Half a Rogue

Harold MacGrath

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To The Memory Of My Mother

Chapter I

It was Warrington's invariable habit—when no business or social engagement pressed him to go elsewhere—to drop into a certain quaint little restaurant just off Broadway for his dinners. It was out of the way; the throb and rattle of the great commercial artery became like the far−off murmur of the sea, restful rather than annoying. He always made it a point to dine alone, undisturbed. The proprietor nor his silent−footed waiters had the slightest idea who Warrington was. To them he was simply a profitable customer who signified that he dined there in order to be alone His table was up stairs. Below, there was always the usual dinner crowd till theater time; and the music had the faculty of luring his thoughts astray, being, as he was, fonder of music than of work. As a matter of fact, it was in this little restaurant that he winnowed the day's ideas, revamped scenes, trimmed the rough edges of his climaxes, revised this epigram or rejected this or that line; all on the backs of envelopes and on the margins of newspapers. In his den at his bachelor apartments, he worked; but here he dreamed, usually behind the soothing, opalescent veil of Madame Nicotine.

What a marvelous thing a good after−dinner cigar is! In the smoke of it the poor man sees his ships come in, the poet sees his muse beckoning with hands full of largess, the millionaire reverts to his early struggles, and the lover sees his divinity in a thousand graceful poses.

To−night, however, Warrington's cigar was without magic. He was out of sorts. Things had gone wrong at the rehearsal that morning. The star had demanded the removal of certain lines which gave the leading man an opportunity to shine in the climax of the third act. He had labored a whole month over this climax, and he revolted at the thought of changing it to suit the whim of a capricious woman.

Everybody had agreed that this climax was the best the young dramatist had yet constructed. A critic who had been invited to a reading had declared that it lacked little of being great. And at this late hour the star wanted it changed in order to bring her alone in the lime−light! It was preposterous. As Warrington was on the first wave of popularity, the business manager and the stage manager both agreed to leave the matter wholly in the dramatist's hands. He resolutely declined to make a single alteration in the scene. There was a fine storm. The star declared that if the change was not made at once she would leave the company. In making this declaration she knew her strength. Her husband was rich; a contract was nothing to her. There was not another actress of her ability to be found; the season was too late. There was not another woman available, nor would any other manager lend one. As the opening performance was but two weeks hence, you will realize why Warrington's mood this night was anything but amiable.

He scowled at his cigar. There was always something, some sacrifice to make, and seldom for art's sake. It is all very well to witness a play from the other side of the footlights; everything appears to work out so smoothly, easily and without effort. To this phenomenon is due the amateur dramatist—because it looks simple. A play is not written; it is built, like a house. In most cases the dramatist is simply the architect. The novelist has comparatively an easy road to travel. The dramatist is beset from all sides, now the business manager—that is to say, the box−office—now the stage manager, now the star, now the leading man or woman. Jealousy's green eyes peer from behind every scene. The dramatist's ideal, when finally presented to the public, resembles those mutilated marbles that decorate the museums of Rome and Naples. Only there is this difference: the public can easily imagine what the sculptor was about, but seldom the dramatist.

Warrington was a young man, tolerably good−looking, noticeably well set up. When they have good features, a cleft chin and a generous nose, clean−shaven men are good to look at. He had fine eyes, in the corners of which always lurked mirth and mischief; for he possessed above all things an inexhaustible fund of dry humor. His lines seldom provoked rough laughter; rather, silent chuckles.

Warrington's scowl abated none. In business, women were generally nuisances; they were always taking impossible stands. He would find some way out; he was determined not to submit to the imperious fancies of an actress, however famous she might be.

"Sir, will you aid a lady in distress?" The voice was tremulous, but as rich in tone as the diapason of an organ.

Warrington looked up from his cigar to behold a handsome young woman standing at the side of his table. Her

round, smooth cheeks were flushed, and on the lower lids of her splendid dark eyes tears of shame trembled and threatened to fall. Behind her stood a waiter, of impassive countenance, who was adding up the figures on a check, his movement full of suggestion.

The dramatist understood the situation at once. The young lady had ordered dinner, and, having eaten it, found that she could not pay for it. It was, to say the least, a trite situation. But what can a man do when a pretty woman approaches him and pleads for assistance? So Warrington rose.

"What may the trouble be?" he asked coldly, for all that he instantly recognized her to be a person of breeding and refinement.

"I—I have lost my purse, and I have no money to pay the waiter." She made this confession bravely and frankly.

He looked about. They were alone. She interpreted his glance rather shrewdly.

"There were no women to appeal to. The waiter refused to accept my word, and I really can't blame him. I had not even the money to send a messenger home."

One of the trembling tears escaped and rolled down the blooming cheek. Warrington surrendered. He saw that this was an exceptional case. The girl was truly in distress. He knew his New York thoroughly; a man or woman without funds is treated with the finished cruelty with which the jovial Romans amused themselves with the Christians. Lack of money in one person creates incredulity in another. A penniless person is invariably a liar and a thief. Only one sort of person is pitied in New York: the person who has more money than she or he can possibly spend.

The girl fumbled in her hand−bag and produced a card, which she gave to Warrington—"Katherine Challoner." He looked from the card to the girl and then back to the card. Somehow, the name was not wholly unfamiliar, but at that moment he could not place it.

"Waiter, let me see the check," he said. It amounted to two dollars and ten cents. Warrington smiled. "Scarcely large enough to cause all this trouble," he added reassuringly. "I will attend to it."

The waiter bowed and withdrew. So long as the check was paid he did not care who paid it.

"Oh, it is so horribly embarrassing! What must you think of me?" She twisted her gloves with a nervous strength which threatened to rend them.

"May I give you a bit of friendly advice?" he asked.

She nodded, hiding the fall of the second tear.

"Well, never dine alone in public; at any rate, in the evening. It is not wise for a woman to do so. She subjects herself to any number of embarrassments."

She did not reply, and for a moment he believed that she was about to break down completely. He aimlessly brushed the cigar ashes from the tablecloth. He hated a scene in public. In the theater it was different; it was a part of the petty round of business to have the leading lady burst into tears when things didn't suit her. What fools women are in general! But the girl surprised him by holding up determinedly, and sinking her white teeth into her lips to smother the sob which rose in her throat.

"Be seated," he said, drawing out the opposite chair.

A wave of alarm spread over her face. She clasped her hands.

"Sir, if you are a gentleman—"

Warrington interrupted her by giving her his card, which was addressed. She glanced at it through a blur of tears, then sat down. He shrugged his shoulders slightly; his vanity was touched. There was, then, a young woman in New York who had not heard of Richard Warrington.

"In asking you to be seated," he explained, "it was in order that you might wait in comfort while I despatched a messenger to your home. Doubtless you have a brother, a father, or some male relative, who will come at once to your assistance." Which proved that Warrington was prudent.

But instead of brightening as he expected she would, she straightened in her chair, while her eyes widened with horror, as if she saw something frightful in perspective.

What the deuce could be the matter now? he wondered, as he witnessed this inexplicable change.

"No, no! You must not send a messenger!" she protested.

"But—"

"No, no!" tears welling into her beautiful eyes again. They were beautiful, he was forced to admit.

"But," he persisted, "you wished the waiter to do so. I do not understand." His tone became formal again.

"I have reasons. Oh, heavens! I am the most miserable woman in all the world!" She suddenly bowed her head upon her hands and her shoulders rose and fell with silent sobs.

Warrington stared at her, dumfounded. NOW what? He glanced cautiously around as if in search of some avenue of escape. The waiter, ever watchful, assumed that he was wanted, and made as though to approach the table; but Warrington warned him off. All distrust in the girl vanished. Decidedly she was in great trouble of some sort, and it wasn't because she could not pay a restaurant check. Women—and especially New York women—do not shed tears when a stranger offers to settle for their dinner checks.

"If you will kindly explain to me what the trouble is," visibly embarrassed, "perhaps I can help you. Have you run away from borne?" he asked.

A negative nod.

"Are you married?"

Another negative nod.

Warrington scratched his chin. "Have you done anything wrong?"

A decided negative shake of the head. At any other time the gesticulation of the ostrich plume, so close to his face, would have amused him; but there was something eminently pathetic in the diapasm which drifted toward him from the feather.

"Come, come; you may trust me thoroughly. If you are afraid to return home alone—"

He was interrupted by an affirmative nod this time. Possibly, he conjectured, the girl had started out to elope and had fortunately paused at the brink.

"Will it help you at all if I go home with you?" he asked.

His ear caught a muffled "Yes."

Warrington beckoned to the waiter.

"Order a cab at once," he said.

The waiter hurried away, with visions of handsome tips.

Presently the girl raised her head and sat up. Her eyes, dark as shadows in still waters, glistened.

"Be perfectly frank with me; and if I can be of service to you, do not hesitate to command me." He eyed her thoughtfully. Everything attached to her person suggested elegance. Her skin was as fine as vellum; her hair had a dash of golden bronze in it; her hands were white and shapely, and the horn on the tips of the fingers shone rosily. Now, what in the world was there to trouble a young woman who possessed these favors, who wore jewels on her fingers and sable on her shoulders? "Talk to me just as you would to a brother," he added presently.

"You will take this ring," she said irrelevantly. She slipped a fine sapphire from one of her fingers and pushed it across the table.

"And for what reason?" he cried.

"Security for my dinner. I can not accept charity," with a hint of hauteur which did not in the least displease him.

"But, my dear young woman, I can not accept this ring. You have my address. You may send the sum whenever you please. I see no reason why, as soon as you arrive home, you can not refund the small sum of two dollars and ten cents. It appears to me very simple."

"There will be no one at home, not even the servants," wearily.

Warrington's brows came together. Was the girl fooling him, after all? But for what reason?

"You have me confused," he admitted. "I can do nothing blindly. Tell me what the trouble is."

"How can I tell you, an absolute stranger? It is all so frightful, and I am so young!"

Frightful? Young? He picked up his half−finished cigar, but immediately let it fall. He stole a look at his watch; it was seven.

"Oh, I know what you must think of me," despairingly. "Nobody believes in another's real misfortune in this horrid city. There are so many fraudulent methods used to obtain people's sympathies that every one has lost trust. I had no money when I entered here; but outside it was so dark. Whenever I stopped, wondering where I should go, men turned and stared at me. Once a policeman peered into my face suspiciously. And I dared not return home, I dared not! No, no; I promise not to embarrass you with any more tears." She brushed her eyes with a rapid movement.

Warrington's success as a dramatist was due largely to his interest in all things that passed under his notice. Nothing was too trivial to observe. The tragic threads of human life, which escaped the eyes of the passing many or were ignored by them, always aroused his interest and attention; and more than once he had picked up one of these threads and followed it to the end. Out of these seemingly insignificant things he often built one of those breathless, nerve−gripping climaxes which had, in a few years' time, made him famous. In the present case he believed that he had stumbled upon something worthy his investigation. This handsome young woman, richly dressed, who dared not go home, who had jewels but no money—there was some mystery surrounding her, and he determined to find out what it was. And then, besides, for all that he was worldly, he was young and still believed in his Keats.

"If, as you say, there is no one at your home, why do you fear to go there?" he asked, with some remnant of caution.

"It is the horror of the place," shuddering; "the horror!" And indeed, at that moment, her face expressed horror.

"Is it some one dead?" lowering his voice.

"Dead?" with a flash of cold anger in her eyes. "Yes—to me, to truth, to honor; dead to everything that should make life worth the living. Oh, it is impossible to say more in this place, to tell you here what has happened this day to rob me of all my tender illusions. This morning I awoke happy, my heart was light; now, nothing but shame and misery!" She hid her eyes for a space behind the back of her hand.

"I will take you home," he said simply.

"You trust me?"

"Why not? I am a man, and can take care of myself."

"Thank you!"

What a voice! It possessed a marvelous quality, low and penetrating, like the voices of great singers and actresses. Any woman with such a voice ...

Here the waiter returned to announce that a cab awaited them in the street below. Warrington paid the two checks, dropped a liberal tip, rose and got into his coat. The girl also rose, picked up his card, glanced carelessly at it, and put it into her hand−bag—a little gold−link affair worth many dinners. It was the voice and these evidences of wealth, more than anything else, that determined Warrington. Frauds were always perpetrated for money, and this exquisite creature had a small fortune on her fingers.

Silently they left the restaurant, entered the cab, and went rolling out into Broadway. Warrington, repressing his curiosity, leaned back against the cushions. The girl looked dully ahead.

What manner of tragedy was about to unfold itself to his gaze?

The house was situated in Central Park, West. It was of modern architecture, a residence such as only rich men can afford to build. It was in utter gloom; not a single light could be seen at any window. It looked, indeed, as if tragedy sat enthroned within. Warrington's spine wrinkled a bit as he got out of the cab and offered his hand to the girl.

Mute and mysterious as a sphinx, the girl walked to the steps, not even looking around to see if he was coming after her. Perhaps she knew the power of curiosity. Without hesitance she mounted the steps; he followed, a step behind. At the door, however, she paused. He could hear her breath coming in quick gasps. Oddly enough, the recollection of some detective stories flashed through his mind.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing; only I am afraid."

She stooped; there was a grating sound, a click, and the door opened. Warrington was a man of courage, but he afterward confessed that it took all his nerve force to move his foot across the threshold.

"Do not be frightened," she said calmly; "there is nothing but ghosts here to frighten any one."

"Ghosts?"

"Yes."

"Have you brought me here to tell me a ghost story?" with an effort at lightness. What misery the girl's tones conveyed to his ears!

"The ghosts of things that ought to, and should, have been; are not those the most melancholy?" She pressed a button and flooded the hallway with light.

His keen eyes roving met nothing but signs of luxury. She led him into the library and turned on the lights. Not a servant anywhere in sight; the great house seemed absolutely empty. Not even the usual cat or dog came romping inquisitively into the room. The shelves of books stirred his sense of envy; what a den for a literary man to wander in! There were beautiful marbles, splendid paintings, taste and refinement visible everywhere.

Warrington stood silently watching the girl as she took off her hat and carelessly tossed it on the reading−table. The Russian sables were treated with like indifference. The natural abundance of her hair amazed him; and what a figure, so elegant, rounded, and mature! The girl, without noticing him, walked the length of the room and back several times. Once or twice she made a gesture. It was not addressed to him, but to some conflict going on in her mind.

He sat down on the edge of a chair and fell to twirling his hat, a sign that he was not perfectly at his ease.

"I am wondering where I shall begin," she said.

Warrington turned down his coat−collar, and the action seemed to relieve him of the sense of awkwardness.

"Luxury!" she began, with a sweep of her hand which was full of majesty and despair. "Why have I chosen you out of all the thousands? Why should I believe that my story would interest you? Well, little as I have seen of the world, I have learned that woman does not go to woman in cases such as mine is." And then pathetically: "I know no woman to whom I might go. Women are like daws; their sympathy comes but to peck. Do you know what it is to be alone in a city? The desert is not loneliness; it is only solitude. True loneliness is to be found only in great communities. To be without a single friend or confidant, when thousand of beings move about you; to pour your sorrows into cold, unfeeling ears; to seek sympathy in blind eyes—that is loneliness. That is the loneliness that causes the heart to break."

Warrington's eyes never left hers; he was fascinated.

"Luxury!" she repeated bitterly. "Surrounding me with all a woman might desire—paintings that charm the eye, books that charm the mind, music that charms the ear. Money!"

"Philosophy in a girl!" thought Warrington. His hat became motionless.

"It is all a lie, a lie!" The girl struck her hands together, impotent in her wrath.

It was done so naturally that Warrington, always the dramatist, made a mental note of the gesture.

"I was educated in Paris and Berlin; my musical education was completed in Dresden. Like all young girls with music−loving souls, I was something of a poet. I saw the beautiful in everything; sometimes the beauty existed only in my imagination. I dreamed; I was happy. I was told that I possessed a voice such as is given to few. I sang before the Emperor of Austria at a private musicale. He complimented me. The future was bright indeed. Think of it; at twenty I retained all my illusions! I am now twenty−three, and not a single illusion is left. I saw but little of my father and mother, which is not unusual with children of wealthy parents. The first shock that came to my knowledge was the news that my mother had ceased to live with my father. I was recalled. There were no explanations. My father met me at the boat. He greeted my effusive caresses—caresses that I had saved for years!—with careless indifference. This was the second shock. What did it all mean? Where was my mother? My father did not reply. When I reached home I found that all the servants I had known in my childhood days were gone. From the new ones I knew that I should learn nothing of the mystery which, like a pall, had suddenly settled down upon me."

She paused, her arms hanging listless at her sides, her gaze riveted upon a pattern in the rug at her feet. Warrington sat like a man of stone; her voice had cast a spell upon him.

"I do not know why I tell you these things. It may weary you. I do not care. Madness lay in silence. I had to tell some one. This morning I found out all. My mother left my father because he was ... a thief!"

"A thief!" fell mechanically from Warrington's lips.

"A thief, bold, unscrupulous; not the petty burglar, no. A man who has stolen funds intrusted to him for years; a man who has plundered the orphan and the widow, the most despicable of all men. My mother died of shame, and I knew nothing. My father left last night for South America, taking with him all the available funds, leaving me a curt note of explanation. I have neither money, friends, nor home. The newspapers as yet know nothing; but to−morrow, to−morrow! The banks have seized everything."

She continued her story. Sometimes she was superb in her wrath; at others, abject in her misery. She seemed to pass through the whole gamut of the passions.

And all this while it ran through Warrington's head—"What a theme for a play! What a voice!"

He pitied the girl from the bottom of his heart; but what could he do for her other than offer her cold sympathy? He was ill at ease in the face of this peculiar tragedy.

All at once the girl stopped and faced him, There was a smile on her lips, a smile that might be likened to a flash of sunlight on a wintry day. Directly the smile melted into a laugh, mellow, mischievous, reverberating.

Warrington sat up stiffly in his chair.

"I beg your pardon!" he said.

The girl sat down before a small writing−table. She reached among some papers and finally found what she sought.

"Mr. Warrington, all this has been in very bad taste; I frankly confess it. There are two things you may do: leave the house in anger, or remain to forgive me this imposition."

"I fail to understand." He was not only angered, but bewildered.

"I have deceived you."

"You mean that you have lured me here by trick? That you have played upon my sympathies to gratify ..."

"Wait a moment," she interrupted proudly, her cheeks darkening richly. "A trick, it is true; but there are extenuating circumstances. What I have told you HAS happened, only it was not to−day nor yesterday. Please remain seated till I have done. I AM poor; I WAS educated in the cities I have named; I have to earn my living."

She rose and came over to his chair. She gave him a letter.

"Read this; you will fully understand."

Warrington experienced a mild chill as he saw a letter addressed to him, and his rude scribble at the bottom of it.

Miss Challoner—I beg to state that I have neither the time nor the inclination to bother with amateur actresses. Richard Warrington.

"It was scarcely polite, was it?" she asked, with a tinge of irony. "It was scarcely diplomatic, either, you will admit. I simply asked you for work. Surely, an honest effort to obtain employment ought not to be met with insolence."

He stared dumbly at the evidence in his hand. He recalled distinctly the rage that was in his heart when he penned this note. The stage manager had lost some valuable manuscript that had to be rewritten from memory, the notes having been destroyed.

"For weeks," said the girl, "I have tried to get a hearing. Manager after manager I sought; all refused to see me. I have suffered a hundred affronts, all in silence. Your manager I saw, but he referred me to you, knowing that probably I should never find you. But I was determined. So I wrote; that was your answer. I confess that at the time I was terribly angry, for courtesy is a simple thing and within reach of every one."

To receive a lesson in manners from a young woman, when that young woman is handsome and talented, is not a very pleasant experience. But Warrington was, a thorough gentleman, and he submitted with grace.

"I know that you are a busy man, that you are besieged with applications. You ought, at least, to have formal slips, such as editors have. I have confidence in my ability to act, the confidence which talent gives to all persons. After receiving your letter I was more than ever determined to see you. So I resorted to this subterfuge. It was all very distasteful to me; but I possess a vein of wilfulness. This is not my home. It is the home of a friend who was kind enough to turn it over to me this night, relying upon my wit to bring about this meeting."

"It was neatly done," was Warrington's comment. He was not angry now at all. In fact, the girl interested him tremendously. "I am rather curious to learn how you went about it."

"You are not angry?"

"I was."

This seemed to satisfy her.

"Well, first I learned where you were in the habit of dining. All day long a messenger has been following you. A telephone brought me to the restaurant. The rest you know. It was simple."

"Very simple," laconically.

"You listened and believed. I have been watching you. You believed everything I have told you. You have even been calculating how this scene might go in a play. Have I convinced you that I have the ability to act?"

Warrington folded the letter and balanced it on his palm.

"You have fooled me completely; that ought to be sufficient recommendation."

"Thank you." But her eyes were eager with anxiety.

"Miss Challoner, I apologize for this letter. I do more than that. I promise not to leave this house till you agree to call at the theater at ten to−morrow morning." He was smiling, and Warrington had a pleasant smile. He had an idea besides. "Good fortune put it into my head to follow you here. I see it all now, quite plainly. I am in a peculiar difficulty, and I honestly believe that you can help me out of it. How long would it take you to learn a leading part? In fact, the principal part?"

"A week."

"Have you had any experience?"

"A short season out west in a stock company."

"Good!"

"And I love work."

"Do not build any great hopes," he warned, "for your chance depends upon the whim of another woman. But you have my word and my good offices that something shall be put in your way. You will come at ten?" drawing on his gloves.

"Promptly."

"I believe that we both have been wise to−night; though it is true that a man dislikes being a fool and having it made manifest."

"And how about the woman scorned?" with an enchanting smile.

"It is kismet," he acknowledged.

Chapter II

Warrington laid down his pen, brushed his smarting eyes, lighted his pipe, and tilted back his chair. With his hands clasped behind his head, he fell into a waking dream, that familiar pastime of the creative mind. It was half after nine, and he had been writing steadily since seven. The scenario was done; the villain had lighted his last cigarette, the hero had put his arms protectingly around the heroine, and the irascible rich uncle had been brought to terms. All this, of course, figuratively speaking; for no one ever knew what the plot of that particular play was, insomuch as Warrington never submitted the scenario to his manager, an act which caused almost a serious rupture between them. But to−night his puppets were moving hither and thither across the stage, pulsing with life; they were making entrances and exits; developing this climax and that; with wit and satire, humor and pathos. It was all very real to the dreamer.

The manuscript lay scattered about the top of his broad flat desk, and the floor beside the waste−basket was flaked with the remains of various futile lines and epigrams. The ash−pan was littered with burnt matches, ends of cigars and pipe tobacco, while the ash−crumbs speckled all dark objects, not excepting the green rug under his feet. Warrington smoked incessantly while at work, now a cigarette, now a cigar, now a pipe. Specialists declare with cold authoritative positiveness that the use of tobacco blunts the thought, dulls the edge of invention; but Warrington knew better. Many a night he had thrown his coat over his smoking−jacket and dashed down the street to the corner drug−store for a fresh supply of tobacco. He simply could not work without it. I do not know that he saw his heroes and heroines any plainer for the smoke; but I do know that when their creator held a cigar between his teeth, they frowned less, and the spirit of malice and irony, of which he was master, became subdued.

Warrington was thirty−five now. The grey hair at the temples and the freshness of his complexion gave him a singularly youthful appearance. His mouth was even−lipped and rather pleasure−loving, which, without the balance of a strong nose, would have appealed to you as effeminate. Warrington's was what the wise phrenologists call the fighting nose; not pugnacious, but the nose of a man who will fight for what he believes to be right, fight bitterly and fearlessly. To−day he was famous, but only yesterday he had been fighting, retreating, throwing up this redoubt, digging this trench; fighting, fighting. Poverty, ignorance and contempt he fought; fought dishonesty, and vice, and treachery, and discouragement.

Presently he leaned toward the desk and picked up a letter. He read it thoughtfully, and his brows drew together. A smile, whimsically sad, stirred his lips, and was gone. It was written by a girl or a very young woman. There was no signature, no address, no veiled request for an autograph. It was one of those letters which bring to the novelist or dramatist, or any man of talent, a real and singular pleasure. It is precious because honest and devoid of the tawdry gilt of flattery.

Richard Warrington—You will smile, I know, when you read this letter, doubtless so many like it are mailed to you day by day. You will toss it into the waste−basket, too, as it deserves to be. But it had to be written. However, I feel that I am not writing to a mere stranger, but to a friend whom I know well. Three times you have entered into my life, and on each occasion you have come by a different avenue. I was ill at school when you first appeared to me. It was a poem in a magazine. It was so full of the spirit of joyousness, so full of kindliness, so rich in faith and hope, that I cried over it, cut it out and treasured it, and re−read it often in the lonely hours when things discouraged me,—things which mean so little to women but so much to girls. Two years went by, and then came that brave book! It was like coming across a half−forgotten friend. I actually ran home with it, and sat up all night to complete it. It was splendid. It was the poem matured, broadened, rounded. And finally your first play! How I listened to every word, watched every move! I wrote you a letter that night, but tore it up, not having the courage to send it to you. How versatile you must be: a poem, a book, a play! I have seen all your plays these five years, plays merry and gay, sad and grave. How many times you have mysteriously told me to be brave! I envy and admire you. What an exquisite thing it must be to hear one's thoughts spoken across the footlights! Please do not laugh. It would hurt me to know that you could laugh at my honest admiration. You won't laugh, will you? I am sure you will value this letter for its honesty rather than for its literary quality. I have often wondered what you were like. But after all, that can not matter, since you are good and kind and wise; for you can not be else, and

write the lofty things you do.

Warrington put the letter away, placed it carefully among the few things he held of value. It would not be true to say that it left him unaffected. There was an innocent barb in this girlish admiration, and it pierced the quick of all that was good in him.

"Good and kind and wise," he mused. "If only the child knew! Heigh−ho! I am kind, sometimes I've been good, and often wise. Well, I can't disillusion the child, happily; she has given me no address."

He rose, wheeled his chair to a window facing the street, and opened it. The cool fresh April air rushed in, clearing the room of its opalescent clouds, cleansing his brain of the fever that beset it. He leaned with his elbows on the sill and, breathed noisily, gratefully. Above, heaven had decked her broad bosom with her flickering stars, and from the million lamps of the great city rose and floated a tarnished yellow haze. So many sounds go forth to make the voices of the night: somewhere a child was crying fretfully, across the way the faint tinkle of a piano, the far−off rattle of the elevated, a muffled laugh from a window, above, the rat−tat of a cab−horse, the breeze in the ivy clinging to the walls of the church next door, the quarrelsome chirp of the sleepy sparrows; and then, recurrence. Only the poet or the man in pain opens his ears to these sounds.

Over on Broadway a child of his fertile brain was holding the rapt attention of several hundred men and women; and across the broad land that night four other dramas were being successfully acted. People were discussing his theories, denouncing or approving his conception of life. The struggle was past, his royalties were making him rich. And here he was this night, drinking the cup of bitterness, of unhappiness, the astringent draft of things that might and should have been. The coveted grape was sour, the desired apple was withered. Those who traverse the road with Folly as boon companion find only emptiness.

And so it was with Warrington. He had once been good, wholly good and kind and wise, lofty as a rural poet who has seen nothing of life save nature's pure and visible face. In the heat of battle he had been strong, but success had subtly eaten into the fibers and loosed his hold, and had swept him onward into that whirlpool out of which no man emerges wholly undefiled. It takes a great and strong man to withstand success, and Warrington was only a genius. It was not from lack of will power; rather it was because he was easy−going and loved pleasure for its own sake. He had fought and starved, and now for the jingle of the guinea in his pocket and the junkets of the gay! The prodigality of these creative beings is not fully understood by the laity, else they would forgive more readily the transgressions. Besides, the harbor of family ties is a man's moral bulwark; and Warrington drifted hither and thither with no harbor in view at all.

He had been an orphan since his birth; a mother meant simply a giver of life, and a father meant, even less. Until he had read the reverse and obverse sides of life, his sense of morality had lain dormant and untilled. Such was his misfortune. The solitary relative he laid claim to was an aged aunt, his father's sister. For her he had purchased a beautiful place in the town of his birth, vaguely intending to live out his old age there.

There had been a fight for all he possessed. Good had not come easily, as it does to some particularly favored mortals. There was no family, aristocracy to back him up, no melancholy recollections of past grandeur to add the interest of romance to his endeavors. His father had been a poor man of the people, a farmer. And yet Warrington was by no means plebeian. Somewhere there was a fine strain. It had been a fierce struggle to complete a college education. In the summer−time he had turned his hand to all sorts of things to pay his winter's tuition. He had worked as clerk in summer hotels, as a surveyor's assistant in laying street−railways, he had played at private secretary, he had hawked vegetables about the streets at dawn. Happily, he had no false pride. Chance moves quite as mysteriously as the tides. On leaving college he had secured a minor position on one of the daily newspapers, and had doggedly worked his way up to the coveted position of star−reporter. Here the latent power of the story−teller, the poet and the dramatist was awakened; in any other pursuit the talent would have quietly died, as it has died in the breasts of thousands who, singularly enough, have not stood in the path of Chance.

Socially, Warrington was one of the many nobodies; and if he ever attended dinners and banquets and balls, it was in the capacity of reporter. But his cynical humor, which was manifest even in his youth, saved him the rancor and envy which is the portion of the outsider.

At length the great city called him, and the lure was strong. He answered, and the long battle was on. Sometimes he dined, sometimes he slept; for there's an old Italian saying that he who sleeps dines. He drifted from one paper to another, lived in prosperity one week and in poverty the next; haggled with pawnbrokers and landladies, and borrowed money and lent it. He never saved anything; the dreamer never does. Then one day the

end came to the long lane, as it always does to those who keep on. A book was accepted and published; and then followed the first play.

By and by, when his name began to figure in the dramatic news items, and home visitors in New York returned to boast about the Warrington "first nights," the up−state city woke and began to recollect things—what promise Warrington had shown in his youth, how clever he was, and all that. Nothing succeeds like success, and nobody is so interesting as the prophet who has shaken the dust of his own country and found honor in another. Human nature can't help itself: the women talked of his plays in the reading−clubs, the men speculated on the backs of envelopes what his royalties were, and the newspaper that had given him a bread−and−butter pittance for a man's work proudly took it upon itself to say that its columns had fostered the genius in the growing. This was not because the editors were really proud of their townsman's success; rather it was because it made a neat little advertisement of their own particular foresight, such as it was. In fact, in his own town (because he had refused to live in it!) Warrington was a lion of no small dimensions.

Warrington's novel (the only one he ever wrote) was known to few. To tell the truth, the very critics that were now praising the dramatist had slashed the novelist cruelly. And thereby hangs a tale. A New York theatrical manager sent for Warrington one day and told him that he had read the book, and if the author would attempt a dramatic version, the manager would give it a fair chance. Warrington, the bitterness of failure in his soul, undertook the work, and succeeded. Praise would have made an indifferent novelist of him, for he was a born dramatist.

Regularly each year he visited his birthplace for a day or so, to pay in person his taxes. For all that he labored in New York, he still retained his right to vote in his native town.

A sudden desire seized him to−night to return to his home, to become a citizen in fact and deed. It was now the time of year when the spring torrents flood the lowlands, when the melting snows trickle down the bleak hillsides, when the dead hand of winter lies upon the bosom of awakening spring, and the seed is in travail. Heigh−ho! the world went very well in the springs of old; care was in bondage, and all the many gateways to the heart were bastioned and sentineled.

"Sir, a lady wishes to see you."

Warrington turned. His valet stood respectfully in the doorway.

"The name?" Warrington rose impatiently. Nobody likes to have his dreams disturbed.

"Miss Challoner, sir."

"Challoner!" in surprise; "and this time of night?" He stroked his chin. A moment passed. Not that he hesitated to admit her; rather he wished to make a final analysis of his heart before his eyes fell down to worship her beauty. "Admit her at once." He brushed the ashes from his jacket and smoothed his hair. The valet disappeared. "If I only loved the woman, loved her honestly, boldly, fearlessly, what a difference it would make! I don't love her, and I realize that I never did. She never touched my heart, only my eye and mind. I may be incapable of loving any one; perhaps that's it. But what can have possessed her to leave the theater this time of night?"

A swish of petticoats, a rush of cool air with which mingled an indefinable perfume, and, like a bird taking momentary rest in the passage, she stood poised on the threshold. A beautiful woman is a tangible enchantment; and fame and fortune had made Katherine Challoner beautiful, roguishly, daringly, puzzlingly beautiful. Her eyes sparkled like stars on ruffled waters, the flame of health and life burned in her cheeks, and the moist red mobile mouth expressed emotions so rapidly and irregularly as to bewilder the man who attempted to follow them. Ah, but she could act; comedy or tragedy, it mattered not; she was always superb.

There was a tableau of short duration. Her expression was one of gentle inquiry, his was one of interest not unmixed with fascination. He felt a quick touch of compassion, of embarrassment. There had been times when yonder woman had seemed to show him the preference that is given only to men who are loved. Even as the thought came to him, he prayed that it was only his man's vanity that imagined it. As he stared at her, there came the old thrill: beauty is a power tremendous.

"Dick, you do not say you are glad to see me."

"Beauty striketh the sage dumb," he laughed. "What good fortune brings you here to−night? What has happened? How could you find time between the acts to run over?"

"I am not acting to−night."

"What?"

"No. Nor shall I be to−morrow night, nor the thousand nights that shall follow."

"Why, girl!" he cried, pushing out a chair. He had not seen her for two weeks. He had known nothing of her movements, save that her splendid talents had saved a play from utter ruin. Her declaration was like a thunderbolt. "Explain!"

"Well, I am tired, Dick; I am tired." She sat down, and her gaze roved about the familiar room with a veiled affection for everything she saw. "The world is empty. I have begun to hate the fools who applaud me. I hate the evil smells which hang about the theater. I hate the overture and the man with the drums," whimsically.

"What's he done to you?"

"Nothing, only he makes more noise than the others. I'm tired. It is not a definite reason; but a woman is never obliged to be definite."

"No; I never could understand you, even when you took the trouble to explain things."

"Yes, I know." She drew off her gloves and rubbed her fingers, which were damp and cold.

"But, surely, this is only a whim. You can't seriously mean to give up the stage when the whole world is watching you!"

She did not answer him, but continued to rub her fingers. She wore several rings, among which was a brilliant of unusual luster. Warrington, however, had eyes for nothing but her face. For the past six months he had noted a subtle change in her, a growing reserve, a thoughtfulness that was slowly veiling or subduing her natural gaiety. She now evaded him when he suggested one of their old romps in queer little restaurants; she professed illness when he sent for her to join him in some harmless junketing. She was slowly slipping away from him; no, drifting, since he made no real effort to hold her. And why had he made no real effort? Sometimes he thought he could answer this question, and then again he knew that he could not. Ah, if he only loved her! What a helpmeet: cheerful, resourceful, full of good humor and practical philosophy, a brilliant wit, with all the finished graces of a goddess. Ah, if indeed he only loved her! This thought kept running through his mind persistently; it had done so for days; but it had always led him back to the starting point. Love is not always reasoning with itself. Perhaps—and the thought filled him with regret—perhaps he was indeed incapable of loving any one as his poet's fancy believed he ought to love. And this may account for the truth of the statement that genius is rarely successful in love; the ideal is so high that it is out of the reach of life as we, genius or clod, live it.

"Isn't this determination rather sudden?" he asked, when the pause grew insupportable.

"I have been thinking of it for some time," she replied, smiling. A woman always finds herself at ease during such crises. "Only, I hadn't exactly made up my mind. You were at work?" glancing at the desk.

"Yes, but I'm through for the night. It's only a scenario, and I am not entirely satisfied with it."

She walked over to the desk and picked up a sheet at random. She was a privileged person in these rooms. Warrington never had any nervous dread when she touched his manuscript.

"How is it going to end?" she asked.

"Oh, they are going to marry and be happy ever after," he answered, smiling.

"Ah; then they are never going to have any children?" she said, with a flash of her old−time mischief.

"Will you have a cigarette?" lighting one and offering her the box.

"No; I have a horror of cigarettes since that last play. To smoke in public every night, perforce, took away the charm. I hated that part. An adventuress! It was altogether too close to the quick; for I am nothing more or less than an adventuress who has been successful. Why, the very method I used to make your acquaintance years and years ago, wasn't it?—proved the spirit. 'We hate two kinds of people,'" she read, taking up another page of manuscript; "'the people we wrong and the people who wrong us. Only, the hate for those we have wronged is most enduring.' That isn't half bad, Dick. How do you think of all these things?"

She crossed over to the window to cool her hot face. She, too, heard the voices of the night; not as the poet hears them, but as one in pain. "He never loved me!" she murmured, so softly that even the sparrows in the vine heard her not. And bitter indeed was the pain. But of what use to struggle, or to sigh, or vainly to regret? As things are written, so must they be read. She readily held him guiltless; what she regretted most deeply was the lack of power to have him and to hold him. Long before, she had realized the hopelessness of it all. Knowing that he drank from the cup of dissipation, she had even sought to hold him in contempt; but to her he had never ceased to be a gentleman, tender, manly and kind. It is contempt that casts the first spadeful in the grave of love.

"Come, girl," he said, going to her side; "you have something to tell me. What is it?"

She turned to find his hand outstretched and a friendly look in his eyes. Impulsively she gave him both her hands. He bowed over them with the grave air of the days of powdered wigs. There was not a particle of irony in the movement; rather it was a quiet acknowledgment that he recollected the good influence she had at times worked upon him in some dark days. As he brushed her fingers with his lips, he saw. His head came up quickly.

"Ah!"

"Yes." Her voice was steady and her eyes were brave.

He drew her to the lamp and studied the ring. The ruddy lights dartled as he slowly turned the jewel around.

"It is a beauty. No one but a rich man could have given a ring like that. And on your finger it means but one thing."

"I am to be married in June."

"Do you love him?"

"I respect him; he is noble and good and kind."

Warrington did not press the question. He still retained the hand, though he no longer gazed at the ring.

"I have always wanted a home. The stage never really fascinated me; it was bread and butter."

"Is it necessary to marry in order to have a home?" he asked quietly, letting the hand gently slide from his. "You are wealthy, after a fashion; could you not build a home of your own?"

"Always to be identified as the actress? To be looked at curiously, to be annoyed by those who are not my equals, and only tolerated by those who are? No! I want a man who will protect me from all these things, who will help me to forget some needless follies and the memory that a hundred different men have made play−love to me on the other side of the footlights."

"Some men marry actresses to gratify their vanity; does this man love you?"

"Yes; and he will make me what Heaven intended I should be—a woman. Oh, I have uttered no deceit. This man will take me for what I am."

"And you have come here to−night to ask me to forget, too?" There was no bitterness in his tone, but there was a strong leaven of regret. "Well, I promise to forget."

"It was not necessary to ask you that," generously. "But I thought I would come to you and tell you everything. I did not wish you to misjudge me. For the world will say that I am marrying this good man for his money; whereas, if he was a man of the most moderate circumstances, I should still marry him."

"And who might this lucky man be? To win a woman, such as I know you to be, this man must have some extraordinary attributes." And all at once a sense of infinite relief entered into his heart: if she were indeed married, there would no longer be that tantalizing doubt on his part, that peculiar attraction which at one time resembled love and at another time was simply fascination. She would pass out of his life definitely. He perfectly recognized the fact that he admired her above all other women he knew; but it was also apparent that to see her day by day, year by year, his partner in the commonplaces as well as in the heights, romance would become threadbare quickly enough. "Who is he?" he repeated.

"That I prefer not to disclose to you just yet. What are you going to call your new play?" with a wave of her hand toward the manuscript.

"I had intended to call it Love and Money, but the very name presages failure."

"Yes, it needs the cement of compatibility to keep the two together."

"Well, from my heart I wish you all the best luck in the world," he said, the absence of any mental reservation in his eyes. "You would make any man a good wife. If I weren't a born fool—"

She leaned toward him, her face suddenly tense and eager.

"—if I weren't a born fool," with a smile that was whimsical, "I'd have married you myself, long ago. But fate has cut me out for a bachelor." He knocked the ash from a cold pipe, filled and lighted it. "By the way," he said, "I received a curious letter to−day." Its production would relieve the awkwardness of the moment. "Would you like to see it?" opening the drawer and handing the letter to her. "It's one of the few letters of the sort I'm going to keep."

She accepted the letter, but without any spirit of interest. For a moment a thought had all but swept her off her feet; yet she realized instantly that this thought was futile. Warrington did not love her; and there was nothing to do but to follow out the course she had planned. She had come to him that night with a single purpose in mind: to plumb the very heart of this man who was an enigma to every woman he met. She had plumbed it. Warrington

loved nobody but Warrington and pleasure. Oh, he was capable of the grand passion, she very well knew, but the woman to arouse it had not yet crossed his path.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

She came closer to the lamp. It was only pretense, but Warrington was not aware of it. She had stared at the sheet, reading only her miserable thoughts. Presently she smiled; the girlish exuberance amused her.

"She has put you quite out of reach. What a fine thing it must be to have such faith in any man!"

"And I'm not worth in her esteem an ounce to the pound." He was quite frank with himself. "I would to Heaven I were!"

"And this is the kind of woman that you will fall violently in love with, some day, Dick. It will be your punishment." She had fully recovered by now, and the old−time raillery was in the ascendant. "Oh, she has read you fairly well. You are good and kind and wise, but these virtues are not of equal weight. Your goodness and wisdom will never catch up with your abundant kindness. I've a good deal to thank you for, Dick; a good deal."

"Nonsense! The shoe is on the other foot. You have made half my plays what they are to−day." He rang and ordered some coffee.

She dropped into his desk−chair and propped her chin in her palms, viewing him through half−closed, speculative eyes.

"We've had some jolly larks together," he said. "I shall miss you; how much I shall know only when you are gone. Is he good−looking?"

"Very. He is tall and straight, with a manly face, fine eyes, and a good nose. You know that I'm always particular about a man's nose."

"And young, of course?" not without some feeling of jealousy.

"And young."

"Tell me all about him," drawing up a chair and facing her.

"He is a lucky chap," he summed up when she had done.

"That remains to be seen," lightly. "I may prove the worst wife possible. Perhaps, when I have burned my bridges, I shall be mad for the very publicity I'm trying to escape. Women are like extinct volcanos; they are most to be dreaded when written perfectly harmless."

Warrington shook his head and laughed. Here the coffee came in. He dismissed his man, and poured the nectar himself.

"You are the one man I know who never asks to sweeten my coffee," she observed.

"And yet I had to learn. You haven't taught this other fellow yet, I see. Is he warranted house−broken, or will he have to be chained?"

"He will not have to be chained; and a man who is a recluse seldom has to be broken in."

"A recluse? What's his hobby: butterflies, stones, stamps, or coins?—No, girl; I don't mean that. I'm a little heavy to−night. Do you recollect the night you donned a suit of mine, bundled your hair under a felt hat, and visited the studios? What a romp! Not a soul ever found out who you were; and if I hadn't been in the secret, I shouldn't have known, either. I shall never forget how funny Dolman looked when he started a certain popular story of his and you shut him up. 'Gentlemen,' you said, 'neither listen to, nor repeat that kind of story in the presence of ladies.' 'Ladies?' cried Dolman. 'I see no ladies.' 'But there are gentlemen,' you added quickly. Later, Dolman advised me not to bring any more of my Sunday−school friends to HIS studio."

The woman smiled, but the smile was only on the lips. All those happy frolics were to be no more. Heigh−ho! Over the mantel there were several photographs of herself. Like all celebrities of her kind, the camera was a constant source of amusement. It was not necessarily vanity. The rose is not vain, yet it repeats its singular beauty as often as the seasons permit it. Across these pictures she had scrawled numerous signatures, "Kate" and "Kit" and "Kitty" and "Katherine Challoner," with here and there a phrase in French and Italian.

"You wouldn't return those under any circumstances?"

"No, indeed! That's all I'll have. And besides, you wouldn't ask me to give them up?"

Her answer remained unspoken. The valet appeared deferentially.

"Well?" said Warrington.

"A gentleman to see you, sir. He said he wouldn't need any card. Mr. John Bennington, sir.

"John Bennington!" Warrington sprang from his chair, his face joyous. "Old John here to−night! Finest chap

on earth, Kate; my roommate at college, and the only chap in my town who was my friend when I was a nobody. Old John ..."

"Richard, you must hide me quickly. I mustn't be seen here. There is no way of passing him the hall."

"Good Lord!" He did not notice her pallor. "The butler's pantry," he said hastily.

She slipped out of sight noiselessly. Presently she heard sounds, men's voices, a hearty greeting and for a moment the world seemed gliding from under her feet. Her gloves! She had forgotten her gloves!

Chapter III

Men have a way of greeting which is all their own. It is unlike the kiss and flutter of women, which may signify frankness or deceit, generosity or selfishness, some favor to gain, some treachery to forestall. Men's likes and dislikes are generally visible. The dog wags his tail, or he warns you away with a growl; there is no mistaking his attitude. On the other hand, the cat purrs and rubs against your leg, and when you reach down to smooth her, as likely as not she gives you a dig for your pains. True, there are always exceptions to this rule.

With their hands on each other's shoulders, at arm's length they stood, a likely pair to look at, smiling frankly and joyfully into each other's eyes. When it is without self−interest, friendship between man and man is a fine and noble thing. It is known best in the stress of storms, in the hour of sorrow and adversity. Friendship, to be perfect, must be without any sense of obligation; for obligation implies that one or the other is in debt, and the debtor is always wondering when he will have to pay. Between these two men only the slightest favors had been exchanged. They had grown up together, one the son of a rich steel−mill owner, the other the son of a poor farmer. The one had entered college to the sounding of golden cymbals, the other had marched in with nothing but courage in his pocket. It is impossible to describe how these great friendships come about; generally they begin with some insignificant trifle, soon forgotten. Warrington had licked Bennington in the boyhood days; why, I doubt that the Recording Angel himself remembers. So the friendship began with secret admiration on one side and good−natured toleration on the other. One day Warrington broke a colt for Bennington, and later Bennington found a passably good market for Warrington's vegetables. Friendship, like constancy, finds strange niches. The Bennington family were not very cordial to the young vegetable grower. On the mother's side there was a long line of military ancestors. It is impossible that a cabbage and a uniform should cohere. Warrington's great−grandsires had won honors in the Revolution, but as this fact did not make cabbages grow any faster he kept the faded glory to himself.

In college the two lads were as inseparable as La Mole and Coconnas; they played on the same teams, rowed on the same crews and danced with the same girls. The only material difference in their respective talents lay in one thing: Bennington could not write a respectable rhyme, and I'm not sure that he wasn't proud of it. It distinguished him from the other members of his class. As for Warrington, there wasn't a pretty girl in the whole college town who couldn't boast of one or more of his impassioned stanzas. And you may be sure that when Warrington became talked about these self−same halting verses were dug up from the garret and hung in sundry parlors.

Bennington was handsome, and, but for his father's blood, the idleness of his forebears would have marked him with effeminateness. His head, his face, the shape of his hands and feet, these proclaimed the aristocrat. It was only in the eyes and the broad shoulders that you recognized the iron−monger's breed. His eyes were as blue as his own hammered steel; but, like the eyes of the eagle at peace, they were mild and dreamy and deceptive to casual inspection. In the shops the men knew all about those eyes and shoulders. They had been fooled once, but only once. They had felt the iron in the velvet.

"I'm mighty glad to see you, boy," said Warrington, dropping his arms. "You haven't changed a bit."

"Nor you, Dick; if anything you look younger."

"How many years is it, John?"

"Six or seven; not very long."

"Time never seems long to a man who never has to wait for anything. I have had to reckon time with hours full of suspense, and those hours have aged me; perhaps not outwardly, but all the same, I'm an old man, John."

"Nonsense!"

"When did you cross?"

"About a year ago, when father died. I had given up the English end of the concern two years before, and was just wandering about the continent. I was dreadfully disappointed when I learned that you had visited the shops in ninety−eight. That summer I was in Switzerland. I had no idea there was going to be war, and never saw a newspaper till it was nearly over. I should have enlisted. And another year we passed within two days of each

other."

