against him.

CHAPTER XI. SUE DECLARES HER LOVE.

It was Waterbury who was lying unconscious on the lonely Logan Pike; Waterbury who had been thrown as the bay gelding strove desperately to overhaul the flying runaway filly.

Sue had gone for an evening ride. She wished to be alone. It had been impossible to lose the ubiquitous Mr. Waterbury, but this evening The Rogue had evinced premonitory symptoms of a distemper, and the greatly exercised colonel had induced the turfman to ride over and have a look at him. This left Sue absolutely unfettered, the first occasion in a week.

She was of the kind who fought out trouble silently, but not placidly. She must have something to contend against; something on which to work out the distemper of a heart and mind not in harmony. She must experience physical exhaustion before resignation came. In learning a lesson she could not remain inactive. She must walk, walk, up and down, up an down, until its moral or text was beaten into her mentality with her echoing footsteps.

On this occasion she was in the humor to dare the impossible; dare through sheer irritability of heart−−not mind. And so she saddled Lethe−−an unregenerate pinto of the Southern Trail, whose concealed devilishness forcibly reminded one of Balzac's famous description: "A clenched fist hidden in an empty sleeve."

She had been forbidden to ride the pinto ever since the day it was brought home to her with irrefutable emphasis that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. It was more of a parabola she described, when, bucked off, her head smashed the ground, but the simile serves.

But she would ride Lethe to−night. The other horses were too comfortable. They served to irritate the bandit passions, not to subdue them. She panted for some one, something, to break to her will.

Lethe felt that there was a passion that night riding her; a passion that far surpassed her own. Womanlike, she decided to arbitrate. She would wait until this all−powerful passion burned itself out; then she could afford to safely agitate her own. It would not have grown less in the necessary interim. So, much to Sue's surprise, the filly was as gentle as the proverbial lamb.

As she turned for home, Waterbury rode out of the deepening shadows behind her. He had left the colonel at his breeding−farm. Waterbury and Sue rode in silence. The girl was giving all her attention to her thoughts. What was left over was devoted to the insistent mouth of Lethe, who ever and anon tested the grip on her bridle−rein; ascertaining whether or not there were any symptoms of relaxation or abstraction.

It is human nature to grow tired of being good. Waterbury's better nature had been in the ascendancy for over a week. He thought he could afford to draw on this surplus balance to his credit. He was riding very close to Sue. He had encroached, inch by inch, but her oblivion had not been inclination, as Waterbury fancied. He edged nearer. As she did not heed the steal, he took it for a grant. We fit facts to our inclination. The animal arose mightily in him. In stooping to avoid an overhanging branch he brushed against her. The contact set him aflame. He was hungrily eyeing her profile. Then in a second, he had crushed her head to his shoulder, and was fiercely kissing her again and again−−lips, hair, eyes; eyes, hair, lips.

"There!" he panted, releasing her. He laughed foolishly, biting his nails. His mouth felt as if roofed with sand−paper. His face was white, but not as white as hers.

She was silent. Then she drew a handkerchief from her sleeve and very carefully wiped her lips. She was absolutely silent, but a pulse was beating−−beating in her slim throat. The action, her silence, inflamed Waterbury. He made to crush her waist with his ravenous arm. Then, for the first time, she turned slowly, and her narrowed eyes met his. He saw, even in the gloom. Again he laughed, but the onrushing blood purpled his neck.

Desperation came to help him brave those eyes−−came and failed. He talked, declaimed, avowed−−grew brutally frank. Finally he spoke of the mortgage he held, and waited, breathing heavily, for the answer. There was none.

"I suppose it's some one else, eh?" he rapped out, red showing in the brown of his eyes.

Silence. He savagely cut the gelding across the ears, and then checked its answering, maddened leap. The red deepened in Sue's cheek−−two red spots, the flag of courage.

"It's this nephew of Major Calvert's," added Waterbury. He lost the last shred of common decency he could lay claim to; it was caught up and whirled away in the tempest of his passion. "I saw him to−day, on my way to the track. He didn't see me. When I knew him his name was Garrison−−Billy Garrison. I discharged him for dishonesty. I suppose he sneaked home to a confiding uncle when the world had kicked him out. I suppose they think he's all right, same as you do. But he's a thief. A common, low−down−−"

The girl turned swiftly, and her little gauntlet caught Waterbury full across the mouth.

"You lie!" she whispered, very softly, her face white and quivering, her eyes black with passion.

And then Lethe saw her opportunity. Sensed it in the momentary relaxing of the bridle−rein. She whipped the bit into her fierce, even, white teeth, and with a snort shot down the pike.

And then Waterbury's better self gained supremacy; contrition, self− hatred rushing in like a fierce tidal wave and swamping the last vestige of animalism. He spurred blindly after the fast−disappearing filly.

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Garrison rode one of the best races of his life that night. It was a trial of stamina and nerve. Lethe was primarily a sprinter, and the gelding, raised to his greatest effort by the genius of his rider, outfought her, outstayed her. As he flew down the moon−swept road, bright as at any noontime, Garrison knew success would be his, providing Sue kept her seat, her nerve, and the saddle from twisting.

Inch by inch the white, shadow−flecked space between the gelding and the filly was eaten up. On, on, with only the tempest of their speed and the flying hoofs for audience. On, on, until now the gelding had poked his nose past the filly's flying hocks.

Garrison knew horses. He called on the gelding for a supreme effort, and the gelding answered impressively. He hunched himself, shot past the filly. Twenty yards' gain, twenty yards to the fore, and then Garrison turned easily in the saddle. "All right, Miss Desha, let her come," he sang out cheerfully.

And the filly came, came hard; came with all the bitterness of being outstripped by a clumsy gelding whom she had beaten time and again. As she caught the latter's slowed pace, as her wicked nose drew alongside of the other's withers, Garrison shot out a hand, clamped an iron clutch on the spume−smeared bit, swung the gelding across the filly's right of way; then, with his right hand, choked the fight from her widespread nostrils.

And then, womanlike, Sue fainted, and Garrison was just in time to ease her through his arms to the ground. The two horses, thoroughly blown, placidly settled down to nibble the grass by the wayside.

Sue lay there, her wealth of hair clouding Garrison's shoulder. He watched consciousness return, the flutter of her breath. The perfume of her skin was in his nostrils, his mouth; stealing away his honor. He held her close. She shivered.

He fought to keep from kissing her as she lay there unarmed. Then her throat pulsed; her eyes opened. Garrison kissed her again and again; gripping her as a drowning man grips at a passing straw.

With a great heave and a passionate cry she flung him from her. She rose unsteadily to her feet. He stood, shame engulfing him. Then she caught her breath hard.

"Oh!" she said softly, "it's−−it's you!" She laughed tremulously. "I−− I thought it was Mr. Waterbury."

Relief, longing was in the voice. She made a pleading motion with her arms−−a child longing for its mother's neck. He did not see, heed. He was nervously running his hand through his hair, face flaming. Silence.

"Mr. Waterbury was thrown. I took his mount," he blurted out, at length. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head without replying; biting her lips. She was devouring him with her eyes; eyes dark with passion. The memory of that moment in his arms was seething within her. Why−−why had she not known! They looked at each other; eye to eye; soul to soul. Neither spoke.

She shivered, though the night was warm.

"Why did you call me Miss Desha?" she asked, at length.

"Because," he said feebly−−his nature was true to his Southern name. He was fighting self like the girl−−"I'm going away," he added. It had to come with a rush or not at all. And it must come. He heaved his chest as a swimmer seeks to breast the waves. "I'm not worthy of you. I'm a−−a beast," he said. "I lied to you; lied when I said I was not Garrison. I am Billy Garrison. I did not know that I was. I know now. Know−−−−"

"I knew you were," said the girl simply. "Why did you try to hide it? Shame?"

"No." In sharp staccato sentences he told her of his lapse of memory. "It was not because I was a thief; because I was kicked from the turf; because I was a horse−poisoner−−"

"Then−−it's true?" she asked.

"That I'm a−−beast?" he asked grimly. "Yes, it's true. You doubt me, don't you? You think I knew my identity, my crimes all along, and that I was afraid. Say you doubt me."

"I believe you," she said quietly.

"Thank you," he replied as quietly.

"And−−you think it necessary, imperative that you go away?" There was an unuttered sob in her voice, though she sought to choke it back.

"I do." He laughed a little−−the laugh that had caused the righteous Dan Crimmins to wince.

She made a passionate gesture with her hand. "Billy," she said, and stopped, eyes flaming.

"You were right to break the engagement," he said slowly, eyes on the ground. "I suppose Mr. Waterbury told you who I was, and−−and, of course, you could only act as you did."

She was silent, her face quivering.

"And you think that of me? You would think it of me? No, from the first I knew you were Garrison−−"

"Forgive me," he inserted.

"I broke the engagement," she added, "because conditions were changed −−with me. My condition was no longer what it was when the engagement was made−−" She checked herself with an effort.

"I think I understand−−now," he said, and admiration was in his eyes; "I know the track. I should." He was speaking lifelessly, eyes on the ground. "And I understand that you do not know−−all."

"All?"

"Um−m−m." He looked up and faced her eyes, head held high. "I am an adventurer," he said slowly. "A scoundrel, an impostor. I am not−− Major Calvert's nephew." And he watched her eyes; watched unflinchingly as they changed and changed again. But he would not look away.