"No!" Bennington exclaimed.

"Yes. It was in Italy, at Sorrento, that I learned of your nearness. You were off for Amalfi and I had just come from there. For three days I ran across your name in the hotel registers. I tried to find your permanent address, but failed. Cook's nor the bankers in Naples knew anything about you. I tell you what, it was discouraging."

"What luck! I was having all my mail sent direct to Mentone, where I spent the winter. Say, what do you think?"

"About what?"

"Won five thousand at Monte Carlo in one play."

"Pounds?" exclaimed Bennington.

"Lord, no!—dollars."

"Ah! But of course you went back and lost it?" ironically.

"On the contrary, I've never staked a dollar since. Gambling was never a habit of mine, though I dare say the moral side of the subject would not have held me back. Simply, I know that the gambler always loses, and the banker always wins, in the end. Common sense told me to quit, and I did. I brought my letter of credit home practically intact."

"You used to play poker," dubiously.

"Poker isn't gambling. It's surreptitiously lending money to your friends."

"You were always good at definitions," sighed Bennington.

"I understand you've sold your holdings in the English shops?"

"Yes. I was weary of the people and what they called their conservatism, which is only a phase of stupidity. And then, besides, I loved the old home up there. I've been living there about a year now."

"It's a pity you couldn't have looked me up before this," Warrington complained.

Bennington only laughed affectionately.

"Take a look around the room while I get the whisky and soda."

"Don't bother, Dick."

"Boy, I licked you once, and I'll do it again if you don't sit down. A little extra attention won't hurt; and I'll guarantee the whisky." Waving his arms toward all the desirable things in the room, he vanished beyond the curtain.

Bennington looked about leisurely. It was just the kind of room he had always imagined; it was like the man who occupied it. Simplicity and taste abounded; the artist and the collector, the poet and the musician, were everywhere in evidence. He strolled over to the mantel and took down one of the pictures signed "Kate." He smiled. It was not an indulgent smile, nor the smile of a man who has stumbled upon another man's secret. The smile was rather exultant. He leaned against the mantel and studied the face in its varied expressions. He nodded approvingly. It was a lovely face; it was more than lovely,—it was tender and strong. Presently he returned to his chair and sat down, the photograph still in his hand. And in this position Warrington found him.

"Ah, you sly dog!" he hailed, setting down the glasses and pouring out a liberal bumper. "So I've caught you? Well, you're not the only man who has been conquered by that very photograph." He had half a notion to go in and bring her out; but then, women are such finicky beings!

Bennington laid aside the photograph, a certain reverence in his action that in ordinary times would not have escaped Warrington's notice.

"What's this to be?" asked Bennington, lifting his glass and stirring the ice.

"Immer und immer, as the German has it," Warrington replied.

"For ever and ever, then!"

And the two lightly touched glasses, with that peculiar gravity which always accompanies such occasions.

"When a man drinks your health in bad whisky, look out for him; but this whisky is very good, Dick." Bennington set down his glass and wiped his lips. "It is very good, indeed."

"Well, how are things up in Herculaneum?" asked Warrington. "You know, or ought to know, that I get up there only once a year."

"Things are not very well. There's the devil to pay in politics, and some day I may have a jolly long strike on my hands," grimly. "But I shall know exactly what to do. That man McQuade owns about all the town now. He

controls congressmen, state senators and assemblymen, and the majority of the Common Council is his, body and soul. Only recently he gave the traction company a new right of way. Not a penny went into the city's purse. And you know these street−railways; they never pay their taxes. A franchise for ninety−nine years; think of it!"

"Why don't you men wake up and oust McQuade? I'll tell you right here, Jack, you have no one to blame but yourself. Scoundrels like McQuade are always in the minority; but they remain in power simply because men like you think politics a dirty business and something for an honest man to keep out of. Run for mayor yourself, if you want clean politics. Rouse up an independent party."

"Do you know what they call me up there?" Bennington laughed.

"I confess to ignorance."

"Well, the newspapers say covertly that I'm all but a naturalized Englishman, a snob, when I'm only a recluse, a man who dresses every night for dinner, who dines instead of eats. There are some things it is impossible to understand, and one is the interest the newspapers take in the private affairs of men. If they jumped on me as a mill−owner, there might be some excuse, but they are always digging me on the private−citizen side. Every man, in his own house, ought to be allowed to do as he pleases. They never bothered the governor any, when he was alive. I believe they were afraid of him."

"I can explain all that, my boy. Buy your clothes of the local tailors; get rid of your valet; forget that you have lived in England. They'll come around to you, then. You may talk as much as you like about the friendliness between the Englishman and the American. It is simply a case of two masters who are determined that their dogs shall be friendly. Let the masters drop out of sight for a moment, and you will find the dogs at each other's throat. And the masters? The dollar on this side and the sovereign on the other. There is a good deal of friendship these days that is based upon three and a half per cent. Get into politics, my boy."

"Bah! I'd look nice running for mayor, wouldn't I? The newspapers would howl calamity, and the demagogues would preach that I would soon impose English wages in the shops, and all that tommyrot. No, thank you; I'll take trouble as it comes, but I'm not looking for it."

"I see that I shall have to go back there and start the ball myself," said Warrington, jesting.

"Why don't you? You are not a rank outsider. The people are proud of you."

"And always will be, so long as I have sense enough to remain here in New York," dryly. "But if I lived there ...!"

"You are not always going to live in New York?"

"Not always."

"You've a beautiful old home up there."

"I bought that just to show the people I had the money," laughing. "They may never forget my cabbages, but they'll forgive them."

"Nevertheless, you ought to return."

"Listen," said Warrington, lifting his hand. They became silent, and presently the voice of the city came into the room. "I'm afraid I could not live away from that. How many times have I stopped work to listen to it! How many inspirations have I drawn from it! It is the siren's music, I know, but I am no longer afraid of the reefs. Perhaps I have become enamored with noise; it is quite possible."

"I have lived in London. I thought it was going to be hard to break away, but it wasn't."

They lighted cigars, and Bennington took up the photograph again.

"A lovely face," was his comment.

"With a heart and a mind even more lovely," supplemented Warrington. "She is one of the most brilliant women I have ever met, and what is more, humorous and good−humored. My word for it, she may have equals, but she has no superiors on this side of the ocean."

Bennington looked up sharply.

"Nothing serious?" he asked gently.

"Serious? No. We are capital friends, but nothing more. There's been too much comradeship to admit anything like sentimentality. Ah, boy, you should see her act!"

"I have. I saw her in London last season. She was playing your War of Women. She appeared to me enchanting. But about these actresses ..."

"I know, I know," interrupted Warrington. "Some of them are bad, but some of them are the noblest creatures

God ever put on earth; and yonder is one of them. I remember. Often we were both in debt; plays went wrong; sometimes I helped her out, sometimes she returned the favor. We were more like two men. Without her help I shouldn't be where I am to−day. I always read the scenario of a play to her first; and often we've worked together half a night on one scene. I shall miss her."

"What! Is she going away?"

"After a fashion. She has retired from the stage."

"Do you believe she means it?" asked Bennington. "You know how changeable actresses' moods are."

"I think Miss Challoner will never act again. She has always been an enigma to the majority of the show people. Never any trumpets, jewelry, petty squabbles, lime−lights, and silks; she never read criticisms, save those I sent her. Managers had to knock on her dressing−room door. Oh, I do not say that she is an absolute paragon, but I do say that she is a good woman, of high ideals, loyal, generous, frank, and honest. And I have often wondered why the devil I couldn't fall in love with her myself," moodily.

Bennington was silent for a moment. Finally he said: "How does it feel to be famous, to have plays produced simultaneously in New York and London?"

"After the first success there is never anything but hard work. A failure once in a while acts like a tonic. And sometimes we get an anonymous letter that refreshes us—a real admirer, who writes from the heart and doesn't fish for a letter or an autograph in return. I received one of these only a few days ago, and I want you to read it." Warrington produced the missive and tossed it into Bennington's hands. "Read that. It's worth while to get a letter like that one."

Bennington took up the letter, smiling at his friend's enthusiasm. A single glance at the graceful script, however, changed his expression. He sat back and stared at Warrington.

"What's the matter?"

Bennington did not answer, but settled down to his task, reading carefully and slowly. He did not look for any signature, for he knew there would be none. He returned the letter, his face sober, but his eyes dancing.

"Now, what the deuce do you see that is so amusing?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Don't tell me there isn't any romance in the world. But, hang it, Jack, I'm not worth a letter like that," earnestly.

"Of course not."

"I'm not jesting. I've sown wild oats, and God knows what the harvest will be. There's a law that exacts payment. Retribution is the only certain thing in this world."

"Oh, you're no worse than the average man. But the average man is jolly bad," Bennington added gravely. "But you, Dick; I'm not worrying about you. Perhaps the writer of that letter sees good in you that you can't see yourself; good that is in you but of which you are unconscious. 0ne thing, you have never besmirched the talents God gave you. Everything you have done has been clean and wholesome—like yourself."

"I wish I could believe that! But I've had no ties, Jack, none. You can't keep to a course without a compass. The real good in life, the good that makes life worth while, is the toil for those you love. I love nobody, not even myself. But this girl rather woke me up. I began to look inward, as they say. So far I've not discovered much good. I'd give a good deal to meet this writer."

"Doubtless you will find her charming."

Suddenly Warrington turned upon his friend. "But what I want to know is, what brought you around here this time o' night? I never knew you to do anything without a definite purpose."

"That's precisely what I've been waiting for you to lead up to. The truth is—" Bennington hesitated. His hand, idly trailing over the desk, came into contact with something smooth and soft. It was a pair of white kid gloves, a woman's. Absently he drew them through his hand. He was only half conscious of his action, and he did not observe Warrington's sudden agitation. "The truth is, I've gone and done it. I'm going to be married in June, and I want you to be my best man."

Warrington's hand went out impulsively.

"Oh, I felt it in my bones when your card came in," he said, rearranging the glasses. "Lucky woman! Long life to you, Jack, and long happiness!"

"Thank you, Dick." (Ceremonial recurrence of drinking a health.)

"Now, out with it. Who is she, and all about her?"

"Dick, I'm genuinely sorry, but I'm still under bond of silence."

"More mysteries!" cried Warrington, with evident discontent.

"Only for a week, when, if you say, we'll have breakfast here in these very rooms.

"Done. Only I must say you're a bit hard on me to−night.

"I'm sorry."

"Let me see; I'll describe her for you. Beautiful."

"Yes."

"Accomplished."

"Very."

"A woman who will be both wife and comrade."

"Exactly."

"An American."

"In all things."

"You make me envious."

"Why don't you get married yourself?"

"Bah!" Warrington went to the window and looked down upon the street.

Bennington eyed his broad shoulders sympathetically. He looked down at the limp, smooth skins in his hand, and sat up stiffly. From the gloves to Warrington and back again to the gloves, his gaze traveled. With an impulse rather mechanical he raised the gloves to his nose. Quickly he dropped them on the desk, took up the photograph, rose and replaced it on the mantel. Hearing him, Warrington turned.

"No, Jack, I doubt if I shall ever be lucky enough to find the one woman. I've been so busy that I've never had time to hunt for happiness. And those who hunt for it never find it, and those who wait for it can not see it standing at their side."

Bennington wandered about, from object to object. Here he picked up a dagger, there a turquoise in the matrix, and again some inlaid wood from Sorrento. From these his interest traveled to and lingered over some celebrated autographs.

"Happiness is a peculiar thing," went on the dramatist. "It is far less distinctive than fame or fortune. They sometimes knock at your door, but happiness steals in without warning, and often leaves as mysteriously as it comes."

Bennington paused to examine a jade cigarette case, which he opened and closed aimlessly. And there were queer little Japanese ash−trays that arrested his attention.

"Men like you and me, Jack, never marry unless we love. It is never a business transaction."

"It is love or nothing," said Bennington, turning his face toward Warrington. The smile he gave was kindly. "Yes, true happiness can be sought only in those we love. There is happiness even in loving some one who does not love you." Bennington repressed a sigh. "But, Dick, you'll be the best man?"

"Depend upon me. What do you say to this day week for breakfast here?"

"That will be wholly agreeable to me."

Bennington's cigar had gone out. He leaned upon the desk and took his light from the chimney. Men who have traveled widely never waste matches.

"Can't you bunk here for the night? There's plenty of room," said Warrington.

"Impossible, Dick. I leave at midnight for home. I must be there to−morrow morning. I'm afraid of trouble in the shops. The unions are determined to push me to the limit of my patience."

"Why the deuce don't you get rid of the shops?"

"They're the handiwork of my father, and I'm proud to follow his steps." Bennington's eyes were no longer at peace; they sparkled with defiance. "Half−past ten!" suddenly. "I must be going. My luggage is still at the hotel. God bless you, Dick!"

Their hands met once again.

"You know, jack, that I love you best of all men."

"You are sure there is no woman?"

Warrington laughed easily. "Ah, if there was a woman! I expect to be lonely some day."

Bennington put on his hat and gloves, and Warrington followed him into the hall. Once the prospective bridegroom paused, as if he had left something unsaid; but he seemed to think the better of silence, and went on.

"Tuesday morning, then?"

"Tuesday morning. Good night."

"Good night, and luck attend you."

The door closed, and Warrington went slowly back to his desk, his mind filled with pleasant recollections of youth. He re−read the letter, studied it thoroughly, in hopes that there might be an anagram. There was nothing he could see, and he put it away, rather annoyed. He arranged the sheets and notes of the scenario, marshaled the scattered pencils, and was putting the glasses on the tray, when a sound in the doorway caused him to lift his head. One of the glasses tumbled over and rolled across the desk, leaving a trail of water which found its level among the ash−trays.

"It is quite evident that you forgot me," said the woman, a faint mirthless smile stirring her lips. "It was very close in there, and I could hear nothing." She placed a hand on her forehead, swayed, and closed her eyes for a second.

"You are faint!" he cried, springing toward her.

"It is nothing," she replied, with a repelling gesture. "John Bennington, was it not?"

"Yes." His eyes grew round with wonder.

"I was going to keep it secret as long as I could, but I see it is useless. He is the man I have promised to marry." Her voice had a singular quietness.

Warrington retreated to his desk, leaning heavily against it.

"Bennington? You are going to marry John Bennington?" dully.

"Yes."

He sat down abruptly and stared at her with the expression of one who is suddenly confronted by some Medusa's head, as if in the straggling wisps of hair that escaped from beneath her hat he saw the writhing serpents. She was going to marry John Bennington!

She stepped quickly up to the desk and began to scatter things about. Her hands shook, she breathed rapidly, her delicate nostrils dilating the while.

"Look out!" he warned, at her side the same instant. "Your hat is burning!" He smothered the incipient flame between his palms.

"Never mind the hat. My gloves, Dick, my gloves! I left them here on the desk."

"Your gloves?" Then immediately he recollected that he had seen them in Bennington's hands, but he was positive that the gloves meant nothing to Bennington. He had picked them up just as he would have picked up a paper−cutter, a pencil, a match−box, if any of these had been within reach of his nervous fingers. Most men who are at times mentally embarrassed find relief in touching small inanimate objects. So he said reassuringly: "Don't let a pair of gloves worry you, girl."

"He bought them for me this morning," a break in her voice. "I MUST find them!"

The situation assumed altogether a different angle. There was a hint of tragedy in her eyes. More trivial things than a forgotten pair of gloves have brought about death and division. Together they renewed the search. They sifted the manuscripts, the books, the magazines, burrowed into the drawers; and sometimes their hands touched, but they neither noticed nor felt the contact. Warrington even dropped to his knees and hunted under the desk, all the while "Jack Bennington, Jack Bennington!" drumming in his ears. The search was useless. The gloves were nowhere to be found. He stood up irresolute, dismayed and anxious, keenly alive to her misery and to the inferences his best friend might draw. The desk stood between them, but their faces were within two spans of the hand.

"I can't find them."

"They are gone!" she whispered.

Chapter IV

When the pathfinders came into the territory which is now called the Empire State, they carried muskets and tripods under one arm and Greek dictionaries under the other. They surveyed all day and scanned all night, skirmishing intermittently with prowling redskins. They knew something about elementary geometry, too, and you will find evidences of it everywhere, even in the Dutch settlements. The Dutchman always made the beauty of geometry impossible. Thus, nowadays, one can not move forward nor backward fifty miles in any direction without having the classic memory jarred into activity. Behold Athens, Rome, Ithaca, Troy; Homer, Virgil, Cicero; Pompey and Hannibal; cities and poets and heroes! It was, in those early days, a liberal education to be born in any one of these towns. Let us take Troy, for instance. When the young mind learned to spell it, the young mind yearned to know what Troy signified. Then came Homer, with his heroic fairy−story of gods, demigods and mortals. Of one thing you may be reasonably sure: Helen was kept religiously in the background. You will find no city named after her; nor Sappho, nor Aspasia. The explorer and the geographer have never given woman any recognition; it was left to the poets to sing her praise. Even Columbus, fine old gentleman that he was, absolutely ignored Isabella as a geographical name.

The city of Herculaneum (so called in honor of one Hercules) was very well named. To become immortal it had the same number of tasks to perform as had old Hercules. The Augean Stables were in the City Hall; and had Hercules lived in Herculaneum, he never would have sat with the gods. The city lay in a pleasant valley, embraced by imposing wooded hills. There was plenty of water about, a lake, a river, a creek; none of these, however, was navigable for commercial purposes. But this in nowise hindered the city's progress. On the tranquil bosom of the Erie Canal rode the graceful barges of commerce straight and slowly through the very heart of the town. Like its historic namesake, the city lived under the eternal shadow of smoke, barring Sundays; but its origin was not volcanic, only bituminous. True, year in and year out the streets were torn up, presenting an aspect not unlike the lava−beds of Vesuvius; but as this phase always implies, not destruction, but construction, murmurs were only local and few. It was a prosperous and busy city. It grew, it grows, and will grow. Long life to it! Every year the city directory points with pride to its growing bulk. A hundred thousand people; and, as Max O'Rell said—"All alive and kicking!" Herculaneum held its neighbors in hearty contempt, like the youth who has suddenly found his man's strength, and parades round with a chip on his shoulder.

Three railroad lines ran through the business section, bisecting the principal thoroughfares. The passenger trains went along swiftly enough, but often freights of almost interminable length drawled through the squares. I say drawled advisedly. Surely the whuff−whuff of the engine seems to me a kind of mechanical speech; and to this was often added the sad lowing of cattle. From time to time some earnest but misdirected young man would join the aldermanic body, and immediately lift up his voice in protest. It was outrageous, and so forth; the railroads must be brought to their senses, and so forth. Presently a meeting would come and go without his voice being heard, another, and yet another. By and by he would silently cast his vote for the various businesses under hand, and go home. The old−timers would smile. They understood. They rode on annuals themselves.

All the same, Herculaneum was a beautiful city in parts. Great leafy maples and elms arched the streets in the residential quarters, and the streets themselves were broad and straight. There were several dignified buildings of ten and twelve stories, many handsome banks, several clubs, and two or three passable monuments. There were at that time five enterprising newspapers, four frankly partizan and one independent. Personalities entered freely into the editorials, which often abounded in wit and scholarship. There were three theaters, and many churches of many denominations; religion and amusement, to thrive, must have variety. There were great steel shops, machine−shops, factories and breweries. And there were a few people who got in touch with one another, and invented society.

Herculaneum has its counterpart in every state; each city is a composite of all the others. A fashion in New York is immediately reproduced in every other city on the continent. Conservatism, day by day, becomes more and more retiring; presently it will exist only in Webster, side by side with the word prehistoric.

It was Sunday in Herculaneum, a June Sunday, radiant with sunshine. The broad green leaves of the maples

shivered, lacing the streets with amber and jade, and from a thousand emerald gardens rose the subtle, fragrant incense of flowers. How still and beautiful this day seems to us who have hurried hither and thither for six long days, sometimes in anger, sometimes in exultation, failure or success! It breathes a peace and quiet that is tonic. Upon this day there is truce between us and the enemy.

In Herculaneum they still went to church on a Sunday morning. Perhaps it was merely habit, perhaps it was simply formality, perhaps it was only to parade new clothes; anyhow, they went to church. At ten−thirty the procession started; gentlemen in their tiles, ladies in their furbelows, children stiffly starched. Some rode to church, but the majority walked. There were many store−windows to preen before, as in a mirror. Vanity has something to her credit, after all; it is due to her that most of us make an effort to keep spruce and clean.

Comment passed like the fall of dominoes. Some woman, ultra−fashionable, would start the chatter. She NEVER saw anything like the gowns Mrs. Jones wore; Mrs. Jones touched upon the impossible feathers of Mrs. Smith's hat, and Mrs. Smith in turn questioned the exquisite complexion of Mrs. Green, who thought Mrs. White's children the homeliest in the city. (Can't you hear the dominoes going down?)

The men nodded here and there, briefly. Saturday night in a provincial town holds many recollections.

The high church was a stately pile of granite, with lofty spire and fine memorial windows. Doves fluttered about the eaves. Upon this particular Sunday morning there seemed to be something in the air that was not a component part of any of the elements. It was simply a bit of news which the church−goers had read in the papers that morning. To many a bud and belle it was a thunder−clap, a bolt from a cloudless heaven. They whispered about it, lifted their eyebrows, and shrugged their shoulders. But their mamas gave no sign. If the fox of disappointment ate into their vitals, they determined, Spartan−like, that none should know it. An actress! Men might marry actresses in England, but Herculaneum still clung to the belief that actresses were not eligible.

Some of the men had seen Katherine Challoner act, and they sighed, retrospectively and introspectively.

"I feel for Mrs. Bennington and her daughter. It must be a great blow to their pride." Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene sat down in her pew−seat and arranged her silk petticoats. Mrs. Wilmington−Fairchilds sat down beside her. "You know I never meddle with scandal."

Mrs. Fairchilds nodded brightly.

"Never. I never repeat anything I hear. The Archibald affair was enacted right under my very nose; but did I circulate what I saw? I think not! That woman!—but there! I pray for her every night."

"Was it really true, then?" asked Mrs. Fairchilds, breathless. She knew something about the Archibald affair, but not enough.

"I saw it all with these eyes," flatly. "But, as I said, I keep my hands clean of scandal." Her hands were white and flabby. "I consider it not only wicked to start a scandal, but positively bad taste. The lightest word sometimes ruins a reputation."

"Mrs. Archibald—" began Mrs. Fairchilds.

"Not another word, my dear. I've said nothing at all; I haven't even told you what I saw. But an actress is different. Think of it, my dear! She will live among us and we shall have to meet her. Think of the actors who have kissed her in their make−believe love affairs! It is so horribly common. I have heard a good many things about her. She has romped in studios in male attire and smokes cigarettes. I should not want any son of mine to be seen with her. I'm not saying a single word against her, mind you; not a single word. You know as well as I do what a wild fellow Warrington is. Well, she has been going around with him."

"But they took him up in London," said Mrs. Wilmington−Fairchilds.

"London! London society, indeed! It's the greatest jumble in the world: nobility hobnobs with jockeys, piano−players, writers and actors."

Mrs. Fairchilds shook her head sadly. She had always believed London society quite the proper thing, and she had followed the serials of "The Duchess" with reverent awe. But Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene ought to know; she had traveled in Europe several seasons. Mrs. Franklyn− Haldene was one of the prominent social leaders, and Mrs. Fairchilds had ambitions. The ready listener gets along very well in this old world of ours.

"I always knew that some time or other the plebeian Bennington blood would crop out," went on Mrs. Haldene. "But we must not criticize the dead," benignly.

"We shall have to receive her."

"After a fashion," replied Mrs. Haldene, opening her prayer−book. Her tone implied that things would not go

very smoothly for the interloper. "All this comes from assimilating English ideas," she added.

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was one of those fortunate persons who always have their names in the society columns of the Sunday newspapers. Either she was among those present, or she gave a luncheon, or she assisted at a reception, or was going out of town, or coming back. Those who ran their husbands in debt to get into society always looked to see what Mrs. Haldene had been doing the past week. The society reporters, very often smug young women of aristocratic but impoverished families, called her up by telephone every day in the week. Mrs. Haldene pretended to demur, but the reporters found her an inexhaustible mine of tittle−tattle. Sometimes they omitted some news which she considered important; and, as the saying goes, the hair flew. She found many contestants for the leadership; but her rivals never lasted more than a month. She was president of hospital societies, orphan asylums, and the auxiliary Republican Club, and spoke at a bimonthly club on the servant question. Everybody was a little afraid of her, with one exception.

The society columns of the Sunday newspapers have become permanently established. In every city and hamlet from New York to San Francisco, you will find the society column. It is all tommyrot to the outsider; but the proprietor is generally a shrewd business man and makes vanity pay tribute to his exchequer. The column especially in early summer, begins something like this:

June will be a busy month for brides, and King Cupid and his gala court will hold sway. The bridal processions will begin to move this week in homes and churches. On Wednesday, at high noon, the marriage of Miss Katherine Challoner, the well−known actress, and Mr. John Bennington, of this city, will be solemnized in New York. Only the immediate relatives will be present. Richard Warrington, our own celebrated townsman, will act as best man. The announcement comes as a great surprise to society, as Mr. Bennington was looked upon as a confirmed bachelor.

And again you will find something of this sort:

April 22—Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene leaves next week for Washington, where she will be the guest of Senator Soandso's wife.

April 29—Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene left yesterday for Washington.

May 6—Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, who is visiting in Washington, will return next week.

May 13—Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene has returned home from a delightful visit in Washington.

Sometimes, when there was no escape from it, Mr. Franklyn−Haldene's name also appeared.

From mundane things to the spiritual!

"Yes, I feel for Mrs. Bennington," continued Mrs. Haldene. "We have to submit to our boys' running around with actresses; but to marry them!"

"And married life, I understand, seldom agrees with them. They invariably return to the stage. I wonder if this woman has ever been married before?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. For my part, I'm very glad the ceremony will not be performed in the church. Hush!" with a warning glance over her shoulder.

There was a sudden craning of necks, an agitation among the hats and bonnets. Down the aisle came a handsome, dignified woman in widow's weeds, a woman who was easily fifty−six, but who looked as if she had just crossed the threshold of the forties. Her face was serene, the half−smile on her lips was gentle and sweet her warm brown eyes viewed the world peacefully. Ah, how well she knew that to−day this temple of worship was but a den of jackals, ready to rend her if she so much as hesitated, so much as faltered in look or speech! Never should they feed themselves upon her sorrow. She went on, smiling here and there. The low hum, the pallid lights, the murmur from the organ, all seemed cruelly accented. Her pew was third from the chancel; she was but half−way through the gantlet of curious eyes.

Following her was a young girl of twenty. She was youth in all its beauty and charm and fragrance. Many a young masculine heart throbbed violently as she passed, and straightway determined to win fame and fortune, if for no other purpose than to cast them at her feet. This was Patty Bennington.

The two reached their pew without mishap, and immediately rested their heads reverently upon the rail in prayer. Presently the music ceased, the rector mounted the pulpit, and the day's service began. I doubt if many could tell you what the sermon was about that day.

No other place offers to the speculative eye of the philosopher so many varied phases of humanity as the church. In the open, during the week−days, there is little pretense, one way or the other; but in church, on Sunday,

everybody, or nearly everybody, seems to have donned a mask, a transparent mask, a smug mask, the mask of the known hypocrite. The man who is a brute to his wife goes meekly to his seat; the miser, who has six days pinched his tenants or evicted them, passes the collection plate, his face benevolent; the woman whose tongue is that of the liar and the gossip, who has done her best to smirch the reputation of her nearest neighbor, lifts her eyes heavenward and follows every word of a sermon she can not comprehend; and the man or woman who has stepped aside actually believes that his or her presence in church hoodwinks every one. Heigh−ho! and envy with her brooding yellow eyes and hypocrisy with her eternal smirk sit side by side in church.

Oh, there are some good and kindly people in this ragged world of ours, and they go to church with prayer in their hearts and goodness on their lips and forgiveness in their hands. They wear no masks; their hearts and minds go in and out of church unchanged. These are the salt of the earth, and do not often have their names in the Sunday papers, unless it is in the matter of their wills and codicils. Then only do the worldly know that charity had walked among them and they knew her not.

Of such was Miss Anna Warrington, spinster−aunt of Richard. She occupied the other half of the Bennington pew. Until half a dozen years ago, when her boy had come into his own, she had known but little save poverty and disillusion; and the good she always dreamed of doing she was now doing in fact. Very quietly her withered old hand stole over the low partition and pressed Mrs. Bennington's hand. The clasp spoke mutely of courage and good−will. She knew nothing of awe, kindly soul; the great and the small were all the same to her. She remembered without rancor the time when Mrs. Bennington scarcely noticed her; but sorrow had visited Mrs. Bennington and widened her vision and broadened her heart; and the two met each other on a common basis, the loss of dear ones.

The clock is invariably hung in the rear of the church. The man who originally selected this position was evidently a bit of a cynic. Perhaps he wanted to impress the preacher with the fact that there must be a limitation to all things, even good sermons; or perhaps he wanted to test the patience and sincerity of the congregation. The sermon was rather tedious this Sunday; shiny, well−worn platitudes are always tedious. And many twisted in their seats to get a glimpse of the clock.

Whenever Patty looked around (for youth sits impatiently in church), always she met eyes, eyes, eyes. But she was a brave lass, and more than once she beat aside the curious gaze. How she hated them! She knew what they were whispering, whispering. Her brother was going to marry an actress. She was proud of her brother's choice. He was going to marry a woman who was as brilliant as she was handsome, who counted among her friends the great men and women of the time, who dwelt in a world where mediocrity is unknown and likewise unwelcome. Mediocrity's teeth are sharp only for those who fear them.

Patty was nervous on her mother's account, not her own. It had been a blow to the mother, who had always hoped to have her boy to herself as long as she lived. He had never worried her with flirtations; there had been no youthful affairs. The mother of the boy who is always falling in love can meet the final blow half−way. Mrs. Bennington had made an idol of the boy, but at the same time she had made a man of him. From the time he could talk till he had entered man's estate, she had been constant at his side, now with wisdom and learning, now with laughter and wit, always and always with boundless and brooding love. The first lesson had been on the horror of cruelty; the second, on the power of truth; the third, on the good that comes from firmness. It is very easy to make an idol and a fool of a boy; but Mrs. Bennington always had the future in mind. It was hard, it was bitter, that another should step in and claim the perfected man. She had been lulled into the belief that now she would have him all her own till the end of her days. But it was not to be. Her sense of justice was evenly balanced; her son had the same right that his father had; it was natural that he should desire a mate and a home of his own; but, nevertheless, it was bitter. That his choice had been an actress caused her no alarm. Her son was a gentleman; he would never marry beneath him; it was love, not infatuation; and love is never love unless it can find something noble and good to rest upon. It was not the actress, no; the one great reiterating question was: did this brilliant woman love her son? Was it the man or his money? She had gone to New York to meet Miss Challoner. She had steeled her heart against all those subtle advances, such as an actress knows how to make. She had gone to conquer, but had been conquered. For when Kate Challoner determined to charm she was not to be resisted. She had gone up to the mother and daughter and put her arms around them. "I knew that I should love you both. How could I help it? And please be kind to me: God has been in giving me your son." Ah, if she had only said: "I shall love you because I love him!" But there was doubt, haunting doubt. If the glamour of married life wore out, and

the craving for publicity returned, this woman might easily wreck her son's life and the lives of those who loved him.

She was very glad when the service came to an end and the stir and rustle announced the departure of the congregation.

At the door she found Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene. She rather expected to find her. They were enemies of old.

"Shall I congratulate you?" asked the formidable person.

Many of the congregation stopped. They hadn't the courage of Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, but they lacked none of her curiosity.

"You may, indeed," returned Mrs. Bennington serenely. She understood perfectly well; but she was an old hand at woman's war. "My son is very fortunate. I shall love my new daughter dearly, for she loves my son."

"She is just splendid!" said Patty, with sparkling eyes. How she longed to scratch the powder from Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's beak−like nose! Busybody, meddler! "I never suspected John had such good sense."

"You are very fortunate," said Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene. She smiled, nodded, and passed on into the street. A truce!

Mr. Franklyn−Haldene, as he entered the carriage after his wife, savagely bit off the end of a cigar.

"What the devil's the matter with you women, anyhow?" he demanded.

"Franklyn!"

"Why couldn't you leave her alone? You're all a pack of buzzards, waiting for some heart to peck at. Church!—bah!"

It was only on rare occasions that Mr. Franklyn−Haldene voiced his sentiments. On these occasions Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene rarely spoke. There was a man in her husband she had no desire to rouse. Mr. Haldene was the exception referred to; he was not afraid of his wife.

They rode homeward in silence. As they passed the Warrington place, Mr. Haldene again spoke.

"Warrington is home over Sunday. Saw him on horseback this morning."

"There's one thing I'm thankful for: the wedding will not be in Herculaneum."

"Humph!"

"It's disgusting; and we shall have to receive her. But I do not envy her her lot."

"Neither do I," said Haldene. "You women have already mapped out a nice little hell for her. Why should you be so vindictive simply because she is an actress? If she is good and honest, what the deuce?"

"There's no use arguing with you."

"I'm glad you've found that out. You'd find out lots of other things if you stayed home long enough. I shall treat the woman decently."

"I dare say all you men will."

"And you, Madam, shall be among the first to call on her. Mind that!"

She looked at the man pityingly. Men never understood. Call on her? Of course, she would call on her. For how could she make the woman unhappy if she did not call on her?

Chapter V

Every city has its Fifth Avenue. That which we can not have as our own we strive to imitate. Animal and vegetable life simply reproduces itself; humanity does more than that, it imitates. Williams Street was the Fifth Avenue of Herculaneum. It was broad, handsome, and climbed a hill of easy incline. It was a street of which any city might be justly proud. Only two or three houses jarred the artistic sense. These were built by men who grew rich so suddenly and unexpectedly that their sense of the grotesque became abnormal. It is an interesting fact to note that the children of this class become immediately seized with a species of insanity, an insanity which urges them on the one hand to buy newspapers with dollar−bills, and on the other to treat their parents with scant respect. Sudden riches have, it would seem, but two generations: the parent who accumulates and the son who spends.

The Warrington home (manor was applied to but few houses in town) stood back from the street two hundred feet or more, on a beautiful natural terrace. The lawn was wide and crisp and green, and the oak trees were the envy of many. The house itself had been built by one of the early settlers, and Warrington had admired it since boyhood. It was of wood, white, with green blinds and wide verandas, pillared after the colonial style. Warrington had purchased it on a bank foreclosure, and rather cheaply, considering the location. The interior was simple but rich. The great fireplace was made of old Roman bricks; there were exquisite paintings and marbles and rugs and china, and books and books. Very few persons in Herculaneum had been inside, but these few circulated the report that the old house had the handsomest interior in town. Straightway Warrington's income became four times as large as it really was.

The old aunt and the "girl" kept the house scrupulously clean, for there was no knowing when Richard might take it into his head to come home. The "girl's" husband took care of the stables and exercised the horses. And all went very well.

Warrington seldom went to church. It was not because he was without belief; there was a strong leaven of faith underlying his cynicism. Frankly, sermons bored him. It was so easy for his imaginative mind to reach out and take the thought from the preacher's mouth almost before he uttered it. Thus, there was never any suspense, and suspense in sermons, as in books and plays, is the only thing that holds captive our interest.

So he stayed at home and read the Sunday papers. That part not devoted to society and foreign news was given up wholly to local politics. Both the Democratic and Republican parties were in bad odor. In the Common Council they were giving away street−railway franchises; gambling−dens flourished undisturbed, and saloons closed only when some member of the saloon−keeper's family died. The anti−gambling league had succeeded in suppressing the slot machines for a fortnight; this was the only triumph virtue could mark down for herself. There were reformers in plenty, but their inordinate love of publicity ruined the effectiveness of their work. A brass band will not move the criminal half so quickly as a sudden pull at the scruff of his neck. So the evil−doer lay low, or borrowed the most convenient halo and posed as a deeply−wronged man. Warrington, as he read, smiled in contempt. They had only one real man in town, scoundrel though he was. There are certain phases of villainy that compel our admiration, and the villainy of McQuade was of this order. The newspapers were evidently subsidized, for their clamor was half−hearted and hypocritical. Once or twice Warrington felt a sudden longing to take off his coat and get into the fight; but the impulse was transitory. He realized that he loved ease and comfort too well.

Finally he tossed aside the sheets and signaled to the dog. It was a bull terrier, old and scarred, and unchanging in his affections. He loved this master of his, even if he saw him but once a year. They understood each other perfectly. He was a peace−loving animal, but he was a fighter at times—like his master. He had a beautiful head, broad punishing jaws, and, for all his age, he had not run to fat, which is the ignominious end of all athletes, men or dogs.

"Old boy, this is a jolly bad world."

Jove wagged his stump of a tail.

"We should all be thieves if it were not for publicity and jail."

Jove coughed deprecatingly. Perhaps he recollected purloined haunches of aforetime.

"Sometimes I've half a mind to pack up and light out to the woods, and never look at a human being again."

Jove thought this would be fine; his tail said so.

"But I'm like a man at a good play; I've simply got to stay and see how it ends, for the great Dramatist has me guessing."

Warrington stared into the kind brown eyes and pulled the ragged ears. There was a kind of guilt in the old dog's eyes, for dogs have consciences. If only he dared tell his master! There was somebody else now. True, this somebody else would never take the master's place; but what was a poor dog to do when he was lonesome and never laid eyes on his master for months and months? Nobody paid much attention to him in this house when the master was away. He respected aunty (who had the spinster's foolish aversion for dogs and the incomprehensible affection for cats!) and for this reason never molested her supercilious Angora cat. Could he be blamed if he sought (and found) elsewhere affection and confidence? Why, these morning rides were as good as a bone. She talked to him, told him her secrets (secrets he swore on a dog's bible never to reveal!) and desires, and fed him chicken, and cuddled him. There were times when he realized that old age was upon him; some of these canters left him breathless and groggy.

"I've been thinking, boy," the master's voice went on. "New York isn't so much, after all. I wasn't city born, and there are times when the flowing gold of the fields and the cool woods call. Bah! There's nothing now to hold me anywhere. I hope she'll make him happy; she can do it if she tries. Heigh−ho! the ride this morning has made me sleepy. To your rug, boy, to your rug."

Warrington stretched himself on the lounge and fell asleep. And thus the aunt found him on her return from church. She hated to wake him but she simply could not hold back the news till luncheon. She touched his arm, and he woke with the same smile that had dimpled his cheeks when he was a babe in her arms. Those of us who have retained the good disposition of youth never scowl upon being awakened.

"Aha," he cried, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Richard, I wish you had gone to church this morning."

"And watched the gossips and scandal−mongers twist their barbs in Mrs. Bennington's heart? Hardly."

She gazed at him, nonplussed. There was surely something uncanny in this boy, who always seemed to know what people were doing, had done or were going to do.

"I wouldn't have believed it of my congregation," she said.

"Oh, Mrs. Bennington is a woman of the world; she understands how to make barbs harmless. But that's why I never go to church. It doesn't soothe me as it ought to; I fall too easily into the habit of pulling my neighbor's mind into pieces. Gossip and weddings and funerals; your reputation in shreds, your best girl married, your best friend dead. I find myself nearer Heaven when I'm alone in the fields. But I've been thinking, Aunty."

"About what?"

"About coming home to stay."

"Oh, Richard, if you only would!" sitting beside him and folding him in her arms. "I'm so lonely. There's only you and I; all the others I've loved are asleep on the hill. Do come home, Richard; you're all I have."

"I'm thinking it over."

Here the Angora came in cautiously. She saw Jove and the dog saw her; fur and hair bristled. Jove looked at his master beseechingly—"Say the word, Dick, say the word, and I'll give you an entertainment." But the word did not come.

"There's your church−goers, Aunty; always ready to fly at each other. In order to study humanity thoroughly, one must first learn the ways of the beast."

"I'm afraid your dog's a traitor."

"A traitor?"

"Yes. Half the time he runs over to the Benningtons' and stays all night. I don't see why he should."

"Maybe they pet him over there. Perhaps he wants a hand sometimes, just like human beings when they're lonely. If you petted him once in a while, one pat for every ten you give the cat, the old boy would be tickled to death."

"But I'm kind to him, Richard; he has the best meat I can buy. I'd pet him, too, but I'm afraid of him. I'm always afraid of dogs. Besides, his feet are always muddy and his hair falls out and sticks to everything."

"Who is his latest love?"

"Patty Bennington. They go out riding together. I can always tell, for his stomach is invariably caked with dried mud."

"Patty Bennington? The old dog shows good taste. And I had forgotten all about Bennington's having a sister. I was thunderstruck when I met her the other week in New York. I had really forgotten her. She is charming."

"She is a dear young girl. Ah, Richard, if only you would find some one like her."

"Marriages are made in Heaven, Aunt, and I'm going to wait till I get there. But I'll think it over about coming home to stay."

"I'll be so happy!" the old lady cried. "I'm going right out into the kitchen myself and make one of those cherry pies you used to rave over."

She disappeared; and Warrington laughed, rose and stretched the sleep from his arms and legs, and went up stairs to dress. Yes, he would think it over. There was nothing to hold him in New York, nothing but the craving for noise and late hours. Why not settle down here? There would be plenty to do. Besides, if he lived in Herculaneum he could run over to the Bennington home at any time of day. His cheeks flushed of a sudden.

"Hang it, am I lying to myself about that girl? Is it the knowledge that she'll be my neighbor that inclines me to live here? I know I shall miss her if I stay in New York; I'm honest enough to admit that. God knows I've nothing but honor in my heart for her. Why, I wouldn't even kiss her hand without old Jack's consent. Well, well; the scene in the church Wednesday will solve all doubts—if I have any."

The Sunday luncheon passed uneventfully. The aunt said nothing more about his coming home to stay. She knew her boy; urging would do more harm than good; so she left him to decide freely.

"Is the pie good, Richard?" she asked.

"Fine! Can you spare me another piece?"

"I'm glad you'll never be too proud to eat pie," she returned.

"Not even when it's humble," laughed Warrington.

"There are some folks roundabout who do not think pie is proper," seriously.

"Not proper? Tommyrot! Pie is an institution; it is as unassailable as the Constitution of the country. I do not speak of the human constitution. There are some folks so purse−proud that they call pies tarts."

She looked askance at him. There were times when she wasn't quite sure of this boy of hers. He might be serious, and then again he might be quietly laughing. But she saw with satisfaction that the pie disappeared.

"The world, Richard, isn't what it was in my time."

"I dare say it isn't, Aunty; yet cherries are just as good as ever and June as beautiful. It isn't the world, Aunt o' mine; it's the plaguy people. Those who stay away from church ought to go, and those who go ought to stay away. I'm going down to the club this afternoon. I shall dine there, and later look up the Benningtons. So don't keep dinner waiting for me."

"Cheer her up, Richard; she needs cheering. It's been a blow to her to lose her boy. If you'd only get married, too, Richard, I could die content. What in the world shall you do when I am gone?"

"Heaven knows!" The thought of losing this dear old soul gave a serious tone to his voice. He kissed her on the cheek and went out into the hall. Jove came waltzing after him. "Humph! What do you want, sir? Want to go out with me, eh? Very well; but you must promise to behave yourself. I'll have you talking to no poor−dog trash, mind." Jove promised unutterable things. "Come on, then."

He walked slowly down town, his cane behind his back, his chin in his collar, deep in meditation. He knew instinctively that Mrs. Bennington wanted to talk to him about the coming marriage. He determined to tell her the truth, truth that would set her mother's heart at peace.

Jove ran hither and thither importantly. It was good to be out with the master. He ran into this yard and that, scared a cat up a tree, chased the sparrows, and grumbled at the other dogs he saw. All at once he paused, stiffened, each muscle tense. Warrington, catching the pose, looked up. A handsome trotter was coming along at a walk. In the light road−wagon sat a man and a white bulldog. It was easy for Warrington to recognize McQuade, who in turn knew that this good−looking young man must be the dramatist. The two glanced at each other casually. They were unacquainted. Not so the dogs. They had met. The white bull teetered on the seat. Jove bared his strong teeth. How he hated that sleek white brute up there! He would have given his life for one good hold on that broad throat. The white dog was thinking, too. Some day, when the time came, he would clean the slate. Once

he had almost had the tan for his own. And he hated the girl who had beaten him off with her heavy riding−crop.

McQuade drove on, and Warrington resumed his interrupted study of the sidewalk. McQuade thought nothing more about the fellow who wrote plays, and the dramatist had no place in his mind for the petty affairs of the politician. Fate, however, moves quite as certainly and mysteriously as the cosmic law. The bitter feud between these two men began with their dogs.

At the club Warrington found a few lonely bachelors, who welcomed him to the long table in the grill−room; but he was in no mood for gossip and whisky. He ordered a lithia, drank it quickly, and escaped to the reading−room to write some letters.

Down in the grill−room they talked him over.

"I don't know whether he boozes now, but he used to be tanked quite regularly," said one.

"Yes, and they say he writes best when half−seas over."

"Evidently," said a third, "he doesn't drink unless he wants to; and that's more than most of us can say."

"Pshaw! Sunday's clearing−up day; nobody drinks much on Sunday. I wonder that Warrington didn't marry Challoner himself. He went around with her a lot."

Everybody shrugged. You can shrug away a reputation a deal more safely than you can talk it.

"Oh, Bennington's no ass. She's a woman of brains, anyhow. It's something better than marrying a little fool of a pretty chorus girl. She'll probably make things lively for one iron−monger. If the hair doesn't fly, the money will. He's a good sort of chap, but he wants a snaffle and a curb on his high−stepper."

Then the topic changed to poker and the marvelous hands held the night before.

Warrington finished his correspondence, dined alone, and at seven−thirty started up the street to the Benningtons'. Jove, with the assurance of one who knows he will be welcomed, approached the inviting veranda at a gallop. His master, however, followed with a sense of diffidence. He noted that there was a party of young people on the veranda. He knew the severe and critical eye of youth, and he was a bit afraid of himself. Evidently Miss Patty had no lack of beaux. Miss Patty in person appeared at the top of the steps, and smiled.

"I was half expecting you," she said, offering a slim cool hand.

Warrington clasped it in his own and gave it a friendly pressure.

"Thank you," he replied. "Please don't disturb yourselves," he remonstrated, as the young men rose reluctantly from their chairs. "Is Mrs. Bennington at home?"

"You will find her in the library." Then Patty introduced him. There was some constraint on the part of the young men. They agreed that, should the celebrity remain, he would become the center of attraction at once, and all the bright things they had brought for the dazzlement of Patty would have to pass unsaid.

To youth, every new−corner is a possible rival; he wouldn't be human if he didn't believe that each man who comes along is simply bound to fall in love with the very girl HE has his eyes on.

On the other hand, the young girls regretted that the great dramatist wasn't going to sit beside them. There is a strange glamour about these men and women who talk or write to us from over the footlights. As Warrington disappeared into the hallway, the murmur and frequent laughter was resumed.

Mrs. Bennington was very glad to see him. She laid aside her book and made room for him on the divan. They talked about the weather, the changes that had taken place since the fall, a scrap of foreign travel of mutual interest, each hoping that the other would be first to broach the subject most vital to both. Finally, Mrs. Bennington realized that she could fence no longer.

"It was very good of you to come. I have so many things to ask you."

"Yes."

"My boy's determination to marry has been very sudden. I knew nothing till a month ago. I love him so, and my whole heart hungers for one thing—the assurance that he will be happy with the woman of his choice."

"My dear Mrs. Bennington, Jack will marry a woman who is as loyal and honest as she is brilliant and beautiful. Miss Challoner is a woman any family might be proud to claim. She numbers among her friends many of the brilliant minds of the age; she compels their respect and admiration by her intellect and her generosity. Oh, Jack is to be envied. I can readily understand the deep−rooted antagonism the actress still finds among the laity. It is a foolish prejudice. I can point out many cases where the layman has married an actress and has been happy and contented with his lot."

"But on the obverse side?" with a smile that was sad and dubious.

"Happiness is always in the minority of cases, in all walks of life. Happiness depends wholly upon ourselves; environment has nothing to do with it. Most of these theatrical marriages you have read about were mere business contracts. John is in love."

"But is he loved?"

"Miss Challoner has a very comfortable fortune of her own. She would, in my opinion, be the last person in the world to marry for money or social position, the latter of which she already has."

But she saw through his diplomacy.

"Perhaps she may desire a home?"

"That is probable; but it is quite evident to me that she wants John with it."

"There are persons in town who will do their best to make her unhappy."

"You will always find those persons; but I am confident Miss Challoner will prove a match for any of them. There is no other woman in the world who knows better than she the value of well−applied flattery."

"She is certainly a charming woman; it is impossible not to admit that frankly. But you, who are familiar with the stage, know how unstable people of that sort are. Suppose she tires of John? It would break my heart."

"Ah, all that will depend upon Jack. Doubtless he knows the meaning of 'to have and to hold.' To hold any woman's love, a man must make himself indispensable; he must be her partner in all things: her comrade and husband when need be, her lover always. There can be no going back to old haunts, so attractive to men; club life must become merely an incident. Again, he must not be under her feet all the time. Too much or too little will not do; it must be the happy between."

"You are a very wise young man."

Warrington laughed embarrassedly. "I have had to figure out all these things."

"But if she does not love him!"

"How in the world can she help it?"

She caught up his hand in a motherly clasp.

"We mothers are vain in our love. We make our sons paragons; we blind ourselves to their faults; we overlook their follies, and condone their sins. And we build so many castles that one day tumble down about our ears. Why is it a mother always wishes her boy to marry the woman of her choice? What right has a mother to interfere with her son's heart−desires? It may be that we fear the stranger will stand between us. A mother holds, and always will hold, that no woman on earth is good enough for her son. Now, as I recollect, I did not think Mr. Bennington too good for me." She smiled drolly.

Lucky Jack! If only he had had a mother like this! Warrington thought.

"I dare say he thought that, too," he said. "Myself, I never knew a mother's love. No doubt I should have been a better man. Yet, I've often observed that a boy with a loving mother takes her love as a matter of course, and never realizes his riches till he has lost them. My aunt is the only mother I have known."

"And a dear, kind, loving soul she is," said Mrs. Bennington. "She loves you, if not with mother−love, at least with mother−instinct. When we two get together, we have a time of it; I, lauding my boy; she, praising hers. But I go round and round in a circle: my boy. Sons never grow up, they are always our babies; they come to us with their heartaches, at three or at thirty; there is ever one door open in the storm, the mother's heart. If she loves my boy, nothing shall be too good for her."

"I feel reasonably sure that she does." Did she? he wondered. Did she love Jack as he (Warrington) wanted some day to be loved?

"As you say," the mother went on, "how can she help loving him? He is a handsome boy; and this alone is enough to attract women. But he is so kind and gentle, Richard; so manly and strong. He has his faults; he is human, like his mother. John is terribly strong−willed, and this would worry me, were I not sure that his sense of justice is equally strong. He is like me in gentleness; but the man in him is the same man I loved in my girlhood days. When John maps out a course to act upon, if he believes he is right, nothing can swerve him—nothing. And sometimes he has been innocently wrong. I told Miss Challoner all his good qualities and his bad. She told me that she, too, has her faults. She added that there was only one other man who could in any manner compare with John, and that man is you."

"I?" his face growing warm.

"Yes. But she had no right to compare anybody with my boy," laughing.

"There isn't any comparison whatever," admitted Warrington, laughing too. "But it was very kind of Miss Challoner to say a good word for me." And then upon impulse he related how, and under what circumstances, he had first met the actress.

"It reads like a story,—a versatile woman. This talk has done me much good. I know the affection that exists between you and John, and I am confident that you would not misrepresent anything. I shall sleep easier to−night."

The portieres rattled, and Patty stood in the doorway.

"Everybody's gone; may I come in?"

Warrington rose. "I really should be very glad to make your acquaintance," gallantly. "It's so long a time since I've met young people—"

"Young people!" indignantly. "I am not young people; I am twenty, going on twenty−one."

"I apologize." Warrington sat down.

Thereupon Miss Patty, who was a good sailor, laid her course close to the wind, and with few tacks made her goal; which was the complete subjugation of this brilliant man. She was gay, sad, witty and wise; and there were moments when her mother looked at her in puzzled surprise. As for Warrington, he went from one laugh into another.

Oh, dazzling twenty; blissful, ignorant, confident twenty! Who among you would not be twenty, when trouble passes like cloud−shadows in April; when the door of the world first opens? Ay, who would not trade the meager pittance, wrested from the grinding years, for one fleet, smiling dream of twenty?

"It is all over town, the reply you made to Mrs. Winthrop and that little, sawed−off, witty daughter of hers."

"Patty!"

"Well, she is sawed−off and witty."

"What did I say?" asked Warrington, blushing. He had forgotten the incident.

"Mrs. Winthrop asked you to make her daughter an epigram, and you replied that Heaven had already done that."

"By the way," said Warrington, when the laughter subsided, "I understand that my old dog has been running away from home lately. I hope he doesn't bother you."

"Bother, indeed! I just love him," cried Patty. "He's such a lovable animal. We have such good times on our morning rides. We had trouble last week, though. A white bulldog sprang at him. Jove was so tired that he would have been whipped had I not dismounted and beaten the white dog off. Oh, Jove was perfectly willing to contest the right of way. And when it was all over, who should come along but Mr. McQuade, the politician. It was his dog. And he hadn't even the grace to make an apology for his dog's ill manners."

"May I not ride with you to−morrow morning?" he asked. He had intended to leave Herculaneum at noon; but there were many later trains.

"That will be delightful! I know so many beautiful roads; and we can lunch at the Country Club. And Jove can go along, too."

"Where is the traitor?"

"He is sound asleep on the veranda rugs."

"Well, it's long past his bedtime. I must be going."

"Some time I hope you will come just to call on me."

"I shall not need any urging."

They followed him to the door, and good nights were said.

"Oh, Patty, he has lifted so much doubt!" said the mother, as the two returned to the library. "He has nothing but praise for Miss Challoner. It is quite possible that John will be happy."

"It is not only possible, mother darling, but probable. For my part, I think her the most charming, most fascinating woman I ever met. And she told me she rides. What jolly times we'll have together, when John settles down in the new house!"

"The new house!" repeated the mother, biting her lips. "How the word hurts! Patty, why could they not come here? We'll be so lonely. Yet, it is the law of Heaven that a man and his wife must live by and for themselves."

Warrington walked home, lightened in spirit. He swung his cane, gave Jove a dozen love−taps and whistled operatic airs. What a charming young creature it was, to be sure! The brain of a woman and the heart of a child.

And he had forgotten all about her. Now, of course, his recollection became clear. He remembered a mite of a girl in short frocks, wonder−eyes, and candy−smudged lips. How they grew, these youngsters!

He went into the house, still whistling. Jove ran out into the kitchen to see if by some possible miracle there was another piece of steak in his grub−pan. A dog's eyes are always close to his stomach. Warrington, finding that everybody had gone to bed, turned out the lights and went up stairs. He knocked on the door of his aunt's bedroom.

"Is that you, Richard?"

"Yes. May I come in?"

"Certainly."

He entered quietly. The moonlight, pouring in through the window, lay blue−white on the counterpane and the beloved old face.

"What is it?" she asked.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and patted her hands.

"Aunty, old lady, I'm through thinking. I'm going to come home just as soon as I can fix up things in New York."

"Richard, my boy!" Her arms pulled him downward. "I knew it when you came in. I've prayed so long for this. God has answered my prayers. I'm so happy. Don't you remember how you used to tell me all your plans, the plots of your stories, the funny things that had come to you during the day? You used to come home late, but that didn't matter; you'd always find some pie and cheese and a glass of milk on the kitchen table—the old kitchen table. I'm so glad!"

"It may be a month or so; for I'll have to sell some of the things. But I'm coming home, I'm coming home." He bent swiftly and kissed her. "Good night."

Chapter VI

Warrington was up and about at six the next morning. He had never really outgrown the natural habit of waking at dawn, but he had fallen upon the evil way of turning over and sleeping till half after nine. He ate a light breakfast and went out to the stables and moved among the stalls, talking affectionate nonsense to the horses. A man can not talk baby−talk, that is the undisputed prerogative of the woman; but he has a fashion of his own which serves. "Aha, old boy! handsome beggar!" or—"How's the little lady this morning, eh?" or yet again—"Rascal! you've been rubbing the hair off your tail!" In the boxstall Warrington's thoroughbred Irish hunter nozzled his palm for loaf−sugar, and whinnied with pleasure when he found it. One of the first things Warrington had done, upon drawing his first big royalty check, was to buy a horse. As a boy on the farm he had hungered for the possession of one of those sleek, handsome animals which men call thoroughbreds. Then for a while he bought, sold and traded horses, for the mere pleasure it gave him to be near them. Finally he came to Herculaneum with two such saddle−horses as made every millionaire in town (and there were several in Herculaneum) offer fabulous sums whenever they ran across the owner. Next, he added two carriage−horses, in their way quite equal to the hunters. Men offered to buy these, too, but Warrington was a property owner now, and he wanted the horses for his own. In New York one of his wealthy friends had given him free use of his stables: so Warrington rode, at home and abroad. His income, ranging from twenty to thirty thousand the year, gave him that financial independence which neither the clerk nor the millionaire knew or understood. In the phraseology of the day, he carried his business under his hat: in other words, he had no business cares or responsibilities whatever.

Warrington made it a rule to saddle and bridle his own horses; grooms become careless. One or two men of his acquaintance had gone to their death for the want of care and a firm buckle. Besides, he enjoyed the work, and it accustomed the horses to his touch. He saddled his favorite hunter and led the eager animal into the open. He mounted and whistled for the dog; but Jove for once did not respond; doubtless he was out of hearing. Thereupon Warrington started for the Benningtons' and found Patty already in the saddle. It was not that the dramatist was blase, but he had come into contact with so many beautiful women that his pulse rarely stirred out of its healthy, measured beat. But this morning he was conscious of a slight thrill. The girl was really beautiful; more than that, she was fresh with youth and gaiety, gaiety which older women find necessary to repress. She was dressed in a dark grey riding−habit and wore a beaver cocked−hat.

"Good morning," he said, touching his cap with his crop. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"Only a moment." The truth is, she wanted to prove to him that there was one woman who did not keep men waiting. "Shall I pick the going?"

"I'm afraid I've lost track of the good country roads."

"Follow me, then."

They walked their horses to the city limits. You never saw either of them galloping over brick or asphalt, which quickly ruins the surest− footed horse; neither did they permit any fox−trotting, which, while it shows off a spirited horse, decreases his value in the ring. All of which is to say, these two, like their mounts, were thoroughbreds.

"Where is Jove?" she asked presently.

"The rogue is missing. I dare say he is gallivanting around some neighbor's back yard. I haven't laid eyes on him this morning. I believe he realizes that he will see me frequently hereafter, and has not bothered his head to look me up."

"Frequently?" She turned her head.

"Yes. I am coming home to live. Of course, this is my place of residence; my voter's bed, as the politicians say, is here in Herculaneum. But I mean to live here now in deed as well as in thought."

"I am sure we shall be delighted to have you with us." This was said gravely. A thought, which she would have repelled gladly, sprang into being. "I know John will be glad. He's always talking about you and your exploits at college."

"Our exploits," he corrected, laughing. "Shall we give them a little exercise now?" he asked, with a gesture toward the long brown road.

She nodded, and they started off at a sharp trot, and presently broke into a canter. So he was coming home to live? She felt a hot wave of sudden anger sweep over her, and her hands tightened on the reins. It was true, then? She loved her brother. What right had this man at her side to threaten her brother's happiness? Had Katherine Challoner signified her desire not to leave New York, would Warrington have decided to return to Herculaneum? Her hands relaxed. What a silly little fool she was! She, who despised and contemned gossip, was giving it ready ear. Had she ever found gossip other than an errant, cowardly liar? Gossip, gossip! Ah, if gossip, when she had made her round, would not leave suspicion behind her; suspicion, hydra−headed! What signified it that Warrington intended to come home to live? What signified it that her brother's wife would live across the way? She was ashamed of her evil thought; presently she would be no better than Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, or any of those women who get together to tear somebody apart. As if Warrington could compare with her big, handsome, manly brother! It was all impossible. She would punish herself for even entertaining such a thought as had been hers but a moment gone.

She stole a glance at Warrington. He was riding easily, his feet light in the stirrups, his head thrown back, his eyes half closed, and was breathing deeply of the cool air, which was heavy with the smell of sweet clover and dew−wet earth. It was a good, clean, honest face. Indeed, it was all impossible. Dissipation writes plainly upon the human countenance, and it had left no visible sign on Warrington's face. It may be that dissipation sometimes whimsically neglects to write at all.

They thundered over a wooden bridge. The spirit of the morning was in the horses; they began to race. An unexpected curve in the road discovered a road−builder and his gang of Italians. A low barrier ran across the road. It was not exactly needed, as they were not digging, but laying crushed stone. The obstruction was simply for the convenience of the boss, who desired to work unhampered.

"Shall we?" cried Warrington, mischief in his eyes.

"Yes." There was no fear in this girl.

On they went, in a cloud of dust. The Italians made for the ditches, but the boss stood in the road and waved his arms in warning. Presently he, too, ducked.

Hep! and over the pair went, landing clean and sound on the other side of the barrier. Before the surprised boss could express himself, they were far down the road. A curse was hurled after them, but they heard it not. They hadn't hurt the road at all, but the authority of the boss had suffered. He knew the girl, little snob! He would find out who the man was, soon enough. And if he had any influence in the City Hall, as he believed he had, he would make it tolerably warm for yonder vanishing parties.

He had put up that barrier to signify that the road was closed; very well, they'd see. Dirt under their feet, huh? All right. How he hated them all, with their horses and carriages and dances and dinners and clubs! Bah! He took a flask from his pocket and drank. Then he cursed the laggard Italians, and mourned that a year and a half must pass before he could sell their votes again. Bolles contracted for Italian labor and controlled something more than eight hundred votes. McQuade sublet various small contracts to him, and in return used the Italians during elections.

That jump, harmless enough in itself, was to prove a bad inspiration on Warrington's part. But it is always these seemingly inconsequent things that bear the heaviest reckoning.

Half a mile onward they drew down to a walk, flushed and breathless.

"Perhaps we oughtn't to have done that," she said doubtfully, working the numbness from her fingers. "No thoroughfare" had hitherto been religiously respected by her; this was her first transgression, and she wasn't entirely satisfied with herself.

"Pshaw! There's no harm done. There was no earthly reason why we should have turned back to the fork and added two miles to our ride. Don't let anything like that worry you; we went by too fast to be recognized. Look! here's a big clover patch. I never pass clover without wanting to get down and hunt for four−leaves. Shall we?"

She was out of the saddle before the query had left his lips.

"I believe it would be a good idea to arm ourselves against bad luck," she replied, gently moving aside the clover heads with her crop.

"You believe in four−leaf clover, then?"

She nodded.

"I do. I also am very careful," he added, "to catch the money−patches on my coffee."

She laughed. After all, there was something old−fashioned about this man. "And I never think of plucking a five−leaf. That's bad luck."

"The worst kind of bad luck. I remember, when I was a kid, I never played hooky without first hunting up my four−leaved amulet. If I got a licking when I returned home, why, I consoled myself with the thought, that it might have been ten times worse but for the four−leaf."

They moved about, looking here and there, while the horses buried their noses in the wet grass and threatened never to return to the road again. After a diligent search Patty found a beautiful four−leaf clover. She exhibited it in triumph.

"You've better luck than I," said Warrington. "We shall have to go on without my finding one."

"You may have this one," she replied; "and I hope it will bring you all sorts of good luck."

He took out his card−case and made room for the little amulet.

"It is impossible not to be fortunate now," he said, with a gravity that was not assumed.

She looked at him dubiously. No, there was no laughter in his eyes; he was perfectly serious.

They walked the horses over a small hill, then mounted. It was a very pleasant morning for Warrington. It had been years since he had talked to a young woman who was witty and unworldly. He had to readjust himself. He had written down that all witty women were worldly, but that all worldly women were not witty. But to be witty and unsophisticated was altogether out of his calculations.

At the Country Club they stabled the horses and wandered about the golf links. Luncheon was served on the veranda; and presently Warrington found himself confiding in this young girl as if he had known her intimately all his life. The girl felt a thrill of exultation. It flattered her young vanity to hear this celebrity telling her about his ambitions.

"Everything becomes monotonous after a while," he said. "And I have just begun to grow weary of living alone. Day after day, the same faces, the same places, the same arguments, the same work. I've grown tired. I want to live like other human beings. Monotony leads very quickly into folly, and I confess to many acts of folly. And no folly is absolutely harmless." He stirred his tea and stared into the cup.

"Why, I should think you ought to be the most contented of men," she cried. "You are famous, wealthy, courted. And when you return to Herculaneum, every girl in town will set her cap for you. I warn you of this, because I've taken a friendly interest in you."

"It is very good of you. Come," he said, draining his cup; "surely you tell fortunes in tea−cups; tell mine."

"Four−leaf clovers and tea−grounds," she mused. "You strike me as being a very superstitious young man."

"I am."

She passed the cup back to him. "Pour a little fresh tea in, spill it gently, turn the cup against the saucer and twirl it three times. That's the incantation."

He followed the directions carefully, and she extended her hand for the cup.

"There is always a woman in a man's tea−cup," she began. "There are two in this one."

"Good gracious!"

"Yes. Do you see that?" pointing to a cluster of leaves.

"Looks like a camel. Am I going to be thirsty?"

"That always indicates scandal," she declared soberly.

"Scandal?" He smiled skeptically.

"Scandal and disappointment. But happily these do not appear as having permanency."

"Thanks," piously. "Disappointment? I can readily believe that. Disappointment has always been my portion. But scandal has never lifted her ugly head."

"We are all far−sighted when scandal is in our immediate vicinity. This cup says scandal. There is plenty of money about you. See that? That means an enemy, strong, implacable. Disappointment and scandal are in his zone, which means he will probably be the cause of all your trouble. Have you an enemy?"

"None that I know of, save myself. But don't you think something is the matter with the tea? It seems impossible that those harmless grounds ... Why, I shan't sleep o' nights after this."

"You are laughing. Yet, this man is there. And here is a lie, too. It's a very bad cup, Mr. Warrington. I'm

sorry."

"So am I," gaily. "By the way, when do you and your mother start for New York?"

"We leave to−night."

"Good. Do you mind if I take the same train down?"

"Mother and I'll be glad to have you with us."

The servant cleared the table, and Warrington lighted a cigar. A trolley−car rolled up in front of the club, and several golf enthusiasts alighted. They knew Patty, and bowed; they weren't quite certain who her escort was.

At two o'clock they began the journey home. There wasn't much loitering by the way. Patty had a tea; she must have time to rest and dress. All told, it was an enjoyable day for Warrington. More than ever he set his face against the great city and looked with satisfaction on the hills of his childhood. It would be a pleasant pastime to sit on Patty's veranda and talk, become, and act like one of the young people. He was growing old; his youth must be renewed soon, or he would lose it utterly. This young man had been surfeited with noise and light, with the sham and glitter of hotels, clubs and restaurants. He was not to the manner born; thus he could easily see how palpably false life is in a great city. To those who have lived in the abnormal glamour of city life, absolute quiet is a kind of new excitement.

Warrington found that he was a bit stiff from the long ride.

Patty, however, rode nearly every day; so she was but slightly fatigued. Nevertheless, she was conscious of not wanting to dress for the tea. But there was a very good reason why she must attend the function (as applied by the society reporter); they would naturally discuss her brother's coming marriage, but if she was present, the discussion would not rise above whispers. She wanted to meet the old busybodies in the open; she wasn't afraid. As she dressed, she caught herself doing aimless things, such as approaching the window and watching the clouds, or thoughtfully studying her face in the mirror, or patting the rug impatiently, or sighing. She shook herself vehemently, and went resolutely about the intricate business known as toilet.

"I simply can't believe it. I know he isn't that kind of man. This can't be such a wicked world. But if she dares to make John unhappy, I shall hate her. Why must we hear these things that make us doubt and ponder and hesitate?"

At the tea the ladies greeted her sympathetically. Sympathy! Hypocrites! Heads came together; she could see them from the corner of her eyes. She saw Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, like a vast ship of the line, manoeuvering toward her. There were several escapes, but Patty stood her ground.

"You are looking charming, my dear," said Mrs. Haldene.

"Thank you."

"You go to the wedding, of course."

"Yes; mother and I leave to−night for New York. I am so excited over it. To think of John's being married to a celebrity!"

Patty was excited, but this excitement did not find its origin in anything exultant. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene to mind her own business. There was something primitive in Patty. Her second thoughts were due to cultivation, and not from any inherent caution.

Mrs. Haldene smiled and went on. It was a wonderful smile; it never changed; it served for all emotions, anger, hate, love, envy and malice. Mrs. Haldene never flew into passions or ecstasies. She was indeed preserved; and from the puckering taste she left in her wake, it might be suspected that she was pickled.

Before Patty arrived, two things had been fully discussed: the Bennington wedding and the report that Warrington was coming home to live. Shrugs, knowing glances, hypocritical resignation. Too bad, too bad! Warrington was coming home to live; young Mrs. Bennington would live across the street. When two and two make four, what more need be said?

But Patty had her friends, and they stood by her loyally.

New York. Clamor, clamor; noise, noise; the calling of cabmen, the clanging of street−cars, the rumbling of the elevated, the roaring of the drays, the rattling of the carts; shouting, pushing, hurrying, rushing, digging, streaming, pell−mell; the smell of coal−gas, of food cooking, of good and bad tobacco, of wet pavements, of plaster; riches and poverty jostling; romance and reality at war; monoliths of stone and iron; shops, shops; signs, signs; hotels; the tower of Babel; all the nations of the world shouldering one another; Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Turks; jumble, jumble. This is New York. There is nothing American about it; there is nothing

English, French, German, Latin or Oriental about it. It is cosmopolitan; that is to say, it represents everything and nothing.

Warrington, Patty and her mother alighted from the train in the gloomy, smoky cavern called the Grand Central Station and walked toward the gates. There was sunshine outside, but it was scarcely noticeable through the blackened canopy overhead.

"There's John!" cried Patty, seizing her mother's arm. "And Miss Challoner, too!"

A moment later the son was holding his mother in a fond embrace. Mrs. Bennington gave the actress her hand, who ignored it, put her arms around the mother and kissed her. There was not the slightest affectation in the act; it was done naturally and sweetly. Mrs. Bennington was well pleased. But Patty, Miss Challoner hugged Patty and whispered: "My sister!" If Patty had any doubts, they disappeared like summer mists in sunshine.

"I'm a rank outsider," Warrington grumbled.

"Surely you did not expect to be kissed!" Patty retorted.

"A man never gives up hoping. Well, Benedick," to John, "I suppose you've a nice breakfast waiting for us somewhere."

"That I have!" John thwacked Warrington on the shoulder. "It was good of you to come down with the folks."

"No trouble at all."

They all followed John, who announced that he had a carriage waiting, large enough to carry them all comfortably. As they crossed over to the street exit Warrington covertly glanced at Miss Challoner. She was radiant; there was color on her cheeks and lips; she was happy. Heigh−ho! Warrington sighed. She was gone, as completely as though she had died. He grew angry at the heaviness of his heart. Was he always to love no one but Warrington? It is fine to be a bachelor when one is young; but when the years multiply, when there are no new junkets and old ones grow stale, when scenes change, when friends drop out one by one, when a younger generation usurps the primrose path of dalliance, ah! the world becomes a dreary place. The old bachelor is the loneliest and most pathetic of men.

Once inside the carriage, the women began a light, friendly chatter; smiles and laughter; little jests about Benedicks, about the servant question, about coming home late o' nights; antenuptial persiflage. There was little that was spontaneous; each jest was an effort; but it sufficed to relieve what might have been awkward silence.

"It's up to you, now, Dick," said John. "Think of the good times we four could have together!"

"And who'd marry an old man like me?" asked Warrington plaintively.

"Bosh!" said John.

"Nonsense!" said Patty.

"You are a young man," said the mother.

"There are plenty setting their caps for you, if you but knew it," said Miss Challoner.

"Aha! I smell a conspiracy!" laughed Warrington. "You are putting your heads together to get me off your hands."

The breakfast awaited them at Bennington's hotel. This passed off smoothly. Then Warrington excused himself. He had a business engagement down town. It was arranged, however, that they were to be his guests that evening at dinner and a box−party at the summer opera. On Wednesday, at ten, they were to breakfast in his apartment. From his rooms they would go straight to the parson's, the "Little Church Around the Corner."

When Warrington had gone, John turned to his sister.

"Isn't he the finest chap?"

"He isn't to be compared with you," Patty answered.

"Nobody is," said Miss Challoner.

John colored with pleasure.

"Mr. Warrington is a thorough gentleman, and I like him very much," said Mrs. Bennington. "I have heard things about him; I can see that there has been some exaggeration. I shall be very glad to have him for a neighbor."

"A neighbor?" said Miss Challoner.

"Yes. He is coming back to Herculaneum to live."

"That is news to me." The actress stirred her coffee and smiled at Patty. "I understand you've been riding together. He is really a splendid horseman."

"He has the dearest old dog," replied Patty.

The day passed quickly for all concerned: the dinner and box−party left nothing to be desired.

The wedding−breakfast would have provoked envy in the heart of Lucullus; for Warrington was a man of the world, thoroughly polished; there was nothing Stoic about him (though, in the early days he had been a disciple of this cult perforce); he was a thoroughgoing epicure.

Patty was delighted. Warrington guided her about the rooms on a tour of inspection. He pointed out all the curios and told the history of each. But the desk was the article which interested her most.

"And this is where you write? Upon this desk plays have grown up? Won't you give me a single sheet of manuscript to take home with me?"

"I certainly shall."

He pulled out a drawer and found some old manuscript. He selected a sheet, signed it, and gave it to her.

"I am rich!" the girl exclaimed. "Signed manuscript from a real live author! I suppose that you receive tons of letters, some praising, some arguing, some from mere autograph fiends."

"It's a part of the day's work." His face brightened. He searched his pockets. "Here is one out of the ordinary. It is unsigned, so I feel no qualms of conscience in letting you read it."

Patty took the envelope with suppressed eagerness. She drew out the letter and read it slowly.

"Do you receive many like that?" she asked, folding the letter and returning it.

"Very few; that's why I treasure it. I should like to meet the writer; but that's impossible. I have read and re−read it fifty times."

"Evidently it was written in good faith." Patty was not very enthusiastic.

"There's not the least doubt of that. I am glad of one thing: I can't disillusion her."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, this young woman thinks I must be a paragon of virtues. I'm not; I'm a miserable impostor. She takes it for granted that I am good and kind and wise."

"Aren't you?" asked Patty gravely.

"As men go. I always try to be kind; sometimes I am good, and sometimes I am wise."

"I'm afraid you are one of those young men who try to be bad and can't. They are hopeless."

Warrington laughed.

"But I am superstitious about that letter. I've carried it in my pocket for weeks. It's a kind of mentor. Whenever some fool thing comes into my head, I stop and think of the letter."

"That is good. The writer hasn't wasted her time."

"I love you!" whispered John.

Miss Challoner smiled into his eyes. The smile encouraged him, and he raised her hand to his lips.

Ah, if it were not for those gloves! Why did he not say something? She was positive that he had them. To smile and laugh and talk; to face the altar, knowing that he possessed those hateful gloves! To pretend to deceive when she knew that he was not deceived! It was maddening. It was not possible that Warrington had the gloves; he would never have kept them all this while. What meant this man at her side? What was he going to do? She recollected a play in which there was a pair of gloves. The man had thrown them at the woman's feet, and, at the very altar, turned and left her. But she knew that men did not do such things in life. She was innocent of any wrong; this knowledge sustained her.

"A honeymoon in Switzerland: it has been the dream of my life." This time he drew her arm through his and crossed the room to his mother's side. "Mother mine, we shall be gone only three months; then we shall come home to stay."

"I shall miss you so; you have been away so much that I am hardly acquainted with you."

The woman who was to become her daughter suddenly dropped on her knees beside the chair.

"Please love me, too. I have been so lonely all my life."

"My daughter!" Mrs. Bennington laid her hand on the splendid head.

"I shall never marry," said Patty decidedly.

"What? Young lady, don't let any one hear you make such a remark. One of these fine days somebody will swoop you up and run off with you. I don't know but that I could play the part fairly well." Warrington laughed.

"Indeed! You'd have a time of it."

"I dare say. But there's the breakfast waiting."

Toasts and good wishes, how easy they are to give!

At the church the women cried a little. Women cry when they are happy, they cry when they are not; their tears keep a man guessing year in and year out. But this is no place for a dissertation on tears. There's time enough for that.

The bride and groom left immediately for Boston, from which city they were to sail for Europe the following day. In the carriage John drew his bride close to his heart.

"Mine!" he said, kissing her. "God grant that I may make you happy, girl."

"John, you are the finest gentleman in the world!"

His hand stole into his coat pocket and gently dropped something into her lap. She looked down and saw through her tears a crumpled pair of white kid gloves. Then she knew what manner of man was this at her side.

"It was not because I doubted you," he said softly: "it was because they were yours."

Chapter VII

Spring came round again in Herculaneum. People began to go to the tailor and the dress−maker and the hatter. There were witty editorials in the newspapers on house−cleaning and about the man who had the courage to wear the first straw hat. The season (referring to the winter festivities) had been unusually lively. There had been two charity balls by rival hospital boards, receptions, amateur dramatics, dinners and dances, not to omit the announcement of several engagements.

The new Bennington mansion had its house−warming in November. The reception, followed by a dinner−dance in the evening, was, according to the society columns, "one of the social events of the season. The handsomest house in town was a bower of smilax and hothouse roses." Everybody went to the reception, for everybody was more or less curious to meet the former celebrated actress. The society reporters, waiting for their cues, were rather non−committal in their description of the mistress. There was reason. They did not care, at this early stage of the game, to offend the leader by too much praise of a newcomer who had yet to establish herself. Besides, they realized how little their paragraphs would mean to a woman whose portrait had appeared in nearly all the illustrated magazines in the world. Thus, the half−heartedness of the newspapers was equally due to self−consciousness. Society itself, however, was greatly pleased with the beautiful Mrs. Bennington, for she entered with zest into all society's plans. In fact, she threatened to become very popular. The younger element began to call her Mrs. Jack.

Kate was in her element, for to live after this fashion was the one ambition that had survived all seasons. She was like a child with some wonderful new French doll. There was always a crowd of young married people about her, which is a healthy sign. She and Patty became inseparable comrades. They shopped together, went to the matinees, and drove and rode together.

Everything went along smoothly, too smoothly. Fate never permits anything like this to prosper long.

For the first time in her career Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene saw her position menaced. The younger set no longer consulted her as formerly. When, like Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, a woman has nothing more serious to live for than to organize social affairs, the slightest defection from her ranks is viewed in the light of a catastrophe. She had called on Mrs. Bennington the second, armed with all those subtle cruelties which women of her caliber know so well how to handle. And behold! she met a fencer who quietly buttoned the foils before the bout began. She had finally departed with smiles on her lips and rage in her heart. This actress, whom she had thought to awe with the majesty of her position in Herculaneum, was not awed at all. It was disconcerting; it was humiliating. She had condescended to tolerate and was tolerated in turn. Katherine adored Patty, and Patty had told her that she hated Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene. Naturally Katherine assumed the defensive whenever she met the common enemy.

But Mrs. Haldene could wait. She had waited before this. She had made certain prophecies, and it embittered her to learn that so far none of these prophecies had come true. She could wait. Something was destined to happen, sooner or later. She knew human nature too well not to be expectant. To Mrs. Haldene the most gratifying phrase in the language was: "I told you so!" Warrington had disappointed her, too. He behaved himself. He did not run after young Mrs. Bennington; he never called there alone; he was seen more frequently at the old Bennington place. The truth is, Patty was busy reforming the wayward dramatist, and Warrington was busy watching the result. There were those who nodded and looked wise whenever they saw the two together.

Oh, Herculaneum was a city to be desired, socially. Everybody was on his or her best behavior. It was only from among the poor that scandal gleaned her items for the newspapers. The shooting of such a man by such a woman's husband aroused only the mildest comment. But that class of people, don't you know, is so primeval. To kill a man from jealousy! It was ridiculous. Why did they not go to court, like civilized human beings?

Of course there is always scandal in politics; everybody understands that this is unavoidable. Another franchise had slipped out of the Common Council into the transit company's pocket, and even the partizan papers mildly belabored the aldermanic body. The Evening Call, however slashed the ward representatives vigorously. It wound up its editorial with the query: "How much longer will the public stand this sort of thing?" The Call was the only independent sheet in town, and did about as it pleased.

Warrington found himself taking more than normal interest in the situation. Occasionally, on Monday nights, he wandered into the City Hall and listened to the impassioned speeches of the aldermen. Many a tempestuous scene passed under his notice. Ordinances were passed or blocked, pavement deals were rushed through or sidetracked. And once, when the gas company was menaced with dollar−gas, the city pay−roll was held up for two months by the lighting company's cohorts. Only Heaven knows how much longer it might have been held back, had not an assemblyman come to the mayor's help by rushing up to the capital and railroading through a law that required only a two−thirds vote.

The Democrats had remained in power for six years, and Herculaneum was essentially a Republican city. On the Democratic side was McQuade, on the Republican side was ex−Senator Henderson. These men were bosses of no ordinary type. The first was from the mass, the second from the class; and both were millionaires. The political arena was a pastime for these two men; it was a huge complex game of chess in which recently the senator had been worsted. The public paid, as it invariably does, to watch this game on the checkerboard of wards. The senator had been unfortunate in his candidates. He had tried young men and old, lawyers and merchants; but he had failed to nominate a man who was popular with class and mass.

The present mayor was a shrewd Democrat who understood the diplomacy of petty politics. He shook the grimy hand of toil in preference to the gloved hand of idleness. He was thoroughly a politician. He never disregarded public opinion openly. He never sailed close to the wind, but spent his time in safe tacks to whatever harbor he desired. He was McQuade's man just so long as McQuade made the business worth while. He had opened up many new streets, abolished needless nuisances, and these concessions gave him a strong hold on the independent voter. He was a king over frogs which had changed much since Aesop's time, for now they let well enough alone.

Nevertheless, things were going from bad to worse. Three terms are likely to cause a man to grow careless or indifferent, and Donnelly was making frequent bad breaks. The senator, ever watchful, believed he saw a chance to sweep McQuade off the board.

McQuade had an able lieutenant in Alderman Martin, whom the sporting fraternity followed loyally. Martin owned and ran the most disreputable hotel in the city. It occupied a position of unusual prominence on one of the principal business streets. There was a saloon and a cheap restaurant on the ground floor. On the second floor were wine−rooms and a notorious gambling−den. Above this was the hotel. The guests stole in at midnight and stole out at dawn.

This gambling−den was frequently the bone of contention between energetic ministers of the gospel and the police department. Regularly the police swore that gambling did not exist in town, and regularly the ministers went on a still hunt for proofs. Singularly enough, they never found any. A hint from headquarters, and the den would close up till after the excitement was over. All the newspapers understood that the police lied; but the editors were either afraid or indifferent; and the farce was played over yearly for the benefit of the ministerial association.

The place was run honestly enough. When the stakes are small, the professional gambler does not have to be dishonest. All the same, this kind of gambler is the most despicable of men. He lures the wage of the poor; clerks, bookkeepers, traveling salesmen, laborers, college boys, men who drink too much of a Saturday night, all these come to the net. Nobody ever wins anything; and if perchance one does make a small winning, it goes quickly over the bar. Women wait and wonder at home; it is their common lot. The spirit of the gambler is in us all, and we might as well confess it here and now. It is in the corpuscles: something for nothing, something for nothing!

Martin was a power in the Common Council. He could block or put through any measure. He always carried a roll of gold−bills in his pockets—for what purpose no one had the temerity to inquire. His following was large and turbulent; it came from the shops and the factories and the streets. In his ward no candidate had ever defeated him. "Nice people" had very little to do with Mr. Martin; the laborer who was honest had little to do with him, either. He was a pariah, but a very formidable one. Yet, no one, though many accused him, caught him in a dishonest deal.

On the other hand, Senator Henderson's party had the cloak of respectability on its shoulders. His lieutenants were prominent business men who went into politics as a light diversion, young men of aristocratic families who were ambitious to go to Albany or Washington, and lawyers. The senator was a shrewd politician, with an unreadable face, clean−shaven but for a stubby mustache, and keen blue eyes that saw everything. He was loyal to

his party and above dishonesty.

This was the political situation in Herculaneum.

One May evening the senator called up Warrington. He was told that Mr. Warrington was at the club. The senator drove to the club forthwith. He found the dramatist in the reading−room, and greeted him pleasantly.

"My boy, I want half an hour of your time."

"You are welcome to an hour of it, Senator," replied Warrington, curious to know what the senator had to say to him.

"Come into a private dining−room, then." Once seated at the table, the senator reached over and touched Warrington mysteriously on the arm. "Young man, I heard you speak the other night at the Chamber of Commerce banquet. You're a born orator, and what is better than that, you've common sense and humor. How would you like to be mayor of Herculaneum next fall?"

"Mayor?" gasped Warrington.

"Yes."

"I'd make a fine mayor," with forced laughter, but thinking rapidly. "Aren't you jollying me, Senator?"

"I'm dead in earnest, Warrington. There is not another available man in sight. By available I mean a man who can pull the party out of the bog. There are a hundred I could nominate, but the nomination would be as far as they could go. We want a man who is fresh and new to the people, so far as politics goes; a man who can not be influenced by money or political emoluments. There are thousands of voters who are discontented, but they'd prefer to vote for Donnelly again rather than to vote for some one they know would be no better. You are known the world over. A good many people would never have known there was such a place as Herculaneum but for you. It is the home of the distinguished playwright."

"But I know practically nothing about political machinery," Warrington protested.

"You can leave the machinery to me," said the senator wisely. "I'll set the wheels going. It will be as easy as sliding down hill. I'll give you my word, if you land in the City Hall, to send you to Washington with the next Congress. Will you accept the nomination, in case I swing it around to you in September? It's a big thing. All you literary boys are breaking into politics. This is your chance."

"I'll take the night to think it over," said Warrington. He was vastly flattered, but he was none the less cautious and non−committal.

"Take a week, my boy; take a week. Another thing. You are intimate with young Bennington. He's a hard−headed chap and doesn't countenance politics in his shops. The two of you ought to bring the hands to their senses. If we can line up the Bennington steel−mills, others will fall in. Bennington owns the shops, but our friend McQuade owns the men who work there. Take a week to think it over; I can rely on your absolute secrecy."

"I shall be silent for half a dozen reasons," Warrington replied. "But I shan't keep you waiting a week. Call me up by 'phone to−morrow at any time between five and six. I shall say yes or no, direct."

"I like to hear a man talk like that."

"I can't get the idea into my head yet. I never expected to meddle with politics in this town."

"We'll do the meddling for you. Even if you accept, we shall require silence till the convention. It will be a bomb in the enemy's camp. You'll come around to the idea. Between five and six, then?"

"I shall have your answer ready. Good night."

The senator took himself off, while Warrington ordered a bottle of beer and drank it thoughtfully. Mayor! It would be a huge joke indeed to come back to Herculaneum to rule it. He chuckled all the way home that night; but when his head struck the pillow he saw the serious side of the affair. He recalled the old days when they sneered at him for selling vegetables; and here they were, coming to him with the mayoralty. It was mighty gratifying. And there was the promise of Washington. But he knew the world: political promises and pie−crusts. What would the aunt say? What would Patty say? Somehow, he was always thinking of Patty. He had not thought as yet to make any analysis of his regard for Patty. He held her in the light of an agreeable comrade, nothing more than that. Would she be pleased to see him mayor of Herculaneum? Bah! He couldn't sleep. He got out of bed, found a pipe and lighted it, and sat in the rocker by the window. Jove, hearing him moving about the room, woke up and came trotting in to inquire.

"Ha, old boy, what do you think?"

Jove laid his head on his master's knees.

"They want to make a mayor out of me."

Jove signified his approval.

"They have forgiven us our daily vegetables. But shall I? Will it be worth while? Well, we'll take a ride into the hills in the morning, and we'll think it all out. Mayor of Herculaneum; sounds good, doesn't it? Nothing like success, Jove."

Warrington smoked till the fire in his pipe died. He turned in, and this time he won sleep.

Early the next morning he was off on his horse, and he did not return till noon. But he had his answer.

At three that afternoon he had callers. Patty and Kate had just run over to see how the new play was getting on. Warrington confessed that he was doing only desultory work, but promised to read the scenario to them when it was done.

"You are becoming lazy," said Kate rebukingly.

"No; only a country gentleman."

"Patty, did you hear that? He calls Herculaneum a country village."

"Nothing of the sort. One may live in a city and be a countryman still."

"Mr. Warrington probably misses New York," said Patty.

"Not the veriest particle," promptly. Certainly Patty was growing more charming every day.

The Angora cat, with feline caution, peeped into the room. Patty, who loved cats, made a dash for the fluffy animal, which turned tail and bolted for the kitchen, Patty a close second.

For the first time since the marriage Kate and Warrington were alone together. He gazed at her, mildly speculative.

"Well, what do you see?" she asked.

"You are certainly one of the most beautiful women in the world," he declared, sighing.

"You say 'one of'?" frowning. "There was a time when it was not general; you used the definite article."

"I know it."

"Then there must be somebody else," quickly.

"I'm not a marrying man," he said evasively.

"Is it Patty, Dick? Oh, if it were only Patty!"

"I'm not good enough for Patty, Kate. The Lord knows, though, that I wish I were. She embarrasses me at times with her implicit faith in my goodness."

"Ah, Richard, what a terrible past yours was!" mockingly. "Nonsense!" briskly. "You are guilty of nothing but innocuous villainies. If there were fairies I should ask one to make you fall violently in love with Patty."

"No fairies need apply," ambiguously. "But you; you seem to be happy."

"There can not be a happier woman in the world. Let me confess. The confession may hurt your vanity. I love my husband better than I dreamed I could love. He is so just, so tender and strong. And isn't he handsome? I am madly jealous of every woman that comes near him. And once upon a time I believed that I was in love with Mr. Richard." There was no coquetry in this frank statement.

"Any one can see that you are happy."

"I want every one to see it. I want to tell everybody, too. You have no idea how strong he is, Dick. Yesterday I was in the shops with him. A rail was in the way; the men about did not see it; or refused to see it. John stooped, picked it up with his bare hands, and dropped it to one side. There are but two men in the shops who can do that. But I have a horror of those great bars of twisting white iron. They terrify me. I do not understand, but the men are always sullen when I am there. John says it's my imagination."

"It probably is. Perhaps the begrimed faces have something to do with it."

"I can read the human countenance too well," she said. "Is it because I have been on the stage? Have these men a base opinion of me?"

"Impossible!"

"And they seem to dislike John, too."

"John can take care of himself. He'll wait a long while, but when he moves forward nothing can stop him. Don't you ever miss the glare of the lights?" he asked, his endeavor being to interest her in something foreign to the shops.

"Dick, I have almost forgotten that I ever acted. You will remember that I refused to assist in the amateur

theatricals last winter. Act? I hate the word. It suggests the puppet, the living in other people's worlds, parrot−wise, in imitation."

"Come, come, Kate; it's the greatest gift of all and you know it. Think! The power to make people laugh and cry, to make either happiness or misery perfectly real!"

"Oh, there was pleasure in it at times," she admitted reluctantly. "Do you remember my gloves, Dick? John had them."

"He knew you were in my rooms that night?"

"Yes. I told him the simple truth, and he believed me. How could I help loving a man as loyal as that?"

"It is fine. But Jack was always a thorough man. I don't blame you for loving him. I call him all sorts of names to Patty, and it is fun to watch her eyes flash."

Kate gave him a curious smile.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You smiled."

"I had a happy thought."

"Probably about that house−broken John of yours."

"Who's calling John house−broken?" Patty stood in the doorway, the Angora struggling under her arm.

"Well, isn't he house−broken?" asked Warrington with gentle malice. "Gentle and warranted to stand?"

Patty, for reasons of her own, permitted him to believe that he succeeded in teasing her.

"Kate, let us be going. I can not listen to Mr. Warrington's remarks regarding my brother. He treats John as if he were a horse."

"Just as you say, dear. We shall punish Mr. Warrington by not making informal calls in the future."

"Wait till I get my hat," cried Warrington, "and I'll walk over to the house with you."

"If you do that," said Patty, "we shall be compelled to ask you to remain to dinner."

"Oh, I should refuse. I've a telephone engagement between five and six."

"But we never serve dinner till seven," replied Patty, buttoning her coat austerely.

Kate laughed merrily.

"If you will ask me over to dinner," said Warrington, "I'll tell you a secret, a real dark political secret, one that I've promised not to tell to a soul."

The two women stopped abruptly. The cast was irresistible, and they had to rise to it.

Yet Patty murmured: "How like a woman he is!"

"It simply shows what high regard I have for your discretion. It is a secret some men would pay a comfortable fortune to learn."

"Will you please come and dine with us this evening?" asked Patty.

"I shall be very happy."

"And now, the secret," said Mrs. Jack.

"Between five and six I expect a call on the phone from Senator Henderson."

"Senator Henderson!" exclaimed the women in unison.

"I shall say but a single word. It will be yes."

"But the secret! Mercy alive, you are keeping us waiting!"

Warrington glanced around with mock caution. He went mysteriously to the portieres and peered into the hall; he repeated this performance at the dining−room door, then turned, a finger upon his lips.

"Senator Henderson is looking for a candidate for mayor this fall. Mind, not a word to a soul, not even to John," this warning addressed principally to Mrs. Jack.

"The Honorable Richard Warrington," said Patty, musing. She rolled the words on her tongue as if testing the sound of them.

"That's it," laughed Warrington. "The Honorable Richard Warrington!—sounds like Lord Mayor of London!"

Every Eden has its serpent, sooner or later. Thus, having futilely tried the usual gates by which he enters Eden to destroy it, this particular serpent found a breach in the gate of politics.

Chapter VIII

McQuade and Martin entered a cafe popular for its noon lunches. It was hot weather in July, and both were mopping their bald foreheads, their faces and necks. The white bulldog trotted along behind, his tongue lolling out of his mouth and his eyes heavy. The two men sat down in a corner under an electric fan; the dog crawled under the table, grateful for the cold stone tiling.

"What do you know about this fellow Warrington?" asked McQuade, tossing his hat on one of the unoccupied chairs.

"The fellow who writes plays?"

"Yes. What do you know about him?"

"Why, he used to peddle vegetables and now he owns a swell place on Williams Street."

"Gamble?"

"Not that I know of. I never go into Pete's myself. It wouldn't be good business. But they tell me Warrington used to drop in once in a while, when he was a reporter, and choke his salary to death over the roulette table."

"Doesn't gamble now?"

"Not in any of the joints around town."

"Drink?"

"Oh, I guess he boozes a little; but he's hard−headed and knows how to handle the stuff."

"Women?—Roast beef, boiled potatoes and musty ale for two."

"Actresses.—Say, make mine a beer.—A gay buck in New York, I understand. Used to chase around after the Challoner woman who married Bennington."

"Nothing here in town?"

"Haven't paid any attention to him. I guess he's straight enough these days."

"Tip Pete off to−day. The police will make a raid Saturday night. The ministers have been shouting again, and two or three losers have whined."

"All right. But what's all this about Warrington?" asked Martin, whose curiosity was aroused.

"I'll tell you later." The waiter returned with the platters of food, and McQuade ate without further comment or question.