"I−−I think I will sit down, if you don't mind," she whispered, hand at throat. She seated herself, as one in a maze, on a log by the wayside. She looked up, a twisted little smile on her lips, as he stood above her. "Won't−−won't you sit down and tell−−tell me all?"

He obeyed automatically, not striving to fathom the great charity of her silence. And then he told all−−all. Even as he had told that very good trainer and righteous friend, Dan Crimmins. His voice was perfectly lifeless. And the girl listened, lips clenched on teeth.

"And−−and that's all," he whispered. "God knows it's enough−−too much." He drew himself away as some unclean thing.

"All that, all that, and you only a boy," whispered the girl, half to herself. "You must not tell the major. You must not," she cried fiercely.

"I must," he whispered. "I will."

"You must not. You won't. You must go away, go away. Wipe the slate clean," she added tensely. "You must not tell the major. It must be broken to him gently, by degrees. Boy, boy, don't you know what it is to love; to have your heart twisted, broken, trampled? You must not tell him. It would kill. I−−know." She crushed her hands in her lap.

"I'm a coward if I run," he said.

"A murderer if you stay," she answered. "And Mr. Waterbury−−he will flay you−−keep you in the mire. I know. No, you must go, you must go. Must have a chance for regeneration."

"You are very kind−−very kind. You do not say you loathe me." He arose abruptly, clenching his hands above his head in silent agony

"No, I do not," she whispered, leaning forward, hands gripping the log, eyes burning up into his face. "I do not. Because I can't. I can't. Because I love you, love you, love you. Boy, boy, can't you see? Won't you see? I love you−−"

"Don't," he cried sharply, as if in physical agony. "You don't know what you say−−"

"I do, I do. I love you, love you," she stormed. Passion, long stamped down, had arisen in all its might. The surging intensity of her nature was at white heat. It had broken all bonds, swept everything aside in its mad rush. "Take me with you. Take me with you−−anywhere," she panted passionately. She arose and caught him swiftly by the arm, forcing up her flaming face to his. "I don't care what you are−−I know what you will be. I've loved you from the first. I lied when I ever said I hated you. I'll help you to make a new start. Oh, so hard! Try me. Try me. Take me with you. You are all I have. I can't give you up. I won't! Take me, take me. Do, do, do!" Her head thrown back, she forced a hungry arm about his neck and strove to drag his lips to hers.

He caught both wrists and eyed her. She was panting, but her eyes met his unwaveringly, gloriously unashamed. He fought for every word. "Don't−−tempt−−me−−Sue. Good God, girl! you don't know how I love you. You can't. Loved you from that night in the train. Now I know who you were, what you are to me−−everything. Help me to think of you, not of myself. You must guard yourself. I'm tired of fighting−−I can't−−−−"

"It's the girl up North?"

He drew back. He had forgotten. He turned away, head bowed. Both were fighting−−fighting against love−−everything. Then Sue drew a great breath and commenced to shiver.

"I was wrong. You must go to her," she whispered. "She has the right of way. She has the right of way. Go, go," she blazed, passion slipping up again. "Go before I forget honor; forget everything but that I love."

Garrison turned. She never forgot the look his face held; never forgot the tone of his voice.

"I go. Good−by, Sue. I go to the girl up North. You are above me in every way−−infinitely above me. Yes, the girl up North. I had forgotten. She is my wife. And I have children."

He swung on his heel and blindly flung himself upon the waiting gelding.

Sue stood motionless.

CHAPTER XII. GARRISON HIMSELF AGAIN.

That night Garrison left for New York; left with the memory of Sue standing there on the moonlit pike, that look in her eyes; that look of dazed horror which he strove blindly to shut out. He did not return to Calvert House; not because he remembered the girl's advice and was acting upon it. His mind had no room for the past. Every blood−vessel was striving to grapple with the present. He was numb with agony. It seemed as if his brain had been beaten with sticks; beaten to a pulp. That last scene with Sue had uprooted every fiber of his being. He writhed when he thought of it. But one thought possessed him. To get away, get away, get away; out of it all; anyhow, anywhere.

He was like a raw recruit who has been lying on the firing−line, suffering the agonies of apprehension, of imagination; experiencing the proximity of death in cold blood, without the heat of action to render him oblivious.

Garrison had been on the firing−line for so long that his nerve was frayed to ribbons. Now the blow had fallen at last. The exposure had come, and a fierce frenzy possessed him to complete the work begun. He craved physical combat. And when he thought of Sue he felt like a murderer fleeing from the scene of his crime; striving, with distance, to blot out the memory of his victim. That was all he thought of. That, and to get away−−to flee from himself. Afterward, analysis of actions would come. At present, only action; only action.

It was five miles to the Cottonton depot, reached by a road that branched off from the Logan Pike about half a mile above the spot where Waterbury had been thrown. He remembered that there was a through train at ten−fifteen. He would have time if he rode hard. With head bowed, shoulders hunched, he bent over the gelding. He had no recollection of that ride.

But the long, weary journey North was one he had full recollection of. He was forced to remain partially inactive, though he paced from smoking to observation−car time and time again. He could not remain still. The first great fury of the storm had passed. It had swept him up, weak and nerveless, on the beach of retrospect; among the wreck of past hopes; the flotsam and jetsam of what might have been.

He had time for self−analysis, for remorse, for the fierce probings of conscience. One minute he regretted that he had run away without confessing to the major; the next, remembering Sue's advice, he was glad. He tried to shut out the girl's picture from his heart. Impossible. She was the picture; all else was but frame. He knew that he had lost her irrevocably. What must she think of him? How she must utterly despise him!

On the second day doubt came to Garrison, and with it a ray of hope. For the first time the possibility suggested itself that Dan Crimmins, from the deep well of his lively imagination, might have concocted Mrs. Garrison and offspring. Crimmins had said he had always hated him. And he had acted like a villain. He looked like one; like a felon, but newly jail−freed. Might he not have invented the statement through sheer ill will? Realizing that Garrison's memory was a blank, might he not have sought to rivet the blackmailing fetters upon him by this new bolt?

Thus Garrison reasoned, and outlined two schemes. First, he would find his wife if wife there were. He could not love her, for love must have a beginning, and it feeds on the past. He had neither. But he would be loyal to her; loyal as Crimmins said she had been loyal to him. Then he would face whatever charges were against him, and seek restoration from the jockey club, though it took his lifetime. And he would seek some way of wiping out, or at least diminishing, the stain he had left behind him in Virginia.

On the other hand, if Crimmins had lied−−Garrison's jaw came out and his eyes snapped. Then he would scrape himself morally clean, and fight and fight for honorable recognition from the world. He would prove that a "has−been" can come back. He would brand the negative as a lie. And then−−Sue. Perhaps−−perhaps.

Those were the two roads. Which would he traverse? Whichever it was, though his heart, his entire being, lay with the latter, he would follow the pointing finger of honor; follow it to the end, no matter what it might cost, or where it might lead. Love had restored to him the appreciation of man's birthright; the birthright without which nothing is won in this world or the next. He had gained self−respect. At present it was but the thought. He would fight to make it reality; fight to keep it.

And that night as the train was leaping out of the darkness toward the lights of the great city, racing toward its haven, rushing like a falling comet, some one blundered. The world called it a disaster; the official statement, an accident, an open switch; the press called it an outrage. Pessimism called it fate−−stern mother of the unsavory. Optimism called it Providence. At all events, the train jammed shut like a closing telescope. Undiluted Hades was very prevalent for over an hour. There were groans, screams, prayers−−all the jargon of those about to precipitately return from whence they came. It was not a pleasant scene. Ghouls were there. But mercy, charity, and great courage were also there. And Garrison was there.

Fate, the unsavory, had been with him. He had been thrown clear at the first crash; thrown through his sleeping−berth window. Physically he was not very presentable. But he fought a good fight against the flames and the general chaos.

One of the forward cars was a caldron of flame. A baby's cry swung out from among the roar and smart of the living hell. There was a frantic father and a demented mother. Both had to be thrown and pounded into submission; held by sheer weight and muscle.

There were brave men there that night, but there was no sense in giving two lives for one. Death was reaping more than enough. They would try to save the "kid," but it looked hopeless. Was it a girl? Yes, and an only child? She must be pinned under a seat. The fire would be about opening up on her. Sure−−sure they would see what could be done. Anyway, the roof was due to smash down. But they'd see. But there were lots of others who needed a hand; others who were not pinned under seats with the flames hungry for them.

But Garrison had swung on to a near−by horse−cart, jammed into rubber boots, coats, and helmet, tying a wet towel over nose and mouth. And as some stared, some cursed, and some cheered feebly, he smashed his way through the smother of flame to the choking screams of the child.

The roof fell in. A great crash and a spouting fire of flame. An eternity, and then he emerged like one of the three prophets from the fiery furnace. Only he was not a Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego. He was not fashioned from providential asbestos. He was vulnerable. They carried him to a near−by house. His head had been wonderfully smashed by the falling roof. His eyebrows and hair were left behind in the smother of flame. He was fire−licked from toe to heel. He was raving. But the child was safe. And that wreck and that rescue went down in history.

For weeks Garrison was in the hospital. It was very like the rehearsal of a past performance. He was completely out of his head. It was all very like the months he put in at Bellevue in the long ago, before he had experienced the hunger−cancer and compromised with honesty.