Martin ate his meat in silence also, but he was busy wondering. Warrington? What had interested the boss in that swell? Humph!

These men ate quickly and digested slowly. McQuade took out two fat black cigars and passed one to Martin, who tore off the end with his teeth.

"I want to find out all there is to know about Warrington. I can't explain why just now; too many around."

"Set Bolles after him. Bolles used to be with a private detective bureau. If there's anything to learn, he'll learn it. There he is now. Hey, waiter, ask that gentleman looking for a vacant table to come over. Hello, Bolles!"

"How do you do, Mr. Martin. Hot day, Mr. McQuade."

"Sit down," said McQuade, with a nod of invitation toward the remaining vacant chair. "Cigar or a drink?"

"Bring me a little whisky—no, make it an old−fashioned cocktail. That'll be about right."

"Mr. McQuade has a job for you, Bolles, if you're willing to undertake it."

"I've got some time on my hands just now," replied Bolles. "Contract work?"

"After a fashion," said McQuade grimly. "Eat your dinner and we'll go up stairs to my office. What I have to say can't be said here."

"All right, Mr. McQuade. If it's dagos, I'll have plenty in hand in November."

"I shall want you to go to New York," said McQuade.

"New York or San Francisco, so long as some one foots the bills."

"I'll foot 'em," agreed McQuade. "Hustle your dinner. We'll wait for you at the bar."

Bolles ordered. A job for McQuade that took him to New York meant money, money and a good time. There were no more contracts till September, so the junket to New York wouldn't interfere with his regular work. He

had sublet his Italians. He was free. A few minutes later he joined McQuade, and the trio went up stairs in a cloud of tobacco smoke. McQuade nodded to the typewriter, who rose and left the private office. The three men sat down, in what might be described as a one−two−three attitude: domination, tacit acceptance of this domination, and servility.

"Do you know Richard Warrington, the playwriter?"

"That snob? Yes, I know who he is, and I'd like to punch his head for him, too."

McQuade smiled. This manifest rancor on Bolles' part would make things easier than he thought.

"Well, listen. I've just been tipped that big things are going to happen this fall. That fool Donnelly has queered himself, and is making a muddle of everything he touches. Senator Henderson is a shrewd man, but he wasn't shrewd enough this time. He should have conducted his little conspiracy in his own home and not at a club where servants often find profit in selling what they hear. Henderson is going to put Warrington up for mayor."

"The hell he is!" said Bolles.

Martin's jaw dropped, and the cigar ashes tumbled down his shirt bosom.

"It's no joke," went on McQuade. "If he is nominated, he'll win. The people are wanting a change. If the Henderson people get into the City Hall, I stand to lose a fortune on contracts. You both know what that means. Warrington must never get a chance to accept."

Bolles looked at Martin. McQuade saw the look, and, interpreting it, laughed.

"These are no dime−novel days. We don't kill men to get 'em out of the way. We take a look into their past and use it as a club."

"I begin to see," said Martin. "Warrington must be side−tracked before the convention. Good. That'll be simple."

"Not very," McQuade admitted. "It's going to be a devilish hard job. You, Bolles, pack up and go to New York. I want some information regarding this young fellow's past in New York. It's up to you to get it. No faking, mind you; good substantial evidence that can be backed up by affidavits. Get the idea? Five hundred and expenses, if you succeed; your expenses anyhow. Five hundred is a lot of money these days. But if you go on a bat, I'll drop you like a hot brick, for good and all. Think it over. Pack up to−night, if you want to. Here's a hundred to start with. Remember this, now, there must be a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes. A man has no past, if there isn't a woman in it."

"I can land that five hundred," Bolles declared confidently. "I can find the woman. I'll write you every other day."

"Well, then, that's all. Good luck. No boozing while you're on the job Afterward I don't care what you do. By−by."

Bolles took his dismissal smilingly. Five hundred. It was easy.

"If it's possible, he'll do it," said Martin. "But what's your campaign?"

"Donnelly must remain another term. After that, oblivion. There'll be bids this fall. If Henderson's man wins, there'll be new aldermen. These bids of mine must go through and gas must be kept at a dollar−fifty. I'm a rich man, but at present I'm up to my neck in southern contracts that aren't paying ten cents on the dollar. Herculaneum's got to foot the bill."

"How'd you find out about Henderson's coup?"

"One of the waiters at his club said he had some information. I gave him ten dollars for something I'd have given ten hundred for just as quickly. If Henderson had sprung Warrington in September, we'd have been swamped. Now we have a good chance to hang on."

"Force him to back down and withdraw?"

McQuade nodded.

"It's simply got to be done. I didn't give Henderson credit for so clever a move as this. A new man, famous and wealthy, under no obligations to his party; the voters would follow him just for the novelty of the thing. Besides, there are other reasons, but I'm keeping them to myself. How about that pavement deal in John Street?"

John Street possessed but three or four houses. The paving would be a ten−thousand−dollar job. As a witty political speaker once said, they paved Herculaneum in the concrete and in the abstract.

"It will go through Monday night, smooth as butter."

"Canvassed the boys?"

"More than three−fourths vote. Sure."

"I'm depending upon you."

"Will you turn down Donnelly at the convention?"

"I tell you he's got to run again. I'll bring him to order, after a little heart−to−heart talk. He's the only man in sight."

"Why not play the same game as Henderson?"

"I've thought it all out. There's no one but Donnelly. Pick up anything you can about Warrington."

"All right. By the way, the boys want to know if you think we can pull off those ten−round bouts this winter."

"I'm going down to the capital to see."

Martin telephoned for his team, and twenty minutes later he was driving countryward. McQuade dictated a few letters, one of which he directed to be sent by messenger. Then he left the office and called upon the editor of the Times. This conference lasted an hour. McQuade was chief owner of the Times.

Warrington was greatly surprised when, at three−thirty, a message was brought to him requesting him briefly and politely to do Mr. McQuade the honor to call on him between four and five that afternoon. He had met McQuade at the Chamber of Commerce dinner. The introduction had been most formal. What the deuce did McQuade wish to see him about? Should he go? A natural aversion to the man said no; but policy urged him as well as curiosity. He went to the telephone and called up McQuade's office. Mr. McQuade was not in, but would return at four. Ah! It was the typewriter who spoke. Would she kindly notify Mr. McQuade on his return that Mr. Warrington would be at his office at four−thirty? She would. Thanks.

Warrington smoked uneasily. He had no desire to meet McQuade. Their ways were widely separated and reached nothing in common. But he readily recognized the fact that McQuade was not a man such as one might heedlessly antagonize. What could the politician want of the literary man? McQuade dabbled in racing horses; perhaps he had a horse to sell. In that event, they would meet on common ground. But his belief in this possibility was only half−hearted. He filled his pockets with cigars, whistled for the dog, and departed. Both of the Bennington houses were closed; the two families were up north in the woods.

Promptly at four−thirty Warrington and his dog entered the elevator of the McQuade Building and were dislodged on the third floor. They went along the dim corridor, scrutinizing doors, each hunting for one of his kind. Jove couldn't read, but he could smell. Finally Warrington came to a stand. Upon the glass panel of the door he read:

Daniel McQuade Co.

General Contractors

He did not knock. He opened the door and walked in. It is a sign of weakness for a man to knock on the door of a business office, unless it is marked private, Nevertheless, the dingy glass had known the knock of many knuckles. A girl was hammering on the typewriting machine. She ceased only when she completed the page. She looked up. Her expression, on seeing who the visitor was, changed instantly. It was not often that a man like this one entered the office of Daniel McQuade and Company, General Contractors.

"I have an appointment with Mr. McQuade," said Warrington pleasantly; "would you mind announcing me?"

"Just a moment," answered the girl, rising and entering the private office. She returned at once. "Mr. McQuade will see you."

Warrington walked quietly into the lion's den.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Warrington," said McQuade, pointing toward a chair. He did not offer his hand; something told him not to make that mistake.

From under the desk McQuade's dog emerged, stiff and bristling. On his side, Jove stood squarely on his legs, head on, as they say, his lips writhing and quivering with rage. Warrington touched the chair that had been offered him. Jove begged. But the master was obdurate. Jove jumped up, but turned quickly. The white dog stopped. He recognized that he was at a complete disadvantage.

McQuade watched these proceedings with an amused twinkle. It was a clever manoeuver. So far as he was concerned, a good dog fight would not have been to his distaste.

"It doesn't hurt the brutes to light once in a while. But, of course," he added, "your dog is old."

"Nothing is old till it is useless."

"An epigram from one of your plays?"

"No; but it sounds good enough to use. Jove has strong teeth, however, and he comes from a fighting family. But for my part, I had much rather see two men pummel each other."

"So would I, for that matter." McQuade pushed the match−box toward Warrington, but Warrington drew out his own and struck a light. McQuade shrugged.

"Mr. McQuade, I am interested to learn what is back of your note. Horses?"

"No; not horses."

McQuade viewed the young man through half−closed eyes. The contractor was a big hulk of a man, physically as strong as a bull, with reddish hair, small twinkling eyes, a puffy nose mottled with veins, thin lips shaded by a bristling red mustache, and a heavy jaw. The red fell of hair on his hands reminded Warrington of a sow's back. Everything about McQuade suggested strength and tensity of purpose. He had begun work on a canal−boat. He had carried shovel and pick. From boss on a railway section job he had become a brakeman. He took a turn at lumbering, bought a tract of chestnuts and made a good penny in railroad ties. He saved every dollar above his expenses. He bought a small interest in a contracting firm, and presently he became its head. There was ebb and tide to his fortunes but he hung on. A lighting contract made him a rich man. Then he drifted into politics; and now, at the age of fifty, he was a power in the state. The one phase of sentiment in the man was the longing to possess all those obstacles that had beset his path in the days of his struggles. He bought the canal−boat and converted it into a house−boat; he broke the man who had refused him a job at the start; he bought the block, the sidewalk of which he had swept; every man who stood in his way he removed this way or that. He was dishonest, but his dishonesty was of a Napoleonic order. He was uneducated, but he possessed that exact knowledge of mankind that makes leaders; and his shrewdness was the result of caution and suspicion. But like all men of his breed, he hated with peculiar venom the well−born; he loved to grapple with them, to wrest their idleness from them, to compel them to work for a living, to humiliate them. The fiber in McQuade was coarse; he possessed neither generosity nor magnanimity; the very men who feared him held him in secret contempt.

"No, Mr. Warrington, I haven't any horses for sale to−day," he began. "Not very long ago you met Senator Henderson at your club. He offered you the nomination for mayor this fall, and you accepted it."

Warrington could not repress a start of surprise. He had not quite expected this. He was annoyed.

"That is true. What mystifies me," he supplemented, "is how this knowledge came to your ears."

"I generally hear what's going on. My object in asking you to call is to talk over the matter on a friendly basis."

"I can not see what good that will do. Politically we have nothing in common."

"Politically or socially. But the point is this. What have you done that you should merit this honor? I'll talk frankly. What have you done toward the building up of your city? What have you done toward its progress in manufacturing and building? You have done nothing but buy a house on the fashionable street and pay the taxes."

"You might add that I once peddled vegetables," said Warrington.

It was McQuade's turn to be surprised. From what he had observed of fashionable people, especially the new−rich, they endeavored to submerge altogether the evidences of past manual and menial labor.

"Then you are not ashamed of the fact that you sold vegetables?"

"In truth, I'm rather proud of it. It was the first step in the fight. And I tell you honestly, Mr. McQuade, that I have fought every inch of the way. And I shall continue to fight, when there's anything worth fighting for. I'm not a manufacturer or a builder, but I am none the less eligible for public office. What little money I have was made honestly, every penny of it. It was not built on political robbery and the failures of others. But let us come to the point. You have something to say."

"Yes. I have. And it is this: I don't propose to have you meddle with the politics of this city. I hope we can come to a peaceful understanding. I don't want to war against you."

"Mr. McQuade, you talk like a man out of his senses. Who's going to prevent me from accepting the nomination?"

"I am," answered McQuade, bringing a fist down on his desk.

The dogs growled. They seemed to realize that war of some kind was in the air.

"How?" asked Warrington. The man was a fool!

"You will go to Senator Henderson and tell him that you have reconsidered."

Warrington laughed. "I believed I knew all phases, but this one surpasses any I ever heard of. You have the nerve to ask me, of the opposition party, to refuse the nomination for mayor?"

"I have."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Not of you, my lad," McQuade answered sardonically, spreading out his great hands. "Do I look like a man afraid of anything? But the thought of a stranger becoming mayor of Herculaneum rather frightens me. Let us have peace, Mr. Warrington."

"I ask nothing better."

"Withdraw."

"I never withdraw. I am not afraid of anything. I even promise to be good−natured enough to look upon this meeting as a colossal joke." Warrington's cigar had gone out. He relighted it coolly. "If the nomination is offered me, I shall accept it; and once having accepted it, I'll fight, but honorably and in the open. Look here, McQuade, don't be a fool. You've something against me personally. What is it? If I recollect, I ran across you once or twice when I was a newspaper man."

McQuade's eyes narrowed again.

"Personally, you are nothing to me," he replied; "politically, you are a meddler, and you are in my way."

"Oh, I am in your way? That is to say, if I am elected, there'll be too much honesty in the City Hall to suit your plans? I can readily believe that. If you can convince me that I ought not to run for mayor, do so. I can accept any reasonable argument. But bluster will do no good. For a man of your accredited ability, you are making a poor move, even a fatal one."

"Will you withdraw?"

"Emphatically no!"

"All right. Whatever comes your way after this, don't blame me. I have given you a fair warning."

"You have threatened."

"I can act also. And you can put this in your pipe, Mr. Warrington, that before October comes round, when the Republican convention meets, you will withdraw your name quickly enough. This is not a threat. It's a warning. That's all. I'm sorry you can't see the matter from my standpoint."

"Come, boy," said Warrington to his dog. "You had better keep your animal under the table."

McQuade did not move or answer. So Warrington grasped Jove by the collar and led him out of the private office. McQuade heard the dramatist whistle on the way to the elevator.

"So he'll fight, eh?" growled McQuade. "Well, I'll break him, or my name's not McQuade. The damned meddling upstart, with his plays and fine women! You're a hell of a dog, you are! Why the devil didn't you kill his pup for him?"

McQuade sent a kick at the dog, who dodged it successfully, trotted out to the typewriter and crawled under the girl's skirts.

Warrington went home, thoroughly angry with himself. To have bandied words and threats with a man like McQuade! He had lowered himself to the man's level. But there were times when he could not control his tongue. Education and time had not tamed him any. Withdraw? It would have to be something more tangible than threats.

"Richard, you are not eating anything," said his aunt at dinner that evening.

"I'm not hungry, Aunty. It's been one of those days when a man gets up wrong."

"I'm sorry. Doesn't the play go along smoothly?"

"Not as smoothly as I should like."

"There was a long−distance call for you this afternoon. The Benningtons want you to come up at once instead of next week."

Warrington brightened perceptibly. He went to work, but his heart wasn't in it. The interview with McQuade insisted upon recurring. Why hadn't he walked out without any comment whatever? Silence would have crushed McQuade. He knew that McQuade could not back up this threat; it was only a threat. Bah! Once more he flung himself into his work.

Half an hour later the door−bell rang.

Chapter IX

Character is a word from which have descended two meanings diametrically opposed to each other. We say a man has a character, or we say he is one; The first signifies respect; the second, a tolerant contempt. There exists in all small communities, such as villages, towns, and cities of the third class, what is known as a character. In the cities he is found loafing in hotel lobbies or in the corridors of the City Hall; in the hamlet he is usually the orator of the post−office or the corner grocery. Invariably his wife takes in washing, and once in a while he secures for her an extra order. If he has any children, they live in the streets. He wears a collar, but seldom adds a tie. He prides himself on being the friend of the laboring man, and a necktie implies the worship of the golden calf. He never denies himself a social glass. He never buys, but he always manages to be introduced in time. After the first drink he calls his new friend by his surname; after the second drink it is "Arthur" or "John" or "Henry," as the case may be; then it dwindles into "Art" or "Jack" or "Hank." No one ever objects to this progressive familiarity. The stranger finds the character rather amusing. The character is usually a harmless parasite, and his one ambition is to get a political job such as entails no work. He is always pulling wires, as they say; but those at the other end are not sensitive to the touch. On dull days he loiters around the police court and looks mysterious. Cub reporters at first glance believe him to be a detective in disguise.

Herculaneum had its character. He was a pompous little man to whom the inelegant applied the term of runt. He never could have passed the army examination, for he had no instep. He walked like a duck, flat−footed, minus the waddle. He was pop−eyed, and the fumes of strong drink had loosened the tear−ducts so that his eyes swam in a perennial mist of tears. His wife still called him William, but down town he was Bill. He knew everybody in town, and everybody in town knew him. There was a time when he had been on intimate terms with so distinguished a person as Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene. He will tell you to this day how he was wont to dandle her on his knee. Bill was one of those individuals of whom it is said: "He means well." In other words, he was a do−nothing, a ne'er−do−well. He had been comparatively rich once, but he had meant well with his money. One grand splurge, and it was all over. Herculaneum still recollects that splurge. When in his cups, Bill was always referring to those gorgeous days. Afterward, Bill and his family lived from hand to mouth. Occasionally, at Christmas, some of his old friends who felt sorry for him sent him a purse. Did Bill purchase turkey and coal and potatoes? No, indeed. He bought useless French toys for the children, who went hungry. Another time, when heartless winter returned and the price of coal went up, a church social was arranged for Bill's benefit. It netted him nearly a hundred dollars. But Bill didn't pay his landlord and grocer; not he! He came down town the following day with a shiny plug−hat and a gold−headed cane.

Bill was a first−class genealogist. He could tell you the history of every leading family in town. It took Bill to expose the new−rich; he did it handsomely. The way these breakfast millionaires lorded and landaued it highly amused him. Who were they, anyhow? Coal−heavers, hod−carriers, stock−speculators, riffraff, who possessed an ounce of brains and a pound of luck. Why, they didn't even know how to spend their money when they got it. But what could be expected of people who put iron dogs and wooden deers on their front lawns? But the Benningtons, the Haldenes, and the Winterflelds, and the Parkers, —they had something to brag about. They were Bunker Hillers, they were; they had always had money and social position. As for the Millens, and the Deckers, and the McQuades—pah!

Bill had a wonderful memory; he never forgot those who laughed at him and those who nodded kindly. He was shiftless and lazy, but he had a code of honor. Bill could have blackmailed many a careless man of prominence, had he been so minded. But a man who had once dined a governor of the state could do no wrong. His main fault was that he had neglected to wean his former greatness; he still nursed it. Thus, it was beneath his dignity to accept a position as a clerk in a store or shop. The fact that his pristine glory was somewhat dimmed to the eyes of his fellow citizens in no wise disturbed Bill. Sometimes, when he was inclined to let loose the flood−gates of memory, his friends would slip a quarter into his palm and bid him get a drink, this being the easiest method of getting rid of him.

Bill marched into the Warrington place jauntily. He wore a tie. Jove ran out and sniffed the frayed hems of his

trousers. But like all men of his ilk, he possessed the gift of making friends with dogs. He patted Jove's broad head, spoke to him, and the dog wagged what there was left of his tail. Bill proceeded to the front door and resolutely rang the bell. The door opened presently.

"Is Richard in?" Bill asked. He had had only two drinks that evening.

"Mr. Warrington is in," answered the valet, with chilling dignity. "What is your business?"

"Mine!" thundered Bill, who had a democratic contempt for a gentleman's gentleman. "I have important business to transact with your master. Take this card in to him. He'll see me."

The valet looked at the greasy card. The name was written in ink; the card was of the kind one finds in hotels for the convenience of the guests.

"I will take the card to Mr. Warrington," the valet promised reluctantly. There was, however, a barely perceptible grin struggling at the corners of his mouth. He was not wholly devoid of the sense of humor, as a gentleman's gentleman should at all times be.

"William Osborne? What the deuce does he want here?" asked Warrington impatiently.

"He said his business was important, sir. If it is half as important as he acts—"

"No comments, please. Show Mr. Osborne in."

Warrington turned all his mail face−downward. He knew Bill of aforetime, in the old newspaper days. Bill had marvelously keen eyes, for all that they were watery. The valet ushered him into the study. He wore his usual blase expression. He sat down and drew up his chair to the desk.

"Well, Mr. Osborne, what's on your mind to−night?" Warrington leaned back.

"The truth is, Richard," began William, "I found this letter on the pavement this afternoon. Guess you'd been down to the hotel this afternoon, and dropped it. I found it out in front. There was no envelope, so I couldn't help reading it."

Warrington seized the letter eagerly. It was the only letter of its kind in the world. It was enchanted.

"Mr. Osborne, you've done me a real service. I would not take a small fortune for this letter. I don't recollect how I came to lose it. Must have taken it out and dropped it accidentally. Thanks."

"Don't mention it, my boy." Very few called him Mr. Osborne.

"It is worth a good deal to me. Would you be offended if I gave you ten as a reward?"

"I'd feel hurt, Richard, but not offended," a twinkle in the watery eyes.

Warrington laughed, drew out his wallet and handed William a crisp, crackly bank−note. It went, neatly creased, into William's sagging vest−pocket.

"Have a cigarette?" asked Warrington.

"Richard, there's one thing I never did, and that's smoke one of those coffin−nails. Whisky and tobacco are all right, but I draw the line at cigarettes."

Warrington passed him a cigar. William bit off the end and lighted it. He sniffed with evident relish.

"Seems impossible, Richard, that only a few years ago you were a reporter at the police station. But I always said that you'd get there some day. You saw the dramatic side of the simplest case. I knew your father. He was one of the best farmers in the county. But he didn't know how to invest his savings. He ought to have left you rich."

"But he didn't. After all, it's a fine thing to make for the good things in life and win them yourself."

"That's true. You're a different breed from some of these people who are your neighbors. We're all mighty proud of you, here in Herculaneum. What you want to do is to get into politics." Here Bill winked mysteriously. "You've money and influence, and that's what counts."

"I'm seriously thinking the thing over," returned Warrington, not quite understanding the wink.

"Everything's on the bum in town; it wants a clean bill. McQuade must go. The man never keeps a promise. Told me in the presence of witnesses, last election, that he'd give me a job on the new police board; and yet after election he put in one of those whipper−snappers who know nothing. Of course, you've been in town long enough to know that Donnelly is simply McQuade's creature. I never had any luck."

"Oh, it may change by and by." Warrington, at that moment, felt genuinely sorry for the outcast.

Bill twirled his hat. "You've never laughed at me, Richard; you've always treated me like a gentleman, which I was once. I didn't mail that letter because I wanted to see if you had changed any. If you had become a snob, why, you could fight your blamed battles yourself; no help from me. But you're just the same. I've brought something

that'll be of more use to you than that letter, and don't you forget it."

"What?" asked Warrington skeptically.

Suddenly Bill leaned forward, shading his voice with his hand. "I was in Hanley's for a glass of beer this noon. I sat in a dark place. The table next to me was occupied by Martin, McQuade, and a fellow named Bolles."

"Bolles?"

"You've been away so long you haven't heard of him. He handles the dagos during election. Well, McQuade was asking all sorts of questions about you. Asked if you gambled, or drank, or ran around after women."

Warrington no longer leaned back in his chair. His body assumed an alert angle.

"They all went up to McQuade's office. The typewriter is a niece of mine. McQuade has heard that the senator is going to spring your name at the caucus. But that's a small matter. McQuade is going to do you some way or other."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he sees that his goose is cooked if you run. He's determined that he won't let you."

Warrington laughed; there was a note of battle in his laughter. "Go on," he said.

"Nobody knew anything about your habits. So McQuade has sent Bolles to New York. He used to be a private detective, He's gone to New York to look up your past there. I know Bolles; he'll stop at nothing. McQuade, however, was wise enough to warn him not to fake, but to get real facts."

This time Warrington's laughter was genuine.

"He's welcome to all he can find."

"But this isn't all. I know a printer on the Times. To−morrow the whole story about your accepting the senator's offer will come out. They hope the senator will be forced to change his plans. They think the public will lose interest in your campaign. Surprise is what the public needs. I'll tell you something else. Morris, who died last week, had just sold out his interest in the Telegraph to McQuade. This means that McQuade has the controlling interest in every newspaper in town. I never heard of such a thing before; five newspapers, Democratic and Republican, owned by a Democratic boss."

Warrington smoked thoughtfully. This man McQuade was something out of the ordinary. And he had defied him.

"I am very much obliged to you, Osborne. If I win out, on my word of honor, I'll do something for you."

"You aren't afraid of McQuade?" anxiously.

"My dear Mr. Osborne, I am not afraid of the Old Nick himself. I'll give this man McQuade the biggest fight he has ever had. Bolles will have his pains for nothing. Any scandal he can rake up about my past will be pure blackmail; and I know how to deal with that breed."

"McQuade will try something else, then. He's sworn to stop you. I'm glad you aren't afraid of him."

"I can't thank you enough."

"I wander about town a good deal; nobody pays much attention to me; so lots of things fall under my notice. I'll let you know what I hear. You'll find all the decent people on your side, surprise or no surprise. They're tired of McQuade and Donnelly; Some of these paving deals smell. Well, I'm keeping you from your work." Bill rose.

"Help yourself to these cigars," said Warrington gratefully, passing the box.

Bill took three.

"Good night, Richard."

"Good night, Mr. Osborne. If by any good luck I become mayor of Herculaneum, I'll not forget your service to−night."

"That's all that's necessary for me;" and Bill bowed himself out. He layed his course for his familiar haunts.

Warrington turned to his work again. But the news he had just received disturbed all connected thought, so he put the manuscript away. So the first gun had been fired! They had sent a man to hunt up his past in New York. He looked back, searching this corner and that, but he could not recall anything that would serve McQuade's purpose. No man is totally free from folly. True, there was a time when he drank, but he had stopped that idiocy nearly two years before. This could not be tallied against him with effect. And, thank God, there had been no women. His gambling had been of the innocuous kind. Well, let them hunt; much good it would do them.

He picked up the letter which Osborne had so fortunately come upon. He was often amused at the fascination it held for him. He would never meet the writer, and yet not a day passed that he did not strive to conjure up an

imaginative likeness. And he had nearly lost it. The creases were beginning to show. He studied it thoroughly. He held it toward the light. Ah, here was something that had hitherto escaped his notice. It was a peculiar water−mark. He examined the folds. The sheet had not been folded originally, letter−wise, but had been fiat, as if torn from a tablet. He scrutinized the edges and found signs of mucilage. Here was something, but it led him to no solution. The post−office mark had been made in New York. To trace a letter in New York would be as impracticable as subtracting gold from sea−water. It was a tantalizing mystery, and it bothered him more than he liked to confess. He put the letter in his wallet, and went into the sewing−room, where his aunt was knitting. The dear old lady smiled at him.

"Aunty, I've got a secret to tell you."

"What is it, Richard?"

"I'm going to run for mayor."

The old lady dropped her work and held up her hands in horror.

"You are fooling, Richard!"

"I am very serious, Aunty."

"But politicians are such scamps, Richard."

"Somebody's got to reform them."

"But they'll reform you into one of their kind. You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do. I've promised, and I can't back down now."

"No good will come of it," said the old lady prophetically, reaching down for her work. "But if you are determined, I suppose it's no use for me to talk. What will the Benningtons say?"

"They rather approve of the idea. I'm going up there early to−morrow. I'll be up before you're down. Good night." He lightly kissed the wrinkled face.

"Have a good time, Richard; and God bless my boy."

He paused on the threshold and came back. Why, he did not know. But having come back, he kissed her once again, his hands on her cheeks. There were tears in her eyes.

"You're so kind and good to an old woman, Richard."

"Pshaw! there's nobody your equal in all the world. Good night;" and he stepped out into the hall.

The next morning he left town for the Benningtons' bungalow in the Adirondacks. He carried his fishing−rods, for Patty had told him that their lake was alive with black bass. Warrington was an ardent angler. Rain might deluge him, the sun scorch, but he would sit in a boat all day for a possible strike. He arrived at two in the afternoon, and found John, Kate and Patty at the village station. A buckboard took them into the heart of the forest, and the penetrating, resinous perfumes tingled Warrington's nostrils. He had been in the woods in years gone by; not a tree or a shrub that he did not know. It was nearly a two hours' drive to the lake, which was circled by lordly mountains.

"Isn't it beautiful?" asked Patty, with a kind of proprietary pride.

"It is as fine as anything in the Alps," Warrington admitted. "Shall we go a−fishing in the morning?"

"If you can get up early enough."

"Trust me!" enthusiastically.

"I netted one this morning that weighed three pounds."

"Fish grow more rapidly out of water than in," railingly.

"John, didn't that bass weigh three pounds?" Patty appealed.

"It weighed three and a half."

"I apologize," said Warrington humbly.

"How's the politician?" whispered Kate, eagerly.

"About to find himself in the heart of a great scandal. The enemy has located us, and this afternoon the Times is to come out with a broadside. I haven't the least idea what it will say, nor care."

"That's the proper way to talk," replied Kate approvingly. "We climbed that bald mountain yesterday. Patty took some beautiful photographs."

"The tip of your nose is beginning to peel," said Warrington irrelevantly.

"It's horrid of you to mention it. I'm not used to the sun, but I love it. Patty is teaching me how to bait a hook."

"I'd like to see a photograph of that," Warrington cried. "Say, John, is there any way of getting to−night's

newspapers up here?"

"Nothing till to−morrow morning. The boat leaves the mail at night. But what's this talk about politics?" John demanded.

Warrington looked at Patty and Kate in honest amazement.

"Do you two mean to tell me," he asked, "that you have really kept the news from John?"

"You told us not to tell," said Kate reproachfully.

"Well, I see that I shall never get any nearer the truth about women. I thought sure they'd tell you, Jack, that I'm going to run for mayor this fall."

"No!"

"Truth. And it's going to be the fight of my life. I accepted in the spirit of fun, but I am dead in earnest now. Whichever way it goes, it will be a good fight. And you may lay to that, my lad, as our friend Long John Silver used to say."

He said nothing, however, of his interview with McQuade. That was one of the things he thought best to keep to himself.

"I'll harangue the boys in the shops," volunteered John, "though there's a spirit of unrest I don't like. I've no doubt that before long I shall have a fight on my hands. But I shall know exactly what to do," grimly. "But hang business! These two weeks are going to be totally outside the circle of business. I hope you'll win, Dick. We'll burn all the stray barrels for you on election night."

"There'll be plenty of them burning. But I shall be nervous till I see the Times."

"You'll have it in the morning."

Warrington sighed. Half an hour later the bungalow came into view.

The elder Bennington knew the value of hygienic living. He kept his children out of doors, summer and winter. He taught them how to ride, to hunt, to fish; he was their partner in all out−of−door games; he made sport interesting and imparted to them his own zest and vitality. So they grew up strong and healthy. He left their mental instruction to the mother, knowing full well that she would do as much on her side as he had done on his. Only one law did he lay down: the children should go to public schools till the time for higher education arrived. Then they might choose whatever seat of learning they desired. He had the sound belief that children sent to private schools rarely become useful citizens.

The rosal glow of dawn tipped the mountains, and a russet haze lay on the still bosom of the lake. Warrington made a successful cast not far from the lily−pods. Zing! went the reel. But by the pressure of his thumb he brought the runaway to a sudden halt. The tip of the rod threatened to break! Hooked! Patty swung round the canoe, which action gave the angler freer play. Ah, wasn't that beautiful! Two feet out of the water! Here he comes, but not more swiftly than the reel can take him. Off he goes again—take care for the unexpected slack. Another leap, like a bronze flame, and then a dash for the shallow bottom. He fought gallantly for his life and freedom. Patty reached for the net. Inch by inch Warrington drew him in. Twice he leaped over the net, but Patty was an old hand. The third effort landed him.

"Two pounds," said Patty. "Plenty for breakfast now."

"Tell you what, this is sport. How many have we?"

"Seven in half an hour." Patty began using her paddle.

"Finest sport in the world!" Warrington settled down on the cushion and leisurely watched the brown arms of his guide.

"You're a good fisherman. And I like to see a good fisherman get excited. John is like a statue when he gets a strike; he reels them in like a machine. He becomes angry if any one talks. But it's fun to watch Kate. She nearly falls out of the boat, and screams when the bass leaps. Isn't it beautiful?"

"It is a kind of Eden. But I'm so restless. I have to be wandering from place to place. If I owned your bungalow, I should sell it the second year. All the charm would go the first season. God has made so many beautiful places in this world for man that man is the only ungrateful creature in it. What's that smoke in the distance?"

"That's the mail−boat, with your newspaper. It will be two hours yet before it reaches our dock. It has to zigzag to and fro across the lake. I'm hungry."

"So am I. Let me take the paddle."

The exchange was made, and he sent the canoe over the water rapidly. Patty eyed him with frank admiration.

"Is there anything you can't do well?"

"A good many things," he acknowledged.

"I should like to know what they are."

Neither spoke again till the canoe glided around the dock and a landing was made. Warrington strung the fish, and together he and Patty went toward the kitchen. At seven−thirty the family sat down to a breakfast of fried bass, and Patty told how the catch had been made.

"He's a better fisherman than you, John."

"Just as you say, Patty. I care not who catches bass, so long as I may eat them," in humorous paraphrase.

There was no little excitement over the arrival of the mail−boat. They were all eager to see what the Times had to say. There was a column or more on the first page, subheaded. Warrington's career was rather accurately portrayed, but there were some pungent references to cabbages. In the leader, on the editorial page, was the master−hand.

"In brief, this young man is to be the Republican candidate for mayor. Grown desperate these half−dozen years of ineffectual striving for political pap, Senator Henderson resorts to such an expedient. But the coup falls flat; there will be no surprise at the convention; the senator loses the point he seeks to score. Personally, we have nothing to say against the character of Mr. Warrington. After a fashion he is a credit to his native town. But we reaffirm, he is not a citizen, he is not eligible to the high office. If he accepts, after this arraignment, he becomes nothing more than an impertinent meddler. What has he done for the people of Herculaneum? Nothing. Who knows anything about his character, his honor, his worth? Nobody. To hold one's franchise as a citizen does not make that person a citizen in the honest sense of the word. Let Mr. Warrington live among us half a dozen years, and then we shall see. The senator, who is not without some wisdom and experience, will doubtless withdraw this abortive candidate. It's the only logical thing he can do. We dare say that the dramatist accepted the honor with but one end in view: to find some material for a new play. But Herculaneum declines to be so honored. He is legally, but not morally, a citizen. He is a meddler, and Herculaneum is already too well supplied with meddlers. Do the wise thing, Mr. Warrington; withdraw. Otherwise your profit will be laughter and ridicule; for the Republican party can never hope to win under such equivocal leadership. That's all we have to say."

Warrington, who had been reading the articles aloud, grinned and thrust the paper into his pocket.

"What shall you do?" asked John curiously.

"Do? Go into the fight tooth and nail. They dub me a meddler; I'll make the word good."

"Hurrah!" cried Kate, clapping her hands. She caught Patty in her arms, and the two waltzed around the dock.

The two men shook hands, and presently all four were reading their private letters. Warrington received but one. It was a brief note from the senator. "Pay no attention to Times' story. Are you game for a fight? Write me at once, and I'll start the campaign on the receipt of your letter."

"Patty, where do you write letters?" he asked. He called her Patty quite naturally. Patty was in no wise offended.

"In the reading−room you will find a desk with paper and pens and ink. Shall I go with you?"

"Not at all. I've only a note to scribble to Senator Henderson."

Warrington found the desk. Upon it lay a tablet. He wrote hurriedly:

"Start your campaign; I am in it now to the last ditch."

As he re−read it, he observed a blur in the grain of the paper. On closer inspection he saw that it was a water−mark. He had seen one similar, but where? His heart began thumping his ribs. He produced the inevitable letter. The water−mark was identical. He even laid the letter unfolded on the tablet. It fitted exactly.

"Patty!" he murmured in a whisper.

Patty had never written him a single line; whenever she had communicated to him her commands, it had been by telephone. Patty Bennington! The window was at his elbow. He looked out and followed the sky−line of the hills as they rolled away to the south. Patty! It was a very beautiful world, and this was a day of days. It all came to him in that moment of discovery. He had drifted along toward it quite unconsciously, as a river might idle toward the sea. Patty! The light of this knowledge was blinding for a space. So Warrington came into his own romance. It was not the grand passion, which is always meteoric; it was rather like a new star, radiant, peaceful, eternal.

"Patty!" He smiled.

Chapter X

It was only when the whistle of the returning boat sounded close by that he realized he had been sitting there for nearly an hour. He roused himself, sealed and addressed his letter to the senator, and hurried down to the dock. Patty was alone, mending some tackle.

"It must be a long letter," she remarked, standing up and shaking her skirts.

"Why, this is only the beginning of it," he replied ambiguously. "It is never going to end."

"Mercy! It must be a postscript."

He had no retort handy, so he contented himself with watching the approach of the boat.

"Some men are never satisfied," she said owlishly. "If I were a successful dramatist, such as you are, a public office would look rather tawdry."

"But it's real, Patty; it's life and not mummery."

"I don't know," doubtfully; "from what I have read, there are more puppets in and about a City Hall than ever dangled in the puppet booth. Did I give you permission to call me Patty?" demurely.

"Not that I recollect." The boat came sweeping up to the dock, and he tossed the senator's letter to the boy. The boat went on with a musical gurgle. "But when I especially like anything, I usually appropriate it."

"I can see that you will make a good politician."

He laughed happily.

"Evidently you like the name. You have applied it to me three times this morning."

"Like it? Why, I think it is the most charming name I ever heard. It smells of primroses, garden−walls, soldiers in ragged regimentals, of the time when they built houses with big−columned porches."

"My!"

"May I not call you Patty?"

"Oh, if you ask my permission, you may."

"I do."

"That is better."

"Patty?"

"Well."

"Do you ever look in your mirror?"

"The idea! Of course I do. I look in it every morning and every night. And as often as I find the time. Why?"

"Nothing; only, I do not blame you."

"What's all this leading to?" frowning.

"Heaven knows! But I feel sentimental this morning. There is so much beauty surrounding me that I feel impelled to voice my appreciation of it."

"There is no remedy, I suppose."

"None, save the agony of extemporization."

"I have never heard you talk like this before. What IS the matter?"

"Perhaps it is the exhilaration I feel for the coming fight. Would you like to see me mayor?"

"Indeed I should. Think of the circus tickets you'd have to give away each year! You know they always give the mayor a handful for his personal use. No, Mr. Warrington, I shall be very proud of you when you are mayor."

"What's the matter with your calling me Richard or Dick?"

"We must not advance too suddenly."

"Is there anything the matter with the name?"

"Oh, no; Richard is quite musical in its way. But I am always thinking of the humpbacked king. If I called you anything it would be Dick."

"Richard was not humpbacked. Moreover, he was a valiant king, greatly maligned by Mr. Shakespeare."

"I see that I shall not dare argue with you on the subject; but we can not banish on so short a notice the early impressions of childhood. Richard Third has always been a bugaboo to my mind. Some day, perhaps, I'll get over

it."

"Make it Dick, as a compromise."

"Some day, when I have known you a little longer. Has John ever told you about Mr. McQuade?"

"McQuade?" Warrington realized that he had been floating on a pleasant sea. He came upon the hidden shore rather soundly. "McQuade?" he repeated.

"Yes. He had the audacity to propose to mother shortly after father's death. Think of it! John wrote to him very definitely that his presence in the house would no longer be welcomed or tolerated. Father had some slight business transactions with Mr. McQuade, and he came up to the house frequently. He continued these visits after father's death. We treated him decently, but we simply could not make him feel welcome. The third time he called he proposed.

"Mother left the room without even replying. He understood. A few minutes afterward we heard the door slam. John wrote him the next morning. Did you ever hear of anything to equal the cold−bloodedness of it?"

Warrington looked at her in absolute amazement.

"Well, of all the nerve! Why the deuce didn't John punch his head?" savagely.

"Mr. McQuade is not a gentleman; John is," simply. "But Mr. McQuade hasn't forgotten; not he. He pays no attention to any of us; but that is no sign that he does not think a good deal. However, we do not worry. There is no possible chance for him to retaliate; at least John declares there isn't. But sometimes I grow afraid when I think it all over. To his mind I can see that he considers himself badly affronted; and from what I know of his history, he never lets an affront pass without striking back in some manner."

"Don't you worry your head about McQuade. What do you think? He is so anxious to get me out of the political arena that he has sent a man down to New York to look into my past. Isn't that droll?"

Patty stooped again to the fishing−tackle.

"Such men as McQuade can invent. I should be very careful, if I were you. Your own conscience may prove you guiltless of scandal, but there are certain people who would rather believe bad than good—scandal than truth; and these are always in the majority. Don't laugh, but watch. That's my advice to you, Mr. Meddler." She smiled brightly at him as she threaded the line through the guides of the rod.

"I may not have lived as cleanly as I might have," he said soberly. "I have been knocked about so much. There were times when I grew tired of fighting. But I have never done anything that will not stand daylight. There was a time, Patty, when I came near making a fool of myself." He sat down, his legs swinging over the water. "I drank more than was good for me. He stared into the brown water and watched the minnows as they darted hither and thither. "I was alone; things went wrong, and I was cowardly enough to fall into the habit. But it was only periodically. You remember that letter I showed you?"

"Yes." Patty's voice was low.

"I believe I have read it a thousand times. It has caused me a great many regrets. I should like, some day, to meet the writer and disillusion her. One thing she may be sure of: I have never belittled the talent God has given me. I have striven for the ideal; I have even fought for it. That part of my life holds no stain."

"But the habit?" hesitant.

"It is gone, where all fool−habits go, when a man has will power to rid himself of them. Pride has something to do with it; and I have my share of pride. I shall never go back."

His head was turned away, but she could see the muscles in the jaws harden.

"You will never go back, I am sure, Richard."

That she had at last pronounced his given name did not stir him; in fact, it passed over his head and hearing. Like a dragon−brood, he saw in fancy his past follies springing up about him. Not yet could he tell this clean−minded, gentle−bred girl that he loved her. He must prove himself still further before he might utter what so thoroughly filled his heart and mind.

"Your brother's wife brought me to my senses. What I am to−day she in part has made. That is why I think so much of her; that is why I am happy to see that she is happy and has realized her heart's desire. Heigh−ho! I believe I am making you my confessor." He turned his face toward her now, and his smile was rather sad. "When I recall the worry I have given my poor old aunt, who loves me so, I feel like a contemptible scoundrel. How many countless sacrifices has she made for me, in the days when we had nothing! But she shall have all the comforts now, and all the love and kindness I am capable of giving her. I shall never leave her again."

There were tears in Patty's eyes. "It is never too late to mend; and when a man is penitent, truly and honestly penitent, much shall be forgiven him. It is only those who are by nature coarse who do not eventually surmount temptation. What you have told me I have known this long while."

"You have known?" he cried with sinking heart.

"Yes. We live in a city where gossip travels quickly and thoroughly. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was telling mother one afternoon that you drank. I suppose she felt it her duty."

"To be sure," bitterly. "Was it while I have been living at home?"

"No; when the rumor came that you were coming."

He shrugged expressively. "I ought to have known."

"But come; you are up here to be cheered, not lectured. Let us play billiards. I can hear John and Kate playing now. We'll play sides; and if we win against those two, I promise to call you Richard once a day while you are up here. Or, would you rather I played and sang?"

"Much rather," brightening up a bit. "There is always time to play billiards. But first, I want you to come with me into the reading−room. I have something to show you; I had almost forgotten."

"The reading−room?" puzzled.

"Yes. Will you come?"

She nodded her assent, and the two entered the house. Warrington, having arrived at the writing−desk, bade her sit down. He had an idea. Patty sat down.

"I want you to write something for me," he said, pushing the pen and tablet toward her.

"What's the matter with your hand?" she demanded.

"Nothing."

"Then why do you want me to write?"

"I have never seen your handwriting. I'm something of an expert in that line. I'll read your future."

"But I don't want my future read," rebelliously.

"Well, then, your past."

"Much less my past. Come; you are only beating about the bush. What is it you want?"

"I want to know," he said quietly, "why you have kept me in ignorance all this while." He laid the letter on the desk, and placed a finger on the water−mark. "It wasn't fair to let me compose panegyrics over it all the while you were laughing in your sleeve. Ah, I've caught you. You can't get away this time, Patty."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about." But she looked at the letter and not at him.

"Do you see those water−marks?" he demanded.

"Yes. You will find them in a thousand tablets like this. I bought a dozen of them in New York; cheap and handy."

Warrington's confidence in his discovery began to shake. He braced himself and took a bold course.

"Patty, you wrote that letter; you know you did. You wrote it in New York, the day you bought the tablets."

"I?"

"Yes. Confess."

"My dear Mr. Warrington, you must prove it," lightly. "It would not be proper for me to admit that I had been so foolish as to write a letter like that."

"But you've praised it!"

"Simply because praising it would please you; for no other reason."

"Did you, or did you not write it?"

"Find out. You must prove that I wrote it. Certainly I have nothing to confess."

"You will not answer me one way or the other?"

"No."

"If you had not written it you would."

"I don't believe I shall sing this morning," rising.

"And I have wondered a thousand times who could have written it. And all the time it was you."

"Nor play billiards," went on Patty.

"If only I were all you hitherto believed me to be!"

"Nor fish to−morrow morning."

"This letter has been like an anchor. Immediately upon receiving it I began to try to live better."

"Nor fish the day after to−morrow."

"And I had forgotten all about Jack's having a sister!"

"Something I shall neither forget nor forgive. And if you persist in accusing me of writing that letter, I promise not to fish again while you are here." She walked toward the door, her chin held high.

"You wrote it. Come and sing. I'll say nothing more about it. There's nothing more to be said." He carelessly picked up a book and looked at the fly−leaf. "From Sister Patty to Brother John," he read. There was no mistake now. He laughed. Patty turned. "The writing is the same."

"Is it?"

"Will you sing?"

No answer.

"Please."

Patty stood between the door that led to the veranda and the door that led to the music−room—between Charybdis and Scylla, as it were, for she knew he would follow her whichever way she went. She turned into the music−room.

"Thanks," he said.

The days passed all too quickly for Warrington. He walked in the golden glow of his first romance, that romance which never leaves us till life itself departs. He spoke no word of his love, but at times there was something in his voice that thrilled Patty and subdued her elfish gaiety. Some girls would have understood at once, but Patty was different. She was happy one moment, and troubled the next, not knowing the reason. She was not analytical; there was no sophistry in her young heart. She did not dream that this man loved her; she was not vain enough for that.

John and Kate watched them approvingly. They knew the worth of the man; they were not at all worried over what was past. They saw their own romance tenderly reflected. Mrs. Bennington was utterly oblivious. Mothers never realize that their daughters and sons must some day leave them; they refuse to accept this natural law; they lament over it to−day as they lamented in the days of the Old Testament. The truth is, children are always children to the parents; paternal and maternal authority believes its right indefinite.

By this time all the newspapers, save the Telegraph, had made readable copy out of Warrington's candidacy. Why the Telegraph remained mute was rather mystifying. Warrington saw the hand of McQuade in this. The party papers had to defend the senator, but their defense was not so strong as it might have been. Not a single sheet came out frankly for Warrington. The young candidate smoked his pipe and said nothing, but mentally he was rolling up his sleeves a little each day. He had not yet pulled through the convention. Strong as the senator was, there might yet be a hitch in the final adjustment. So far nothing had come of Bolles' trip to New York. Occasionally newspapers from the nearby towns fell into Warrington's hands. These spoke of his candidacy in the highest terms, and belabored the editors of Herculaneum for not accepting such a good chance of ridding itself of McQuadeism.

Meantime, there was fishing, long trips into the heart of the forests, dancing at the hotel at the head of the lake, billiards and music. Warrington was already deeply tanned, and Patty's nose was liberally sprinkled with golden freckles.

One evening Kate and John sat on the veranda from where they could easily watch Warrington and Patty in the music−room.