And again there came nights when doctors shook their heads and nurses looked grave; nights when it was understood that before another dawn had come creeping through the windows little Billy Garrison would have crossed the Big Divide; nights when the shibboleths of a dead−and−gone life were even fluttering on his lips; nights when names but not identities fought with one another for existence; fought for birth, for supremacy, and "Sue" always won; nights when he sat up in bed as he had sat up in Bellevue long ago, and with tense hands and blazing eyes fought out victory on the stretch. Horrible, horrible nights; surcharged with the frenzy and unreality of a nightmare.

And one of his audience who seldom left the narrow cot was a man who had come to look for a friend among the wreck victims; come and found him not. He had chanced to pass Garrison's cot. And he had remained.

Came a night at last when stamina and hope and grit won the long, long fight. The crisis was turned. The demons, defeated, who had been fighting among themselves for the possession of Garrison's mind, reluctantly gave it back to him. And, moreover, they gave it back−− intact. The part they had stolen that night in the Hoffman House was replaced.

This restoration the doctors subsequently called by a very learned and mysterious name. They gave an esoteric explanation redounding greatly to the credit of the general medical and surgical world. It was something to the effect that the initial blow Garrison had received had forced a piece of bone against the brain in such a manner as to defy mere man's surgery. This had caused the lapse of memory.

Then had come the second blow that night of the wreck. Where man had failed, nature had stepped in and operated successfully. Her methods had been crude, but effective. The unscientific blow on the head had restored the dislodged bone to its proper place. The medical world was highly pleased over this manifestation of nature's surgical skill, and appeared to think that she had operated under its direction. And nature never denied it.

As Garrison opened his eyes, dazed, weak as water, memory, full, complete, rushed into action. His brain recalled everything−− everything from the period it is given man to remember down to the present. It was all so clear, so perfect, so workmanlike. The long− halted clock of memory was ticking away merrily, perfectly, and not one hour was missing from its dial. The thread of his severed life was joined−−joined in such a manner that no hitch or knot was apparent.

To use a third simile, the former blank, utterly fearsome space, was filled−−filled with clear writing, without blotch or blemish. And on the space was not recorded one deed he had dreaded to see. There were mistakes, weaknesses−−but not dishonor. For a moment he could not grasp the full meaning of the blessing. He could only sense that he had indeed been blessed above his deserts.

And then as Garrison understood what it all meant to him; understood the chief fact that he had not deserted wife and children; that Sue might be won, he crushed his face to the pillow and cried−−cried like a little child.

And a big man, sitting in the shelter of a screen, hitched his chair nearer the cot, and laid both hands on Garrison's. He did not speak, but there was a wonderful light in his eyes−−steady, clear gray eyes.

"Kid," he said. "Kid."

Garrison turned swiftly. His hand gripped the other's.

"Jimmie Drake," he whispered. For the first time the blood came to his face.

CHAPTER XIII. PROVEN CLEAN.

Two months had gone in; two months of slow recuperation, regeneration for Garrison. He was just beginning to look at life from the standpoint of unremitting toil and endeavor. It is the only satisfactory standpoint. From it we see life in its true proportions. Neither distorted through the blue glasses of pessimism−−but another name for the failure of misapplication−−nor through the wonderful rose−colored glasses of the dreamer. He was patiently going back over his past life; returning to the point where he had deserted the clearly defined path of honor and duty for the flowery fields of unbridled license.

It was no easy task he had set himself, but he did not falter by the wayside. Three great stimulants he had−−health, the thought of Sue Desha, and the practical assistance of Jimmie Drake.

It was a month, dating from the memorable meeting with the turfman, before Garrison was able to leave the hospital. When he did, it was to take up his life at Drake's Long Island breeding−farm and racing− stable; for in the interim Drake had passed from book−making stage to that of owner. He ran a first−class string of mounts, and he signed Garrison to ride for him during the ensuing season.

It was the first chance for regeneration, and it had been timidly asked and gladly granted; asked and granted during one of the long nights in the hospital when Garrison was struggling for strength and faith. It had been the first time he had been permitted to talk for any great length.

"Thank you," he said, on the granting of his request, which he more than thought would be refused. His eyes voiced where his lips were dumb. "I haven't gone back, Jimmie, but it's good of you to give me a chance on my say−so. I'll bear it in mind. And−−and it's good of you, Jimmie, to−−to come and sit with me. I−−I appreciate it all, and I don't see why you should do it."

Drake laughed awkwardly.

"It's the least I could do, kid. The favor ain't on my side, it's on yours. Anyway, what use is a friend if he ain't there when you need him? It was luck I found you here. I thought you had disappeared for keeps. Remember that day you cut me on Broadway? I ought to have followed you, but I was sore−−"

"But I−−I didn't mean to cut you, Jimmie. I didn't know you. I want to tell you all about that−−about everything. I'm just beginning to know now that I'm living. I've been buried alive. Honest!"

"I always thought there was something back of your absent treatment. What was it?" Drake hitched his chair nearer and focused all his powers of concentration. "What was it, kid? Out with it. And if I can be of any help you know you have only to put it there." He held out a large hand.

And then slowly, haltingly, but lucidly, dispassionately, events following in sequence, Garrison told everything; concealing nothing. Nor did he try to gloss over or strive to nullify his own dishonorable actions. He told everything, and the turfman, chin in hand, eyes riveted on the narrator, listened absorbed.

"Gee!" Jimmie Drake whispered at last, "it sounds like a fairy−story. It don't sound real." Then he suddenly crashed a fist into his open palm. "I see, I see," he snapped, striving to control his excitement. "Then you don't know. You can't know."

"Know what?" Garrison sat bolt upright in his narrow cot, his heart pounding.

"Why−−why about Crimmins, about Waterbury, about Sis−−everything," exclaimed Drake. "It was all in the Eastern papers. You were in Bellevue then. I thought you knew. Don't you know, kid, that it was proven that Crimmins poisoned Sis? Hold on, keep quiet. Yes, it was Crimmins. Now, don't get excited. Yes, I'll tell you all. Give me time. Why, kid, you were as clean as the wind that dried your first shirt. Sure, sure. We all knew it−−then. And we thought you did−−"

"Tell me, tell me." Garrison's lip was quivering; his face gray with excitement.

Drake ran on forcefully, succinctly, his hand gripping Garrison's.

"Well, we'll take it up from that day of the Carter Handicap. Remember? When you and Waterbury had it out? Now, I had suspected that Dan Crimmins had been plunging against his stable for some time. I had got on to some bets he had put through with the aid of his dirty commissioners. That's why I stood up for you against Waterbury. I knew he was square. I knew he didn't throw the race, and, as for you−−well, I said to myself: 'That ain't like the kid.' I knew the evidence against you, but it was hard to believe, kid. And I believed you when you said you hadn't made a cent on the race, but instead had lost all you had, I believed that. But I knew Crimmins had made a pile. I found that out. And I believed he drugged you, kid.

"Now, when you tell me you were fighting consumption it clears a lot of space for me that has been dark. I knew you were doped half the time, but I thought you were going the pace with the pipe, though I'll admit I couldn't fathom what drug you were taking. But now I know Crimmins fed you dope while pretending to hand you nerve food. I know it. I know he bet against his stable time and ag'in and won every race you were accused of throwing. I tracked things pretty clear that day after I left you.

"Well, I went to Waterbury and laid the charge against the trainer; giving him a chance to square himself before I made trouble higher up. Well, Waterbury was mad. Said he had no hand in it, and I believed him. The upshot of it was that he faced Crimmins. Now, Crimmins had been blowing himself on the pile he had made, and he was nasty. Instead of denying it and putting the proving of the game up to me, he took the bit in his mouth at something Waterbury said.

"I don't know all the facts. They came out in the paper afterward. But Crimmins and Waterbury had a scrap, and the trainer was fired. He was fired when you went to the stable to say good−by to Sis. He was packing what things he had there, but when he saw you weren't on, he kept it mum. I believe then he was planning to do away with Sis, and you offered a nice easy get−away for him. He hated you. First, because you turned down the crooked deal he offered you, for it was he who was beating the bookies, and he wanted a pal. Secondly, he thought you had split about the dope, and he laid his discharge to you. And he hated Waterbury. He could square you both at one shot. He poisoned Sis when you'd gone.

"Every one believed you guilty, for they didn't know the row Crimmins and Waterbury had. But Waterbury suspected. He and Crimmins had it out. He caught him on Broadway, a day or two later, and Crimmins walloped him over the head with a blackjack. Waterbury went to the hospital, and came next to dying. Crimmins went to jail. I guess he was down and out, all right, when, as you say, he heard from his brother that Waterbury was at Cottonton. I believe he went there to square him, but ran across you instead, and thought he could have a good blackmailing game on the side. That wife game was a plot to catch you, kid. He didn't think you'd dare to come North. When you told him about your lapse of memory, then he knew he was safe. You knew nothing of his showdown."

Garrison covered his face with his hands. Only he knew the great, the mighty obsession that was slowly withdrawing itself from his heart. It was all so wonderful; all so incredible. Long contact with misfortune had sapped the natural resiliency of his character. It had been subjected to so much pressure that it had become flaccid. The pressure removed, it would be some time before the heart could act upon the message of good tidings the brain had conveyed to it. For a long time he remained silent. And Drake respected his silence to the letter. Then Garrison uncovered his eyes.

"I can't believe it. I can't believe it," he whispered, wide−eyed. "It is too good to be true. It means too much. You're sure you're right, Jimmie? It means I'm proven clean, proven square. It means reinstatement on the turf. Means−−everything."

"All that, kid," said Drake. "I thought you knew."

Garrison hugged his knees in a paroxysm of silent joy.

"But−−Waterbury?" he puzzled at length. "He knew I had been exonerated. And yet−−yet he must have said something to the contrary to Miss Desha. She knew all along that I was Garrison; knew when I didn't know myself. But she thought me square. But Waterbury must have said something. I can never forget her saying when I confessed: 'It's true, then.' I can never forget that, and the look in her eyes."

"Aye, Waterbury," mused Drake soberly. He eyed Garrison. "You know he's dead," he said simply. He nodded confirmation as the other stared, white−faced. "Died this morning after he was thrown. Fractured skull. I had word. Some right−meaning chap says somewhere something about saying nothing but good of the dead, kid. If Waterbury tried to queer you, it was through jealousy. I understand he cared something for Miss Desha. He had his good points, like every man. Think of them, kid, not the bad ones. I guess the bookkeeper up above will credit us with all the times we've tried to do the square, even if we petered out before we'd made good. Trying counts something, kid. Don't forget that."

"Yes, he had his good points," whispered Garrison. "I don't forget, Jimmie. I don't forget that he has a cleaner bill of moral health than I have. I was an impostor. That I can't forget; cannot wipe out."

"I was coming to that," Drake scratched his grizzled head elaborately. "I didn't say anything when you were unwinding that yarn, kid, but it sounded mighty tangled to me."

"How?"

"How? Why, we ain't living in fairy−books to−day. It's straight hard life. And there ain't any fools, as far as I can see, who are allowed to take up air and space. I've heard of Major Calvert, and his brains were all there the last time I heard of him−−"

"What do you mean?" Garrison bored his eyes into Drake's.

"Why, I mean, kid, that blood is thicker than water, and leave it to a woman to see through a stone wall. I don't believe you could palm yourself off to the major and his wife as their nephew. It's not reasonable nohow. I don't believe any one could fool any family."

"But I did!" Garrison was staring blankly. "I did, Jimmie! Remember I had the cooked−up proofs. Remember that they had never seen the real nephew−−"

"Oh, shucks! What's the odds? Blood's blood. You don't mean to say a man wouldn't know his own sister's child? Living in the house with him? Wouldn't there be some likeness, some family trait, some characteristic? Are folks any different from horses? No, no, it might happen in stories, but not life, not life."

Garrison shook his head wearily. "I can't follow you, Jimmie. You like to argue for the sake of arguing. I don't understand. They did believe me. Isn't that enough? Why−−why−−−−" His face blanched at the thought. "You don't mean to say that they knew I was an imposter? Knew all along? You−−can't mean that, Jimmie?"

"I may," said Drake shortly. "But, see here, kid, you'll admit it would be impossible for two people to have that birthmark on them; the identical mark in the identical spot. You'll admit that. Now, wouldn't it be impossible?"

"Improbable, but not impossible." Suddenly Garrison had commenced to breathe heavily, his hands clenching.

Drake cocked his head on one side and closed an eye. He eyed Garrison steadily. "Kid, it seems to me that you've only been fooling yourself. I believe you're Major Calvert's nephew. That's straight."

For a long time Garrison stared at him unwinkingly. Then he laughed wildly.

"Oh, you're good, Jimmie. No, no. Don't tempt me. You forget; forget two great things. I know my mother's name was Loring, not Calvert. And my father's name was Garrison, not Dagget."

"Um−m−m," mused Drake, knitting brows. "You don't say? But, see here, kid, didn't you say that this Dagget's mother was only Major Calvert's half−sister? How about that, eh? Then her name would be different from his. How about that? How do you know Loring mightn't fit it? Answer me that."

"I never thought of that," whispered Garrison. "If you only are right, Jimmie! If you only are, what it would mean? But my father, my father," he cried weakly. "My father. There's no getting around that, Jimmie. His name was Garrison. My name is Garrison. There's no dodging that. You can't change that into Dagget."

"How do you know?" argued Drake, slowly, pertinaciously. "This here is my idea, and I ain't willing to give it up without a fight. How do you know but your father might have changed his name? I've known less likelier things to happen. You know he was good blood gone wrong. How do you know he mightn't have changed it so as not disgrace his family, eh? Changed it after he married your mother, and she stood for it so as not to disgrace her family. You were a kid when she died, and you weren't present, you say. How do you know but she mightn't have wanted to tell you a whole lot, eh? A whole lot your father wouldn't tell you because he never cared for you. No, the more I think of it the more I'm certain that you're Major Calvert's nephew. You're the only logical answer. That mark of the spur and the other incidents is good enough for me."

"Don't tempt me, Jimmie, don't tempt me," pleaded Garrison again. "You don't know what it all means. I may be his nephew. I may be−−God grant I am! But I must be honest. I must be honest."

"Well, I'm going to hunt up that lawyer, Snark," affirmed Drake finally. "I won't rest until I see this thing through. Snark may have known all along you were the rightful heir, and merely put up a job to get a pile out of you when you came into the estate. Or he may have been honest in his dishonesty; may not have known. But I'm going to rustle round after him. Maybe there's proofs he holds. What about Major Calvert? Are you going to write him?"

Garrison considered. "No−−no," he said at length. "No, if−−if by any chance I am his nephew−−you see how I want to believe you, Jimmie, God knows how much−−then I'll tell him afterward. Afterward when−−I'm clean. I want to lie low; to square myself in my own sight and man's. I want to make another name for myself, Jimmie. I want to start all over and shame no man. If by any chance I am William C. Dagget, then−− then I want to be worthy of that name. And I owe everything to Garrison. I'm going to clean that name. It meant something once−−and it'll mean something again."

"I believe you, kid."

Subsequently, Drake fulfilled his word concerning the "rustling round" after that eminent lawyer, Theobald D. Snark. His efforts met with failure. Probably the eminent lawyer's business had increased so enormously that he had been compelled to vacate the niche he held in the Nassau Street bookcase. But Drake had not given up the fight.

Meanwhile Garrison had commenced his life of regeneration at the turfman's Long Island stable. He was to ride Speedaway in the coming Carter Handicap. The event that had seen him go down, down to oblivion one year ago might herald the reascendency of his star. He had vowed it would. And so in grim silence he prepared for his farewell appearance in that great seriocomic tragedy of life called "Making Good."

CHAPTER XIV. GARRISON FINDS HIMSELF.

Sue never rightly remembered how the two months passed; the two months succeeding that hideous night when in

paralyzed silence she watched Garrison away. The greatest sorrow is stagnant, not active. The heart becomes like a frozen morass. Sometimes memory slips through the crust, only to sink in the grim "slough of despond."

Waterbury's death had unnerved her, coming as it did at a time when tragedy had opened the pores of her heart. He had been conscious for a few minutes before the messenger of a new life summoned him into the great beyond. He used the few minutes well. If we all lived with the thought that the next hour would be our last, the world would be peopled with angels−−and hypocrites.

Waterbury asked permission of his host, Colonel Desha, to see Sue alone. It was willingly granted. The girl, white−faced, came and sat by the bed in the room of many shadows; the room where death was tapping, tapping on the door. She had said nothing to her father regarding the events preceding the runaway and Waterbury's accident.

Waterbury eyed her long and gravely. The heat of his great passion had melted the baser metal of his nature. What original alloy of gold he possessed had but emerged refined. His fingers, formerly pudgy, well− fed, had suddenly become skeletons of themselves. They were picking at the coverlet.

"I lied about−−about Garrison," he whispered, forcing life to his mouth, his eyes never leaving the girl's. "I lied. He was square−−" Breath would not come. "For−forgive," he cried, suddenly in a smother of sweat. "Forgive−−"

"Gladly, willingly," whispered the girl. She was crying inwardly.

His eyes flamed for an instant, and then died away. By sheer will− power he succeeded in stretching a hand across the coverlet, palm upward. "Put−−put it−−there," he whispered. "Will you?"

She understood. It was the sporting world's token of forgiveness; of friendship. She laid her hand in his, gripping with a firm clasp.

"Thank you," he whispered. Again his eyes flamed; again died away. The end was very near. Perhaps the approaching freedom of the spirit lent him power to read the girl's thoughts. For as he looked into her eyes, his own saw that she knew what lay in his. He breathed heavily, painfully.

"Could−−could you?" he whispered. "If−−if you only could." There was a great longing, a mighty wistfulness in his voice. Death was trying to place its hand over his mouth. With a mighty effort Waterbury slipped past it. "If you only could," he reiterated. "It−−it means so little to you, Miss Desha−−so much, so much to−−me!"

And again the girl understood. Without a word she bent over and kissed him. He smiled. And so died Waterbury.

Afterward, the girl remembered Waterbury's confession. So Garrison was honest! Somehow, she had always believed he was. His eyes, the windows of his soul, were not fouled. She had read weakness there, but never dishonesty. Yes, somehow she had always believed him honest. But he was married. That was different. The concrete, not the abstract, was paramount. All else was swamped by the fact that he was married. She could not believe that he had forgotten his marriage with his true identity. She could not believe that. Her heart was against her. Love to her was everything. She could not understand how one could ever forget. One might forget the world, but not that, not that.

True to her code of judging not, she did not attempt to estimate Garrison. She could not bear to use the probe. There are some things too sacred to be dissected; so near the heart that their proximity renders an experiment prohibitive. She believed that Garrison loved her. She believed that above all. Surely he had given something in exchange for all that he owned of her. If in unguarded moments her conscience assumed the woolsack, mercy, not justice, swayed it.