"What do you think of it, John?"

"There's not a finer chap in the world. But I don't think Patty realizes yet."

"Dear Patty!" Kate reached over and took his hand in hers, laying it against her cold cheek. "What is it, John? You have been worried all day."

"Nothing; nothing to bother you with."

"The shops? It worries me when you don't confide in me in everything."

"Well, dear, the trouble I've been expecting for months is about to come. You know that young Chittenden, the English inventor, has been experimenting with a machine that will do the work of five men. They have been trying to force him to join the union, but he has refused, having had too many examples of unionism in his own country to risk his independence here. Well, I received a letter from the general manager this morning. Either

Chittenden must join or go; otherwise the men will go out September first."

"What shall you do?"

"I shall keep Chittenden. I am master there," striking the arm of his chair; "master in everything. If they go out in September, it will be for good. I shall tear down the shops and build model tenements."

"John!"

"I am sick and tired, dear. I have raised the wages all over the district; my men work less than any other hands in town. I have built a gymnasium for them, given them books, pool−tables, and games, to say nothing of the swimming−tank. I have arranged the annual outings. I have established a pension−list. But all this seems to have done no good. I am at the end of the rope. Oh, the poor devils who work are all right; it's the men outside who are raising all this trouble; it's the union, not the men. There's no denying the power these men can wield, for wrong or right. Ignorance can not resist the temptation to use it at all times and for all purposes. But I am master at the Bennington shops; injustice shall not dictate to me. They'll use it politically, too. After all, I'm glad I've told you."

"But, John, I'm afraid for you. They may hurt you."

John answered with a sound that was more of a growl than a laugh.

"Don't you worry about me, honey; I'm no weakling. I wish Dick could be with me when the fight comes, but he will have his hands full, and the strike will not help him any. Don't you worry. Father always felt that there would be trouble some day. He held a large bundle of bank−stock and railroad bonds, and the income from these alone will take care of us very comfortably. There's a good deal of real estate, too, that may be reckoned on. If the crash does come, we'll pack up, take the mother, and go abroad for a year or so. But before I'm done I'll teach local unionism a lesson it will not forget soon. Don't you worry," he repeated again; "you just leave it to me."

She did not speak, but kissed his hand. She knew that no pleading could move him; and besides, he was in the right.

"I don't understand the lukewarmness of the party papers," he said. "They ought to hurrah over Dick. But perhaps the secret machinery is being set to work, and they've been told that there will be trouble at the convention. The senator never backs down, and I've never seen anybody that could frighten Dick. There'll be some interesting events this fall. Herculaneum will figure in the newspapers from Maine to California, for everybody is familiar with Warrington's name and work. It's a month yet before the delegates get together; either Warrington will run or he won't. Calling him a meddler is good. If the Times isn't a meddler, I never saw one and have misunderstood the meaning of the word."

In the music−room Patty was playing Grieg and MacDowell, and Warrington was turning the pages. The chords, weird and melancholy, seemed to permeate his whole being; sad, haunting music, that spoke of toil, tears, death and division, failure and defeat, hapless love and loveless happiness. After a polonaise, Patty stopped.

"If music were only lasting, like a painting, a statue, a book," she said; "but it isn't. Why these things haunt me every day, but I can recollect nothing; I have to come back to the piano. It is elusive."

"And the most powerful of all the arts that arouse the emotions. Hang it! when I hear a great singer, a great violinist, half the time I find an invisible hand clutching me by the throat ... Patty, honestly now, didn't you write that letter?"

"Yes," looking him courageously in the eyes. "And I hope you were not laughing when you said all those kind things about it."

"Laughing? No," gravely, "I was not laughing. Play something lively; Chaminade; I am blue to−night."

So Patty played the light, enchanting sketches. In the midst of one of them she stopped suddenly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought I heard the boat's whistle. Listen. Yes, there it is. It must be a telegram. They never come up to the head of the lake at night for anything less. There goes John with a lantern."

"Never mind the telegram," he said; "play."

A quarter of an hour later John and Kate came in.

"A telegram for you, Dick," John announced, sending the yellow envelope skimming through the air.

Warrington caught it deftly. He balanced it in his hand speculatively.

"It is probably a hurry−call from the senator. I may have to go back to town to−morrow. I have always hated telegrams."

He opened it carelessly and read it. He read it again, slowly; and Patty, who was nearest to him, saw his face

turn gray under the tan and his lips tremble. He looked from one to the other dumbly, then back at the sheet in his hand.

"Richard!" said Kate, with that quick intuition which leaps across chasms of doubt and arrives definitely.

"My aunt died this afternoon," he said, his voice breaking, for he had not the power to control it.

Nobody moved; a kind of paralysis touched them all.

"She died this afternoon, and I wasn't there." There is something terribly pathetic in a strong man's grief.

"Dick!" John rushed to his side. "Dick, old man, there must be some mistake."

He seized the telegram from Warrington's nerveless fingers. There was no mistake. The telegram was signed by the family physician. Then John did the kindliest thing in his power.

"Do you wish to be alone, Dick?"

Warrington nodded. John laid the telegram on the table, and the three of them passed out of the room. A gust of wind, coming down from the mountains, carried the telegram gently to the floor. Warrington, leaning against the table, stared down at it.

What frightful things these missives are! Charged with success or failure, riches or poverty, victory or defeat, births or deaths, they fly to and fro around the great world hourly, on ominous and sinister wings. A letter often fails to reach us, but a telegram, never. It is the messenger of fate, whose emissaries never fail to arrive.

Death had never before looked into Warrington's life; he had viewed it with equanimity, with a tolerant pity for those who succumbed to it, for those whose hearts it ravaged with loneliness and longing. He had used it frequently in his business as a property by which to arouse the emotions of his audiences. That it should some day stand at his side, looking into his eyes, never occurred to him. He tried to think, to beguile himself into the belief that he should presently awake to find it a dream. Futile expedient! She was dead; that dear, kind, loving heart was dead. Ah! and she had died alone! A great sob choked him. He sank into a chair and buried his face in his arms. The past rushed over him like a vast wave. How many times had he carelessly wounded that heart which had beat solely for him! How many times had he given his word, only to break it! He was alone, alone; death had severed the single tie; he was alone. Death is kind to the dead, but harsh to the living. Presently his sighs became less regular, and at length they ceased entirely.

The portiere rustled slightly, and Patty's face became visible. Her eyes were wet. She had tried to keep away, but something drew her irresistibly. Her heart swelled. If only she might touch his bowed head, aye, kiss the touches of grey at the temples; if only she might console him in this hour of darkness and grief. Poor boy, poor boy! She knew not how long she watched him; it might have been minutes or hours; she was without recollection of time. A hand touched her gently on the arm. Kate stood by her side.

"Come," she whispered; "come, Patty."

Patty turned without question or remonstrance and followed her up stairs.

"Kate, dear Kate!"

"What is it, darling?"

"He is all alone!"

At midnight John tiptoed into the music−room. Warrington had not moved. John tapped him on the shoulder.

"You mustn't stay here, old man. Come to bed."

Warrington stood up.

"Would you like a drop of brandy?"

Warrington shook his head.

"It is terribly hard," said John, throwing his arm across the other's shoulders. "I know; I understand. You are recalling all the mistakes, all the broken promises, all the disappointments. That is but natural. But in a few days all the little acts of kindness will return to your memory; all the good times you two have had together, the thousand little benefits that made her last days pleasant. These will soften the blow, Dick."

"I wasn't there," Warrington murmured dully. His mind could accept but one fact: his aunt had died alone, without his being at the bedside.

It rained in Herculaneum that night. The pavement in Williams Street glistened sharply, for a wind was swinging the arc−lamps. The trees on the Warrington lawn sighed incessantly; and drip, drip, drip, went the rain on the leaves. Not a light shone anywhere in the house; total darkness brooded over it. In one of the rooms a dog lay with his nose against the threshold of the door. From time to time he whined mournfully. In another room an

Angora cat stalked restlessly back and forth, sometimes leaping upon a chair, sometimes trotting round and round, and again, wild−eyed and furtive, it stood motionless, as if listening. Death had entered the house; and death, to the beast, is not understandable.

Chapter XI

Everybody had gone down the winding road to the granite entrance of the cemetery; the minister, the choir, the friends and those who had come because they reveled in morbid scenes. These were curious to see how Warrington was affected, if he showed his grief or contained it, so that they might have something to talk about till some one else died. There are some people in this merry world of ours who, when they take up the evening paper, turn first to the day's death notices; who see no sermons in the bright flowers, the birds and butterflies, the misty blue hills, the sunshine, who read no lesson in beauty, who recognize no message in the moon and the stars, in cheerfulness and good humor. On the contrary, they seem to abhor the sunshine; they keep their parlors for ever in musty darkness, a kind of tomb where they place funeral wreaths under glass globes and enter but half a dozen times a year. Well, even these had finally dragged themselves away from the grave, and left Warrington standing alone beside the brown roll of damp fresh earth. No carriage awaited him, for he had signified his intention of walking home.

All about him the great elms and maples and oaks showed crisp against the pale summer sky. Occasionally a leaf fell. A red squirrel chattered above him, and an oriole sang shrilly and joyously near by. The sun was reddening in the west, and below, almost at his feet, the valley swam in a haze of delicate amethyst. The curving stream glittered. From where he stood he could see them bundling up the sheaves of wheat. All these things told him mutely that the world was going on the same as ever; nothing had changed. In the city men and women were going about their affairs as usual; the smoke rolled up from the great chimneys. When all is said, our griefs and joys are wholly our own; the outsider does not participate.

Yes, the world went on just the same. Death makes a vacancy, but the Great Accountant easily fills it; and the summing up of balances goes on. Let us thank God for the buoyancy of the human spirit, which, however sorely tried, presently rises and assumes its normal interest in life.

Warrington looked dreamily at the grave, and the philosopher in him speculated upon the mystery of it. Either the grave is Heaven or it is nothing; one can proceed no farther. If there was a Heaven (and in the secret corner of his heart he believed there was), a new star shone in the sky at night, a gentle, peaceful star. Just now the pain came in the knowledge that she was gone; later the actual absence would be felt. For a month or so it would seem that she had gone on a journey; he would find himself waiting and watching; but as the weeks and months went by, and he heard not her step nor her voice, then would come the real anguish. They tell us that these wounds heal; well, maybe; but they open and reopen and open again till that day we ourselves cease to take interest in worldly affairs.

He stooped and picked up one of the roses which she had held in her hand. Reverently he pressed his lips to it and put it away in his wallet. Then he turned and went slowly down the hill. He had never really known her till these last few months; not till now did he realize how closely knit together had been their lives and affections. He lighted a cigar, and with his hands behind his back and his chin in his collar, he continued to the gates. The old care−taker opened and closed the gates phlegmatically. Day by day they came, and one by one they never went out again. To him there was neither joy nor grief; if the grass grew thick and the trees leaved abundantly, that was all he desired.

It was a long walk to Williams Street, and he was tired when he entered the house. Jove leaped upon him gladly. Warrington held the dog's head in his hands and gazed into the brown eyes. Here was one that loved him, wholly and without question. You will always find some good in the man who retains the affection of his dog. In good times or bad, they are stanch friends; and they are without self−interest, which is more than human. In the living−room he found the Angora curled up on a sofa−cushion. He smoothed her, and she stretched her lithe body luxuriously and yawned. There is no other animal which so completely interprets the word indifference. Warrington wondered what he should do with her, for he was not very fond of cats. But his aunt had loved her, so he passed on to the dining−room without deciding what to do.

It was a lonely supper. He kept his eyes on his plate as well as he could; for whenever he saw the back of her chair, his food choked him. He wondered why he did not take the decanter of whisky down from the sideboard; a

generous tumblerful. ... No. This was the first time in months that the desire to drink deeply came to him. No; he would leave it there. Supper done, he went to his den and took down a book. Could he live here now? He doubted it, for it was a house of empty doors. He settled himself in a chair and turned the pages of the book to a place he loved well. It was where D'Artagnan, representing Planchet and Company, returns to the grocer with the bags of English gold which, for several good reasons, Charles Second has given him for General Monk's sword. He was well along toward the fainting of the honest Planchet on the money−bags, when the telephone rang. He took up the receiver.

"Well?"

"Mama wants you to come over and spend the night with us. John and Kate will be here, too."

He recognized Patty's voice.

"I shall be very glad to," he replied. "Good−by." He rang for Mary, who came in, her eyes red and swollen; Poor soul, she had also lost her best friend. "I am going over to the Benningtons' to spend the night, Mary.

"Very well, sir; just as you think best."

The Benningtons were very kind to him. They engaged his interest the moment he entered the house. They talked of a thousand and one things diverting: the foreign news, the political outlook, the September horse−show at which Patty would ride and jump, what was contemplated in society for the fall and winter, the ice−carnival, and the engagements.

"Why don't you enter your Irish hunter?" asked John, when the talk veered around to horses again.

"I ride for the mere pleasure of it," replied Warrington; "or, if you will, I'm too lazy to learn the judges' catechism."

Presently they had him telling how he had written his first play, and how completely Mrs. Jack had fooled him on their first meeting.

"No, I have not the slightest desire to return to the stage," said Mrs. Jack, in answer to a casual inquiry made by Warrington.

"Not while I'm around," supplemented John.

"Why, nothing could lure me back to it," Mrs. Jack declared emphatically. "I am happy. I am very happy. I have nothing to wish for, save that my happiness may endure."

Mrs. Bennington, who had long since grown to love her daughter−in−law, smiled benignly.

"You will always be happy, my dear; you were born to be. It is the just reward for making those around you happy."

"Patty," said Warrington, "would you like the Angora?"

"I should love it dearly."

"Then I'll send it over to you in the morning."

And that was as near as they approached the subject they were tacitly avoiding.

At a quarter of nine, to the consternation of every one, Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was announced.

"Take me up stairs to the billiard−room," said Warrington; "I am not in the mood to meet that woman to−night."

"Come on, then," cried John, willing enough. "There's the servants' stairs. I'll give you a handicap of twenty in a hundred points."

"I'll beat you at those odds."

"That remains to be seen."

And the two hurried up the stairs just as the hall−door closed. The billiard−room was situated at the head of the front stairs. Warrington won the bank, and he ran a score of ten. While he was chalking his cue he heard voices.

"It is very sad." It was Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene talking. "We shall miss her in church work. It is a severe blow to Mr. Warrington."

"That was a good draw, John. Three cushions this time. Good. You're playing strong to−night."

"Did you think to bring over your pajamas?" John asked irrelevantly.

Warrington smiled in spite of himself.

"I forgot all about them," he admitted.

"Thought you would, so I brought over two sets. We're about the same size. Pshaw! that was an easy one,

too."

Warrington missed his shot; He heard voices again.

"And I want you to help me." It was Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene again. "We shall reorganize the Woman's Auxiliary Republican Club, and we shall need you. It is principally for that that I came over."

"I take very little interest in anything outside my home," replied Mrs. Bennington.

"Did you get that?" whispered John, as he drew back for a carom.

"But this is very important for the city's welfare," pursued Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene.

"I doubt it. So long as we do not vote—"

"That's just it. We can't vote, but we can get together and control the male vote in the family. That's something."

John grinned at Warrington, who replied with a shrug.

"And they all call me the meddler!" he said.

"What's the matter with your staying on here a few days, Dick?"

"I should be nothing but a bother to you."

"Rot! You can't stay alone over there."

"I'll have to; I can't leave those poor old souls alone. They are broken−hearted. I sent her two hundred every month regularly, just for pin−money; and what do you think she did with it? Hoarded it up and willed something like two thousand to Mary and her husband. I'm all in, Dick. But go on; I'll finish the game."

"All right. But whenever you feel lonesome, come here or over to my house. There'll always be a spare room for you in either house."

"It's mighty kind of you, John. My shot?" Warrington ran four and missed.

Voices again.

"I never believe what I hear, and only half of what I see." That was Mrs. Jack speaking.

Murmurs. The billiard−balls clicked sharply as John played for position.

"The stage doesn't appeal to you any more, then?" Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene.

"Not in the least. It never did appeal to me. I am so far away from it now that I am losing the desire to witness plays."

"And for whom will Mr. Warrington write his plays now?"

"The vacancy I made has long ago been filled. I was but one in a thousand to interpret his characters. There is always a lack of plays, but never of actors."

"Excuse me for a moment." It was Patty this time.

"Certainly, my dear."

Warrington heard nothing more for several minutes.

"Is it true what I hear about Patty and that rich young Mr. Whiteland, of New York?"

"What is it that you have heard?"

"Why, that their engagement is about to be announced."

Warrington stood perfectly still. Whiteland had been a guest at the Adirondack bungalow earlier in the summer. He waited for the answer, and it seemed to him that it would never come.

"I am not engaged to any one, Mrs. Haldene, and I hope you will do me the favor to deny the report whenever you come across it." Patty had returned. "It seems incredible that a young man may not call upon a young woman without their names becoming coupled matrimonially."

"Nevertheless, he is regarded as extremely eligible."

"I have often wondered over Haldene's regular Saturday night jag at the club," said John, stringing his count, "but I wonder no longer. They say she never goes out Saturdays."

Warrington heard the words, but the sense of them passed by. He could realize only one thing, and that was, he loved Patty better than all the world. He could accept his own defeat with philosophy, but another man's success!—could he accept that? How strangely everything had changed in the last few days! He had never known real mental anguish; heartaches in others had always afforded him mild amusement and contempt. It was one thing, he reflected, to write about human emotions; it was entirely another thing to live and act them. He saw that his past had been full of egotism and selfishness, but he also saw that his selfishness was of the kind that has its foundation in indifference and not in calculation. The voices went on down stairs, but he ceased to pay any

attention to them.

"John, there's been something in my mind for many months."

"What is it?"

"Do you recollect the night you came into my rooms in New York?"

"I shall never forget it," quietly.

"Your wife was there."

"I know it. I found her gloves." He made a difficult masse. "She told me all about it. At the time, however, I had a pretty bad case of heart−trouble. But I understand. She was in the habit of dropping in on you. Why not? Your cooperation made you both famous. A man in love finds all sorts of excuses for jealousy. But I'm glad you've spoken. I can readily understand how you felt when you found the gloves gone.

"You're a good man, John," said Warrington.

"Kate loves me; it ought to make any man good to have a wife who loves him. I have no use for a man who sees evil in everything and good in nothing. Say no more about it, boy."

"I hadn't seen you in so long that I was confused. If I had reflected ... But you see, I didn't know that you were engaged, or even that you knew her. I never understood, until you were gone, why she wanted to hide herself. I'm glad I've relieved my mind." Warrington sighed.

"It's all right. There! I told you that I'd win even at those odds."

Presently they heard a stir down stairs. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was going. The door closed. The family came up to the billiard−room. Warrington looked at Patty, whose cheeks were flushed and whose eyes flashed.

"Why, what's the matter, Pat?" John asked.

"Nothing."

"Mrs. Haldene has been making herself useful as usual," said Mrs. Jack, slipping her arm around Patty's waist.

Patty was in a rage about something; nobody seemed to know what it was.

"You are not going to join the Auxiliary, are you, mother?" John inquired, putting the cues in the rack.

"Indeed I am not. The men in my family always used their own judgment in politics. They have always been Whigs or Republicans."

"Did you ever meet a woman, Dick, who was a Democrat?" laughed John.

"Perhaps," was the reply, "but it has escaped my recollection."

But he was thinking: after all, he had a right to win Patty if he could. It was not what he had done in the past, it was what he was capable of doing from now on that counted.

"You're going to have a stiff fight at the convention," said John.

"I know it. But a fight of any kind will keep my mind occupied. The senator has assured me that I shall get the nomination."

On the way home Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene saw the flutter of a white dress on the Wilmington−Fairchilds' veranda. She couldn't resist, so she crossed the lawn and mounted the veranda steps. She did not observe her husband in the corner, smoking with the master of the house.

"I've been over to the Benningtons'," she began, rather breathless.

"What's the news?"

"There is no truth in the report of Patty's engagement to young Whiteland."

"There isn't? Well, there ought to be, after the way they went around together last winter."

"She told me so herself," Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene declared emphatically. "Do you know what I believe?"

"No," truthfully.

"I've an idea that Patty is inclined toward that fellow Warrington."

"You don't mean it!"

"He's always around there. He must have thought a great deal of his aunt. She was buried to−day, and there he is, playing billiards with John Bennington. If that isn't heartlessness!"

"What do you want a man to do?" growled her husband from behind his cigar. "Sit in a dark room and wring his hands all day, like a woman? Men have other things to do in life than mourn the departed."

"Franklyn? I didn't see you."

"You seldom do."

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene at once plunged into a discussion of fashion, the one thing that left her husband high

and dry, so far as his native irony was concerned.

That same night McQuade concluded some interesting business. He possessed large interests in the local breweries. Breweries on the average do not pay very good dividends on stock, so the brewer often establishes a dozen saloons about town to help the business along. McQuade owned a dozen or more of these saloons, some in the heart of the city, some in the outlying wards of the town. He conducted the business with his usual shrewdness. The saloons were all well managed by Germans, who, as a drinking people, are the most orderly in the world. It was not generally known that McQuade was interested in the sale of liquors. His name was never mentioned in connection with the saloons.

One of these saloons was on a side street. The back door of it faced the towpath. It did not have a very good reputation; and though, for two years, no disturbances had occurred there, the police still kept an eye on the place. It was on the boundary line of the two most turbulent wards in the city. To the north was the Italian colony, to the south was the Irish colony. Both were orderly and self−respecting as a rule, though squalor and poverty abounded. But these two races are at once the simplest and most quick−tempered, and whenever an Irishman or an Italian crossed the boundary line there was usually a hurry call for the patrol wagon, and some one was always more or less battered up.

Over this saloon was a series of small rooms which were called "wine rooms," though nobody opened wine there. Beer was ten cents a glass up stairs, and whisky twenty. Women were not infrequently seen climbing the stairs to these rooms. But, as already stated, everybody behaved. Schmuck, who managed the saloon, was a giant of a man, a Turnvereiner, who could hold his own with any man in town. It will be understood that the orderliness was therefore due to a respect for Schmuck's strength, and not to any inclination to be orderly.

On this night, then, at nine o'clock, a man entered and approached the bar. He was sharp−eyed, lean−faced, with a heavy blue beard closely shaven, saving the mustache, which was black and hung over the man's lips. He wore good clothes. There was a large diamond on one of his fingers and another in the bosom of his shirt, in which a white tie was tucked carefully. They were yellow diamonds. But those among whom this man moved did not know the difference between yellow stones and white. Morrissy was accounted very well−to−do.

"Hello, Schmuck!" he hailed. "Got the room up stairs in order?"

"Yes." Schmuck wiped the bar. "Der poss iss coming to−night, I see. Huh?"

"Yes. He ought to be along now," replied Morrissy, glancing at his watch, which was as conspicuous as his yellow diamonds.

"How you getting along mit der poys?"

"Oh, we're coming along fine, all right."

"Going to call 'em out uf der mills? Huh?"

"Perhaps. When the boss comes, tell him I'm up stairs."

Morrissy lighted a cigar, took the evening papers from the end of the bar, and disappeared. Schmuck could hear him moving the chairs about. Ten minutes later McQuade appeared. Schmuck nodded toward the stairs, and without a word McQuade went up.

"Good evening, Morrissy. I missed a car, or I'd have been here earlier."

"That's all right, Mr. McQuade; glad to wait for you." Morrissy threw aside his papers and drew his chair to the table.

McQuade closed the door and sat down.

"You got my letter?" he began, wiping his forehead.

Morrissy nodded.

"Well?"

"Well, the boys will go out Monday morning. A committee will wait on Bennington in the morning. He won't back down and discharge the English inventor, so it's a sure thing they'll walk out, every mother's son of them."

"On the morning they go out, I'll send you my check for five hundred."

"For the union?"

"I'll send it to you, and you can use it as you see fit. On Monday morning, then."

"Sure thing."

They smoked for a while. Suddenly McQuade laid a bulky envelope on the table, got up and went out. Morrissy weighed the envelope carefully, thrust it into his pocket, and also departed.

"Five hundred now, and five hundred on Monday. I can see him sending a check. It will be bills. Bah! I should have called out the boys anyhow."

McQuade hurried home. He had another appointment, vastly more important than the one he had just kept. Bolles had returned from New York. It was easy enough to buy a labor union, but it was a different matter to ruin a man of Warrington's note. Bolles had telegraphed that he would be in Herculaneum that night. That meant that he had found something worth while. Each time the car stopped to let passengers on or off, McQuade stirred restlessly. He jumped from the car when it reached his corner, and walked hurriedly down the street to his house, a big pile of red granite and an architectural nightmare. He rushed up the steps impatiently, applied his latch−key and pushed in the door. He slammed it and went directly to his study. Bolles was asleep in a chair. McQuade shook him roughly. Bolles opened his eyes.

"You've been on a drunk," said McQuade, quickly noting the puffed eyes and haggard cheeks.

"But I've got what I went after, all the same," replied Bolles truculently.

"What have you got? If you've done any faking, I'll break every bone in your body."

"Now, look here, Mr. McQuade; don't talk to me like that."

"What have you got, then?"

"Well, I've got something that's worth five hundred; that's what. I worked like a nigger for a month; pumped everybody that ever knew him. Not a blame thing, till night before last I ran into the janitor of the apartments where Warrington lived."

"Go on."

"He'd been fired, and I got him drunk. I asked him if any women had ever gone up to Warrington's rooms. One. He was sitting in the basement. It was a hot night, and he was sitting up because he could not sleep. At midnight a coupe drove up, and Warrington and a woman alighted. From the looks of things she was drunk, but he found out afterward that she was very sick. The woman remained in Warrington's apartments till the following morning."

"When was all this?"

"About four years ago. She left very early."

"Hell!" roared McQuade, doubling his fists. "And I've been sending you money every week for such news as this! I want something big, you fool! What earthly use is this information to me? I couldn't frighten Warrington with it."

"I haven't told you the woman's name yet," said Bolles, leering.

"The woman's name? What's that got to do with it?"

"A whole lot. It was Katherine Challoner, the actress, Bennington's wife; that's who it was!"

McQuade sat very still. So still, that he could hear the clock ticking in the parlor. Bennington's wife!

Chapter XII

The death of his aunt gave Warrington a longing for action—swift mental and physical action. To sit in that dark, empty house, to read or to write, was utterly impossible; nor had he any desire to take long rides into the country. His mind was never clearer than when he rode alone, and what he wanted was confusion, noise, excitement, struggle. So he made an appointment with Senator Henderson the next morning. He left the Benningtons with the promise that he would return that evening and dine with them. Warrington had become the senator's hobby; he was going to do great things with this young man's future. He would some day make an ambassador of him; it would be a pleasant souvenir of his old age. Warrington was brilliant, a fine linguist, was a born diplomat, had a good voice, and a fund of wit and repartee; nothing more was required. He would give the name Warrington a high place in the diplomatic history of the United States. Some of the most capable diplomats this country had produced had been poets. Warrington's being a playwright would add luster to the office. The senator was going over these things, when a clerk announced that Mr. Warrington was waiting to see him.

"Send him right in."

Immediately Warrington entered. He was simply dressed in a business suit of dark blue. He wore a straw hat and a black tie. There was no broad band of crape on his hat or his sleeve. He had the poet's horror of parading grief, simply because it was considered fashionable to do so. He sincerely believed that outward mourning was obsolete, a custom of the Middle Ages.

"Ha!" ejaculated the senator.

"Good morning. How goes the fight?"

"Fine, my boy; I'll land you there next week; you see if I don't. The main obstacle is the curious attitude of the press. You and I know the reason well enough. McQuade is back of this influence. But the voter doesn't know this, and will accept the surface indications only. Now you know the newspaper fellows. Why not drop around to the offices and find out something definite?"

"It's a good idea, Senator. I'll do it this very morning."

"Has McQuade any personal grudge against you?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"He's a bad enemy, and often a downright unscrupulous one. If it's only politics, I'll have a chat with him myself. You pump the newspapers. You leave it to me to swing the boys into line at the convention."

Then they proceeded to go over the ground thoroughly. Something must be done with the newspapers. The delegates and minor bosses were already grumbling. Had nothing appeared in the newspapers, Warrington's nomination would have gone through without even minor opposition. But the Republican machine was in sore straits. If Donnelly won this time, it would mean years of Democratic rule in an essentially Republican town. McQuade must be broken, his strong barricades toppled; and now that there would be no surprise for the public, the majority of the delegates began to look doubtfully upon what they called the senator's coup. They wanted the City Hall, and they did not care how they got there. Warrington was a fine chap, and all that, but his acquaintanceship was limited. He could not go about shaking hands like Donnelly, who knew everybody, high and low. The laboring man knew nothing about Warrington, save that he was famous for writing plays they had not seen, nor would have understood if they had. Warrington was a "swell"; he had nothing in common with the man who carried the dinner−pail.

"And there the matter stands, my boy," concluded the senator, shifting his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "If I can swing the convention the rest will be plain sailing, once you start speech−making. Oh, McQuade is clever. He knew that by exposing my hand he would lessen your chances. But you tackle the newspapers and see what can be done. And good luck to you."

McQuade came down early that morning. The first thing he did was to call on the editor of the Times.

"Here's something," he said, tossing a few typewritten pages on the editor's desk. "This'll settle Warrington's hash, Walford."

"What is it?" asked Walford.

"Read it and see for yourself." McQuade sat down and picked up the early New York papers.

Walford read slowly. When he reached the last paragraph he returned to the first and read the article through again. He laid it down and faced his employer.

"Mr. McQuade, the Call and the Times are the only papers in town that pay dividends. The Times as it stands to−day is a good, legitimate business investment. Do you want the circulation to drop ten thousand and the big advertisers to cancel their contracts?"

"What's the matter with the story? Isn't it all right?"

"Frankly, it isn't."

"It's true," said McQuade, his fist thudding on the desk; "it's true, I tell you, every damned word of it."

"The truth of it isn't the question. It's the advisability of publishing it. I say to you that if you insist on this story's publication, you'll kill the Times deader than a door−nail. I'll call the business manager in." Walford whistled through a tube, and shortly after the business manager appeared. "Read this," said Walford briefly, "and give Mr. McQuade your honest opinion regarding its publication. Mr. McQuade thinks it ought to run as local news."

The business manager read it.

"It makes good reading, Mr. McQuade, but if you want to kill the Times, run it. There are some stories that can only be rumored, not printed, and this is one of them. If this appears, you have my word that every decent advertiser will cancel his contract forthwith."

Walford looked at his employer in frank triumph. McQuade had great confidence in these two men. He ripped the manuscript into squares and filtered them through his fingers into the waste−basket.

"You boys are probably right," he said reluctantly. "I have no desire to see the paper lose its sound footing. But this would have killed the man socially and politically, so far as this town is concerned."

"Admitted," replied Walford, straightening out some proofs. "But we'll topple him over in a legitimate way."

"Go ahead, then. I'm not particular how it's done so long as you do it. Perhaps, after all, it's just as well. I've got another idea. I can see that I've made a mistake."

McQuade started down the stairs to the street and met Warrington coming up. The two men paused for a moment, then went on. Once on the sidewalk, McQuade turned and hesitated. No, he had nothing to say to Mr. Warrington. He strode down the street toward his own offices.

It will be seen that Warrington had gone directly into the enemy's camp. He knew Walford of old; they were tolerably good friends. He gave his card to the boy. Walford, on reading it, stuffed several newspapers into the waste−basket and pressed his foot on them. He was a bit shaken.

"Send him in. Hello, Dick," he said. "How are you? You're the last man I expected to see this morning. What can I do for you?"

"You can tell your political reporter and your editorial man to let up on me for a week," said Warrington directly. "What the devil have I done to you chaps that you should light into me after this fashion?"

"You have become rich and famous, Dick, and mediocrity can stand anything but that." But there was a twinkle in Walford's eyes.

"Come, Wally, you know that isn't the truth."

"Well, if you want the truth I'll give it to you. Answer me frankly and honestly, do you consider that you have any moral right to accept a nomination for the mayoralty of Herculaneum?"

"Moral right. I'll pick up that phrase and carry it to your camp. I have as much moral right as Donnelly, who, if he hasn't been caught, is none the less culpable for breaking his oath of loyalty. You know this as well as I do."

Walford eyed the waste−basket thoughtfully.

"Now, we'll turn to the legal side," continued Warrington. "I was born here; I cast my first vote here; for several years I've been a property owner and have paid my taxes without lying to the tax−assessor. It is notorious that Donnelly is worth half a million, and yet he is assessed upon a house worth about seven thousand. You have called me a meddler; you apply the term every day. Now draw the distinction, as to eligibility, between Donnelly and myself."

Walford got up from his chair and closed the door. He returned and sat down again.

"Dick, politics is politics, and its ways are dark and mysterious, like the heathen Chinee. If I had your talent—if I had your ability to earn money, I'd walk out of this office this moment. But I am only a poor devil of a

newspaper man. I've a family. When I was twenty, eighteen years ago, I was earning twelve a week; to−day it is forty; when I am sixty it will return to twelve. You know the business; you know the value they set on a man's brains in this city. And there's always somebody waiting for your shoes. Now, listen. In the first place I must live, and as honorably as environment permits me. By conviction I am a Democrat; I believe in the Democratic principles. Thus, I consider it my duty to thwart, if possible, any and all moves the Republican party makes. I recognize your strength, and I shall do what I can from my side of the barricade to defeat your nomination at the Republican convention; for I believe you able, if once nominated, to lead your party to success and victory. But I shall fight you honestly, Dick. In all I have said so far, there has been no innuendo; I've stood out in the open. I did you a good turn this morning, but you will never be any the wiser. Personally, I like you; I have always liked you, and I am glad to see one man of the craft rise above the grubs and earn a splendid competence. It hasn't been easy, Dick; you've had to fight for it, and that's what I admire. You're a good, clean fighter. If I should rebel against continuing this attack against you, the attack would go on, but I shouldn't. That would do neither of us any good. McQuade might find a man with less scruples than I have. And that's how the matter stands, Dick."

"Well, you're frank and honest about it, and I know you will at least give me a square deal, in the event of my nomination."

"You may reckon on that. Good luck to you and bad luck to your cause."

They talked about the old days for a while, and then Warrington departed and directed his steps to the office of the Journal, the paper in which he had begun his career. Oh, here they were willing to do anything in their power from now on. If he was really determined to accept the nomination, they would aid him editorially. That evening the editor made good his word, frankly indorsing Warrington as the best possible choice for Republican nominee. The editor explained his former attitude by setting forth his belief that Mr. Warrington's candidacy was not serious. At the office of the Telegraph they treated him cordially enough. They never meddled with politics till the fight was on. Then they picked the candidate whose views most coincided with their own. If Mr. Warrington was nominated, doubtless they would support his ticket. The general manager had been a classmate of Warrington's. He called on him and explained his errand. The manager simply wrote on a pad: "McQuade owns fifty−five per cent. of the shares," held it under Warrington's nose and then tore it up.

"That's where our independence stands at this moment."

"I had heard of this, but didn't quite believe it," Warrington said. Bill Osborne evidently knew what was going on, then. "I'm sorry to have troubled you."

"None at all."

On the street Warrington was stopped by Ben Jordan, the Telegraph's star reporter, who had worked with Warrington on the Journal.

"Say, Dick, I am glad to see you. I was going up to your house on purpose to see you. Come over to Martin's a minute. I've got some news that might interest you."

"I don't like Martin's place," said Warrington. "Let's compromise on Hanley's."

"All right, my boy."

They walked down to Hanley's, talking animatedly.

"What will you have, Ben?"

"Musty ale."

"Two musty ales," Warrington ordered. "Well, Ben?"

Ben took a deep swallow of ale. He was the best all−round reporter in the city; he knew more people than Osborne knew. Murders, strikes, fires, they were all the same to Ben. He knew where to start and where to end. The city editor never sent Ben out on a hunt for scandal; he knew better than to do that. Nine times out of ten, the other papers got the scandal and Ben's behavior became one. The labor unions were Ben's great stand−by. On dull days he could always get a story from the unions. He attended their meetings religiously. They trusted him implicitly, for Ben never broke his word to any one but his landlady. He was short and wiry, with a head so large as to be almost a deformity. On top of this head was a shock of brick−colored hair that resembled a street−cleaner's broom. And Ben's heart was as big as his head. His generosity was always getting him into financial trouble.

"Dick, you're a friend of Bennington's. You can quietly tip him that his men will go out Monday morning. There's only one thing that will avert a strike, and that's the discharge of the Englishman."

"Bennington will never discharge him."

"So I understand. He'll have a long strike on his hands."

"Do you know the inside?"

"Enough to say that the men will go out. They're a lot of sheep. They've an idea they've been wronged. But you can't reason with them."

"Ben, you go up to the shops yourself and tell Bennington what you know."

"I don't know him. How'll he take it?"

"Tell him I sent you."

"I'll do it, Dick. But if he kicks me out, the drinks will be on you. What countermove will he make?"

"Better ask him yourself. But if you have any influence among the unions, tell them to go slow. They haven't sized up Bennington. Wait a moment. I'll give you a note to him." He called for paper and envelopes, and wrote:

Dear John:

This will introduce to you Mr. Jordan, a reporter in whom I have the greatest confidence. Whatever you may tell him you may rest assured that he will never repeat. I am sending him to you in hopes he may suggest some plan by which to ward off the impending strike. There may be a little self−interest on my side. A strike just now will raise the devil in politics. You may trust Jordan fully.

Warrington.

He pushed it across the table. "There, that will smooth the way."

"Many thanks, my son. Where's he eat his lunch?"

"Usually in the office."

"Well, I'm off!"

Ben always had his eye on the story of to−morrow, and he would face all or any difficulties in pursuit of the end. If he could stop the strike at the Bennington shops it would be a great thing for the Telegraph and a great thing for Ben. So he hailed a car, serenely unconscious that he was taking a position absolutely opposed to that of his employer. He arrived at the shops some time before the noon hour. His letter opened all doors. Bennington was in his private office. He read the letter and offered Ben a chair.

"I have never been interviewed," he said.

"I am not here for an interview," said Ben. "Your men will go out Monday."

"Monday? How did you learn that?"

"My business takes me among the unions. What shall you do in the event of the strike?"

"And I have no desire to be interviewed."

"You read Mr. Warrington's letter. Perhaps, if I knew what stand you will take, I could talk to the men myself. I have averted three or four strikes in my time, simply because the boys know that I always speak the truth, the plain truth. In this case I feel that you have the right on your side. You haven't said anything yet. The union is practically trying to bluff you into coming to its terms: the discharge of the inventor, or a strike."

"Are you representing the union?"

"I am representing nobody but myself."

"I may tell you, then, that I shall not discharge the inventor. Nor will I, if the men go out, take a single one of them back."

"The men will not believe that. They never do. They've been so successful in Pennsylvania that they are attempting to repeat that success all over the Country. They have grown pig−headed. I feel sorry for the poor devils, who never realize when they are well off."

"I feel sorry, too, Mr. Jordan," said Bennington. He played a tattoo on his strong white teeth with his pencil. "Mr. Warrington seems to know you well."

"We began on the Journal together. You will not tell me what your plan is, then?"

"I'd rather not, for honestly, I can not see how it would better the case."

"It might be worth while to give me a chance."

Bennington re−read Warrington's note. Then he studied the frank blue eyes of the reporter.

"Miss Ward, you may go," he said to the stenographer. "Now,"—when the girl had gone,—"you will give me your word?"

"It's all I have."

"How can you convince the men without telling them?"

"Oh, I meant that whatever you tell me shall not see light in the papers till I have your permission. There's a weekly meeting to−night. They will decide finally at this meeting. To−morrow will be too late."

Bennington was an accurate judge of men. He felt that he could trust this shock−headed journalist. If without any loss of self−respect, if without receding a single step from his position, he could avert the crash, he would gladly do so. He had reached one determination, and nothing on earth would swerve him. So he told Ben just exactly what would happen if the men went out. Ben did not doubt him for a moment. He, too, was something of a judge of men. This man would never back down.

"I give you this to show them, if your arguments do not prevail," concluded Bennington, producing a folded paper. "They will hardly doubt this."

Ben opened it. It was a permit from the municipal government to tear down a brick structure within the city limits. Ben stowed the permit in his pocket. He looked with admiration at the man who could plan, coolly and quietly, the destruction of a fortune that had taken a quarter of a century to build. He was grave. There was a big responsibility pressing on his shoulders.

"Much obliged. You will never regret the confidence you repose in me. Now I'll tell you something on my side. It is not the inventor, though the men believe it is. The inventor is a pretext of Morrissy, the union leader."

"A pretext?"

"I can't prove what I say, that's the trouble; but McQuade has his hand in this. I wish to Heaven I could find solid proofs."

"McQuade?" Bennington scowled. He could readily understand now. McQuade! This was McQuade's revenge. He could wait patiently all this while!

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Bennington; I'll do what I can."

Bennington ate no lunch that noon. Instead, he wandered about the great smoky shops, sweeping his glance over the blast−furnaces, the gutters into which the molten ore was poured, the giant trip−hammers, the ponderous rolling−machines, the gas−furnaces for tempering fine steel. The men moved aside. Only here and there a man, grown old in the shops, touched his grimy cap. ... To tear it down! It would be like rending a limb, for he loved every brick and stone and girder, as his father before him had loved them. He squared his shoulders, and his jaws hardened. No man, without justice on his side, should dictate to him; no man should order him to hire this man or discharge that one. He alone had that right; he alone was master. Bennington was not a coward; he would not sell to another; he would not shirk the task laid out for his hand. Unionism, such as it stood, must receive a violent lesson. And McQuade?

"Damn him!" he muttered, his fingers knotting.

Education subdues or obliterates the best of fighting in the coward only. The brave man is always masculine in these crises, and he will fight with his bare hands when reason and intelligence fail. A great longing rose up in Bennington's heart to have it out physically with McQuade. To feel that gross bulk under his knees, to sink his fingers into that brawny throat!—The men, eying him covertly, saw his arms go outward and his hands open and shut convulsively. More than ever they avoided his path. Once before they had witnessed a similar abstraction. They had seen him fling to the ground a huge puddler who had struck his apprentice without cause. The puddler, one of the strongest men in the shops, struggled to his feet and rushed at his assailant. Bennington had knocked him down again, and this time the puddler remained on the ground, insensible. Bennington had gone back to his office, shutting and opening his fists. Ay, they had long since ceased calling him the dude. The man of brawn has a hearty respect for spectacular exhibitions of strength.

One o'clock. The trip−hammers began their intermittent thunder, the rolling−machines shrieked, and the hot ore sputtered and crackled. Bennington returned to his office and re−read the letter his father had written to him on his death−bed. He would obey it to the final line.

That particular branch of the local unions which was represented in the Bennington steel−mills met in the loft of one of the brick buildings off the main street. The room was spacious, but ill ventilated. That, night it was crowded. The men were noisy, and a haze of rank tobacco−smoke drifted aimlessly about, vainly seeking egress. Morrissy called the meeting to order at eight−thirty. He spoke briefly of the injustice of the employers, locally and elsewhere, of the burdens the laboring man had always borne and would always bear, so long as he declined to demand his rights. The men cheered him. Many had been drinking freely. Morrissy stated the case against

Bennington. He used his words adroitly and spoke with the air of a man who regrets exceedingly a disagreeable duty.

From his seat in the rear Jordan watched him, following each word closely. He saw that Morrissy knew his business thoroughly.

"We'll get what we want, men; we always do. It isn't a matter of money; it's principle. If we back down, we are lost; if we surrender this time, we'll have to surrender one thing at a time till we're away back where we started from, slaves to enrich the oppressor. We've got to fight for our rights. Here's an inventor who, if we permit him to remain, will succeed in throwing two hundred men out of work. Bennington is making enough money as things are now. There's no need of improvement, such as will take bread and butter out of our mouths, out of the mouths of our wives and children. We've got to strike. That'll bring him to his senses."

At the conclusion he was loudly applauded.

Jordan stood up and waited till the noise had fully subsided. Everybody knew him. They had seen him stand up before, and he always said something worth listening to.

"You all know me, boys," he began.

"You bet!"

"You're all right!"

"Speech! Go ahead!"

Jordan caught Morrissy's eye. Morrissy nodded with bad grace. Jordan spoke for half an hour. He repeated word for word what Bennington had told him. In the end he was greeted with laughter.

"Very well, boys," he said, shrugging. "It's none of my business. You've never caught me lying yet. You don't know this man Bennington. I believe I do. He'll make good his threat. Wait and see."

"How much were you paid to attend this meeting?" demanded Morrissy, sneering.

"A good deal less than you were, Mr. Morrissy." There was a dangerous flush on Ben's cheeks, but the smoke was so dense that Morrissy failed to observe it. The men laughed again, accepting Ben's retort as a piece of banter. Ben went on doggedly: "I have in my pocket a permit to tear down the shops. Bennington gave it to me to produce. Look at it, if you doubt my word. There it is."

The men passed it along the aisles. It came back presently, much the worse for the wear. Some of the older men looked exceedingly grave, but they were in the minority.

"Anybody can get a permit to tear down his property," said Morrissy scornfully. "It's a big bluff, men. What! tear down the golden goose? Not in a thousand years! It's a plain bluff. And I'm sorry to see a decent man like our newspaper friend on the enemy's side."

"If I am on the enemy's side, Mr. Morrissy, it's because I'm a friend of every man here, save one," significantly. "You men will vote a strike. I can see that. But you'll regret it to your last day. I've nothing more to say. I helped you once when old man Bennington was alive, but I guess you've forgotten it." Ben sat down in silence.

"We'll proceed with the voting," said Morrissy.

Half an hour later there was a cheer. The men would go out Monday, if the demands of the committee were not acceded to. The meeting broke up, and many of the men flocked into the near−by saloons. Morrissy approached Ben, who had waited for him. No one was within earshot.

"What the hell do you mean by saying you were paid less than I was?" he said, his jaw protruding at an ugly angle.

"I mean, Morrissy," answered Ben fearlessly, "that you had better move carefully in the future. If I were you, I wouldn't accept any unstamped envelopes in Herculaneum It would be a good plan to go to some other town for that."

"Why, damn you!" Morrissy raised his fist.

"Stay where you are," warned Ben, seizing a camp−chair "or I'll break your head. Listen to me. I'm starting out from this night on to break you, and, by God, I'll do it before the year is over. This is your last strike, so make the most of it. You were at Schmuck's the other night, you and McQuade. There was a friend of mine on the other side of the partition. Unfortunately this friend was alone. I haven't got any proofs, but I'll get them."

Morrissy became yellower than his diamonds. Ben flung aside his chair and left the hall. He went straight to Martin's saloon. He found Bill Osborne alone at a table.

"Will they strike, Ben?" he asked in a rough whisper.

"Yes. I thought I might influence them, Bill, but I've only made an ass of myself. Two whiskies," he ordered, "and make one of them stiff. I told Morrissy."

"You didn't mention my name, Ben? Don't say you told him that I was on the other side of the partition!" Bill's eyes nearly stood out of his head.

"I told him nothing. How'd you happen to land in Schmuck's saloon, anyhow? Why didn't you telephone me when you heard Morrissy come in?"

"Oh. Ben, I was drunk! If I hadn't been so drunk!" Bill's eyes overflowed remorsefully.

Ben swore.

"And say, Ben, that fellow Bolles is back in town. He was in here a few minutes ago, drunk as a lord. He flashed a roll of bills that would have choked an ox."

"Where is he now?"

"Up stairs playing the wheel."

Ben shook his head. He had his salary in his pocket, and he vividly remembered what roulette had done to it a fortnight gone.

"If Bolles is drunk, it wouldn't do any good to talk to him." Ben sighed and drank his liquor neat. He was tired.