She realized the mighty temptation Garrison had been forced against by circumstances. And if he had fallen, might not she herself? Had it not taken all her courage to renounce−−to give the girl up North the right of way? Now she understood the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation."

Yes, it had been weakness with Garrison, not dishonor. He had been fighting against it all the time. She remembered that morning in the tennis−court−−her first intimacy with him. And he had spoken of the girl up North. She remembered him saying: "But doesn't the Bible say to leave all and cleave unto your wife?"

That had been a confession, though she knew it not. And she had ignored it, taking it as badinage, and he had been too weak to brand it truth. Strangely enough, she did not judge him for posing as Major Calvert's nephew. Strangely enough, that seemed trivial in comparison with the other. It was so natural for him to be the rightful heir that she could not realize that he was an impostor, nor apportion the fact its true significance. Her brain was unfit to grapple. Only her heart lived; lived with the passive life of stagnation. It was choked with weeds on the surface. She tried to patch together the broken parts of her life. Tried and failed. She could not. She seemed to be existing without an excuse; aimlessly, soullessly.

After many horrible days, hideous nights, she realized that she still loved Garrison. Loved with a love that threatened to absorb even her physical existence. It seemed as if the very breath of her lungs had been diverted to her heart, where it became tissue−searing flame.

And at Calvert House life had resolved itself into silence. The major and his wife were striving to live in the future; striving to live against Garrison's return. They were ignorant of the true cause of his leaving. For Sue, the keeper of the secret, had not divulged it. She had been left with a difficult proposition to face, and she could not face it. She temporized. She knew that sooner or later the truth would have to come out. She put it off. She could not tell, not now, not now. Each day only rendered it the more difficult. She could not tell.

She had only to look at the old major; to look at his wife, to see that the blow would blast them. She had had youth to help her, and even she had been blasted. What chance had they? And so she said that Garrison and she had quarreled seriously and that in sudden anger, pique, he had left. Oh, yes, she knew he would return. She was quite sure of it. It was all so silly and over nothing, and she had no idea he would take it that way. And she was so sorry, so sorry.

It had all been her fault. He had not been to blame. It was she, only she. In a thoughtless moment she had said something about his being dependent on his uncle, and he had fired up, affirming that he would show her that he was a man, and could earn his own salt. Yes, it had been entirely her own fault, and no one hated herself as she did. He had gone to prove his manhood, and she knew how stubborn he was. He would not return until he wished.

Sue lied bravely, convincingly, whole−heartedly. Everything she did was done thoroughly. She would not think of the future. But she could not tell that Garrison was an impostor; a father of children. She could not tell. So she lied, and lied so well that the old major, bewildered, was forced to believe her. He was forced to acquiesce. He could not interfere. He could do nothing. It was better that his nephew should prove his manhood; return some time and love the girl, than that he should hate her for eternity.

Each day he hoped to see Garrison back, but each day passed without that consummation. The strain was beginning to tell on him. His heart was bound up in the boy. If he did not return soon he would advertise, institute a search. He well knew the folly of youth. He was broad− minded, great−hearted enough not to censure the girl by word or act. He saw how she was suffering; growing paler daily. But why didn't Garrison write? All the anger, all the quarrels in the world could not account for his leaving like that; account for his silence.

The major commenced to doubt. And his wife's words: "It's not like Sue to permit William to go like that. Nor like her to ever have said such a thing even unthinkingly. There's more than that on the girl's mind. She is wasting

away"−−but served to strengthen the doubt. Still, he was impotent. He could not understand. If his nephew did not wish to return, all the advertising in creation could not drag him back.

Yes, his wife was right. There was more on the girl's mind than that. And it was not like Sue to act as she affirmed she had. Still, he could not bring himself to doubt her. He was in a quandary. It had begun to tell on him, on his wife; even as it had already told on the girl.

And old Colonel Desha was likewise breasting a sea of trouble. Waterbury's death had brought financial matters to a focus. Honor imperatively demanded that the mortgage be settled with the dead man's heirs. It was only due to Sue's desperate financiering that the interest had been met up to the present. That it would be paid next month depended solely on the chance of The Rogue winning the Carter Handicap. Things had come to as bad a pass as that.

The colonel frantically bent every effort toward getting the thoroughbred into condition. How he hated himself now for posting his all on the winter books! Now that the great trial was so near, his deep convictions of triumph did not look so wonderful.

There were good horses entered against The Rogue. Major Calvert's Dixie, for instance, and Speedaway, the wonderful goer owned by that man Drake. Then there were half a dozen others−−all from well−known stables. There could be no doubt that "class" would be present in abundance at the Carter. And only he had so much at stake. He had entered The Rogue in the first flush consequent on his winning the last Carter. But he must win this. He must. Getting him into condition entailed expense. It must be met. All his hopes, his fears, were staked on The Rogue. Money never was so paramount; the need of it so great. Fiercely he hugged his poverty to his breast, keeping it from his friend the major.

Then, too, he was greatly worried over Sue. She was not looking well. He was worried over Garrison's continued absence. He was worried over everything. It was besetting him from all sides. Worry was causing him to take the lime−light from himself. He awoke to the fact that Sue was in very poor health. If she died−− He never could finish.

Taken all in all, it was a very bad time for the two oldest families in Cottonton. Every member was suffering silently, stoically; each in a different way. One striving to conceal from the other. And it all centered about Garrison.

And then, one day when things were at their worst, when Garrison, unconscious of the general misery he had engendered, had completed Speedaway's training for the Carter, when he himself was ready for the fight of his life, a stranger stepped off the Cottonton express and made his way to the Desha homestead. He knew the colonel. He was a big, quiet man−−Jimmie Drake.

A week later and Drake had returned North. He had not said anything to Garrison regarding what had called him away, but the latter vaguely sensed that it was another attempt on the indefatigable turfman's part to ferret out the eminent lawyer, Mr. Snark. And when Drake, on his return, called Garrison into the club−house, Garrison went white− faced. He had just sent Speedaway over the seven furlongs in record time, and his heart was big with hope.

Drake never wasted ammunition in preliminary skirmishing. He told the joke first and the story afterward.

"I've been South. Seen Colonel Desha and Major Calvert," he said tersely.

Garrison was silent, looking at him. He tried to read fate in his inscrutable eyes; news of some description; tried, and failed. He turned away his head. "Tell me," he said simply. Drake eyed him and slowly came forward and held out his large bloodshot hand.

"Billy Garrison−−'Bud'−−'Kid'−−William C. Dagget," he said, nodding his head.

Garrison rose with difficulty, the sweat on his face.

"William C. Dagget? Me? Me? Me?" he whispered, his head thrown forward, his eyes narrowed, starting at Drake. "Just God, Jimmie! Don't play with me−−−−" He sat down abruptly covering his quivering face with his hands.

Drake laid a hand on the heaving shoulders. "There, there, kid," he murmured gruffly, as if to a child, "don't go and blow up over it. Yes, you're Dagget. The luckiest kid in the States, and−−and the damnedest. You've raised a muss−pile down South in Cottonton. Dagget or no Dagget, I'm talking straight. You've been selfish, kid. You've only been thinking of yourself; your regeneration; your past, your present, your future. You−−you−−you. You never thought of the folks you left down home; left to suffocate with the stink you raised. You cleared out scot−free, and, say, kid, you let a girl lie for you; lie for you. You did that. A girl, by heck! who wouldn't lie for the Almighty Himself. A girl who−−who−−−−" Drake searched frantically for a fitting simile, gasped, mopped his face with a lurid silk handkerchief, and flumped into a chair. "Well, say, kid, it's just plain hell. That's what it is."

"Lied for me?" said Garrison very quietly.

"That's the word. But I'll start from the time the fur commenced to fly. In the first place, there's no doubt about your identity. I was right. I've proved that. I couldn't find Snark−−I guess the devil must have called him back home. So I took things on my own hook and went to Cottonton, where I moseyed round considerable. I know Colonel Desha, and I learned a good deal in a quiet way when I was there. I learned from Major Calvert that his half−sister's−−your mother's−−name was Loring. That cinched it for me. But I said nothing. They were in an awful stew over your absence, but I never let on, at first, that I had you bunked.

"I learned, among other things, that Miss Desha had taken upon herself the blame of your leaving; saying that she had said something you had taken exception to; that you had gone to prove your manhood, kid. Your manhood, kid−−mind that. She's a thoroughbred, that girl. Now, I would have backed her lie to the finish if something hadn't gone and happened." Drake paused significantly. "That something was that the major received a letter−−from your father, kid."

"My father?" whispered Garrison.

"Um−m−m, the very party. Written from 'Frisco−−on his death−bed. One of those old−timey, stage−climax death−bed confessions. As old as the mortgage on the farm business. As I remarked before some right−meaning chap says somewhere something about saying nothing but good of the dead. I'm not slinging mud. I guess there was a whole lot missing in your father, kid, but he tried to square himself at the finish, the same as we all do, I guess.

"He wrote to the major, saying he had never told his son−−you, kid−−of his real name nor of his mother's family. He confessed to changing his name from Dagget to Garrison for the very reasons I said. Remember? He ended by saying he had wronged you; that he knew you would be the major's heir, and that if you were to be found it would be under the name of Garrison. That is, if you were still living. He didn't know anything about you.