Chapter XIII

Regularly once a week Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene visited a hair−dresser. This distinguished social leader employed a French maid who was very adept at dressing hair, but the two never got along very well verbally; Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene insisted on speaking in broken French while the maid persisted in broken English. Such conversation is naturally disjointed and leads nowhere. The particular hair−dresser who received Mrs. Haldene's patronage possessed a lively imagination together with an endless chain of gossip. Mrs. Haldene was superior to gossiping with servants, but a hair−dresser is a little closer in relation to life. Many visited her in the course of a week, and some had the happy faculty of relieving their minds of what they saw and heard regardless of the social status of the listener. Mrs. Haldene never came away from the hair−dresser's empty−handed; in fact, she carried away with her food for thought that took fully a week to digest.

Like most places of its kind, the establishment was located in the boarding−house district; but this did not prevent fashionable carriages from stopping at the door, nor the neighboring boarders from sitting on their front steps and speculating as to whom this or that carriage belonged. There was always a maid on guard in the hall; she was very haughty and proportionately homely. It did not occur to the proprietress that this maid was a living advertisement of her incompetence to perform those wonders stated in the neat little pamphlets piled on the card−table; nor did it impress the patrons, who took it for granted that the maid, naturally enough, could not afford to have the operation of beauty performed.

A woman with wrinkles is always hopeful.

A strange medley of persons visited this house, each seeking in her own peculiar way the elixir of life, which is beauty, or the potion of love, which is beauty's handmaiden. There were remedies plus remedies; the same skin−food was warranted to create double−chins or destroy them; the same tonic killed superfluous hair or made it grow on bald spots. A freckle to eradicate, a wrinkle to remove, a moth−patch to bleach, a grey hair to dye; nothing was impossible here, not even credulity. It was but meet that the mistress should steal past the servant, that the servant should dodge the mistress. Every woman craves beauty, but she does not want the public to know that her beauty is of the kind in which nature has no hand. No man is a hero to his valet; no woman is a beauty to her maid. In and out, to and fro; the social leader, the shop−girl, the maid, the woman of the town, the actress, the thin old spinster and the fat matron, here might they be found.

At rare intervals a man was seen to ring the bell, but he was either a bill−collector or a husband in search of his wife.

The proprietress knew everybody intimately—by sight. She was squat, dyed, rouged and penciled, badly, too. She was written down in the city directory as Madame de Chevreuse, but she was emphatically not of French extraction. In her alphabet there were generally but twenty−five letters; there were frequent times when she had no idea that there existed such a letter as "g." How she came to appropriate so distinguished a name as De Chevreuse was a puzzle. Her husband —for she had a husband—was always reading French history in English, and doubtless this name appealed to his imagination and romance. Nobody knew what Madame's real name was, nor that of her husband, for he was always called "Monseer."

The reception−room was decorated after the prevailing fashion. There was gilt and pretense. There were numerous glass cases, filled with lotions and skin−foods and other articles of toilet; there were faceless heads adorned with all shades of hair, scalps, pompadours, and wigs. A few false−faces grinned or scowled or smirked from frames or corners where they were piled. There were tawdry masquerade costumes, too, and theatrical make−up. Curtains divided the several shampooing booths, and a screen cut off the general view of the operation of beauty. However, there were chinks large enough for the inquisitive, and everybody was inquisitive who patronized Madame de Chevreuse, pronounced Chevroose.

And always and ever there prevailed without regeneration the odor of cheap perfumes and scented soaps.

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene left her carriage at the door, perfectly willing that the neighborhood should see her alight. She climbed the steps, stately and imposing. She was one of the few women who could overawe the homely girl in the hallway.

"Is Madame at liberty?"

"She will be shortly, Mrs. Haldene."

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene passed into the reception−room and sat down by the manicure table. The screen was in position. Some one was being beautified. From time to time she heard voices.

"The make−up is taking splendidly to−day."

"Well, it didn't last week. I sweat pink beads all over my new muslin."

"It does peel in hot weather. I understand that Mrs. Welford is going to Dakota."

"He ought to have the first chance there, if what I've heard about her is true. These society women make me tired."

"They haven't much to occupy their time."

"Oh, I don't know. They occupy their time in running around after the other women's husbands."

"And the husbands?"

"The other men's wives."

"You aren't very charitable."

"Nobody's ever given me any charity, I'm sure."

From one of the shampooing booths:

"But you would look very well in the natural grey, ma'am."

"My husband doesn't think so."

"But his hair is grey."

"That doesn't lessen his regard for brunettes."

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene shrugged her majestic shoulders and gazed again into the street. She always regretted that Madame could not be induced to make private visits.

A white poodle, recently shampooed, dashed through the rooms. There is always a watery−eyed, red−lidded poodle in an establishment of this order. The masculine contempt for the pug has died. It took twenty years to accomplish these obsequies. But the poodle, the poor poodle! Call a man a thief, a wretch, a villain, and he will defend himself; but call him a poodle, and he slinks out of sight. It is impossible to explain definitely the cause of this supreme contempt for the poodle, nor why it should be considered the epitome of opprobrium to be called one.

"Maime?"

"Yes, Madame!" replied the girl in the hall.

"Take Beauty into the kitchen and close the door. He's just been washed, and I don't want him all speckled up with hair−dye."

The girl drove the poodle out of the reception−room and caught him in the hall. Presently the kitchen door slammed and the odor of onions in soup no longer fought against the perfumes and soaps for supremacy.

"There," said Madame behind the screen, "you have no rival in town now for beauty."

"I'll be here again next Tuesday."

"Same time?"

"Yes, in the morning."

A woman emerged from behind the screen. She possessed a bold beauty, the sort that appeals to men without intellect. She was dressed extravagantly: too many furbelows, too many jewels, too many flowers. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene recognized her instantly and turned her head toward the window. She heard the woman pass by her, enter the hall and leave the house. She saw her walk quickly away, stop suddenly as if she had forgotten something, open her large purse, turn its contents inside out, replace them, and proceed. But a letter lay on the sidewalk unnoticed. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene secretly hoped that it would remain there till she made her departure.

"Handsome woman, isn't she?" said Madame. "I don't know what it is, but they are always good−looking."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene, who knew very well who the woman was.

"She is one of Mr. McQuade's lady friends."

"Indeed?"

"Yes." Madame was shrewd. She saw that it wouldn't do to tell Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene anything about a woman who could in no way be of use to her. "Have you heard of the Sybil?"

"The Sybil?" repeated Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene.

"Yes. A new fortune−teller, and everybody says she's a wonder. I haven't been to her yet, but I'm goin' just as soon as I get time."

"Do you believe they know what they are talking about?" incredulously.

"Know! I should say I did. Old Mother Danforth has told me lots of things that have come true. She was the one who predicted the Spanish war and the president's assassination. It is marvelous, but she done it."

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene shuddered. With all her faults, she loved the English language.

"How do you want your hair fixed?" Madame inquired, seeing that her patron's interest in mediums was not strong.

"The same as usual. Last week you left a streak, and I am sure everybody noticed it at the Gordon tea. Be careful to−day."

Thereupon Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene constituted herself a martyr to the cause. She was nervous and fidgety in the chair, for the picture of that letter on the sidewalk kept recurring. In the meantime Madame told her all that had happened and all that hadn't, which is equally valuable. The toilet lasted an hour; and when Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene rose from the chair, Madame was as dry as a brook in August. Her patron hurried to the street. The letter was still on the sidewalk. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene picked it up and quickly sought her carriage. Pah! how the thing smelt of sachet−powder. Her aristocratic nose wrinkled in disdain. But her curiosity surmounted her natural repugnance. The address was written in a coarse masculine hand. The carriage had gone two blocks before she found the necessary courage to open the letter. The envelope had already been opened, so in reading it her conscience suggested nothing criminal.

Gossip began on the day Eve entered the Garden of Eden. To be sure, there was little to gossip about, but that little Eve managed without difficulty to collect. It is but human to take a harmless interest in what our next−door neighbor is doing, has done, or may do. Primarily gossip was harmless; to−day it is still harmless in some quarters. The gossip of the present time is like the prude, always looking for the worst and finding it. The real trouble with the gossip lies in the fact that she has little else to do; her own affairs are so uninteresting that she is perforce obliged to look into the affairs of her neighbors. Then, to prove that she is well informed, she feels compelled to repeat what she has seen or heard, more or less accurately. From gossiping to meddling is but a trifling step. To back up a bit of gossip, one often meddles. Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was naturally a daughter of Eve; she was more than a gossip, she was a prophetess. She foretold scandal. She would move Heaven and earth, so the saying goes, to prove her gossip infallible. And when some prophecy of hers went wrong, she did everything in her power to right it. To have acquired the reputation of prophesying is one thing, always to fulfil these prophecies is another. It never occurred to her that she was destroying other people's peace of mind, that she was constituting herself a Fate, that she was meddling with lives which in no wise crossed or interfered with her own. She had no real enmity either for Warrington or Mrs. Jack; simply, she had prophesied that Warrington had taken up his residence in Herculaneum in order to be near Katherine Challoner, John Bennington's wife. Here was a year nearly gone, and the smoke of the prophecy had evaporated, showing that there had been no fire below.

Neither Warrington nor Mrs. Jack was in her thoughts when she opened the letter, which was signed by McQuade's familiar appellation.

Dear Girl—I've got them all this trip. I'll put Bennington on the rack and wring Warrington's political neck, the snob, swelling it around among decent people! What do you think? Why, Warrington used to run after the Challoner woman before she was married; and I have proof that she went to Warrington's room one night and never left till morning. How's that sound? They stick up their noses at you, do they? Wait! They won't look so swell when I'm through with them. If Warrington's name is even mentioned at the Republican convention, I've missed my guess. I got your bills this morning. You'd better go light till I've settled with these meddlers. Then we'll pack up our duds and take that trip to Paris I promised you.

Mac.

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene shivered. How horribly vulgar! She felt polluted for a moment, and half wished she had let the missive lie where it had fallen. But this sense of disgust wore off directly. She had been right, then; there was something wrong; it was her duty, her duty to society, to see that this thing went no further. And that flirtation between Patty and the dramatist must be brought to a sudden halt. How? Ah, she would now find the means. He was merely hoodwinking Patty; it was a trick to be near Mrs. Jack. She had ignored her, had she? She had always scorned to listen to the truth about people, had she? And well she might! Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's

lips tightened. Those friends of hers who had doubted would presently doubt no more. She hadn't the slightest idea how McQuade would use his information; she didn't even care, so long as he used it. She grew indignant. The idea of that woman's posing as she did! The idea of her dreaming to hold permanently the footing she had gained in society! It was nothing short of monstrous. The ever−small voice of conscience spoke, but she refused to listen. She did not ask herself if what McQuade had in his possession was absolute truth. Humanity believes most what it most desires to believe. And aside from all this, it was a triumph, a vindication of her foresight.

"To the Western Union," she called to the groom. When the carriage drew up before the telegraph office, she gave the letter to the groom. "I found this on the sidewalk. Have them return it to the owner by messenger." This was done. "Now, home," she ordered.

That afternoon she attended a large reception. Her bland smile was as bland as ever, but her eyes shone with suppressed excitement. The Benningtons were there, but there was only a frigid nod when she encountered Mrs. Jack and Patty. She wondered that she nodded at all. She took her friend, Mrs. Fairchilds, into a corner. She simply had to tell some one of her discovery, or at least a hint of it.

"Do you recollect what I told you?"

"About—?" Mrs. Fairchilds glanced quickly at Mrs. Jack.

"Yes. Every word was true, and there will be a great upheaval shortly. But not a word to a soul. I never gossip, but in this instance I feel it my duty to warn you. How and where I learned the truth is immaterial. I have learned it, and that is sufficient. It is frightful; it makes my blood boil when I think of it. And she goes everywhere, as if she had a perfect right."

"What have you found?" Mrs. Fairchilds could scarcely breathe, so great was her curiosity.

"You will learn soon enough without my telling you." And that was all Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene would say.

But it was enough, enough for her purpose. Within an hour's time all the old doubt had been stirred into life again, and the meddlers gathered about for the feast. It is all so simple and easy.

Mrs. Jack moved here and there, serenely beautiful, serenely happy, serenely unconscious of the blow that was soon to strike at the very heart of her life. Once in a while her brows would draw together abstractedly. She was thinking of John, and of the heartaches he was having over the action of the men at the shops.

Patty was not gay. She seemed to be impatient to leave. Three or four times she asked Mrs. Jack if she were ready to go; she was tired, the people bored her, she wanted to go home. Finally Mrs. Jack surrendered.

That night at dinner John was very quiet and absent−minded. The shops, the shops, he was thinking of them continuously. In his heart of hearts he had no faith in the reporter's influence. The strike mania had seized the men, and nothing now could hold them back. He knew they would doubt his threat to tear down the buildings. Not till he sent the builder's wrecking crew would they understand. Not a hair's breadth, not the fraction of an inch; if they struck, it would be the end. He gazed at his wife, the melting lights of love in his handsome eyes. Hey−dey! She would always be with him, and together they would go about the great world and forget the injustice and ingratitude of men. But it was going to be hard. Strong men must have something to lay their hands to. He knew that he could not remain idle very long; he must be doing something. But out of the shops he felt that he would be like a ship without steering apparatus—lost, aimless, purposeless.

"John?"

He woke from his dream, and forced a smile to his lips.

"You haven't eaten anything."

"I'm not hungry, dear."

"You haven't spoken half a dozen words since you came home."

"Haven't I? I must have been thinking."

"About the shops?" laying her hand on his and pressing it strongly.

"Yes. I'm afraid, heart o' mine, that it's all over. If they do not strike now, they will later on; if not on this pretext, on some other."

"Why not let him go, John?"

"No." His jaws hardened. "It isn't a question of his going or staying; it is simply a question of who is master, the employed or the employer. The men say it's the principle of the thing; it shall be fought out on those grounds. I'm going down to the club to−night with Dick. I feel the need of getting out and breathing. Dick's not the best company just now, but he'll understand what I need. Poor devil! he's got his hands full, too."

She understood his mood, and offered no objection. She raised his hand and brushed it with her lips.

"I love you, John."

He smiled gratefully.

"You go over to mother's for the evening, and I'll drop in on the way home and pick you up."

Patty was in the music−room, so Mrs. Jack did not disturb her, but started at her basket−work. Mrs. Bennington read till eight, and retired. Patty played all the melancholy music she could think of. When love first makes its entrance into the human heart, there is neither joy nor gladness nor gaiety. On the contrary, there is a vast shadow of melancholy, a painful sadness, doubt and cross−purpose, boldness at one moment and timidity at the next, a longing for solitude. Music and painting and poetry, these arts that only attracted, now engage.

So Patty played.

Sometimes Mrs. Jack looked up from her work, wondering. She had never heard Patty play so many haunting, dismal compositions. At nine the telephone rang, and she dropped her work instantly, thinking the call might be from John. Ah, if the men would only listen to reason!

"Hello!"

"Is Mrs. Bennington at home?" asked a voice, unfamiliar to her ears.

"There are two. Which one do you wish?"

"Mrs. John Bennington."

"This is Mrs. John Bennington speaking. What is it?"

There was a pause.

"I have something very important to communicate to you. In the first place, you must use your influence in making Mr. Warrington withdraw his name as a candidate for nomination."

"Who is this speaking?" she asked sharply.

"Mr. McQuade."

The receiver nearly fell from her hand. McQuade? What in the world—

"Did you get the name?"

"Yes. But I fail to understand what you are talking about. I warn you that I shall ring off immediately."

"One moment, please. If you hang up the receiver, you will regret it. I wish you no ill, Mrs. Bennington. If it were possible I should like to talk with you personally, for this matter deeply concerns your future happiness. I can not call; I have been ordered out of your husband's house. It lies in your power to influence Warrington to drop his political ambition. Information has come to my hand that would not look very well in the newspapers. It is in my power to stop it, but I promise not to lift a hand if you refuse."

"I not only refuse, but I promise to repeat your conversation to my husband this very night." With that Mrs. Jack hung up the receiver. She rose, pale and terribly incensed. The low fellow! How dared he, how dared he! "Patty!" The call brooked no dallying.

The music ceased. Patty came out, blinking.

"You called me, Kate?"

"Patty, McQuade has been calling me up on the telephone."

"Who?"

"McQuade, McQuade! He says that if I do not influence Mr. Warrington to withdraw his name—Did you ever hear of such a thing? I am furious! What can it mean? He says he has heard something about me which he can suppress but will not if I—Why, Patty, what shall I do? What shall I do?" She crushed her hands together wildly.

"Tell John," said Patty sensibly.

"John? He would thresh McQuade within an inch of his life."

"Tell Warrington, then."

"He would do the same as John. But what can the wretch have found? God knows, Patty, I have always been a good, true woman. ... Think of that man's telephoning me!"

Patty ran to her side and flung her arms about her brother's wife. Patty loved her.

"Don't you bother your head, darling. It can't be anything but a political dodge; it can't be anything serious. McQuade is low enough to frighten women, but don't let him frighten you. I know he lies," said the loyal Patty. "And now that I think it over, it would be best to say nothing to John or Richard. Fisticuffs would get into the papers, and it's my opinion that's just what this man McQuade wants. He could swear to a thousand lies, if the

matter became public. But oh!" clenching her hands fiercely, "I'd give a year of my life to see John thresh him. But you say nothing; let us wait and see."

Wise Patty!

At that very moment McQuade sat swinging in his swivel−chair. There was a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"That'll bring 'em," he said aloud, though he was alone. "That'll bring 'em both up here, roaring like lions. They'll muss up the furniture, and then I can tell the reporters all about it. Even Walford can't object this time."

He rubbed his hands together like Shylock at the thought of his pound of flesh. He had waited a long time. They had ordered him, McQuade. who held the city in his hand—they had ordered him out of the house. Not a grain of mercy, not half a grain. Two birds with one stone. He was shrewd for all his illiteracy. He knew women passably well. This one would tell her husband, who would seek for immediate vengeance.

But sometimes chance overthrows the best−laid plans of cleverness and foresight. And this remarkable plan of McQuade's was deranged by a chance guess by Patty.

Meantime at Martin's it was growing lively. The bar was crowded, the restaurant was being liberally patronized, and persons went up the stairs that did not return. Jordan paid the check, and he and Osborne went out.

"When'll they go out, Ben?"

"Monday."

"Too bad. I wish I'd been sober."

"I'll break Morrissy's head one of these fine days. Let's go over to Johnny's; there's music over there."

"All right, Ben."

"And no more booze, mind."

"Just as you say."

Up stairs the gambling−den was doing a good business. The annual trotting meet had brought many sporting men to town. They were standing around the faro table; the two roulette wheels were going, and the Klondike machine spun ceaselessly. There were a dozen stacks of chips in front of Bolles. He was smiling, flushed with triumph and whisky.

"Three hundred to the good, old boy!" he said to the man who spun the ivory ball. "I'll break you fellows to−night."

"Bring Mr. Bolles another whisky," said the proprietor.

"I'll take all you can bring."

"You're a tank, sure."

"You bet!" Bolles grinned.

So did the banker, covertly. He had seen the comedy played a thousand times. Few men ever took away their winnings, once they started in to drink, and Bolles was already drunk. He lost his next bet. He doubled and lost again. Then he stacked his favorite number. The ball rolled into it, but jumped the compartment, wizard−wise, and dropped into single−o. Bolles cursed the luck. Another whisky was placed at his elbow. He drank it at a gulp.

"Make the limit five," he cried.

The banker nodded to the man at the wheel.

Bolles made six bets. He lost them. A quarter of an hour later his entire winnings had passed over the table. He swore, and drew out a roll of bills. He threw a fifty on the black. Red won. He doubled on black. Red won. He plunged. He could not win a single bet. He tried numbers, odd and even, the dozens, splits, squares, column. Fortune had withdrawn her favor.

"Hell!"

He played his last ten on black, and lost.

"Let me have a hundred."

The banker shook his head and pointed to the signs on the wall: "Checks for money, money for checks, no mouth−bets."

Bolles felt in his pockets and repeated the futile search.

"Not a damned cent!" he shouted. "Cleaned out!"

"Give Mr. Bolles a ten−spot," said the banker. "But you can't play it here, Bolles," was the warning.

Bolles stuffed the note in his pocket and rose. He was very drunk; he himself did not realize how drunk he

was till he started for the door. He staggered and lurched against the sideboard. His hat rolled from his head. An attendant quickly recovered it, and Bolles slapped it on his head.

"Get out o' the way! It's a snide game, anyhow. You've got wires on the machine. You've got seven hundred o' my money, and you give me ten! Hell!"

They opened the door for him and he stumbled out into the dark, unlighted hallway. He leaned against the wall, trying to think it out, searching his pockets again and again. Why in hell hadn't he left some of the money with the bartender? Broke, clean, flat broke! And he had pushed his winnings up to three hundred! He became ugly, now that he fully realized what had happened. He ground his teeth and cursed loudly; he even kicked the door savagely. Then he swung rather than walked down the stairs. He turned into the bar and bought three more whiskies, and was then primed for any deviltry. He was very drunk, but it was a wide−awake drunkenness, cruel and revengeful. He turned into the alley and tried to think of some plan by which he could borrow enough to make a new attempt at fickle fortune. To−morrow he could strike McQuade again, but to−night McQuade wouldn't listen to him. Every once in a while he would renew the searching of his pockets, but there was only the remainder of the ten the banker had given him.

John and Warrington had played an uninteresting game of billiards at the club, then finally sought the night and tramped idly about the streets. With Warrington it was sometimes his aunt, sometimes the new life that beat in his heart when he saw Patty, sometimes this game he was playing which had begun in jest and had turned to earnest. With John it was the shops, the shops, always and ever the shops. When they spoke it was in monosyllables. Nevertheless it was restful to each of them to be so well understood that verbal expression was not necessary. They had started toward Martin's on the way home, when Warrington discovered that he was out of cigars. He ran back three or four doors while John proceeded slowly. Just as he was about to cross the alley−way a man suddenly lurched out into the light. He was drunk, but not the maudlin, helpless intoxication that seeks and invites sociability. He was murderously drunk, strong, nervous, excited. He barred Bennington's way.

"I thought it was you!" he said venomously.

Bennington drew back and started to pass around the man. He did not recognize him. He saw in the action only a man disorderly drunk. But he hadn't taken two steps before the other's words stopped him abruptly.

"You're a millionaire, eh? Well, I'll soon fix you and your actress and her lover. Take that as a starter!"

He struck Bennington savagely on the cheek−bone. Bennington stumbled back, but managed to save himself from falling. Instantly all the war that was in his soul saw an outlet. He came back, swift as a panther and as powerful. In an instant his assailant was on his back on the pavement, the strong fingers tightening about the wretch's throat; Bolles was a powerful man, but he had not the slightest chance. Not a sound from either man. There were one or two pedestrians on the opposite side of the street, but either these did not see or would not.

Warrington had made a hurried purchase. As he left the cigar store, he saw the two men fall. He ran up quickly, wondering what the trouble was. He had no idea that John was one of the men, but as he saw the light grey suit, and the Panama lying on the ground, he knew.

"For God's sake, John, what are you doing?" he cried.

With a superhuman effort he dragged the enraged man from the prostrate form in the road. It no longer struggled, but lay inert and without motion.

"Was I killing him, Dick?" said John, in a quavering voice. "He struck me and—Am I mad, or has the world turned upside down in a minute?"

"What did he say?" asked Warrington. He was badly frightened. He knelt at the side of Bolles and felt of his heart. It still beat.

"What did he say? Nothing, nothing!—Where's my hat? I'm going home— Have I—?"

"No, he's alive; but I came just in time."

At this moment Bolles turned over and slowly struggled to a sitting posture. His hands went feebly toward his throat.

"He's all right," said Warrington. "We'd better light out. Now what the devil—"

"He struck me. He was drunk. I've been in a fighting mood all day. Call that carriage."

When Mrs. Jack saw him she screamed.

"John!"

"The asphalt was wet, girl, and I took a bad fall." But John lied with ill grace.

Chapter XIV

The Bennington mills, or shops, were situated just inside the city limits. Beyond was a beautiful undulating country of pastures and wheat−fields, dotted frequently with fine country homes. The mills were somewhat isolated from the general manufacturing settlement, but had spurs of track that for practical purposes were much nearer the main line of freight traffic than any of those manufacturing concerns which posed as its rivals. It was a great quadrangle of brick, partly surrounded by a prison−like wall. Within this wall was a court, usually piled high with coke and coal and useless molds. The building was, by turns, called foundry, mills and shops. The men who toiled there called it the shops. Day and night, night and day, there was clangor and rumbling and roaring and flashes of intense light. In the daytime great volumes of smoke poured from the towering chimneys, and at night flames shot up to the very walls of heaven, burnishing the clouds.

The elder Bennington was one of those men who, with a firm standing on the present, lay admirable plans for the future. He had been in no great hurry to get rich. He went leisurely about it, tantalizing fortune, it might be said. His first venture had shown foresight. At the beginning of the Civil War he had secured an option on many thousand tons of coal. Without taking an actual penny from his pockets, he had netted a comfortable fortune. Again, his foresight recognized that the day would come when the whole continent would gird itself in steel. With his ready money he bought ground and built a small mill. This prospered. He borrowed from the banks, and went on building. Ten years passed. The property was unencumbered; he had paid both interest and principal. He did not believe in stock−holders. He sold no stock. Every nail, bolt and screw was his; every brick, stone and beam. There were no directors to meddle with his plans, no fool's hand to block his progress, to thwart his vast projects. Slowly he became rich, for every piece of steel that went out to the purchasers was honest steel. Sagacity and loyalty overcame all obstacles. Many a time he might have sold at a handsome profit. But selling wasn't his idea; he had a son. Besides, this was his life−work, and he detested the idle rich, which at that time were just coming into evidence.

He never speculated; but he bought government bonds, railroad bonds, municipal bonds, for he had great faith in his country. He had the same faith in his native city, too, for he secured all the bank stock that came his way. Out of every ten dollars he earned he invested five, saved three, and spent two. He lived well, but not ostentatiously. He never gave directly to charities, but he gave work to hundreds, and made men self−reliant and independent, which is a far nobler charity. He never denied himself a vacation; he believed that no man should live and die at his desk. There was plenty of time for work and plenty for play; but neither interfered with the other. He was an ardent fisherman, a keen hunter, and a lover of horses.

More than all these things, he was one of those rare individuals one seldom meets—the born father. He made a man of his son and a woman of his daughter. When he sent the boy to England, he knew that the boy might change his clothes, but neither his character nor his patriotism. He voted independently; he was never a party man; thus, public office was never thrust in his way. Perhaps he was too frankly honest. He never worried when his son reached the mating age. "Whoever my boy marries will be the woman he loves, and he is too much his father's son not to love among his equals." He was a college−bred man besides, but few knew this. He had an eye for paintings, an ear for music, and a heart for a good book. It is this kind of man whom nature allows to be reproduced in his children.

He was gruff, but this gruffness was simply a mask to keep at arm's length those persons whom he did not desire for friends.

When he died he left a will that was a model of its kind. There were not a hundred lines in the document. He divided his fortune into three parts, but he turned the shops over to his son John, without stipulations, wholly and absolutely, to do with them as he pleased. But he had written a letter in which he had set forth his desires. It may be understood at once that these desires readily coincided with those of the son.

John had not begun in the office. On the contrary, during school vacations he worked as a puddler's apprentice, as a molder's apprentice, in the rail−shop, in the sheet−and wire−shops. He worked with his hands, too, and drew his envelope on Saturday nights like the rest of them. There was never any talk about John's joining

the union; the men looked upon his efforts good−naturedly and as a joke. The father, with wisdom always at his elbow, never let the fishing trips go by. John had his play. At the age of twenty he knew as much about the manufacture of steel as the next one. He loved the night shifts, when the whole place seethed and glowed like an inferno. This manual education had done something else, too. It had broadened his shoulders, deepened his chest, and flattened his back. Many a time the old man used to steal out and watch the young Hercules, stripped to the waist, drag rails to the cooling−room. When John entered college athletics he was not closely confined to the training−tables.

Under the guidance of such a father, then, there could not be as a result anything less than a thorough man.

On the following Monday morning succeeding the encounter with Bolles, John boarded a car and went out to the shops as usual. He found nothing changed. The clerks in the office were busy with huge ledgers, though it is true that many a hand was less firm than on ordinary days. Rumors were flying about, from clerk to clerk, but none knew what the boss intended to do. From the shops themselves came the roaring and hammering that had gone on these thirty years or more. Bennington opened his mail and read each letter carefully. There were orders for rails, wire rope and sheets for boilers. The business of the concern always passed through his hands first. Even when he was out of town, duplicates of all orders were sent to him. He laid each letter in the flat basket; but this morning there was no "O. K.—J. B." scrawled across the tops. There would be time enough for that later. He rose and went to the window and looked down into the court. His heart beat heavily. There was something besides the possibility of a strike on his mind. But he flung this thought aside and returned to the strike. Was it right or was it wrong? Should he follow out his father's request, letter for letter? To punish two or three who were guilty, would it be right to punish several hundred who were not? And those clerks and assistants yonder, upon whom families depended, who had nothing to do with unionism, one way or the other, what about them? Fate strikes blindly; the innocent fall with the guilty. The analysis of his own desires was quick enough. Surrender? Not much! Not an inch, not a tenth part of an inch, would he move. If men permitted themselves to be sheep in the hands of an unscrupulous man, so much the worse. He promised himself this much: all those who appealed to him honestly, for these he would find employment elsewhere. There were other mills and shops in town that would be glad enough to employ a Bennington man, which signified capability.

"Mr. Bennington?"

John turned. Chittenden, the young English inventor, stood respectfully just within the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Chittenden. How's the invention going? Did you get that special pulley from Pittsburgh yet?"

"The invention is going very well, sir. But it is not of that I wish to speak."

"Have you joined the union, then?" asked Bennington, with a shade of irony which did not escape the keen−eyed Englishman.

"No!" This was not spoken; it was more like a shout. "I have joined no union, and my brain may rot before I do. The truth is, sir, I hear that if the men go out you'll tear down the shops." He hesitated.

"Go on."

"Well, I do not want this to happen on my account. I am young; I can wait; I'll take my tinkering elsewhere. You've been very good to me sir, and I should hate to see you troubled."

"Chittenden, you can't leave me now. If you do, I shall never forgive you. You are a valuable piece of property just now. You are to be my test case, as the lawyers say. If you go now the men will think I weakened and forced you out. You gave me your word that you would stay here till *I* told you to go."

"There's nothing more to be said, sir. You may depend upon me."

"Thanks. The day you perfect your machine, on that day I shall find the capital to promote it. Good morning."

"The committee was coming up after me, sir," was the reply.

"Ah!" Bennington's eyes flashed. "Then remain to hear what I have to say to them."

All this while the girl at the typewriter never paused. Clickity−click! clickity−click! Suddenly all noises ceased, all but the noise of the typewriter. The two men looked at each other quickly and comprehensively. There was a tramping of feet on the stairs, and presently a knock on the door. Clickity−click!

"You may go," said Bennington to the girl.

The girl gathered up her notes and passed into the main office.

Again came the knock, more aggressive this time.

"Come in."

The committee, headed by Morrissy, entered with shuffling feet. Morrissy saw the Englishman and scowled.

"Well, gentlemen?" said Bennington, sitting on his desk and resting a foot on his chair.

"We have come to learn what you intend to do about this Britisher," began Morrissy.

"I don't recollect your face," replied Bennington thoughtfully. "How long have you been in the shops?"

"I'm not in your shops," returned Morrissy blusteringly.

"In that case," said Bennington mildly, "there's the door. I do not see how this matter concerns you."

"Well, it does concern me, as you'll find soon," cried Morrissy, choking with sudden rage.

"I'll give you one minute to make the foot of the stairs. If you're not there at the end of that time, I'll take you by the collar and help you." Bennington drew out his watch.

"He's the head of our union, Mr. Bennington," interposed one of the men, shifting his feet uneasily.

"Oh! Then he's the man who is really making all this trouble?" Bennington nodded as if he had just arrived at a solution.

"I'm here to see that my men have their rights." Morrissy failed to understand this mild young man. "And it'll take a bigger man than you to throw me out of here. This Britisher either joins the union or he goes."

"If he joins the union he'll be permitted to continue the perfecting of his invention?"

"His invention is not necessary at present. The output as it is meets the demand."

"Look here, Mr. Morrissy, I'll make you a proposition."

"What?"

"You and I will go down to the molding−room and have it out with our fists. If you win, Chittenden goes; if I win, he stays and the men return to work."

"This isn't no kid's play, Mr. Bennington. You've got a big strike looking you in the face."

Bennington laughed. "I'm afraid you're a coward. So Mr. Chittenden must join the union or go. It isn't a question of wage scale or hours; it simply revolves around Mr. Chittenden. Supposing he joins the union, what will you give him to do?" Bennington's voice was that of a man who wishes to know all sides of the question.

"Well, he'll have to learn where they all started from."

"Mr. Chittenden is an expert machinist."

"Let him join the union, then, and there won't be any trouble here. I want justice. This shop is union, and no non−union man can work here. I want justice, that's all."

"You'll get that all in good time, Mr.—ah—?"

"Morrissy."

"Mr. Morrissy. Mr. Chittenden, are you willing to join the union?" Bennington smiled as he plied this question.

"Not I! My word, I'd as lief starve as become a union man, and under such a master. I prize my manhood and independence above all things. I have already refused to join. I never take back what I say."

"Neither do I, Mr. Chittenden." Bennington stood up.

"Then out he goes," said Morrissy, recovering his truculence.

"On what authority?" Bennington's voice was growing milder and milder. "On what authority?" he repeated.

"On mine!" cried Morrissy.

"You are mistaken. I am master here. Mr. Chittenden will remain on the pay−roll."

"Then in ten minutes the men will walk out on my orders. You're making a big mistake, Mr. Bennington."

"That is for me to judge."

"Ten minutes to make up your mind." Morrissy made a gesture toward his watch.

"Don't bother about the time, Mr. Morrissy. We'll spend the ten minutes in the molding−room."

Morrissy turned pale.

"Oh, we shan't come to fisticuffs, Mr. Morrissy. I am a gentleman, and you are not. Not a word!" as Morrissy clenched his fists. "Mr. Shipley," said Bennington to one of the committee, "will you get all the men together? I have a few words to say to them before this ten minutes is up. I want to give the men a fair show."

"You can have twenty minutes, my English−bred gentleman," snarled Morrissy. At that moment he would have given a thousand dollars for the strength to whip the man whose ruin he believed he was planning. "I'm kind of anxious myself to hear what you've got to say.

"In fact, I hope you will listen carefully to every word I say," replied Bennington, with a nod toward the door.

The committee went out solemnly. Morrissy was next to the last to go down the stairs. Bennington followed closely behind him.

"Some day I'll get a good chance at you, Mr. Morrissy, and the devil take care of you when I do. I shall see to it that the law will be found to fit your case."

Morrissy shifted over to the balustrade, looking over his shoulder at the speaker.

"Look here, you can't talk to me that way, Bennington."

"Can't I? I'll proceed. In the first place, you're a damn scoundrel. You've brought about this trouble simply to show that you have power to injure me. Well, you can't injure me, Mr. Morrissy, but you will do irreparable injury to these poor men who put their trust in you and your kind. Chittenden? That's a pretty poor excuse. You've always harbored a grudge against my father, and this seems to be your chance. You've the idea that you can intimidate me. You can't intimidate me any more than you could my father. More than all this, McQuade is back of this move; and if I can prove that you accepted a bribe from him, I'll have you both in court for conspiracy."

"You're talking big. It won't do you any good."

"Wait. I should be willing to wait ten years to call you a thief and a blackguard in public. But I say to you now, privately, you are both a thief and a blackguard."

Morrissy stepped back, red in the face. But he recognized the disadvantage of his position. He was one step lower than his accuser.

"Go on," said Bennington, his voice now hard and metallic; "go on down. There'll be no rough and tumble here. I won't give you that satisfaction."

"Well, you mark my words, I'll get satisfaction out of you shortly, and then you'll talk on the other side of your mouth. This is business now. When that's done, why, I'll make you eat every one of those words."

Bennington laughed sinisterly. He could crush the life out of this flabby ruffian with one arm, easily.

Nothing more was said, and the way to the great molding−room was traversed silently. Shipley sent out orders, and in a few minutes the men congregated to hear what the boss had to say. It was, to say the least, an unusual proceeding, this of an employer delivering a speech to his men after they had practically declared a strike. Morrissy now regretted that he had given Bennington any grace at all, for it was not to be doubted that there was only a small majority of the men who had voted for a strike. And these were the young men; youth is always so hot−headed and cock−sure of itself. The older men, the men who had drawn their pay in the shops for twenty years or more, they were not so confident.

Bennington mounted a pile of molds and raised his hand. The murmur of voices dwindled away into silence. The sun came in through the spreading skylights, and Bennington stood in the center of the radiance. He was a man, every inch of him, and not a man among them could deny it. There are many things that are recognizable even to crass minds, and one of these is a man. Genius they look upon with contempt, but not strength and resolution; they can not comprehend what is not visible to the eye.

"Fire away, boss!" said a voice from the crowd.

Many of the men smiled, but there was no answering smile on the face of the man on the molds.

"I have but few words to say to you men, and I trust for the sake of your families that you will weigh carefully every word I utter." Bennington took his father's letter from his pocket and unfolded it. "You are about to take a step such as you all will live to regret. My father never threatened; he acted. I shall follow his example. You are on the verge of striking. I shall recognize the strike only at the moment you decide to leave the shops. You will strike without cause, without justice, simply because you are commanded to do so by your leader."

"Hold on, Mr. Bennington!" cried one of those nearest him. "We have the right to vote, and we voted against your policy in hiring a non−union man."

"Put it that way if it pleases you," replied Bennington. "I say that you strike simply to show how strong your power is. It is a fine thing to have power, but it is finer by far to use it only when justice makes a cause. But power is a terrible weapon in the hands of those who can not direct it wisely. Let me come to facts. Your wages are the highest in the city, five per cent. above the union scale; your hours are the shortest; there is no Sunday−night shift; you have at your pleasure a gymnasium and a swimming−pool; you are each of you given a week's vacation in the summer on full pay, a thing no other concern of the kind in the state does; all the machinery is flawless, minimizing your chances of danger; in fact, you draw pay fifty−two weeks in the year in the squarest shop in the

world. If any man wishes to deny these things, let him stand forth."

But there was neither sound nor movement from the men.

Bennington continued. "Men, you have no grievance. This man Chittenden, the alleged cause of your striking, takes no food or pay from your mouths or your pockets; he interferes with you in no manner whatever. The contrivance he is trying to complete will not limit the output, but will triple it, necessitating the employment of more men. But your leader says that the present output is wholly sufficient, and you are taking his word for it. Mr. Chittenden represents progress, but you have taken it into your heads that you will have none of it. He refuses to join the union, and I refuse to discharge him on that ground. I do not say that this shall not be a union shop; I say that I shall employ whom I will for any purpose I see fit. It is your say, so say it; yours is the power; use it. ... Patience, just a little longer. I have shown much of it during the past year."

The men swayed restlessly, and then became still again when they saw that he was going to read something.

"I have here the last letter my father ever wrote me. As I received it after his death, I might say that it is a voice from the grave. I will read that part which affects the shops.

"'And so, my son, I leave you this last request. Day after day, year after year, I have toiled honestly, with the will and the foresight God gave me. I die prosperous and contented, having acquired my riches without ill to any and without obligation. I have never wronged any man, though often the power to do so has been in my hands. But reason always cools hot blood, and I have always kept a strong curb on all my angry impulses. Some day the men will strike again, what about I know not; but this I do know: it will be without justice. I have bent to them nine out of ten times. Nine of their demands were not wholly unreasonable, but the tenth was. And this demand was that I should have no non−union men in the shops. This strike lasted four months. You will recall it. I do not know how long it might have gone on, had not the poor devil, who was the cause of it, died. I and the men came together again. We patched up our differences, covertly, so to speak. The men appeared at the gates one morning, and I let them in without referring by a single word to what had taken place. The principle of unionism is a noble thing, but ignoble men, like rust in girders, gnaw rapidly into principles and quickly and treacherously nullify their good.

"'The destroyer is everywhere. The apple has its worm, the rose its canker, the steel its rust. It is the ignorant and envious man who misuses power that, rightly directed, moves toward the emancipation of the human race. There are cruel and grasping and dishonest employers, who grind the heart and soul out of men. The banding together of the laboring men was done in self−defense; it was a case of survive or perish. The man who inaugurated unionism was a great philanthropist. The unions began well; that is because their leaders were honest, and because there was no wolf in the fold to recognize the extent of power. It was an ignorant man who first discovered it, and for the most part ignorance still wears the crown and holds the scepter. The men who put themselves under the guidance of a dishonest labor leader are much to be pitied. The individual laboring man always had my right hand, but I have never had any particular reason to admire the union leader.

"'There were two hundred and twelve strikes last year, of which only six had cause. The others were brought about by politicians and greedy unions. Dishonesty finds the line of least resistance in greed. Now, I have studied the strike problem from beginning to end. There can be no strike at the Bennington shops for a just cause. Had I lived long enough, the shops would have been open−shop. My son, never surrender once to injustice, for if you do you will establish a precedent, and you will go on surrendering to the end of time. I leave the shops to you. There is but one thing I demand, and that is that you shall never sell the shops; Bennington or nothing. If you have difficulties with the men, weigh them on the smallest scales. You will be master there—you alone. It is a big responsibility, but I have the greatest confidence in you. When the time comes, show that you are master, even to the tearing down of every brick and stone that took me so long to erect. I shall be where such disasters will not worry me in the least.'"

Bennington refolded the letter slowly. The men stood absolutely motionless, waiting.

"Men, if you go out this day, not one of you will ever find employment here again. My sense of justice is large, and nothing but that shall dictate to me. I shall employ and discharge whom I will; no man or organization of men shall say to me that this or that shall be done here. I am master, but perhaps you will understand this too late. Stay or go; that is as you please. If you stay, nothing more will be said on my part; if you go ... Well, I shall tear down these walls and sell the machinery for scrap−iron!"

For the first time he showed emotion. He brought his hands strongly together, as a man puts the final blow to

the nail, then buttoned up his coat and stood erect, his chin aggressive and his mouth stern.

"Well, which is it to be?" he demanded.

"You are determined to keep Chittenden?"

"Positively determined."

"We'll go out, Mr. Bennington," said Shipley.

"And what's more," added Morrissy, "we'll see that nobody else comes in."

He lighted a cigar, shoved his hands into his trousers pockets and walked insolently toward the exit. The majority of the men were grinning. Tear down this place? Kill the goose that laid the golden egg? It was preposterous. Why, no man had ever done a thing like that. It was to cut off one's nose to spite one's face. It was a case of bluff, pure and simple. Winter was nearly three months off. By that time this smart young man would be brought to his senses. So they began filing out in twos and threes, their blouses and dinner−pails tucked under their arms. Many were whistling lightly, many were smoking their pipes, but there were some who passed forth silent and grave. If this young man was a chip of the old block, they had best start out at once in search of a new job.

Bennington jumped down from his impromptu platform and closed the ponderous doors. Then he hurried to the main office, where he notified the clerks what had happened. He returned to his private office. He arranged his papers methodically, closed the desk, and sat down. His gaze wandered to the blue hills and rolling pastures, and his eyes sparkled; but he forced back what had caused it, and presently his eyes became dry and hard.

"'You and your actress and her lover'," he murmured softly. "My God, I am very unhappy!"

Chapter XV

The anonymous letter is still being written. This is the weapon of the cowardly and envious heart, so filled with venom and malice that it has the courage or brazenness to go about piously proclaiming the word duty. Beware of the woman who has ink−stains on her fingers and a duty to perform; beware of her also who never complains of the lack of time, but who is always harking on duty, duty. Some people live close to the blinds. Oft on a stilly night one hears the blinds rattle never so slightly. Is anything going on next door? Does a carriage stop across the way at two o'clock of a morning? Trust the woman behind the blinds to answer. Coming or going, little or nothing escapes this vigilant eye that has a retina not unlike that of a horse, since it magnifies the diameter of everything nine times. To hope for the worst and to find it, that is the golden text of the busybody. The busybody is always a prude; and prude signifies an evil−minded person who is virtuous bodily. They are never without ink or soft lead−pencils. Ink has accomplished more wonderful things than man can enumerate; though just now a dissertation on ink in ink is ill−timed.

To return again to the anonymous letter. Add and multiply the lives it has wrecked, the wars brought about. Menelaus, King of the Greeks, doubtless received one regarding Helen's fancy for that simpering son of Priam, Paris. The anonymous letter was in force even in that remote period, the age of myths. It is consistent, for nearly all anonymous letters are myths. A wife stays out late; her actions may be quite harmless, only indiscreet. There is, alack! always some intimate friend who sees, who dabbles her pen in the ink−well and labors over a backhand stroke. It is her bounden duty to inform the husband forthwith. The letter may wreck two lives, but what is this beside stern, implacable duty? When man writes an anonymous letter he is in want of money; when woman writes one she is in want of a sensation. It is easy to reject a demand for money, but we accept the lie and wrap it to our bosoms, so quick are we to believe ill of those we love. This is an aspect of human nature that eludes analysis, as quicksilver eludes the pressure of the finger. The anonymous letter breeds suspicion; suspicion begets tragedy. The greatest tragedy is not that which kills, but that which prolongs mental agony. Honest men and women, so we are told, pay no attention to anonymous letters. They toss them into the waste−basket ... and brood over them in silence.

Now, Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was always considering her duty; her duty to the church, to society, to charity, and, upon occasions, to her lord and master.

"Bennington's men have gone out, the fools!" said Haldene from over the top of his paper.

"Have they?" Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene nibbled the tip of her pen. She sighed, tore up what she had written and filtered it through her fingers into the waste−basket.

"Yes, they've gone out. I don't know what the business world is coming to. Why, the brick−layer gets—I don't say earns—more than the average clerk. And Bennington's men go out simply because he refuses to discharge that young English inventor. ... What are you writing and tearing up so often?" he asked, his curiosity suddenly aroused.

"A letter."

"Thoughts clogged?"

"It is a difficult letter to write."

"Then there can't be any gossip in it."

"I never concern myself with gossip, Franklyn. I wish I could make you understand that."

"I wish you could, too." He laid his paper down. "Well, I'm off to the club, unless you are particularly in need of me."

"You are always going to the club."

"Or coming back."

"Some husbands—"

"Yes, I know. But the men I play poker with are too much interested in the draw to talk about other men's wives."

"It's the talk of the town the way you men play cards."

"Better the purse than the reputation."

"I haven't any doubt that you are doing your best to deplete both," coldly.

Then she sighed profoundly. This man was a great disappointment to her. He did not understand her at all. The truth was, if she but knew it, he understood her only too well. She had married the handsomest man in town because all the other belles had been after him; he had married money, after a fashion. Such mistakes are frequent rather than singular these days. The two had nothing in common. It is strange that persons never find this out till after the honeymoon. Truly, marriage is a voyage of discovery for which there are no relief expeditions.

So Haldene went to the club, while his wife squared another sheet of writing−paper and began again. Half an hour went by before she completed her work with any degree of satisfaction. Even then she had some doubts. She then took a pair of shears and snipped the crest from the sheet and sealed it in a government envelope. Next she threw a light wrap over her shoulders and stole down to the first letter−box, where she deposited the trifle. The falling of the lid broke sharply on the still night. She returned to the house, feeling that a great responsibility had been shifted from hers to another's shoulders. Indeed, she would have gone to any lengths to save Patty a life of misery. And to think of that woman! To think of her assuming a quasi−leadership in society, as if she were to the manner born! The impudence of it all! Poor Mrs. Bennington, with her grey hairs; it would break her heart when she found out (as Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene determined she should) the sort of woman her son had married. She straightened her shoulders and pressed her lips firmly and contemplated a duty, painfully but rigorously performed. She cast the scraps of paper into the grate and applied a match. It is not always well that duty should leave any circumstantial evidence behind.