"There was a whole lot of repentance and general misery in the letter. I don't like to think of it overmuch. But it knocked Cottonton flatter than stale beer. Honest. I never saw such a time. I'm no good at telling a yarn, kid. It was something fierce. There was nothing but knots and knots; all diked up and tangles by the mile. And so I had to step in and straighten things out. And−−and so, kid, I told the major everything; every scrap of your history, as far as I knew it. All you had told to me. I had to. Now, don't tell me I kicked in. Say I did right, kid. I meant to."

"Yes, yes," murmured Garrison blankly. "And−−and the major? What−−did he say, Jimmie?"

Drake frowned thoughtfully.

"Say? Well, kid, I only wish I had an uncle like that. I only wish there were more folks like those Cottonton folks. I do. Say? Why, Lord, kid, it was one grand hallelujah! Forgive? Say," he finished, thoughtfully eyeing the white−faced, newly christened Garrison, "what have you ever done to be loved like that? They were crazy for you. Not a word was said about your imposition. Not a word. It was all: 'When will he be back?' 'Where is he?' 'Telegraph!' All one great slambang of joy. And me? Well, I could have had that town for my own. And your aunt? She cried, cried when she heard all you had been through. Oh, I made a great press−agent, kid. And the old major−− Oh, fuss! I can't tell a yarn nohow," grumbled Drake, stamping about at great length and vigorously using the lurid silk handkerchief.

William C. Dagget was silent−−the silence of great, overwhelming joy. He was shivering. "And−−and Miss Desha?" he whispered at length.

"Yes−−Miss Desha," echoed Drake, planting wide his feet and contemplating the other's bent head. "Yes, Miss Desha. And why in blazes did you tell her you were married, eh?" he asked grimly. "Oh, you thought you were? Oh, yes. And you didn't deny it when you found it wasn't so? Oh, yes, of course. And it didn't matter whether she ate her heart out or not? Of course not. Oh, yes, you wanted to be clean, first, and all that. And she might die in the meantime. You didn't think she still cared for you? Now, see here, kid, that's a lie and you know it. It's a lie. When a girl like Miss Desha goes so far as to−− Oh, fuss! I can't tell a yarn. But, see here, kid, I haven't your blood. I own that. But if I ever put myself before a girl who cared for me the way Miss Desha cares for you, and I professed to love her as you professed to love Miss Desha, than may I rot−−rot, hide, hair, and bones! Now, cuss me out, if you like."

Garrison looked up grimly.

"You're right, Jimmie. I should have stood my ground and taken my dose. I should have written her when I discovered the truth. But−−I couldn't. I couldn't. Listen, Jimmie, it was not selfishness, not cowardice. Can't you see? Can't you see? I cared too much. I was so unworthy, so miserable. How could I ever think she would stoop to my level? She was so high; I so horribly low. It was my own unworthiness choking me. It was not selfishness, Jimmie, not selfishness. It was despair; despair and misery. Don't you understand?"

"Oh, fuss!" said Drake again, using the lurid silk handkerchief. Then he laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "I understand," he said simply. There was silence. Finally Drake wiped his face and cleared his throat.

"And now, with your permission, we'll get down to tacks, Mr. William C. Dagget−−"

"Don't call me that, Jimmie. I'm not that−−yet. I'm Billy Garrison until I've won the Carter Handicap−−proven myself clean."

"Right, kid. And that's what I wished to speak about. In the first place, Major Calvert knows where you are. Colonel and Miss Desha do not. In fact, kid," added Drake, rubbing his chin, "the major and I have a little plot hatched up between us. Your identity, if possible is not to be made known to the colonel and his daughter until the finish of the Carter. Understand?"

"No," said Garrison flatly. "Why?"

"Because, kid, you're not going to ride Speedaway. You're not going to ride for my stable. You're going to ride Colonel Desha's Rogue−−ride as you never rode before. Ride and win. That's why."

Garrison only stared as Drake ran on. "See here, kid, this race means everything to the colonel−−everything in the world. Every cent he has is at stake; his honor, his life, his daughter's happiness. He's proud, cussed proud, and he's kept it mum. And the girl−−Miss Desha has bucked poverty like a thoroughbred. I got to know the facts, picking them up here and there, and the major knows, too. We've got to work in the dark, for the colonel would die first if he knew the truth, before he would accept help even indirectly. The Rogue must win; must. But what chance has he against the major's Dixie, my Speedaway, and the Morgan entry−−Swallow? And so the major has scratched his mount, giving out that Dixie has developed eczema.

"Now, the colonel is searching high and low for a jockey capable of handling The Rogue. It'll take a good man. I recommended you. He doesn't know your identity, for the major and I have kept it from him. He only thinks you are /the/ Garrison who has come back. I have fixed it up with him that you are to ride his mount, and The Rogue will arrive to−morrow.

"The colonel is a wreck mentally and physically; living on nerve. I've agreed to put the finishing touches on The Rogue, and he, knowing my ability and facilities, has permitted me. It's all in my hands−−pretty near. Now, Red McGloin is up on the Morgan entry−−Swallow. He used to be a stable−boy for Waterbury. I guess you've heard of him. He's developed into a first−class boy. But I want to see you lick the hide off him. The fight will lie between you and him. I know the rest of the field−−"

"But Speedaway?" cried Garrison, jumping to his feet. "Jimmie−−you! It's too great a sacrifice; too great, too great. I know how you've longed to win the Carter; what it means to you; how you have slaved to earn it. Jimmie−−Jimmie−−don't tempt me. You can't mean you've scratched Speedaway!"

"Just that, kid," said Drake grimly. "The first scratch in my life−− and the last. Speedaway? Well, she and I will win again some other time. Some time, kid, when we ain't playing against a man's life and a girl's happiness. I'll scratch for those odds. It's for you, kid−−you and the girl. Remember, you're carrying her colors, her life.

"You'll have a good fight−−but fight as you never fought before; as you never hope to fight again. Cottonton will watch you, kid. Don't shame them; don't shame me. Show 'em what you're made of. Show Red that a former stable−boy, no matter what class he is now, can't have the licking of a former master. Show 'em a has−been can come back. Show 'em what Garrison stands for. Show 'em your finish, kid−−I'll ask no more. And you'll carry Jimmie Drake's heart−− Oh, fuss! I can't tell a yarn, nohow."

In silence Garrison gripped Drake's hand. And if ever a mighty resolution was welded in a human heart−−a resolution born of love, everything; one that nothing could deny−−it was born that moment in Garrison's. Born as the tears stood in his eyes, and, man as he was, he could not keep up; nor did he shame his manhood by denying them. "Kid, kid," said Drake.

CHAPTER XV. GARRISON'S FINISH.

It was April 16. Month of budding life; month of hope; month of spring when all the world is young again; when the heart thaws out after its long winter frigidity. It was the day of the opening of the Eastern racing season; the day of the Carter Handicap.

Though not one of the "classics," the Carter annually draws an attendance of over ten thousand; ten thousand enthusiasts who have not had a chance to see the ponies run since the last autumn race; those who had been unable to follow them on the Southern circuit. Women of every walk of life; all sorts and conditions of men. Enthusiasts glad to be out in the life−giving sunshine of April; panting for excitement; full to the mouth with volatile joy; throwing off the shackles of the business treadmill; discarding care with the ubiquitous umbrella and winter flannels; taking fortune boldly by the hand; returning to first principles; living for the moment; for the trial

of skill, endurance, and strength; staking enough in the balances to bring a fillip to the heart and the blood to the cheek.

It was a typical American crowd; long−suffering, giving and taking−− principally giving−−good−humored, just. All morning it came in a seemingly endless chain; uncoupling link by link, only to weld together again. All morning long, ferries, trolleys, trains were jammed with the race−mad throng. Coming by devious ways, for divers reasons; coming from all quarters by every medium; centering at last at the Queen's County Jockey Club.

And never before in the history of the Aqueduct track had so thoroughly a representative body of racegoers assembled at an opening day. Never before had Long Island lent sitting and standing room to so impressive a gathering of talent, money, and family. Every one interested in the various phases of the turf was there, but even they only formed a small portion of the attendance.

Rumors floated from paddock to stand and back again. The air was surcharged with these wireless messages, bearing no signature nor guarantee of authenticity. And borne on the crest of all these rumors was one−−great, paramount. Garrison, the former great Garrison, had come back. He was to ride; ride the winner of the last Carter, the winner of a fluke race.

The world had not forgotten. They remembered The Rogue's last race. They remembered Garrison's last race. The wise ones said that The Rogue could not possibly win. This time there could be no fluke, for the great Red McGloin was up on the favorite. The Rogue would be shown in his true colors−−a second−rater.

Speculation was rife. This Carter Handicap presented many, many features that kept the crowd at fever−heat. Garrison had come back. Garrison had been reinstated. Garrison was up on a mount he had been accused of permitting to win last year. Those who wield the muck−rake for the sake of general filth, not in the name of justice, shook their heads and lifted high hands to Heaven. It looked bad. Why should Garrison be riding for Colonel Desha? Why had Jimmie Drake transferred him at the eleventh hour? Why had Drake scratched Speedaway? Why had Major Calvert scratched Dixie? The latter was an outsider, but they had heard great things of her.

"Cooked," said the muck−rakers wisely, and, thinking it was a show− down for the favorite, stacked every cent they had on Swallow. No long shots for them.

And some there were who cursed Drake and Major Calvert; cursed long and intelligently−−those who had bet on Speedaway and Dixie, bet on the play−or−pay basis, and now that the mounts were scratched, they had been bitten. It was entirely wrong to tempt Fortune, and then have her turn on you. She should always be down on the "other fellow"−−not you.

And then there were those, and many, who did not question, who were glad to know that Garrison had come back on any terms. They had liked him for himself. They were the weak−kneed variety who are stanch in prosperity; who go with the world; coincide with the world's verdict. The world had said Garrison was crooked. If they had not agreed, they had not denied. If Garrison now had been reinstated, then the world said he was honest. They agreed now−−loudly; adding the old shibboleth of the moral coward: "I told you so." But still they doubted that he had "come back." A has−been can never come back.

The conservative element backed Morgan's Swallow. Red McGloin was up, and he was proven class. He had stepped into Garrison's niche of fame. He was the popular idol now. And, as Garrison had once warned him, he was already beginning to pay the price. The philosophy of the exercise boy had changed to the philosophy of the idol; the idol who cannot be pulled down. And he had suffered. He had gone through part of what Garrison had gone through, but he also had experienced what the latter's inherent cleanliness had kept him from.

Temptation had come Red's way; come strong without reservation. Red, with the hunger of the long−denied, with the unrestricted appetite of the intellectually low, had not discriminated. And he had suffered. His trainer had watched him carefully, but youth must have its fling, and youth had flung farther than watching wisdom reckoned.

Red had not gone back. He was young yet. But the first flush of his manhood had gone; the cream had been stolen. His nerve was just a little less than it had been; his eye and hand a little less steady; his judgment a little less sound; his initiative, daring, a little less paramount. And races have been won and lost, and will be won and lost, when that "little Less" is the deciding breath that tips the scale.

But he had no misgivings. Was he not the idol? Was he not up on Swallow, the favorite? Swallow, with the odds−−two to one−−on. He knew Garrison was to ride The Rogue. What did that matter? The Rogue was ten to one against. The Rogue was a fluke horse. Garrison was a has− been. The track says a has−been can never come back. Of course Garrison had been to the dogs during the past year−−what down−and−out jockey has not gone there? And if Drake had transferred him to Desha, it was a case of good riddance. Drake was famous for his eccentric humor. But he was a sound judge of horse−flesh. No doubt he knew what a small chance Speedaway had against Swallow, and he had scratched advisedly; playing the Morgan entry instead.

In the grand stand sat three people wearing a blue and gold ribbon−− the Desha colors. Occasionally they were reinforced by a big man, who circulated between them and the paddock. The latter was Jimmie Drake. The others were "Cottonton," as the turfman called them. They were Major and Mrs. Calvert and Sue Desha.

Colonel Desha was not there. He was eating his heart out back home. The nerve he had been living on had suddenly snapped at the eleventh hour. He was denied watching the race he had paid so much in every way to enter. The doctors had forbidden his leaving. His heart could not stand the excitement; his constitution could not meet the long journey North. And so alone, propped up in bed, he waited; waited, counting off each minute; more excited, wrought up, than if he had been at the track.

It had been arranged that in the event of The Rogue winning, the good news should be telegraphed to the colonel the moment the gelding flashed past the judges' stand. He had insisted on that and on his daughter being present. Some member of the family must be there to back The Rogue in his game fight. And so Sue, in company with the major and his wife, had gone.

She had taken little interest in the race. She knew what it meant, no one knew better than she, but somehow she had no room left for care to occupy. She was apathetic, listless; a striking contrast to the major and his wife, who could hardly repress their feelings. They knew what she would find at the Aqueduct track−−find the world. She did not.

All she knew was that Drake, whom she liked for his rough, patent manhood, had very kindly offered the services of his jockey; a jockey whom he had faith in. Who that jockey was, she did not know, nor overmuch care. A greater sorrow had obliterated her racing passion; had even ridden roughshod over the fear of financial ruin. Her mind was numb.

For days succeeding Drake's statement to her that Garrison was not married she waited for some word from him. Drake had explained how Garrison had thought he was married. He had explained all that. She could never forget the joy that had swamped her on hearing it; even as she could never forget the succeeding days of waiting misery; waiting, waiting, waiting for some word. He had been proven honest, proven Major Calvert's nephew, proven free. What more could he ask? Then why had he not come, written?

She could not believe he no longer cared. She could not believe that; rather, she would not. She gaged his heart by her own. Hers was the woman's portion−−inaction. She must still wait, wait, wait. Still she must eat her heart out.

Hers was the woman's portion. And if he did not come, if he did not write−−even in imagination she could never complete the alternative. She must live in hope; live in hope, in faith, in trust, or not at all.

Colonel Desha's enforced absence overcame the one difficulty Major Calvert and Jimmie Drake had acknowledged might prematurely explode their hidden identity mine. The colonel, exercising his owner's prerogative, would have fussed about The Rogue until the last minute. Of course he would have interviewed Garrison, giving him riding instructions, etc. Now Drake assumed the right by proxy, and Sue, after one eager−whispered word to The Rogue, had assumed her position in the grand stand.

Garrison was up−stairs in the jockey's quarters of the new paddock structure, the lower part of which is reserved for the clerical force, and so she had not seen him. But presently the word that Garrison was to ride flew everywhere, and Sue heard it. She turned slowly to Drake, standing at her elbow, his eyes on the paddock.

"Is it true that a jockey called Garrison is to ride to−day?" she asked, a strange light in her eyes. What that name meant to her!

"Why, yes, I believe so, Miss Desha," replied Drake, delightfully innocent. "Why?"

"Oh," she said slowly. "How−−how queer! I mean−−isn't it queer that two people should have the same name? I suppose this one copied it; imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. I hope he does the name justice. Do you know him? He is a good rider? What horse is he up on?"

Drake, wisely enough, chose the last question. "A ten−to−one shot," he replied illuminatingly. "Perhaps you'll bet on him, Miss Desha, eh? It's what we call a hunch−−coincidence or anything like that. Shall I place a bet for you?"

The girl's eyes kindled strangely. Then she hesitated.

"But−−but I can't bet against The Rogue. It would not be loyal."

Mrs. Calvert laughed softly.

"There are exceptions, dear." In a low aside she added: "Haven't you that much faith in the name of Garrison? There, I know you have. I would be ashamed to tell you how much the major and I have up on that name. And you know I never bet, as a rule. It is very wrong."

And so Sue, the blood in her cheeks, handed all her available cash to Drake to place on the name of Garrison. She would pretend it was the original. Just pretend.

"Here they come," yelled Drake, echoed by the rippling shout of the crowd.

The girl rose, white−faced; striving to pick out the blue and gold of the Desha stable.

And here they came, the thirteen starters; thirteen finished examples of God and man's handicraft. Speed, endurance, skill, nerve, grit−−all were there. Horse and rider trained to the second. Bone, muscle, sinew, class. And foremost of the string came Swallow, the favorite, Red McGloin, confidently smiling, sitting with the conscious ease of the idol who has carried off the past year's Brooklyn Handicap.

Good horses there were; good and true. There were Black Knight and Scapegrace, Rightful and Happy Lad, Bean Eater and Emetic−−the latter the great sprinter who was bracketed with Swallow on the book−maker's sheets. Mares, fillies, geldings−−every offering of horse−flesh above three years. All striving for the glory and honor of

winning this great sprint handicap. The monetary value was the lesser virtue. Eight thousand dollars for the first horse; fifteen hundred for the second; five hundred for the third. All striving to be at least placed within the money−−placed for the honor and glory and standing.

Last of all came The Rogue, black, lean, dangerous. Trained for the fight of his life from muzzle to clean−cut hoofs. Those hoofs had been cared for more carefully than the hands of any queen; packed every day in the soft, velvety red clay brought all the way from the Potomac River.

Garrison, in the blue and gold of the Desha stable, his mouth drawn across his face like a taut wire, sat hunched high on The Rogue's neck. He looked as lean and dangerous as his mount. His seat was recognized instantly, before even his face could be discerned.

A murmur, increasing rapidly to a roar, swung out from every foot of space. Some one cried "Garrison!" And "Garrison! Garrison! Garrison!" was caught up and flung back like the spume of sea from the surf− lashed coast.

He knew the value of that hail, and how only one year ago his name had been spewed from out those selfsame laudatory mouths with venom and contempt. He knew his public. Adversity had been a mighty master. The public−−they who live in the present, not the past. They who swear by triumph, achievement; not effort. They who have no memory for the deeds that have been done unless they vouch for future conquests. The public−−fickle as woman, weak as infancy, gullible as credulity, mighty as fate. Yes, Garrison knew it, and deep down in his heart, though he showed it not, he gloried in the welcome accorded him. He had not been forgotten.

But he had no false hopes, illusions. His had been the welcome vouchsafed the veteran who is hopelessly facing his last fight. They, perhaps, admired his grit, his optimism; admired while they pitied. But how many, how many, really thought he was there to win? How many thought he could win?

He knew, and his heart did not quicken nor his pulse increase so much as a beat. He was cool, implacable, and dangerous as a rattler waiting for the opportune moment to spring. He looked neither to right nor left. He was deaf, impervious. He was there to win. That only.

And he would win? Why not? What were the odds of ten to one? What was the opinion, the judgment of man? What was anything compared with what he was fighting for? What horse, what jockey among them all was backed by what he was backed with? What impulse, what stimulant, what overmastering, driving necessity had they compared with his? And The Rogue knew what was expected of him that day.