The evening papers devoted a good deal of space to the strike at the Bennington shops. They frankly upheld Bennington. They admitted that employers had some individual rights. They berated the men for quarreling over a matter so trivial as the employment of a single non−union man, who was, to say the most, merely an experimenter. However, they treated lightly Bennington's threat to demolish the shops. No man in his right mind would commit so childish an act. It would be revenge of a reactive order, fool matching fools, whereas Bennington ought to be more magnanimous. The labor unions called special meetings, and with one or two exceptions voted to stand by the action of the men.

There was positively no politics behind this strike; everybody understood that; at least, everybody thought he understood. But there were some who smiled mysteriously and wagged their heads. One thing was certain; Bennington's friend, Warrington would lose many hundred votes in November. For everybody knew which way the Republican convention would go; there was nobody in sight but Warrington.

Bennington and Mrs. Jack dined at the old home that evening. There was plenty of gloom and forced gaiety around the board. John pretended that he was well out of a bad job; he was not a dreamer nor a socialist, not he; Utopia was not for the iron age. He told stories, joked and laughed, and smoked frequently. No one but the mother had the courage to ask if he really meant to tear down the mills. She came around the table, smoothed his hair as she had done since he was a boy, and leaned over his chair.

"John?"

"Well, mother mine?"

"Shall you really do it?"

"Do what?"

"Tear it down."

He did not answer at once, and she waited, trembling.

"You would not have me take back my words to the men, would you, mother?" quietly.

"Your father loved the place."

"And do I not?" a note of strong passion in his voice. "I shall tear it down, if I live. Do not ask me anything more about it. Has Dick been over to−day?"

"He telephoned that he would be over after dinner. He wants you to go to the speech−making to−night." Patty rose from her seat at the table.

"Patty," said John, rather surprised at his discovery, "you are almost a woman!"

"You men never see anything quickly," said Mrs. Jack. "Patty has been a beautiful woman for several months."

Patty started, restrained the impulse to speak, and searched Mrs. Jack's face. But Mrs. Jack had eyes for no

one but John. Her thought was far removed from her words. That telephone message rang in her ears every hour of the day. One moment she was on the verge of telling John, the next she dared not. What had that wretch found out? What could he have found out? A lie; it could be nothing more nor less than a lie; but the suspense and the waiting were killing her. Every beat of her heart, every drop of her blood belonged to this man at her side, and she would rather die than that doubt should mingle with his love. She was miserable, miserable; she dared not confide in any one; Patty was too young, for all her womanhood, to understand fully. Night after night she forced her recollection through the dim past, but she could find nothing but harmless, innocent follies. Alas, the kaleidoscope of life has so many variant angles that no two eyes see alike. What to her appeared perfectly innocent might appear evil in the neighbors' eyes; what to her was sunshine, to another might be shadow.

"Think of it!" said John. "Patty will be marrying before long."

Mrs. Bennington looked at Patty and sighed. To rear up children and to lose them, that was the mother's lot. To accept these aches with resignation, to pass the days in reconciling what might be with what shall be, that was the mother's portion. Yes, Patty must some day marry.

"When Patty marries, mother," said John, "you shall come and live with Kate and me."

"You are moving me around like a piece of useless furniture," replied Patty, with some resentment. "I doubt if I shall ever marry."

"Bosh!" laughed John. "There'll come some bold Lochinvar for you, one of these days; and then off you'll go. There's the bell. That must be Dick."

Patty and Mrs. Jack crossed glances quickly. John went to the door himself and brought Warrington back with him.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Mr. Warrington?" asked the mother.

"Thank you, I will." Warrington stirred the tea, gazing pleasantly from face to face.

The lines in his face seemed deeper than usual; the under lids of the eyes were dark, and the squareness of the jaw was more prominent. John saw no change, but the three women did. Warrington looked careworn.

"Well, John, I see that you have done it."

"Yes."

"I'm terribly sorry, but you couldn't back down now and live in town."

"You see, mother?" John smiled sadly.

"Yes, my son. You will do what you think best and manliest."

"How's the cat?" asked Warrington.

"It still wanders about, inconsolable," answered Patty. How careworn he looked!

"Poor beast! It is lucky to have fallen in such good hands."

"When you are mayor," said Patty, "you must give me a permit to rescue stray cats from the pound."

"I'll do more than that; I'll build a house of shelter for them."

"What time does your speaker begin?" inquired John, lighting a fresh cigar.

"John, you are smoking too much," remonstrated Mrs. Jack.

"I know it, honey."

"Rudolph begins at nine; if we go then that will be soon enough. You'll be amused. Have you been riding lately?" Warrington directed this question to Patty.

"Yes, regularly every morning." Patty dallied with the crumbs at the side of her plate.

"I don't know what's the matter with me, but I find it wearies me to climb on to a horse's back. I haven't got back to normal conditions yet."

"I was wondering where you were."

"And how is Jove?" asked Mrs. Jack.

"He's snoozing out on the veranda. I take him everywhere now."

Presently they moved into the living−room. Warrington longed to sit beside Patty, but of a sudden he had grown diffident. It amused him to come into the knowledge that all his address and worldliness would not stand him in good stead in the presence of Patty. Words were no longer at his command; he was no longer at his ease. He was afraid of Patty; and he was very, very lonely. That empty house over the way was no longer home. There were moments when he regretted his plunge into politics. He was not free to pack his luggage and speed away to lands that urged his fancy. He had given his word, and he was too much of a man to withdraw it. He must remain

here and fight two battles.

Mrs. Jack had taken the seat next to him, and was asking him about the progress of the play. It was going on so indifferently that he was of half a mind to destroy it, which he did later. His glance always came back to Patty. She was bent over her basket−work. She was calling him Mr. Warrington again. Had he offended her in any manner? The light from the lamp sparkled in her hair. She was as fresh and beautiful as a July rose. But Mrs. Jack was an artist. She knew how to draw him out; and shortly he was talking animatedly. It was now that Patty's eyes began to rove.

John, his fingers meeting in an arch, one leg thrown restlessly across the other, thoughtfully eyed his wife and his friend. ... It was a lie; there was nothing in all the world so honest as Warrington's hand, so truthful as his wife's eyes. Cursed be the doubt that had wedged between these two he loved!

Time passes quickly or slowly, according to the state of mind. To John the time was long; to Patty and Warrington it was too short; to Mrs. Jack it was neither long nor short, but suspended.

"Time for us to go, John. You are not particular about a chair, are you?" Warrington asked.

"Not I. I prefer to stand up in the rear of the hall. If I am bored I can easily escape."

"Oh, the night will not be without some amusement."

"Take good care of John," whispered Mrs. Jack in Warrington's ear; as the two men were about to depart.

"Trust me!" Warrington smiled.

Patty and John observed this brief intercourse. The eyes of love are sharp. Patty was not jealous, neither was John; but something had entered into their lives that gave to all trivial things a ponderous outline.

"Don't let any reporters talk to John, Mr. Warrington," requested the mother.

"I'll surround him."

"Shall we walk?" asked John.

"We can see better on foot."

"We'll walk, then."

So the two men went down town on foot, and Jove galloped back and forth joyously. At any and all times he was happy with his master. The one bane of his existence was gone, the cat. He was monarch of the house; he could sleep on sofa−pillows and roll on the rugs, and nobody stole his bones.

"Good dog," observed John.

"Money couldn't buy him. I saw that fellow Bolles to−day," tentatively.

"Bolles?" John did not recollect the name.

"The fellow you nearly throttled the other night," explained Warrington. "He looked pretty well battered up. I never saw you lose your temper so quickly before."

"He struck me without provocation, at the wrong moment. Who is going to speak to−night?"

"Donnelly and Rudolph."

"What do you think? Donnelly called me up by 'phone this afternoon. Wants to know if I really intend to tear down the shops. I told him I had nothing to say on the subject."

"Tear them down. I should. You're a rich man."

"Money isn't the question. The thing is, what shall I do? I'm not fitted for anything else."

"Tear down the shops and then build them up again, after a few years. It will be a good lesson to these union leaders. And you could have the fun of fighting to build up the trade your father left. You were talking once of rebuilding entirely."

"Not a bad idea, Dick. Only, I feel sorry for the men."

"Why? Are they free men or are they not? It rested with them just as much as it did with you. I am far removed from the principles of unionism, as they stand to−day. I have no patience or sympathy with men who can not, or will not, appreciate a liberal, honest employer."

"Let's change the subject, Dick."

For a block or so they proceeded in silence.

"John, you're the head of the family. I love Patty better than anything else on God's earth. Do you mind?" Warrington uttered these words swiftly, before his courage, which he had suddenly urged to its highest, dropped back.

John swung round abruptly and brought his hands down heavily on Warrington's shoulders.

"Is that true, Dick?"

"As I stand here. Oh, I know; I'm not good enough for Patty. I haven't lived as decently as I might. I haven't gone through life as circumspectly as you have. I drank; success made me dizzy. But I love Patty—God bless her!—as I never hoped or dreamed of loving any woman. You're a man, John; you will understand. I've been alone all my life; buffeted here and there, living haphazard, without any particular restraint on my desires. The dear old aunt was the only tie, and that was delicate till I came home and found how good and kind she was. I miss her; months from now I shall miss her a hundredfold. I'm very lonely. You've all been so good to me. To be alone, and to think of living alone for the rest of my days, is a torture. My nature craves companionship, and this craving has led me into plenty of mischief. I love Patty. What do you say, John?"

"Say? Why, you are good enough for any woman alive. I am very glad, Dick. Patty married to you! You old farmer," affectionately, "I've always been mentally pairing off you two! Come on; let's hear what the political windmill has to say. They're burning red fire in front of the hall."

But a moment gone their feet had dragged with each step; now there was a lightness that was dancing. John knew that it was all a lie; and his heart was as light as his feet. Kate, dear Kate! He was a wretch! He slapped Warrington on the shoulder.

"To think of your marrying Patty, the little sister!"

"Don't go too fast, John," said Warrington with less enthusiasm. "I haven't said a word to Patty yet; and if she's a sensible young woman, she'll give me my conge first−off."

"By George, women are strange creatures. It's the truth, Dick; you can't tell which way they'll go. But Patty's no fool." John hadn't felt so good in many hours.

"But I love her, and God knows I shall try to be worthy of her, even if I lose her. ... Sky−rockets!" with an upward glance. "That's the signal for Rudolph's arrival at the hall."

"Come on, then!"

Rudolph was the great Jeffersonian Democrat, not by excellence, rather by newspaper courtesy, and that, to be specific, by his own newspaper. He had come up from New York that day to deliver his already famous speech. He was one of the many possibilities in the political arena for the governorship. And as he was a multimillionaire, he was sure of a great crowd. As an Englishman loves a lord, so does the American love a millionaire. Rudolph's newspaper was the only one in the metropolis that patted him on the back regularly each morning. He was the laboring man's friend; he was the arch enemy of the monopolies (not yet called trusts); and so forth and so on. For all that some laughed at him, he was an able politician, and was perfectly honest in all his political transactions, which is something of a paradox. So he came up to Herculaneum to convert the doubting. The laboring party greeted him en masse, and stormed the hall for choice seats.

The hall was a low, rambling structure, bad for the voice, but capable of seating a few thousands. The curbs glared with green and red fire, and a band blared out the songs of freedom. The crowds surged back and forth, grumbling and laughing and shouting. And the near−by saloons did a land−office business. It was a great night for the man who had nothing to do. All at once there was loud hurrahing. An open hack drove up to the entrance, and the great Jeffersonian stood up, bowing, bowing. The green light on one side and the red on the other gave to his face a Gargantuan aspect rather than that of a Quixote, to whom he was more often likened than to any other character in fiction. The police cleared a pathway for the great man, and he hurried up the steps. Another cheer, and another blast from the band. Great is popularity, whose handmaiden is oblivion.

"They'll be doing all this to you some day," John declared, as he and Warrington elbowed through the crowd, the dog between their legs.

"That's him!" cried a voice.

"Who?"

"The fellow that writes; Henderson's man."

"Salt licks for him!" came in derision.

"He'll give Donnelly a run for the money."

"Not in a thousand years!"

All this amused Warrington.

"How d' y' do, Mr. Warrington?"

A hand touched the prospective candidate on the arm. Warrington saw Osborne's rubicund nose.

"So you're out, too, Mr. Osborne?"

"I never let meetings go by, Richard. Good evening, Mr. Bennington. A man with ten millions doesn't look any different from ordinary mortals, does he? But he is different, or he wouldn't have that barrel. A million is like a light−house; it attracts all sorts of birds."

Warrington laughed and went on. Once or twice he lost the dog, but Jove managed to turn up each time.

"We'll stand at the left," said John; "it's nearer the exits."

"Just as you say. I wish I'd left the dog at home. He's a nuisance in a crowd like this."

They presently stood with their backs to the wall and looked toward the stage. Donnelly was already speaking about the great man who was that night to address them.

"And," concluded the mayor, "Mr. Rudolph will lead us to a victory such as the party in this state has not yet known." And half a hundred more final words. Man approaches nearest woman's postscript when he says: "And, gentlemen, just one word more!"

Meantime Warrington's gaze wandered here and there. He saw many familiar faces,—politicians, prominent merchants of both parties, and the usual exuberant hundreds drawn thither only by curiosity. These were willing to applaud anything and anybody, without knowing or caring what about. Quiet one moment, roaring the next; murmur, murmur, like angry waters on shingle. These make and unmake public men; they have nothing, but they can give everything. Strong tobacco smoke rolled ceilingward, and those on the stage became blurred and nebulous. Once Warrington caught a glimpse of a battered face, but it disappeared quickly. However, he said nothing to Bennington. Again, he saw McQuade moving about, within fifty feet. From time to time McQuade stooped, and Warrington knew that the white dog was present.

"Gentlemen," concluded Donnelly, with a flourish, "William Henry Rudolph, of New York, our next governor."

And, to quote the sympathetic reporters, "tremendous applause shook the rafters." Mr. Rudolph rose majestically, and smiled and bowed. Heigh−ho! man accepts applause so easily; the noise, not the heart behind it; the uproar, not the thought. Man usually fools himself when he opens his ears to these sounds, often more empty than brass. But so porous is man's vanity that it readily absorbs any kind of noise arranged for its benefit.

He began calmly. The orator always reserves his telling apostrophes till that time when it is necessary to smite palm with fist. He spoke of Jefferson, the simplicity of his life, the firmness of his purpose, the height of his ideals. He forgot, as political speakers generally forget who emulate their historic political forebears, that progress rearranges principles and constitutions, that what passed as good statesmanship in Jefferson's time is out of order in the present. Mr. Rudolph paused in the middle of a metaphor. There was a sudden commotion in the rear of the hall. Men were surging to and fro.

"Stand back!" cried a firm, resonant voice, full of anger.

The uproar increased. Those in the forward chairs craned their necks. Some stood up to learn what the matter might be. Others mounted their seats. A thousand absurd conjectures passed from mouth to mouth.

"Somebody's dropped dead!"

"Sit down in front! Sit down!"

"What's the matter?"

"Where are the police?"

"Put him out!"

"A fight!"

Blue helmets moved toward the scene of action slowly. Mr. Rudolph still paused and moistened his lips impatiently. Men can give and take away popularity in the same breath, but a dog fight is arranged by occult forces, and must, like opportunity, be taken when it comes. We are educated to accept oratory, but we need no education in the matter of a dog fight. This red corpuscle was transmitted to us from the Stone Age, and the primordial pleasures alone resist enlightenment.

Two bulldogs, one tan, the other white, were fighting desperately, near the exits. In between human legs, under chairs, this way and that, snarling, snapping, dragging. Men called out, kicked, tried to use canes and umbrellas, and some burned matches. The dogs were impervious. Now the white dog was atop, now the tan. So many interfered that there was no interference.

It was Warrington who had cried out. He had been listening to the orator; and Jove, smelling his enemy from

afar, slyly crept out of his master's reach. The white dog had also been on the watch. In the drop of an eyelid the battle was on. Warrington instantly comprehended the situation, when he saw McQuade, who had every confidence in his dog, clear a circle. He pushed his way through the swaying wall of men and commanded those in front to stand back. He was furious. He had no objections to human beings fighting, but he detested these bloody conflicts between dumb brutes. He called to Jove, but Jove was past hearing; he had tasted his enemy's blood. Once Warrington succeeded in parting the dogs, but the crush prevented his making the separation complete. Instantly they were at it again. The police made superhuman efforts to arrive before it was all over. The fight, however, came to an end as suddenly as it had begun. Jove found his grip. But for the broad collar on McQuade's dog the animal would have been throttled then and there.

McQuade lost his temper and his discretion. He kicked Jove cruelly in the side, at the very moment when Warrington had succeeded in breaking the grip. Bennington thrust McQuade back violently, and he would have fallen but for the dense pack bolstering him up.

"I'll remember that kick, Mr. McQuade," said Warrington, white in the face.

"I don't think you'll be mayor of Herculaneum, Mr. Warrington," replied McQuade, glaring venomously at the man who had brushed him aside so easily.

"Perhaps not, Mr. McQuade," said Warrington; "but at any rate there'll be a reckoning for that kick. You've been trying for months to bring these dogs together. You have finally succeeded, and your dog has been licked soundly. You ought to be satisfied."

Warrington took Jove under his arm and pressed toward the door, followed by Bennington, who was also in a fine rage. The dog, bloody and excited, still struggled, though the brutal kick had winded him.

McQuade was no fool. He saw that if Warrington left this way the impression would not be favorable to the boss contractor. So he made haste to approach Warrington.

"Hold on there, Warrington. I apologize for kicking your dog. I admit I was excited; and my dog was getting licked. I am sorry."

"All right, Mr. McQuade," said Warrington, who would have preferred leaving, minus any apology. He understood perfectly well McQuade's reason for bending.

"By George!" whispered Bennington, "I'd give a thousand for one good punch at that ruffian's head. Brute, double−dealing brute! Look out for him after this, Dick."

"I can take care of myself. Officer, will you kindly get a carriage for me?"

"Sure, Mr. Warrington," said the policeman.

The two managed to get out. In fact, everybody was moving toward the exits. They had forgotten Mr. Rudolph, who completed his effort before a two−thirds empty hall. They say that he went back to his hotel that night disgusted with humanity and, mayhap, with the fact that the fight had not occurred nearer the stage. Orators are human also.

As Warrington followed Bennington into the carriage the door closed and a head was thrust inside the open window.

"Don't forget me when you're mayor, Mr. Warrington," said Bill Osborne.

"Well?" Warrington was in no mood for banalities.

Bill glanced hastily from side to side, then said, in a stage whisper that sent Bennington into a roar of laughter:

"I sick'd 'em!"

Chapter XVI

The Republican caucus or convention was uneventful. Warrington was nominated for mayor of Herculaneum, with little or no opposition. Everybody expected it. It was, in the phraseology of the day, cut and dried. There was no surprise on the part of the public. Still, Senator Henderson was jubilant; he had nominated his man.

The young candidate's speech, accepting the nomination, was reproduced in full in all the newspapers, whose editorial writers frankly admitted that the speech was one of the best heard in Herculaneum in years. Reporters raked up anecdotes and old photographs; they enlarged upon the history of his early struggles and his ultimate success; and long despatches flashed over the wires. The whole continent was more or less interested in the sudden political ambition of one of its favorite dramatic writers.

It was true that Warrington's vanity was touched. It always touches our vanity to be given something for which we have made no struggle whatever. It was something to be followed by curious newsboys, to be spoken to respectfully by Tom, Dick and Harry, who erstwhile hadn't known of his existence. Warrington was human, and he laughed at his vanity even as it was being gratified.

On the other side the Democrats perfunctorily nominated Donnelly. It was the best they could do, and Donnelly had nothing to learn. And so the fight was on. Donnelly went everywhere; so did Warrington. If Donnelly spoke in the German district, Warrington spoke to the Italians and in their native tongue. Warrington soon learned how to shake hands in the manner of a candidate,—to take the whole hand and squeeze it soundly. The coal−heaver whose hand the dramatist grasped thereupon returned to his friends with the report that the candidate had a good grip, that there was nothing namby−pamby about him, for all his dude clothes. It is the gift of Heaven to win friends and keep them, and Warrington possessed this gift. His good−humored smile, his ready persiflage, his ease in all environments, and his common sense—these were his bucklers. He spoke in dingy halls, on saloon bars, everywhere and anywhere and at all times. It was a great sight to see him lightly mount a bar and expound his politics, his nostrils assailed by cheap tobacco and kerosene lamps. If Donnelly opened a keg of beer, Warrington opened two; if Donnelly gave a picnic, Warrington gave two. And once he presented free matinee tickets to a thousand women. This was a fine stroke of policy. When a man wins a woman to his cause, he wins a valiant champion. Here, then, were a thousand tongues in his service.

His work put enthusiasm into the rank and file of the party, and soon all half−heartedness disappeared and dissensions vanished. He furnished foot−ball suits for the newsboys, torch−light regimentals for the young men's Republican clubs; he spent his own money freely but judiciously; and all the while Donnelly was not far behind. For the first time in the history of local politics the two parties went to work with solid ranks. It promised to be a great campaign. Warrington's influence soon broke the local confines; and the metropolitan newspapers began to prophesy that as Herculaneum went, so would go the state.

Warrington's theatrical manager came up from New York and said he wanted that play at once. The dramatist declared that there would be no play that season. The manager threatened a lawsuit; Warrington remained unmoved. His first duty was to his party; after the first Tuesday in November he would see. This argument found its way to reportorial ears, with the result that it merely added to the young candidate's growing popularity.

It was only occasionally that he saw the Benningtons. His nights were devoted to speech−making or conferences. Sometimes, however, on his way home late at night, he would walk up as far as the old house and look up at the windows; and if he saw a light in Patty's room he would pause for a few minutes, then turn about, Jove limping at his heels. Patty Bennington! The one idyl in his noisy life, the one uplifting influence! He knew that he was not making this fight for clean politics because his heart was in it, but because Patty's was. It is thus that women make the world better, indirectly. Once or twice he had seen Patty in the gallery at mass meetings; but, hurry as he might, he never could get around to the entrance in time to speak to her.

As for McQuade, he knew that between him and that gentleman the war had only begun. He was constantly wondering how McQuade would act; but so far as he could see, McQuade had absolutely nothing to stand on. McQuade would have to tunnel; he could not carry on the war above ground. McQuade would never forgive the result of the dog fight. There had been so much raillery in the newspapers that McQuade became furious

whenever it was mentioned. His dog was a professional fighter and had made three kills, and here a "pet" had given him his first licking. It rankled, and none of McQuade's friends dared refer to it. So Warrington remained alert and watchful; it was all he could do.

In more ways than one Herculaneum became widely known. Other cities realized that there was a peculiar strike in progress, upon the outcome of which depended the principles of unionism. Here was an employer who was making preparations to destroy his shops, regardless of financial loss, regardless of public opinion, regardless of everything but his right to employ and discharge whom he willed. Every great employer in the country focused his eye upon Herculaneum; every union leader did likewise. The outcome would mean a kind of revolution.

At the shops the men had placed the usual sentinels around the limits, ready to repel the expected army of non−union workmen. But a day passed, two, three, four; a week, then ten days; a month. Not a single strange man approached the gates. Not one man among them had any information whatever as to the movements of their whilom employer. Scab labor never showed its head above the horizon. The men began to wonder; they began to grow restless. But Morrissy always pacified them with the word "wait."

"Vigilance, boys; that's the word," said the leader. "The moment we go to sleep he'll have his men inside."

So the men relaxed none of their watching, night and day. It was rather pathetic to see the children bringing scanty meals to the guarding men. They were being misled, that was all, but they had to find that out themselves. The city's bill−boards were covered with "Boycott" and "Unfair" paper. The men were careful. They made no effort to injure anything; they made no attempt to enter the shops; they had had a brush with the militia once, and they were wise. They could beat the new men and maim them, but so long as they did not touch property there would be no call for the militia. They waited. Mean−time Morrissy wore a new diamond.

One day a cry went up.

"Here's the scabs! Here they come!"

Word was sent immediately to the union's headquarters.

A body of twenty−odd men, carrying shovels and pickaxes and dinner−pails, moved toward the gates. At their head was Bennington himself. He placed the great key in the lock and swung the gates inward. The men passed in quickly. Bennington was last. He turned for a moment and gazed calmly at the threatening faces of the strikers. An impulse came to him.

"Men," he said, "up to one o'clock this noon these gates will be open to you. Each of you can take up your work where you left it, at the same wages, at the same hours. This is the last chance. Later you will learn that you have been betrayed."

"How about Chittenden?"

"Chittenden will return at the same time you do."

"The hell he will! Let him show his British face here, and we'll change it so his mother won't know it."

Bennington went inside and shut the gates. There was nothing more to be done. He did not slam the gates insolently, as some men would have done; he simply shut them.

This event was also reported at headquarters. That afternoon all the strikers were out in force. They congregated in groups and talked angrily. Two policemen patrolled up and down. Bennington had had some difficulty in securing even these. The men waited for the first sign of smoke from the chimneys, but none came. No one was lighting the furnaces; there was nothing but silence inside the shops. There was no possible excuse as yet for deeds of violence, though many of the more turbulent element urged riot at once. What was the use of waiting? In the afternoon there appeared some fifty more strange men. These carried tool−bags. They were challenged. They ignored the challenge and pushed on resolutely. For the first time blows were struck. The leader whirled around.

"Look here, men, you're making a big mistake. Your fists won't help you. We are going inside, and if we can't go in peaceably, why, we'll break some heads to get in. We have all been sworn in legally as deputy police, and if we start in to break heads we promise to do it thoroughly."

"What are you going to do in there?" demanded Morrissy.

"None of your business, for one thing," answered the burly spokesman of the interlopers. "I'll add this much, if it will ease your minds: nobody's going to step into your jobs; when you went out you left your jobs behind."

"So you fellows are what they call strike−breakers, are you?" asked Morrissy wrathfully.

"Oh, we aren't going to break your strike, my friend. You can call this a strike as long as you please, so far as

we're concerned. We've got work to do here, though, and we are going to do it."

"Are you union men?"

"Not so you'd notice it," was the cool reply.

"All right. You fellows won't be here long."

"Stop us if you can. Now, stand aside!" commanded the stranger menacingly.

"Let 'em by, men," cried Morrissy. "Don't touch 'em yet. You just leave it to me. I know a way and a good one, too. You just leave it to me."

The angry strikers divided ranks and the strangers entered the shops.

Morrissy directed his steps to McQuade's office, and together they paid a visit to the mayor.

"Look here, Donnelly, did you permit Bennington to swear in deputy police?" asked McQuade.

"Deputy police? Bennington has no deputy police from this place," answered Donnelly hotly.

"Well, all we know is that he has them," snapped Morrissy.

"Then he has gone directly to the governor."

"The governor?"

McQuade and Morrissy looked at each other blankly.

"He has that prerogative," said Donnelly.

"But he wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, yes, he would. It's his last term; he is without further political ambition; he can act as he pleases, in the face of public condemnation. There's one thing left, though."

"What?"

"Injunction," said Donnelly tersely.

"With Republican judges on the benches?" replied McQuade ironically.

"And you can't enjoin private property," added Morrissy.

"I'll send for Bennington," Donnelly volunteered. "Perhaps I can talk him into reason."

"It's up to you to block this move somehow," said McQuade. "It means the labor vote. And we've got to have that."

"I'll do the best I can. I can stop his permit to tear down the building, if he really intends to do that."

"It will be a good day's work for you."

"I'll act this very afternoon."

Once outside the mayor's office, McQuade turned to Morrissy.

"Where's that receipt you promised on oath?"

"Haven't you got it?" asked Morrissy, feigning surprise.

"No, and I doubt you sent it. But I want it at once, and no more monkeying."

"Well, I sent it. I mailed it to your office. You've overlooked it."

"Come over to my office now and make it out," McQuade insisted.

"You've got plenty of grips on me without that," protested Morrissy reproachfully.

"But I want this one, and I'm going to have it."

"I'll go to your office. Will Donnelly be game?"

"He will if he knows which side his bread is buttered on," contemptuously.

The two went up to McQuade's office. It was deserted.

"The girl's gone this afternoon," said McQuade, "but I can handle the typewriter myself."

"All I've got to say is that I mailed you a receipt. What do you want it for?" with a final protest.

"I've got an idea in my head, Morrissy. I want that receipt. Some day you may take it into your head to testify that I offered you a thousand to bring on the strike at Bennington's. That would put me in and let you out, because I can't prove that I gave the cash to you. Business is business."

"Hell! Any one would think, to hear you talk, that I had threatened to betray."

"Every man to his own skin," replied McQuade philosophically. He then sat down before the typewriter. There were two blank sheets in the roller, with a carbon between. The girl had left her machine all ready for the morrow's work. McQuade picked out his sentence laboriously.

"There, sign that."

The paper read:

"I, James Morrissy, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I have received $1,000, in two sums of $500 each, from Daniel McQuade, these sums being payment agreed upon for my bringing about the strike at the Bennington shops."

Morrissy looked at the boss incredulously.

"I say, Mac, have you gone crazy?" he cried. "Do you want evidence like this lying around in your safe? It's the penitentiary for both of us if any one finds that."

"I know what I am doing," McQuade responded quietly, as indeed he did.

"But look; you've got the strike and I've got the cash; that makes us quits."

"Sign it," was all McQuade replied to this argument.

"All right. What's bad for me is bad for you," and without further ado Morrissy affixed his fist to the sheet.

"Here's the duplicate for you."

Morrissy lighted a match and set fire to the sheet; he stamped on the ashes with grim satisfaction.

"Not for mine," with a laugh. "You're welcome to yours."

McQuade folded his deliberately and put it away in the safe. The sheet of carbon paper he crumpled into a ball and tossed into the waste− basket. We all commit blunders at one time or another, and McQuade had just committed his.

"That's all, Morrissy. I think I can trust you fully. I mean no harm, boy; 'tis only self−preservation."

"Oh, so long as your name's on it there's no kick coming from me; only I never saw you do such a fool thing before. Anything else to−day?"

"No. You might keep tab on that fool Bolles. He's been drunk ever since he came back from New York. And he doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut."

"I'll keep an eye on him."

"He's the only man we have who can handle the dagos. I'll see you up at Dutch Hall to−night. Donnelly is making a speech there, and we'll open a few kegs of beer for the boys."

When Morrissy was gone McQuade laughed softly and went to the safe again. He proceeded to do to his receipt exactly what Morrissy had done to his—burn it. So long as Morrissy believed that McQuade held his signature, so long might Morrissy be trusted. It was only an idea, but it proved that the boss knew his lieutenants tolerably well.

"The blackleg would sell the tomb off his father's grave," he mused, brushing the ashes from his clothes.

Let Bennington rip up his shops; all the better for Donnelly's chances of reelection. The laboring party would be sure to desert Warrington's standard, since he was a personal and intimate friend of Bennington the oppressor. He laughed again sinisterly. Presently he would have them all by the throats. He would watch them squirm, too. This young fool Warrington; he was the first real obstacle he (McQuade) had encountered in his checkered career. Threats could not move him. He had believed at the start that he could scare him away from the convention; but the fool wouldn't be scared. And his damned dog!

"He'll never reach the City Hall, not while I live, damn his impudence! That woman, though, is no fool. She's kept her mouth shut. They don't always do that. Well, I can write more than receipts on the machine. I'll ruin them both if I can. Ordered me out of the house, and I honestly liked the woman! But I'll square accounts presently."

Meanwhile Donnelly set the wires humming. He finally got Bennington at the shops.

"This is Mr. Bennington. Who is it and what is wanted?"

"This is the mayor talking."

"Oh! Well, what is it, Mr. Donnelly?"

"I must see you at once in my office. This is an urgent request. I can't explain the matter over the wire. But you'll do yourself and me a great favor if you'll come into town at once."

"Very important?"

"Extremely so."

"I shall be there at five o'clock."

"Thanks. I shall await you." Donnelly hung up the receiver, very well satisfied.

Bennington understood. Politics was going to take a hand in the game. After all, it was best to take the bull by the horns at once and have it over with. He knew how well he had fortified himself against any political machinery. So, promptly at a quarter to five, he departed, leaving explicit orders with his subordinates. The

strikers moved aside for him, muttering and grumbling, but they made no effort to impede his progress. There were groans and catcalls, but that was all. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but presented his back to them fearlessly. Chittenden, upon Bennington's advice, had gone to New York. The strikers would have used him roughly, could they have laid hands on him.

Arriving in town, Bennington went at once to the City Hall and straight to the mayor's private office.

"Well, Mr. Donnelly?" he began, his hat on his handsome head and his cane behind his back, neither offensive nor defensive.

Donnelly closed the door leading to the clerk's office and came back to his desk. He waved his hand toward a chair. If he could bend this young hot−head, it would be a victory worth while, politically.

"In the first place, Mr. Bennington, aren't you going a little too hard on the men?"

"That was their lookout; they had every chance to think the matter over, to examine all sides of the question."

"You went personally to the governor for deputy police. Why didn't you come to me?"

"The governor is a personal friend of mine."

"I don't believe that I have been found lacking in justice," said Donnelly thoughtfully.

"I can't say that you have. But I was in a hurry, and could not wait for the local machinery to move."

"You have placed armed men in your shops without a justifiable cause."

"The men are mechanics, sworn in for their own self−protection."

Donnelly saw that he was making no impression.

"These men, then, are to tear down your shops?" not without admiration.

"Well, they are there to dismantle it."

"That building must not go down, Mr. Bennington."

"'Must not'? Do I understand you to say 'must not'?"

"Those words exactly."

"It is private property, Mr. Donnelly; it was not organized under corporation laws."

"You can not destroy even private property, in a city, without a legal permit."

"I have that."

"And I shall call a special meeting of the Common Council to rescind your permit."

"Do so. I shall tear it down, nevertheless. I shall do what I please with what is my own." Bennington balanced on his heels.

"The law is there."

"I shall break it, if need says must," urbanely.

Donnelly surveyed the end of his dead cigar.

"The men will become violent."

"Their violence will in no wise hinder me, so long as they confine it to the shops. Even then I shall call upon you for police protection."

"And if I should not give it?"

"Just now I am sure you will. For the mayor of Herculaneum to refuse me my rights would be a nice morsel for the Republican party."

Donnelly passed over this.

"I wish to protect the rights of the workman, just as you wish to protect yours."

"What are the workman's rights?"

Donnelly did not reply.

"Well, I'll reply for you, then. His right is to sell his labor to the highest bidder; his right is to work where he pleases; for what hours he desires; his right is to reject abusive employers and to find those congenial; his right is to produce as little or as much as he thinks best; his right is to think for himself, to act for himself, to live for himself."

"You admit all this, then?" asked Donnelly in astonishment.

"I have never so much as denied a single right that belongs to the workman."

"Then what the devil is all this row about?"

"If the workman has his rights, shall not the employer have his?"

Donnelly mused. He would not be able to do anything with this plain−spoken man.

"But the workman steps beyond. He has no right to dictate to his employer as to what HIS rights shall be. Where there is no amity between capital and labor there is never any justice; one or the other becomes a despot. The workman has his rights, but these end where the other man's rights begin. He shall not say that another man shall not seek work, shall not sell his labor for what he can get; he has no right to forbid another man's choosing freedom; he has no right to say that a manufacturer shall produce only so much."

"Well, I've only to say," said Donnelly, hedging before this clear argument, "I've only to say, if the men become violent, look out for yourself."

"I shall appeal to you for civic or military protection; if you refuse it, to the governor; if politics there interferes, I shall appeal to Washington, where neither your arm nor McQuade's can reach. I understand the causes back of this strike; they are personal, and I'm man enough to look out for myself. But if politics starts to work, there will be a trouble to settle in the courts. You may not know the true cause of this strike, Mr. Donnelly, but I do. The poor deluded men believe it to be the English inventor, but he is only a blind. Had you really wished to do me a favor, you would have spoken to the men before they went out on this silly strike. But I am master of what is mine, and I shall tear down that building. I shall tolerate no interference from any man. The workman has his rights; this is one of my rights, and I intend to use it."

"It's your business. If you are fool enough to kill a golden goose, it's no affair of mine. But I shall rescind your permit, however. I believe it to be my duty."

"Call your Council together, Mr. Donnelly. You can not get a quorum together earlier than to−morrow night; and by that time I shall have the work done. You say you will not afford me protection. Very well; if the men become violent and burn the shops, I shall be relieved of the expense of tearing them down. Good afternoon."

Donnelly sat in his chair for a quarter of an hour, silent and thoughtful. Suddenly he slapped his thigh.

"I don't know what McQuade has against that man, but, by the Lord! he IS a man!"

That night the strikers received several bottles of whisky and a keg of beer. The source of these gifts was unknown. Some of the more thoughtful were for smashing the stuff, but the turbulent majority overruled them. They began to drink and jest. They did so with impunity. For some reason the police had been withdrawn. The hammering inside the shops puzzled them, but they still clung to the idea that all this clamor was only a ruse to frighten them into surrendering. From the interior the pounding gradually approached as far as the walls of the courtyard. At midnight one of these walls went thundering to the ground. A few minutes later another fell. The strikers grouped together, dismayed.

"By God, boys," one of them yelled, "he's tearing it down!"

In that moment, and only then, did they realize that they had been dealing with a man whose will and word were immutable. They saw all their dreams of triumph vanish in the dust that rose from the crumbling brick and plaster. And dismay gave way to insensate rage. It would only be helping Bennington to riot and burn the shops, so now to maim and kill the men who, at hire, were tearing down these walls.

"Come on, boys! We'll help the scabs finish the work! Come on!"

There was now a great breach in the wall. Men moving to and fro could be seen. The strikers snatched up bricks and clubs and dashed toward this. But ere they had set foot on the rubbish they stopped. Half a dozen resolute men faced them. They were armed.

"That's far enough, boys," warned a powerful voice. "I told you we have all been sworn in as deputy police, with all the laws of the state back of us. The first man that steps across that pile of bricks will go to the hospital, the second man to the undertaker."

Chapter XVII

Ah, the vanity of Dawn! Like a Venus she rises from her bath of opalescent mists and dons a gown of pearl. But this does not please the coquette. Her fancy turns from pearl to green, to amber, to pink, to blue and gold and rose, an inexhaustible wardrobe. She blushes, she frowns, she hesitates; she is like a woman in love. She casts abroad her dewy jewels on the leaves, the blades of grass, the tangled laces of the spiders, the drab cold stones. She ruffles the clouds on the face of the sleeping waters; she sweeps through the forests with a low whispering sound, taking a tithe of the resinous perfumes. Always and always she decks herself for the coming of Phoebus, but, woman−like, at first sight of him turns and flies.

Dawn is the most beautiful of all the atmospheric changes, but the vision is a rarity to the majority of us.

Warrington was up and away on his hunter before Phoebus sent his warning flashing over the hills. He took the now familiar road, and urged his animal vigorously. Fine! Not a bit of dust rose from the road, dew−wet and brown. The rime of the slight frost shone from the fences and grasses and stacked corn, like old age that strikes in a single night. Here and there a farmer could be seen pottering about the yards, or there was a pale curl of smoke rising from the chimney. The horse, loving these chill, exhilarating October mornings, went drumming along the road. Occasionally Warrington would rise in the stirrups and gaze forward over this elevation or that, and sometimes behind him. No. For three mornings he had ridden out this old familiar way, but alone. The hunger in his eyes remained unsatisfied.

For the first time in years he turned into a certain familiar fork in the road, and all his youth came back to him as vividly as though it had been but yesterday. Half a mile up this fork was the rambling old farm−house. It was unchanged. The clapboards were still stained with rust, the barns were still a dingy red, the stone and rail fences needed the same repairs. Nothing had changed there but the masters. And under that roof he had made his first feeble protest against life; he had dreamed those valiant dreams of youth that never come true, no matter how successful one may become in after life. Every waking means an illusion gone, another twig pruned from the tree of ardent fancy; and when one is old there is neither shade nor shelter.

Warrington stopped his horse. He had no desire to ride closer; he could see everything well enough from where he sat. Rosy apples twinkled in the orchard on the hill, and golden pumpkins glistened afield, for by now Phoebus had come to his own. How many dawns had he seen from yonder windows, in summer and winter, in autumn and spring? How many times had he gone dreaming to the markets over this road? It was beyond counting. Had any of those particular dreams come true? Not that he could recollect, for he had never dreamed of being a successful dramatist; that good fortune had been thrust upon him. He tried to picture his father walking toward the fields; it was too remote. His mother? Of her he could recollect positively nothing. But the aunt, he saw her everywhere,—in the garden, in the doorway, in the window, by the old well. Now she was culling hollyhocks along the stone wall, now she was coming down the hill with an apron filled with apples, now she was canning preserves and chili sauce in the hot kitchen, or the steel−rimmed spectacles were shining over the worn pages of the New Testament at night.

What was the use? To−day is alien to yesterday; an hour separates as definitely as eternity. There was nothing there for him; so he wheeled and rode back toward the city, conning over a speech he was to make that night. Since Patty had not ridden this way, the zest of the morning's ride was gone. Which road did she take now? To the west, to the south, to the north round the lake? Twice the night before he had started for the telephone to inquire, but had not taken down the receiver. Was he afraid? He could not say. And afraid of what? Still less could he tell. Three months ago he had called her Patty, had jested and laughed with her; and now he hesitated to call her up by telephone. No, he was not afraid of Patty; he was simply afraid of himself. For he realized this—that in the moment he spoke to her alone his love would spring from his lips like a torrent; nothing could stop it; and he was not of that supreme courage at present that spurs the lover to put it to the touch to win or lose it all.

So, then, he rode back to the city, hugging his doubt and his love, with frequent lucid intervals that were devoted to his forthcoming speech. When the battle was over, when he had won or lost, then he would go to her and drink the cup, bitter or sweet.

Patty had not spent the night in comfort; her head had rolled from one pillow to another, and the cases were not always dry. Indeed, it had been some time since she had pressed her cheek tranquilly upon a pillow. Night is either sweetest or most wretched; one spends it recounting one's joys or one's sorrows. Patty was unhappy; and leave it to youth to gain the full meed of misery. Youth has not the philosophy of matured age to cast into the balance. Satisfaction in this workaday world is only momentary. One is never wholly satisfied; there is always some hidden barb. The child wears the mother's skirts enviously while the mother mourns her youth. Expectation leads us to the dividing line of life, and from there retrospection carries us to the end. Experience teaches us that fire burns and that water quenches; beyond this we have learned but little.

This morning Patty was up with the dawn. She did not trouble to wake the groom, but saddled and bridled the horse herself. She mounted and rode quietly into the street. She did not glance at Warrington's house while approaching or passing it, but once she had left it in the rear she turned quickly, flushing as if she had caught herself in some weakness. She directed the horse toward the west, crossing the city before she reached the open country. Here the west wind, young and crisp, blew away the last vestige of heaviness from her eyes. She urged the horse into a canter and maintained this gait for a mile or more. Then she reined in to a walk.

Three weeks! And all this time she had not even breathed a word of it, but had hugged the viper to her heart in silence. She dropped the reins on the neck of the horse and took a letter from the pocket of her riding−coat. How many times had she read it? How many times had fury and rage and despair flashed from her eyes as she read it? She hated him; she hated her. There was neither honesty nor goodness in the world; those who preached it lied. Yes, yes! There was one. John, dear, noble John, he at any rate was honest. But it was all acting on her part, acting, acting. She had married John as a convenience; she had made use of his honest love as a cloak. The despicable creature! And yet, when in her presence, so great was her charm and magnetism, Patty doubted. After all, it was an anonymous letter, and nothing is more vile. But who can say to this viper Doubt—"Vanish!" It goes, it goes again and again; which is to say it always returns. Long ago she would have confronted her brother's wife with this letter, had not John been in the heart of his battle at the shops. For the present he had enough trouble. And yet, to see that woman with John, an angel might be deceived. To see her weep and laugh over him, to see her touch him with her hands, to caress him with her eyes, to be tender and strong at his side. ... Could anybody be so wicked? True, her transgression had been made, according to this letter, before John had married her; but this lessened the enormity of it none in Patty's eyes.

"Oh, I was so happy, and now I am so miserable!" murmured the girl, pressing her hand to her throat, which seemed to stifle her.

She read the letter again, through blurred vision. It was horrible.

One who takes a deep interest in your future welfare finds it a duty to warn you against Richard Warrington, for whom it is being said you have developed a strong sentiment. It is well known that he drank deeply at one time and lived the life of a debauchee. Beware of the woman, also, whom you call sister. The writer does not offer anything detrimental to her married life, but it is known that she was practically Warrington's mistress before she married your splendid brother. She was seen frequently to enter his apartments at night, and the writer can furnish abundant proof that she was seen to leave his apartments one morning. This is not penned with malice. It is simply that the writer knows and admires you and can not stand passively by and see you humiliated by the attentions of a man who is unworthy to lace your shoes. As for your sister−in−law, I have no desire to meddle. Confront both her and Warrington, if the truth of the above statement is doubted by you.

Upon these last words depended Patty's attitude. It must be true. Whoever had written this abominable letter could write plain English, despite the disguised hand. Patty recognized that it was disguised. The capitals differed, so did the tails of the y's and f's; the backhand slant was not always slanting, but frequently leaned toward the opposite angle. She had but to confront them! It seemed simple; but to bring herself to act upon it! She reviewed all the meetings between Kate and Warrington. Never had her eyes discerned evidence of anything other than frank good fellowship. She searched painfully; there was not a single glance, a single smile upon which she could build a guilty alliance. And yet this writer affirmed ... Oh, it was monstrous! Those rumors she had heard months ago! The telephone call from McQuade! Ah, that telephone call! Had Kate been guilty would she have confided to her, Patty? She seemed to be pulled, now forward, now backward. McQuade knew something, the wretch! but what? This letter had never been written by him. A man would have used a pronoun, third person, masculine; he would have shown some venom back of the duplicity that affirmed an interest in her welfare.

The tears dried quickly; the heat of her renewed rage burned them up. She set about to do something she had not thought of doing before—investigating. She held the note−paper to the sun. The water−mark of a fashionable paper manufacturer was easily observable. Men did not write on that brand. So much gained. Then she recalled a French play in which a perfume had convicted a person of theft. She held the envelope to her nose; nothing, not even tobacco. She tried the letter itself. Ah, here was something tangible: heliotrope, vague, but perceptible. Who among her friends used heliotrope on her kerchief? She could not remember; in fact, any or all of them might have worn it, so far as she could recall. She would go over her invitations and visitors' cards; she would play detective; she would ferret out as a spy who took this amiable interest in her future. This determination brightened her considerably. And woe to the meddler if Patty found her! If it was a baseless lie (and she hoped against hope in her loyal little heart!) she would make a pariah of the writer of this particular anonymous letter. True or not, what was it to her? What right had she to interfere? She was cowardly; of that Patty was certain. True friends are the last in the world to inflict sorrow upon us. Kith and kin may stab us, but never the loyal friend. Now that she thought it all over, she was glad that she had repeatedly fought the impulse to lay the matter before her sister. She would trace this letter home first; she would find out upon what authority it was written; there would be time enough after that to confront Kate, or Warrington, or John. Ah, if she had stepped forward in the dark, to wreck her brother's life needlessly. ... Heliotrope! She would never forget that particular odor, never. She had a good idea of justice, and she recognized the fact that any act on her part, against either Kate or Warrington, before she found the writer of the letter, would be rank injustice. Persons can not defend themselves against anonymous letters; they can only ignore them.

She touched her horse again. She was now in feverish haste to get home. She took the turn of the road which presently brought her in the vicinity of the shops. It was practically in ruins. The courtyard walls were all down, the building itself was totally empty of ore or machinery. Bennington had disposed of these to Pennsylvanian concerns. Patty rode up in time to see half a dozen urchins throwing stones at the few window−panes that were still unbroken. She dispersed them angrily, and they gathered at the side of the road, open−mouthed and wide−eyed at the picture of this avenging angel.

"How dare you throw stones at those windows? How dare you?" she cried passionately.

After a while one of the lads found his voice.

"Why, nobody's in it. The man what owns it tored the insides outen it. 'Tain't no harm what we're doin'. Hey, fellers?"