It was only as Garrison was passing the grand stand during the preliminary warming−up process that his nerve faltered. He glanced up −−he was compelled to. A pair of eyes were drawing his. He glanced up −−there was "Cottonton"; "Cottonton" and Sue Desha. The girl's hands were tightly clenched in her lap, her head thrown forward; her eyes obliterating space; eating into his own. How long he looked into those eyes he did not know. The major, his wife, Drake−−all were shut out. He only saw those eyes. And as he looked he saw that the eyes understood at last; understood all. He remembered lifting his cap. That was all.

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"They're off! They're off!" That great, magic cry; fingering at the heart, tingling the blood. Signal for a roar from every throat; for the stretching of every neck to the dislocating point; for prayers, imprecations, adjurations−−the entire stock of nature's sentiment factory. Sentiment, unbridled, unleashed, unchecked. Passion given a kick and sent hurtling without let or hindrance.

The barrier was down. They were off. Off in a smother of spume and dust. Off for the short seven furlongs eating up less than a minute and a half of time. All this preparation, all the preliminaries, the whetting of appetites to

razor edge, the tilts with fortune, the defiance of fate, the moil and toil and tribulations of months−−all brought to a head, focused on this minute and a half. All, all for one minute and a half!

It had been a clean break from the barrier. But in a flash Emetic was away first, hugging the rail. Swallow, taking her pace with all McGloin's nerve and skill, had caught her before she had traveled half a dozen yards. Emetic flung dirt hard, but Swallow hung on, using her as a wind−shield. She was using the pacemaker's "going."

The track was in surprisingly good condition, but there were streaks of damp, lumpy track throughout the long back and home−stretch. This favored The Rogue; told against the fast sprinters Swallow and Emetic. After the two−yard gap left by the leaders came a bunch of four, with The Rogue in the center.

"Pocketed already!" yelled some derisively. Garrison never heeded. Emetic was the fastest sprinter there that day; a sprinter, not a stayer. There is a lot of luck in a handicap. If a sprinter with a light weight up can get away first, she may never be headed till the finish. But it had been a clear break, and Swallow had caught on.

The pace was heart−breaking; murderous; terrific. Emetic's rider had taken a chance and lost it; lost it when McGloin caught him. Swallow was a better stayer; as fast as a sprinter. But if Emetic could not spread−eagle the field, she could set a pace that would try the stamina and lungs of Pegasus. And she did. First furlong in thirteen seconds. Record for the Aqueduct. A record sent flying to flinders. My! that was going some. Quarter−mile in twenty−four flat. Another record wiped out. What a pace!

A great cry went up. Could Emetic hold out? Could she stay, after all? Could she do what she had never done before? Swallow's backers began to blanch. Why, why was McGloin pressing so hard? Why? why? Emetic must tire. Must, must, must. Why would McGloin insist on taking that pace? It was a mistake, a mistake. The race had twisted his brain. The fight for leadership had biased his judgment. If he was not careful that lean, hungry−looking horse, with Garrison up, would swing out from the bunch, fresh, unkilled by pace−following, and beat him to a froth. . . .

There, there! Look at that! Look at that! God! how Garrison is riding! Riding as he never rode before. Has he come back? Look at him. . . . I told you so. I told you so. There comes that black fiend across−− It's a foul! No, no. He's clear. He's clear. There he goes. He's clear. He's slipped the bunch, skinned a leader's nose, jammed against the rail. Look how he's hugging it! Look! He's hugging McGloin's heels. He's waiting, waiting. . . . There, there! It's Emetic. See, she's wet from head to hock. She is, she is! She's tiring; tiring fast. . . . See! . . . McGloin, McGloin, McGloin! You're riding, boy, riding. Good work. Snappy work. You've got Emetic dead to rights. You were all right in following her pace. I knew you were. I knew she would tire. Only two furlongs−− What? What's that? . . . Garrison? That plug Rogue? . . . Oh, Red, Red! . . . Beat him, Red, beat him! It's only a bluff. He's not in your class. He can't hang on. . . . Beat him, Red, beat him! Don't let a has−been put it all over you! . . . Ride, you cripple, ride! . . . What? Can't you shake him off? . . . Slug him! . . . Watch out! He's trying for the rail. Crowd him, crowd him! . . . What's the matter with you? . . . Where's your nerve? You can't shake him off! Beat him down the stretch! He's fresh. He wasn't the fool to follow pace, like you. . . . What's the matter with you? He's crowding you−−look out, there! Jam him! . . . He's pushing you hard. . . . Neck and neck, you fool. That black fiend can't be stopped. . . . Use the whip! Red, use the whip! It's all you've left. Slug her, slug her! That's it, that's it! Slug speed into her. Only a furlong to go. . . . Come on, Red, come on! . . .

Here they come, in a smother of dust. Neck and neck down the stretch. The red and white of the Morgan stable; the blue and gold of the Desha. It's Swallow. No, no, it's The Rogue. Back and forth, back and forth stormed the rival names. The field was pandemonium. "Cottonton" was a mass of frantic arms, raucous voices, white faces. Drake, his pudgy hands whanging about like semaphore−signals in distress, was blowing his lungs out: "Come on, kid come on! You've got him now! He can't last! Come on, come on!−−for my sake, for your sake, for anybody's sake, but only come!"

Game Swallow's eyes had a blue film over them. The heart−breaking pace−following had told. Red's error of judgment had told. The "little less" had told. A frenzied howl went up. "Garrison! Garrison! Garrison!" The name that had once meant so much now meant−−everything. For in a swirl of dust and general undiluted Hades, the horses had stormed past the judges' stand. The great Carter was lost and won.

Swallow, with a thin streamer of blood threading its way from her nostrils, was a beaten horse; a game, plucky, beaten favorite. It was all over. Already The Rogue's number had been posted. It was all over; all over. The finish of a heart−breaking fight; the establishing of a new record for the Aqueduct. And a name had been replaced in its former high niche. The has−been had come back.

And "Cottonton," led by a white−faced girl and a big, apoplectic turfman, were forgetting dignity, decorum, and conventionality as hand in hand they stormed through the surging eruption of humanity fighting to get a chance at little Billy Garrison's hand.

And as, saddle on shoulder, he stood on the weighing−scales and caught sight of the oncoming hosts of "Cottonton" and read what the girl's eyes held, then, indeed, he knew all that his finish had earned him−− the beginning of a new life with a new name; the beginning of one that the lesson he had learned, backed by the great love that had come to him, would make−−paradise. And his one unuttered prayer was: "Dear God, make me worthy, make me worthy of them−−all!"

Aftermath was a blur to "Garrison." Great happiness can obscure, befog like great sorrow. And there are some things that touch the heart too vitally to admit of analyzation. But long afterward, when time, mighty adjuster of the human soul, had given to events their true proportions, that meeting with "Cottonton" loomed up in all its greatness, all its infinite appeal to the emotions, all its appeal to what is highest and worthiest in man. In silence, before all that little world, Sue Desha had put her arms about his neck. In silence he had clasped the major's hand. In silence he had turned to his aunt; and what he read in her misty eyes, read in the eyes of all, even the shrewd, kindly eyes of Drake the Silent and in the slap from his congratulatory paw, was all that man could ask; more than man could deserve.

Afterward the entire party, including Jimmie Drake, who was regarded as the grand master of Cottonton by this time, took train for New York. Regarding the environment, it was somewhat like a former ride "Garrison" had taken; regarding the atmosphere, it was as different as hope from despair. Now Sue was seated by his side, her eyes never once leaving his face. She was not ordinarily one to whom words were ungenerous, but now she could not talk. She could only look and look, as if her happiness would vanish before his eyes. "Garrison" was thinking, thinking of many things. Somehow, words were unkind to him, too; somehow, they seemed quite unnecessary.

"Do you remember this time a year ago?" he asked gravely at length. "It was the first time I saw you. Then it was purgatory to exist, now it is heaven to live. It must be a dream. Why is it that those who deserve least, invariably are given most? Is it the charity of Heaven, or−−what?" He turned and looked into her eyes. She smuggled her hand across to his.

"You," she exclaimed, a caressing, indolent inflection in her soft voice. "You." That "you" is a peculiar characteristic caress of the Southerner. Its meaning is infinite. "I'm too happy to analyze," she confided, her eyes growing dark. "And it is not the charity of Heaven, but the charity of−−man."

"You mustn't say that," he whispered. "It is you, not me. It is you who are all and I nothing. It is you."

She shook her head, smiling. There was an air of seductive luxury about her. She kept her eyes unwaveringly on his. "You," she said again.

"And there's old Jimmie Drake," added "Garrison" musingly, at length, a light in his eyes. He nodded up the aisle where the turfman was entertaining the major and his wife. "There's a man, Sue, dear. A man whose friendship is not a thing of condition nor circumstance. I will always strive to earn, keep it as I will strive to be worthy of your love. I know what it cost Drake to scratch Speedaway. I will not, cannot forget. We owe everything to him, dear; everything."

"I know," said the girl, nodding. "And I, we owe everything to him. He is sort of revered down home like a Messiah, or something like that. You don't know those days of complete misery and utter hopelessness, and what his coming meant. He seemed like a great big sun bursting through a cyclone. I think he understands that there is, and always will be, a very big, warm place in Cottonton's heart for him. At least, we−all have told him often enough. He's coming down home with us now−−with you."

He turned and looked steadily into her great eyes. His hand went out to meet hers.

"You," whispered the girl again.