"Naw. The cops don't say nothin'. An' my old man used to work there."

She saw that they were no more than ordinary boys to whom the panes of glass in a deserted building were legitimate prey.

"So your father was one of the strikers?" said Patty, her lips thinning. "Why did he strike?"

"I don't know; 'cause the others struck, I guess. They was an English lobster workin' without bein' in my old man's union. Mebbe that was it. Anyhow, we don't care; the old man's got another job."

With this the boys climbed the fence and moved across the field, mutely rebellious, like puppies baffled in their pursuit of a cat.

Patty's eyes, moist and shining of a sudden, roved over the grim ruins. Sparrows were chattering on the window ledges and swallows were diving into the black mouths of the towering chimneys. The memory of her father swelled her heart near to bursting. She could see his iron−grey head bending over the desk; she could hear his rough but kindly voice. Why, whenever he entered the house his splendid physical energy seemed to radiate health and cheerfulness, infecting all those about him. She could see the men, too, moving in the glow of ruddy light; she could see again the brilliant sparks flying from under the thundering trip−hammers, the cyclopean eyes that glared up at heaven at night, the great rumbling drays, the freight moving to and from the spur. Now there was no sound; nothing but silence, with the suggestion of a tomb.

The end of the strike had been a nine days' wonder, for it proved that there had actually been no strike at all, since the owner had simply closed down the shops, torn down a few walls, sold the machinery and ore, and canceled all his business obligations. No sensation, however vital, lasts very long these days; and after these nine days it turned its attention to other things, this mutable public. Employers, however, and union leaders, all over the continent, went about their affairs thoughtfully. If one man could do this unheard−of thing, so might others, now that an example had been set before them. The dispersed men harbored no ill feeling toward Morrissy; he, as

they supposed, had acted in good faith for the welfare of the union. But for the man who had had the courage to make good his threats, for him they had nothing but bitterness and hate.

Patty would always remember that final night of the strike when John had come in early in the morning, his clothes torn, his hands bloody, his hair matted to his forehead, and hatless. He had been last to leave the shops, and he had, unarmed, run the gantlet of the maddened strikers who had been held at bay for six long hours. Only his great strength and physical endurance had pulled him out of the arms of violent death. There had been no shot fired from the shops. The strikers saw the utter futility of forcing armed men, so they had hung about with gibe and ribald jeer, waiting for some one careless enough to pass them alone. This Bennington did. His men had forgotten him. Bennington's injuries had been rather trivial; it had been his personal appearance that had terrified the women. He had fallen asleep half an hour after reaching home, and he had slept till nine that evening. Upon awakening he had begun at once to plan a trip to Europe, to wander from capital to capital for a year or so. No one had interrupted him; not even the mother, grown old in the past month, had demurred at his plans. He would have none near him but Kate, and she had hovered about him, ministering to his wants as a mother over a sick child. ... Kate! It all came back with a rush. Kate! Oh, what was she, Patty, to believe? That night she had loved Kate almost to idolatry. She shuddered, turned away from the ruins, and set off at a gallop till she came upon brick pavement. She rarely trotted upon pavement, but this morning she had no thought for the horse; she burned to be at work. She trotted rapidly into town, across the principal thoroughfares, this way being the short cut. By this time men were on the way to work. Many of them turned their heads to stare at her. There was only one woman in town who sat a horse like this one, and it could be no less a person than Patty Bennington. All the men recognized her instantly. She had their good wishes, for all that her brother had taken away the bread and butter of some of them. Many touched their hats from mere force of habit.

There was one man, however, who glared evilly at her from the curb. She recognized him in spite of his discolored face, the result of a long, uninterrupted debauch. It was Bolles. As he caught her eye he smiled evilly and leered at her.

"Wait, my beauty; wait. I'll kill that brother of yours one of these fine days, damn him!" Bolles gave one more look at the swiftly−moving figure on the horse, and shuffled away toward McQuade's office, to await the arrival of that gentleman. Bolles needed money, and he knew where to get it.

As she reached the foot of Williams Street Patty glanced up the hill. A horseman had just entered Warrington's. She recognized both man and horse. It was Warrington. She knew at once that he had ridden out her favorite route, perhaps in the hope of seeing her. Her heart tightened strangely as she walked her horse up the hill, and she would have passed home but for the intelligence of her animal, which turned in toward the house quite naturally. Her mother was on the side veranda.

"Patty, you have worried us all. The stableman, when he found your horse gone, came in with the cry of thieves. I was frightened, too, till I went to your room and found you gone. You mustn't go without notifying the stableman or the groom."

"It was an impulse of the moment, mother. I couldn't sleep, and I saw no need of waking up the boys in the stables."

Patty ran up stairs for a bath and a change of clothes for breakfast. She ate little, however; the ride had not put the usual edge on her appetite.

"Mr. Warrington made a fine speech last night," said the mother, handing the morning paper to Patty.

Patty accepted it mechanically. She had determined not to read the paper. But she knew now, if she unfolded it, she would turn immediately to the local pages and search for Warrington's speech. She read it, and she hated herself for admiring it. The self−lie was not among Patty's failings. There was no denying that Warrington's speech was a good oratorical effort; every line of it rang sound and true; but that might be a trick of the trade. He could make thieves and villains on the stage speak glibly and plausibly; certainly he could do as much for himself. One thing she could not deny him, and that was frankness. He had confessed to her last summer that he was not, or had not been, a good man in the strict sense of the word. She laid down the paper and finished her coffee. She was glad that she did not have to face Kate at each meal. She felt that she couldn't have trusted herself; there were times when she spoke the first thought, and always regretted it. Poor John, poor John!

From the table she went directly to the Indian basket that held all the cards and invitations. The mother, concerned with her household duties, left her to herself. Patty would have found some difficulty at that moment in

answering any curious questions. One by one she drew out the envelopes and cards. There was a permanent scent of sweet grass. She discovered nothing; she realized that her discovering anything depended solely upon hazard. Excitement ebbed, leaving nothing but hopelessness. She threw the cards and invitations into the basket. She might have known that visiting−cards and printed invitations are generally odorless. She sought the garden. The Angora was prowling around, watching the bees and butterflies hovering over wind−fallen fruit. Patty called to her, but the cat ignored the call. From the garden Patty went to the stables, from the stables she returned to the house. She was at peace nowhere. Later her mother found her dreaming in the window−seat.

"Patty, Mrs. Haldene left her shopping−bag here yesterday afternoon. I had forgotten it. Would you mind taking it over to her, or shall I have the maid do it?"

"I have nothing to do, mother. I can take it over just as well as not," said Patty listlessly.

She slipped her arm through the handles of the bag and proceeded into the hall for a hat. As she lifted the hat to her head the bag slipped along her arm close to her nose. Instantly her figure became tense and rigid, her face grim and colorless.

Heliotrope!

Chapter XVIII

There could be no doubt at all. The perfume on the letter and that on the shopping−bag were identical. Indeed, she would take the bag over to Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene; she would be very glad to do her that trifling service. Oh! Patty's rage choked her. During the past three weeks Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene had called at least a dozen times, doubtless to observe the effect of her interest in Patty's welfare. She might have known! Well, this very morning she would ascertain from Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's lips where she had secured her information. She would do more than that; she would make her prove every word of it.

So Patty marched toward the Haldene place, marched, because that verb suggests something warlike, something belligerent. And there was war a−plenty in Patty's heart. Each step she took sang out a sharp "Meddler−gossip! meddler−gossip!" A delivery horse went past, drumming an irritating "Busybody! busybody! busybody!" What had she or hers ever done to Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene that she should stoop to so base a means of attack? An anonymous letter! War raged in Patty's heart; but there was something warmer and clearer coursing through her veins—hope!

She went on. Not a particle of her courage deserted her as she mounted the steps and pushed the bell. When Patty was genuinely roused in anger she was afraid of little or nothing, animate or inanimate. A maid answered the bell. As she recognized the caller she swung back the door and nodded.

"Is Mrs. Haldene at home?" Patty inquired.

"Yes, Miss Patty."

The maid led Patty into the library, where Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was busily engaged in making up an invitation list.

"Why, Patty, I am glad to see you," she cried, dropping her pen and rising. But her curiosity rose at the same time. Patty here?

"You left your shopping−bag when you called yesterday," said Patty, ominously calm. "I have brought it to you."

"It was very careless of me to forget it."

"Yes, it was," Patty assented, her heart beginning to throb violently.

"Thank you. And I have been looking for it high and low."

Patty passed the bag to her enemy. How to begin, how to begin!

"Mrs. Haldene!" Patty's voice was high−pitched and quavering.

"Why, Patty!"

"Why did you write this base letter to me!"—exhibiting the letter resolutely. "Do not deny that you wrote it. It smells of heliotrope—your favorite perfume."

"Patty Bennington, are you mad?" cried Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene. "What letter? What do you mean?" She knew very well, but she had not practised the control of her nerves all these years for nothing. "A letter? I demand to see it."

But Patty reconsidered and withdrew her hand, concluding that Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene could destroy the letter as easily as she had written it; more easily, had Patty but known it.

"I prefer to read it to you." And Patty read, her tones sharp and penetrating, finely tempered by anger.

"I write such a thing as that? You accuse me of writing an anonymous letter of that caliber? You are mad, distinctly mad, and if I did what was right I should ask you to leave this house instantly." Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene rose to her full height, after the manner of indignant persons on the stage.

Patty was not overcome in the least. An idea, bold, unconventional, and not over−scrupulous, shot into her head. With her eyes holding Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's, she stepped toward the desk; then, in a flash, she seized one of the sheets of note−paper that lay scattered about. Mrs. Franklyn Haldene made a desperate effort to intercept Patty; but Patty was young, slender and agile. She ran quickly to the nearest window and compared the written sheet with the blank. The paper and grain were the same, only one showed that the top had been cut off. There was no shadow of doubt.

"You are a horrible woman," said Patty.

"Leave this house instantly!" Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was now thoroughly alarmed.

"Not till you have proved the truth of this letter," Patty declared.

"I refuse to submit to such gross insults in my own house!" Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's voice rose a key. She swept majestically toward the door.

Patty stepped bravely in front of her.

"Have you no breeding?" the storm in Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's voice gathering.

"Who told you that my brother's wife was formerly—"

"Stand aside!"

"I shall not leave this house or your presence till you have answered," replied the little paladin. "You wrote this letter to me, trusting it would make me miserable. It has. But I have not done what you expected,—shown it. Who told you this base lie?"

"I refuse to answer your impudent questions. Will you stand aside?"

"There is a way to force you. I will know, Mrs. Haldene, I will know. If you refuse, I shall turn these two sheets over to my brother's lawyers."

"A lawyer?" with an hysterical laugh. "You would scarcely take a thing like that to a lawyer, of all persons."

"I declare to you that that is exactly what I shall do. You wrote this letter; I can prove that you wrote it. Afraid of publicity? You do not know me. What I demand to know is, who gave you this information? That I will know."

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene saw that Patty would do what she promised; so she took her stand boldly.

"Well, then, since you will have it. Yes, I wrote that letter, for I could no longer stand the humiliation of meeting your sister−in−law in decent houses, and that double hypocrite who pretends to be your brother's friend and your admirer. Proof? I was at my hair−dresser's one morning, when a woman who is an intimate of McQuade, the politician, came in. She dropped a letter. McQuade had written it. It told definitely the information you have in your hand."

"You have that letter?" Patty was conscious of a strange numbness stealing over her.

"No, I haven't. I read it, and sent it to its owner. I consider myself very fortunate. I always had my suspicions, and it was a relief to find that they were not without foundation. You will now relieve me of your unwelcome presence in this house." This time Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene leveled her arm toward the door; the right was with her.

"In a moment," said a third voice, masculine.

Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's arm dropped. Patty turned with a low cry. She had forgotten that there might be some one else in the house.

Haldene entered through the door to the dining−room. His face was hard and his eyes cold.

"I must ask your pardon, both of you, but I could not help overhearing your voices. They ran somewhat high." He bowed to Patty deferentially; he merely glanced at his wife.

"Franklyn!" This phase of the situation was altogether too unexpected and embarrassing for Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene to accept it readily.

"I have heard words about an anonymous letter; I have heard names,—McQuade, your brother, his wife, Warrington, and my wife. I should like to know—"

"Franklyn!" his wife appealed. To be humiliated before this impudent chit of a girl!

"Patience, my dear." Haldene held up his hand. "Well, Patty?"

"Mrs. Haldene has taken the trouble to meddle with my affairs by writing me an anonymous letter concerning the conduct of my brother's wife and his friend. I have traced the letter to Mrs. Haldene, and she has confessed that she wrote it, also stating her reasons and the source of her information." Patty spoke bravely, for she hadn't the least idea whose side Mr. Haldene would take. She was not aware that, for all his idle habits and failings, he had that quality of justice which, upon occasions, makes a terrible judge of a just man.

"Will you let me see that letter?" he asked.

Patty gave it to him without conditions. He read it slowly, but neither woman could discover the slightest emotion on the man's face. He studied it carefully. He even compared the false hand with the true. Then he addressed his wife.

"Did you write this?"

"Yes, I did. And if you have been listening, as you had the courage to say you had, you already know my reasons for writing it." Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was recovering.

"You must apologize," he said.

"Apologize? I think not. On my part there is nothing more to be said."

"I see that I shall have to apologize for you. Patty, I am very sorry that this has happened, and I can promise you that it shall end here. Will you accept my apology?"

After some hesitance, Patty nodded. She could not very well refuse. She had always liked Mr. Haldene. As hitherto remarked, Patty's was an impulsive heart. Suddenly she stretched out her hands toward the wife.

"What have I or mine ever done to you that you should seek to injure us so cruelly? Have we wronged you in thought or deed? What is it that has made you my enemy?"

"I am not your enemy, Patty," said the elder woman, melting ever so slightly. "I have told you that I did not wish to see your life made wretched by marrying a man of Warrington's loose habits, and that I could not tolerate the woman who is your brother's wife."

Patty held out her hand for the letter. She had no desire to remain any longer. She wanted nothing but the privilege of being alone, that she might weep the bitter, galling tears that were brimming her eyes. ... She had no recollection of gaining the street. It was true, it was true! She did not even remember how she reached her room; but as her blurred eyes saw the bed, she fell upon it in a stupor that for a long while did not give any outlet to her tears.

In the meantime Haldene faced his wife.

"I am going down town presently," he said. "I shall send you up by messenger several cabin−plans."

"Cabin−plans?" amazed at this odd turn in affairs.

"Yes. You will spend the winter either in Egypt or Italy, as it pleases you."

"Europe? But my social obligations demand my presence here!" she expostulated.

"You will cancel them. You will go to Europe. Anonymous letters!" He struck the desk violently. It was the first touch of this kind he had ever exhibited in her presence, and it terrified her. "When I married you, people said I married your money. As God is above us, I loved you. Yes, I loved you. But how long was it permitted that this love should live? Six slender months! You, you of all women, you write anonymous letters?" He laughed, but it was laughter that had nothing human in it. "Madam, when I die my deposit box at the bank will be turned over to you. In it you will find six anonymous letters. They have lain there sixteen years. I took the advice of one and followed you. So I let them believe that I had married you for your money. I meant to have my revenge after I was dead. Madam, you will go to Europe. I shall not be home to lunch, but you may expect me at dinner. I am curious to learn whether it will be in Egypt and the Holy Land, or Italy, the land of the fig−tree and the vine. Good morning."

When he was gone, Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene realized, for the first time in sixteen years, that she had married a man. Suddenly her knees gave from under her, and she sank into her chair, staring at the floor with unseeing eyes. For sixteen years!

That afternoon Warrington had a visit. His visitors were Jordan, the reporter, and Osborne. They appeared to be in high spirits.

"We've got him, Dick!" exclaimed Jordan, swinging his hat.

"Got whom?"

"Morrissy—Morrissy and McQuade," said Osborne, in his whisky−roughened voice. "We've got 'em all right, Dick. Look at this," tossing a wrinkled sheet of carbon−paper on Warrington's desk.

Warrington spread it out. It took him but a minute to find out the richness of his possession.

"Where did you come across this?" he asked eagerly.

"My niece found it in her waste−basket. I've sent her into the country to visit relatives," said Osborne. "But if you use it, Dick, you'll have to find the girl another job in some other town."

"You leave that to me. This is worth a thousand to me and a thousand more to John Bennington. Now, both of you go down to any restaurant in town and order what you like, and as long as you like, and you have them call me up if there's any question."

The reporter and the semi−outcast smiled at each other. They saw their appetites appeased to satiety.

"Does a bottle go with the order, Dick?" asked Jordan.

"Half a dozen!" laughed Warrington.

"I've put you in the City Hall, Dick," said Osborne. "And don't forget me when you're there."

"Will there be a story for me?" Jordan asked.

"You'll have a page, Ben."

"That's enough. Well, come on, Bill; we'll show the new mayor that we can order like gentlemen."

"I remember—" But Osborne never completed his reminiscence. Jordan was already propelling him toward the door.

Once the door had closed upon them, Warrington capered around the room like a school−boy. The publication of this confederacy between Morrissy and McQuade would swing the doubting element over to his side and split the ranks of the labor party.

Patty, Patty Bennington! He must see her. It was impossible to wait another day. When was it he had seen her last? Patty, dark−eyed, elfish, winsome, merry! Oh, yes, he must see her at once, this very afternoon. He could no longer repress the tide of his love, which surged at the flood−gates of his heart with mighty pressure. Patty! Patty!

"Patty is not feeling well," said Mrs. Bennington, as she welcomed Warrington at the door, an hour later. "I will call her. I am sure she will be glad to see you."

Warrington went into the music−room, placed his hat on the piano, and idled about impatiently. That morning he had not possessed the courage; now he was willing to face lions and tigers, anything rather than permit another day to pass without telling Patty that he loved her. When she finally appeared she was pale, her eyes were red, but her head was erect and her lips firm.

"Patty, are you ill?" hastening toward her.

"I have a very bad headache," coldly. "You wished to see me?"

Where were all the tender words he had planned to speak? Patty had been weeping!

"You have been crying. What has happened?" anxiously.

"It can not interest you," wearily. Men! She would have a horror of them for the rest of her days.

"Not interest me? Don't you know, haven't you seen by this time, that you interest me more than any other living being or any angel in Heaven?"

Patty caught at the portiere to steady herself. She had not expected declarations of this kind.

"Don't you know," he hurried on, his voice gaining in passion and tenderness, "don't you know that a pain to you means triple pain to me? Don't you know that I love you? Patty, what is the trouble? You are not a woman to weep over headaches."

"Do you wish to know, then?" bitterly. She hated him! How could he stand there telling her that he loved her? "Read this," presenting the letter. "I despise you!"

"Despise me? What in God's name is the matter?"

"Read, read!" vehemently.

Once the letter was in his hand, her arms dropped to her sides, tense. It was best so, to have it over with at once. To crush the thought of him out of her heart for ever, such a remedy was necessary. She watched him. His hand fell slowly. It would have been difficult to say which of the two was the whiter.

"You speak of love to me?"

He stood there, stunned. His silence spoke eloquently to her. He was guilty. She leaped to this conclusion at once, not realizing that no man can immediately defend himself when accused so abruptly.

"You speak of love!" Her wrath seemed to scorch her lips. "My poor brother!"

Warrington straightened. "Do you believe this?" He threw the letter aside, as if the touch contaminated him, caring not where it fell.

"Is it true?"

"An anonymous letter?" he replied, contemptuously.

"I know who wrote it."

"You know who wrote it? Who?" There was terrible anger in his voice now.

"I decline to answer."

"So you give me not even the benefit of a doubt! You believe it!"

Patty was less observant than usual. "Will you please go now? I do not think there is anything more to be said."

"No. I will go." He spoke quietly, but like a man who has received his death−stroke. "One question more. Did McQuade write that letter?"

"No."

He picked up his hat. "So much for my dreams! Deny it? Deny calumny of the anonymous order? No! Defend myself against such a lie? No!"

He walked from the room, his head erect. He did not turn to look at her again. The hall door closed. He was gone.

Chapter XIX

Tragedy was abroad that day, crossing and recrossing Williams Street. Tragedy has the same prerogative as love and death—the right to enter the palace or the hovel, into the heart of youth or age. It was not a killing to−day, only a breaking of hearts, that is to say, the first step. Tragedy never starts out on her rounds roughly; she seeks her cause first; she seeks her anonymous letter, her idle hands, her lying tongue; then she is ready. Tragedy does nothing hastily; she graduates her victim.

Warrington stumbled rather than walked home. When he reached the opposite curb he slipped and fell, bruising his hands. ... Deny it? Deny it when convicted without trial? There are never any proofs to refute a letter written by an unknown enemy. There is never any guard against the stab in the back. ... He and Kate! It was monstrous. And John? Did John know? Did John see that letter? No, Patty surely had not shown it to John. He knew John (or he believed he did); not all the proofs or explanations Heaven or earth could give would convince John, if that letter fell into his hands. ... And he was to speak at a mass meeting that night! God! He stumbled up the steps to the door. He was like a drunken man. ... Patty believed it; Patty, just and merciful, believed it. If she believed, what would John, the jealous husband, believe? There were so many trifling things that now in John's eyes would assume immense proportions. ... In less than half an hour the world had stopped, turned about, and gone another way. He opened the door. As he did so a woman rushed into the hall.

"Richard, Richard, I thought you would never come!"

"You, and in this house alone?" His shoulders drooped.

Mrs. Jack did not observe how white he was, how dull his eye, how abject his whole attitude. She caught him by the sleeve and dragged him into the living−room.

"Richard, I am dying!" she cried. She loosened the collaret at her throat. "What shall I do, what shall I do?"

He realized then that he was not alone in misery.

"What is it, girl?" stirring himself.

"Listen, Dick!" She dropped into the old name unconsciously. She had but one clear thought; this man could save her. "Some time ago—the night you and John went down town together—I received a telephone call from that vile wretch, McQuade."

"McQuade?" Warrington's interest was thoroughly aroused by that name; nothing else could have aroused it.

"He said that if I did not persuade you to withdraw your name before the convention met he would not oppose the publication of a certain story concerning my past and yours. Horrible! What could I do? I remained silent; it was Patty's advice. We were afraid that John would kill McQuade if we told him." She let go of his arm and paced the room, beating her hands together. "Think of the terror I have lived in all these weeks! Half dead every evening when John came home; not daring to read the papers; afraid of calling on my few friends! I have never, in all my life, done an evil action, either in thought or deed. What terrible gift is this that God gives to some people to make truth half a truth and half a truth a lie? Read this!"

It was a half−sheet of ordinary office paper, written on a typewriter. Its purport was similar to the one he had read but a few minutes since. Only it was bolder; there were no protestations about anybody's welfare. It was addressed to John Bennington.

"Great God! another anonymous letter! Do you know who sent this?"

"I can think of no one but McQuade; no one!" frantically. "Save me, Richard! I love him better than God, and this is my punishment. If John sees this, I shall die; if he doesn't kill me I shall kill myself! I opened it by mistake. I am so miserable. What has happened? What have I done that this curse should fall on me? When I came to this city I expected to find rest in the house of the man I loved. ... Patty does not come over. ... What have I not suffered in silence and with smiles? I have seen them whispering; I have seen covert smiles, and nods, and shrugs. I knew. I was an actress. It seems that nothing too bad or vile can be thought of her who honestly throws her soul into the greatest gift given to woman. An actress! They speak of her in the same tone they would use regarding a creature of the streets. Well, because I loved my husband I have said nothing; I have let the poison eat into my heart in silence. But this goes too far. I shall go mad if this thing can not be settled here and now. It is both my

love and my honor. And you must do it, Richard; you must do it."

"You say McQuade called you up by telephone?"

"Yes."

He struck his forehead. The carbon sheet! He ran to his desk, pulled out all the drawers, tumbling the papers about till he found what he sought. From the letter to the faint imprint on the carbon sheet and back to the letter his eyes moved, searching, scrutinizing.

"Look!" with a cry of triumph.

"What is it?"

"Do you see that mutilated letter T?" He indicated with his finger on the dim carbon sheet.

"Yes, yes!"

"Compare it with the letter T in this note."

She did so, her hands shaking pitifully. "I can't see, Richard."

"That carbon sheet came from McQuade's office; so did that letter to John. And now, by the Lord! now to pull out Mr. McQuade's fangs, and slowly, too." He pocketed the two sheets. "Come!" His hat was still on his head.

"Where, Richard?"

"To John."

"No, no! John?"

"To him. We can not settle this matter underground. We must fight in the open, in the light. John must know. You must be brave, girl. This is no time for timidity and tears. You know and I know that right and truth are on our side. We'll risk it in a single throw." Upon determining to act thus, he was acting as only a man acts who has a wide and definite knowledge of men and affairs. "Come; the sooner it is over the better. John may flare up a little, but he is a just man. Let us go to John."

She put forth many arguments, but to each he shook his head. The thought of losing a particle of John's love terrified her, who was ordinarily a courageous woman.

"We are losing time," said Warrington. "When John reads these two documents he will understand. He knows McQuade is base enough to seek revenge this way. He will recognize it for its worth. But if John finds out that we have left him out of our confidence, he will have some good reason to doubt. Come."

So she followed him, her heart like lead, no thought coherent, her will without energy. This was to be the end of all her dreams. They crossed the street without speaking. He helped her down this curb and up that. All this excitement lessened his own pain temporarily. But who had written to Patty, if not McQuade? He could block any future move of McQuade's but this other anonymous writer, whom Patty declared she knew? He went on doggedly. One battle at a time. Together they entered the house, together they passed from room to room in search of John. They came upon him reading in the library. He rose to greet them. There was no beating about the bush for Warrington. He went straight into the heart of things.

"John, read this."

John glanced at the sheet, and his face darkened. The look he shot his wife was indescribable. She watched him, twisting and knotting and untwisting her gloves.

"When did this thing come?" asked John, a slight tremor in his tone.

"This morning," Mrs. Jack answered, her voice choking.

"Why did you not bring it to me?" he asked. "Why did you take it to Dick? You and he should not come to me; on the contrary, you and I should have gone to him. But never mind now. I have carried in my pocket a letter similar to this for several weeks," simply.

"Catch her, John!" cried Warrington.

"No, no! I am not fainting. I am just dizzy."

The poor woman groped her way to the lounge and lay down. Her shoulders were shaking with noiseless sobs.

John crossed the room and put his hand on her head. The touch was tender.

"Well, Dick?"

"It is easy to distort truth into a lie, John."

"But it is very hard to reverse the order again."

"Do you believe the lie?" Warrington looked his friend squarely in the eyes.

A minute passed. The ticking of the clock was audible.

"Believe it? I have had to struggle, I have had to fight hard and all alone. I do not say that I don't believe it. I say that I WILL not!"

A truly noble soul always overawes us. This generosity struck Warrington dumb. But the woman found life in the words. She flung herself before her husband and clasped his knees with a nervous strength that provoked a sharp cry from his lips.

"John, John!"

He stooped and unwound her arms, gently drawing her up, up, till her head lay against his shoulder. Then she became a dead weight. She had fainted. He lifted her up in his strong arms and started for the stairs.

"Were she guilty of all the crimes chronicled in hell, I still should love her. But between you and me, Dick, things must be explained."

"I shall wait for you, John."

John was not gone long. When he returned he found Warrington by the bow−window that looked out upon the lawn.

"Now, Dick, the truth, and nothing but the truth. Don't be afraid of me; I am master of myself."

"I'm not afraid of you. There is half a truth in that letter," began Warrington, facing about. "Your wife did stay a night in my apartments."

John made no sign.

"It was the first week of a new play. I had to be at the theater every night. There were many changes being made. Near midnight we started out for a bite to eat. She had been suffering with attacks of neuralgia of the heart. As we entered the carriage, one of these attacks came on. We drove to her apartments. We could not get in. Her maid was out, the janitor could not be found, and unfortunately she had left her keys at the theater. In a moment like that I accepted the first thing that came into my head: my own apartments. She was not there a quarter of an hour before a trained nurse and her own physician were at her side. I slept in a chair. At six the following morning she left for her own apartments. And that, John, is the truth, God's truth. I see now that I should have taken her to a hotel. You know that there was a time when I was somewhat dissipated. It was easy to take that incident and enlarge upon it. Now, let me tell you where this base slander originated. Compare the letter you have with the one I gave you."

John complied. He nodded. These two letters had come from the same typewriter.

"Next?"

"Here is another document." It was the carbon sheet.

John spread the sheet against the window−pane. The light behind brought out the letters distinctly. He scarcely reached the final line when he spun round, his face mobile with eagerness.

"Where did this come from?"

"Indirectly, out of McQuade's waste−basket."

"Morrissy and McQuade; both of them! Oh, you have done me a service, Dick."

"But it can not be used, John. That and the letters were written on McQuade's typewriter. So much for my political dreams! With that carbon sheet I could pile up a big majority; without it I shall be defeated. But don't let that bother you."

"McQuade!" John slowly extended his arms and closed his fingers so tightly that his whole body trembled. An arm inside those fingers would have snapped like a pipe−stem. "McQuade! Damn him!"

"Take care!" warned the other. "Don't injure those letters. When my name was suggested by Senator Henderson as a possible candidate, McQuade at once set about to see how he could injure my chances. He was afraid of me. An honest man, young, new in politics, and therefore unattached, was a menace to the success of his party, that is to say, his hold on the city government. Among his henchmen was a man named Bolles."

"Ah!" grimly.

"He sent this man to New York to look up my past. In order to earn his money he brought back this lie, which is half a truth. Whether McQuade believes it or not is of no matter; it serves his purpose. Now, John!"

John made no reply. With his hands (one still clutching the letters) behind his back he walked the length of the room and returned.

"Will you take my word, which you have always found loyal, or the word of a man who has written himself down as a rascal, a briber, and a blackleg?"

John put out his empty hand and laid it on Warrington's shoulder.

"You're a good man, Dick. Dissipation is sometimes a crucible that separates the gold from the baser metals. It has done that to you. You are a good man, an honorable man. In coming to me like this you have shown yourself to be courageous as well. There was a moment when the sight of you filled my heart with murder. It was the night after I received that letter. I've been watching you, watching, watching. Well, I would stake my chance of eternity on your honesty. I take your word; I should have taken it, had you nothing to prove your case. That night I ran into Bolles. ... Well, he uttered a vile insult, and I all but throttled him. Here's my hand, Dick."

The hand−grip that followed drew a gasp from Warrington.

"Not every man would be so good about it, John. What shall we do about McQuade?"

"I was about to say that I shall see McQuade within an hour," in a tone that did not promise well for McQuade.

"Wait a day or two, John. If you meet him now, I believe you will do him bodily harm, and he has caused enough trouble, God knows."

"But not to meet him! Not to cram this paper down his vile throat! I had not considered that sacrifice. And I can not touch him by law, either."

"But you can silence him effectually. This business will end right here."

"You are right," said John with reluctance. "If I met him in this rage. I should probably kill him."

"Let us go and pay him a visit together, John," Warrington suggested. "I can manage to keep in between you."

"That's better. We'll go together." And John went for his hat. Then he ran up stairs quickly. There was a loving heart up there that ached, and he alone could soothe it.

And then the two men left the house. As they strode down the street, side by side, step by step, their thoughts were as separate as the two poles. To the one his wife was still his wife, in all the word implied; to the other there was only a long stretch of years that he must pass through alone, alone,—not even the man at his side would ever be quite the same to him, nor his wife. There was a shadow; it would always walk between them.

"Remember, Dick, Patty must never know anything of this. Nothing must come between her and my wife."

"I shall say nothing to any one, John." Who had written to Patty?

It took them a quarter of an hour to reach McQuade's office. Unfortunately for that gentleman, he was still in his office and alone. The new typewriter and the two clerks had gone. He was still wondering why Osborne's niece had resigned so unexpectedly. Probably she was going to get married. They always did when they had saved a penny or two. He laughed. He had been careless now and then, but whatever she might have picked up in the way of business or political secrets could not profit her. Boss McQuade felt secure. Warrington was as good as beaten. He had had his long−delayed revenge on the man who had turned him out of doors.

It was dark outside by this time, and he turned on the drop−light over his desk. He heard the door open and shut, but this was not unusual; so he went on with his writing.

"Well, what's wanted?" he called, folding his letter, but not yet turning his head.

As no one answered, he sent his chair around with a push of his foot. He saw two men, but he did not recognize them at once. By and by his eyes grew accustomed to the dark. Instantly he was on his feet, pressing the button connecting the wall−lights. There was no possible exit save by that door, and these two men stood between. To do McQuade justice, he was not a physical coward. His huge bulk and hardened muscles gave him a ready courage. He forced a smile to his lips. After all, he had expected one or the other of them sooner or later.

"Well, gentlemen, I am highly honored. What can I do for you?" There was a pretense of amiability.

"For the present," said Warrington, "you may sit down. We propose to do so." He drew out a chair from under the office table and placed it close to the door. "You sit there, John." For himself, he sat on the corner of the table.

McQuade did not hesitate, but reseated himself. His thoughts were not particularly lucid, however.

"McQuade, you're as fine a blackleg as ever graced a prison," said Warrington.

"I'll have to take your word for it," was the reply. "But how is it that I see you and Mr. Bennington together?" evilly.

"We'll come to that presently. I had always given you credit for being as astute as you were underhanded and treacherous."

"Thanks." McQuade took a cigar from his pocket and fumbled around in his vest for a match.

"But," Warrington added, "I am pained to reverse my opinion. You are a fool as well as a blackleg."

"How do you make that out?" coolly.

"Do you know where your man Bolles can be found?"

"Bolles? Ah, I begin to see. What do you want of him?"

"We want the esteemed honor of his company at this reunion," dryly.

Bolles? McQuade smiled. He was only too glad to accommodate them. If they wanted Bolles they should have him. Bolles would cut them in two. He reached for the telephone and began to call up the familiar haunts of his henchman. He located him at length in Martin's saloon. There was evidently some reluctance on the part of Bolles.

"Bolles, if you are not at my office inside of ten minutes, I'll break you, and you know what I mean." McQuade hung up the receiver. "He'll be right over. Now, what's all this mystery about?"

"It regards some literary compositions of yours to which I have taken exception."

"Compositions?"

"Yes. Two anonymous letters. But before we discuss them we'll wait for our friend Bolles."

McQuade signified that this was agreeable to him. All the same, he glanced uneasily at the man near the door. Bennington had not made the slightest sound after taking his chair. His arms were folded across his breast, which rose and fell with deep intakes. His face, in the shadow, was no more readable than that of the miniature sphinx paper−weight that rested on McQuade's desk. But Bolles was coming. So they waited. The end of McQuade's cigar waxed and waned according to his inhalations. These inhalations were not quickly made, as by a man whose heart is beating with excitement; they were slow and regular, it might be said, contemplative. John's gaze never left the end of that cigar.

The lights in the tall building opposite began to twinkle from window to window. Warrington slipped off the table and pulled down the curtains. McQuade knocked the ashes from his cigar, contemplated the coal, and returned it to the corner of his mouth.

Ah! The three men heard steps in the hall. The door to the outer office opened and banged. But the man who squeezed past Bennington was not Bolles.

"Morrissy?" cried Warrington. "Fine! Have a chair, Mr. Morrissy, have a chair." Warrington was delighted.

Morrissy's glance, somewhat bewildered, traveled from face to face. On entering he had seen only McQuade's tranquil visage. He sat down, disturbed and mystified.

"What's this?" Morrissy demanded to know.

"Hanged if I know!" said McQuade. "These two gentlemen presented themselves a few moments ago and requested me to send for Bolles. Have a cigar."

Morrissy took the proffered weed, but he did not light it. He turned it round and round in his teeth and chewed it. Well, so long as the boss did not seem alarmed, the trouble could not be serious. Yet he was not over−confident of Bennington's lowering face.

"Been a fine day," said Morrissy, at haphazard.

"Yes, but there's going to be a storm to−night." Warrington resumed his position on the table.

Conversation died. And then Bolles came in. At the sight of Bennington he recoiled.

"Come in, come in!" said McQuade. "Mr. Warrington will offer you a chair," facetiously.

"Yes, Bolles, sit down."

"Well, gentlemen, here's a quorum;" and McQuade began to rock in his chair. Three against two; that would do very well.

"I will go at once at the matter in hand. Those letters, John." Warrington held out his hand. "I'll read one to you, McQuade." He read slowly and distinctly.

"What the hell is this?" said Morrissy.

"It's up to Mr. Warrington to explain." McQuade grinned. That grin, however, nearly cost him his life.

"John, remember your promise!" cried Warrington.

John sat down, seized with a species of vertigo.

"McQuade, you wrote that."

"Me? You're crazy!"

"Not at all. Let me advise you. The next time you put your hand to anonymous letters, examine the type of your machine. There may be some bad letter."

"I don't know what you're driving at," McQuade declared.

"I see that I must read this, then, to convince you." Warrington stood up, his back toward Bennington. He unfolded the carbon sheet and began to read.

McQuade saw Medusa's head, little versed as he was in mythology. He lowered his cigar. The blood in his face gradually receded.

"'In two sums of five hundred each,'" Warrington went on.

Morrissy, who suddenly saw visions of bars and stripes, made a quick, desperate spring. Warrington struck him with full force on the side of the head. Morrissy reeled, stumbled to the floor and lay there. The others were on their feet instantly.

"Stay where you are, John; I don't need any assistance. Now, McQuade, I've got you where I want you." Warrington spoke with deadly calm now. "This carbon was found in your waste−basket and brought to me. The girl is where you can not find her. There are two courses open to you."

"What are they?" There was murder in McQuade's heart, but there was reason in his head. He saw exactly where he stood. They had him.

"One is state's prison; the other is a full retraction of this base calumny. Take your choice."

"Bolles?"

"It's true, every damn word of it," said Bolles venomously. "Your janitor in New York told me the facts. You know they're true."

"Bolles, I nearly killed you one night. So help me, if you do not withdraw that, I'll kill you here and now!" It was the first time Bennington had spoken.

"Bolles," said McQuade, "did you sell a lie to me?"

Bolles eyed Bennington, who had pushed Warrington out of the way and was moving toward him. He saw death on Bennington's face. Warrington again interposed, but John swept him aside with ease.

"Well, there was a doctor and a nurse there all night with them. But she was in Warrington's rooms all night. That seemed enough for me." Bolles put the table between him and Bennington. He was genuinely afraid.

Morrissy turned over and sat up, rubbing his head. Presently he pulled himself to his feet. He was dazed. Recollection of what had happened returned to him. This dude had knocked him out.

"You'll pay well for that," he said.

"Sit down. It's only a marker for what I'll do to you if you make another move. Now, McQuade, which is it?"

"Go ahead and write your letter," McQuade snarled.

Warrington proceeded.

"Now sign it," he said. "Here, John, take care of this carbon. Bolles, your signature." Bolles scrawled a shaking hand. Warrington put the paper in his pocket. "Bite, both of you now, if you dare."

"I'll trouble you for that carbon," said McQuade.

"Hardly. But you have my word of honor that it shall not be used against you unless you force me. It will repose in my deposit box at the bank. But as for you, Morrissy, this climate doesn't suit your abilities. The field is too small. Take my advice and clear out. That is all, gentlemen. Come, John."

When they were gone Morrissy turned savagely upon McQuade.

"I told you you were a damn fool!"

"Get out of here, both of you; and if you ever stick your heads in this office again, I'll smash you."

McQuade dropped into his chair, once more alone. He sat there for an hour, thinking, ruminating, planning; but all his thinking and ruminating and planning had but one result: they had him licked. Morrissy was right; he was a fool. The girl! He would have liked her throat in his fingers that moment, the sneaking, treacherous baggage! Licked! To go about hereafter with that always menacing him! But there was one ray of consolation. He knew something about human nature. Bennington and Warrington would drift apart after this. Bennington had cleared up the scandal, but he hadn't purged his heart of all doubt. There was some satisfaction in this knowledge. And Warrington would never enter the City Hall as Herculaneum's mayor.

Chapter XX

By November John and his wife were on the way to Italy. There is always a second honeymoon for those who have just passed the first matrimonial Scylla and Charybdis; there is always a new courtship, deeper and more understanding. Neither of them had surrendered a particle of their affection for Warrington, but they agreed that it would be easier for all concerned if there came a separation of several months.

"You are all I have," said Warrington, when they bade him good−by. "I shall be very lonely without you. If I lose the election I shall go to Japan."

"There's always Patty and the mother," said John, smiling.

"Yes, there's always Patty and her mother. Good−by, and God bless you both. You deserve all the happiness I can wish for you."

Warrington plunged into the campaign. It would keep him occupied.

Mrs. Bennington and Patty lived as usual, to all outward appearance. But Patty was rarely seen in society. She took her long rides in the afternoon now, always alone, brooding. Her young friends wondered, questioned, then drifted away gradually. Poor little Patty! No one had told her; the viper had not been shaken from her nest. Day after day she waited for the blow to fall, for the tide of scandal to roll over her and obliterate her. She was worldly enough to know that Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene was not the kind of woman to keep such a scandal under lock and key; others must know, Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's particular friends. So she avoided the possibility of meeting these friends by declining all invitations of a formal character. Perhaps after a time it would die of its own accord, to be recalled in after years by another generation, as such things generally are. Patty derived no comfort from the paragraph in the Sunday papers announcing Mrs. Franklyn−Haldene's departure for Egypt, to remain for the winter.

She kept in touch with all that Warrington did. The sense of shame she had at first experienced in reading his speeches was gone. Her pride no longer urged her to cast aside the paper, to read it, to fling it into the flames. Sometimes she saw him on the way home from his morning rides. It seemed to her that he did not sit as erectly as formerly. Why should he? she asked herself bitterly. When the heart is heavy it needs a confidante, but Patty, brave and loyal, denied herself the luxury of her mother's arms. Tell her this frightful story? Bow that proud, handsome head? No.

"It is very strange," mused her mother, one evening, "that Mr. Warrington calls no more. I rather miss his cheerfulness, and John thinks so much of him."

Patty shivered. "He is very busy, mother. Election is only three days off, and doubtless he hasn't a minute to call his own."

Nor had he. Pulled this way and that, speaking every night, from one end of the city to the other, he went over the same ground again and again, with the same noise, the same fumes of tobacco and whisky and kerosene, with his heart no longer behind his will. Yes, Warrington was very busy. He was very unhappy, too. What did he care about the making up of the slate? What was it to him that this man or that wanted this or that berth? What were all these things? But he hid his dissatisfaction admirably. His speeches lacked nothing.

Election day came round finally, and a rare and beautiful day it was. The ghost of summer had returned to view her past victories. A west wind had cleared the skies, the sun shone warm and grateful, the golden leaves shivered and fluttered to the ground. Nature had lent a hand to bring voting humanity to the polls. Some men are such good citizens that they will vote in the rain. But warmth and sunshine bring out the lazy, the indifferent, and the uninterested.

Warrington voted early in the morning, rode to the Country Club, made an attempt to play golf over the partly frozen course, lounged round till three in the afternoon, and then returned to town. There was not a flutter in his heart. There was this truth, however, staring him in the eyes: if he lost, he would become an indifferent citizen; if he won, an in different mayor. He was not a man to falsify his accounts for the inspection of his conscience.

The voting was heavy throughout the day. Crowds lingered round the polls, which, in greater part, were in the rear of shops, in barns and sheds. There was a good deal of repeating in some of the districts, and a dozen arrests

had been made. Neither party was free from this taint of dishonest politics. But no one could prophesy what the final results of the day would be.

Night came. It is the greatest spectacular night the American knows. The noisy, good−natured crowds in the streets, the jostling, snail−moving crowds; the illuminated canvas−sheets in front of the newspaper offices; the blare of tin horns, the cries, the yells, the hoots and hurrahs; the petty street fights; the stalled surface cars; the swearing cabbies; the newsboys hawking their latest extras, men carrying execrable posters of roosters. Hurrah! hurrah! A flash goes over the canvas.

In the 4th District
Donnelly 608
Warrington. 302

A roar that rose and died suddenly, and a wailing of tin horns.

In Seven Districts
Warrington 1,262
Donnelly 1,196

Roars. It was, going to be close. Between times local advertisers used the sheets, or there were pictures of presidents past and present, crowned heads (always greeted with jeers), funny pictures, or returns from other states.

In Nine Districts
Donnelly 1,821
Warrington 1,800

The crowds surged and billowed, and there was pandemonium.

The newspaper offices were having a busy time. This period proves the man; he is a newspaper man or he is not. There was a continuous coming and going of messengers, bringing in returns. The reporters and editors were in their shirt−sleeves, most of them collarless. Figures, figures, thousands of figures to sift and resift. A fire−bell rings. No one looks up save the fire reporter, and he is up and away at once. Filtering through the various noises is the maddening rattle of the telegraph instruments. Great drifts of waste−paper litter the floors. A sandwich man serves coffee and cigars, and there is an occasional bottle of beer. Everybody is writing, writing.

McQuade and his cohorts haunted the city room of the Times. Things did not look well at all. There were twelve more districts to hear from. Donnelly seemed to be the coolest man in that office.

Warrington started home at nine. Up to this time he had been indifferent, but it was impossible not to catch the spirit of this night. Win or lose, however, he wanted to be alone. So he went home, lighted the fire in his working−room, called his dog, and sat there dreaming.

Down town the clamor was increasing. The great throngs round the bulletins were gathering in force. Bonfires were flaring on corners.

In 15 Districts
Warrington 9,782
Donnelly 9,036

Close, terribly close. But those districts upon which the fight really depended had not yet turned up. The big labor vote had not been accounted for.

The Call had notified its readers that when the returns were all in and the battle decided, it would blow a whistle. If Warrington was elected, five blasts; if Donnelly, ten.

So Warrington waited, sunk in his chair, his legs sprawled, his chin on his breast, and his eyes drawing phantoms in the burning wood fire. ... It was cruel that Patty could not know; and yet to leave John with the belief that his sister knew nothing was a kindness, and only John could convince Patty; and it was even a greater kindness to leave Patty with the belief that John knew nothing. So there he stood; friendship on the one side and love on the other. He recalled all the charming ways Patty had, the color of her hair, the light music of her laughter, the dancing shadows in her eyes, the transparent skin, the springy step, and the vigor and life that were hers. And he had lost her, not through any direct fault, but because he was known to have been dissipated at one

time; a shadow that would always be crossing and recrossing his path. So long as he lived he would carry that letter of hers, with its frank, girlish admiration.

So, he mused, those dissipations of his, which, after all, had touched him but lightly—these had, like chickens, come home to roost! And how these chickens had multiplied and grown! On the way home it seemed that everybody had striven to fatten them up a bit and add surreptitiously a chicken or two of his own. Oh, these meddlers, these idle tongues! None of them would set to work to wrong anybody, to wreck anybody's life. They would shrink in horror from the thought, let alone the deed. Yet, they must talk, they must exchange the day's news, they must have news that no one else had; and this competition is the cause of half the misery on earth. What if they exaggerate a little here and a little there? No harm is meant. Human nature, having found its speech, must have something to talk about; that which it has neither seen nor heard, it invents.

Who had written that letter to Patty? Some woman; man had not yet acquired such finished cruelty. He could not understand its purpose, well as he understood women. Who could possibly hate Patty, honest and loyal as the day is long? McQuade's letters had their existence in revenge. Patty had wronged no one; McQuade had.

"Well, Jove, old man, you and I may have to pack up on the morrow. If we are licked, you and I'll go to Japan. That's a country we've always been wanting to see."

Jove lifted his head, somewhat scarred, and gazed up at his master with steadfast love in his red−brown eyes. A dog is better than a horse, a horse is better than a cat, a cat is better than nothing. ... Warrington sat up quickly, drawing in his legs. A whistle! He caught his breath and counted. One—two—three—four—five—SIX! ... Donnelly! He counted no more. Donnelly had won.

His valet found him asleep in the chair the next morning, before a dead fire. It was cold in the room. The valet touched him, but Warrington did not move. It was only when he was roughly shaken that he opened his eyes. A single glance explained the situation. He jumped to his feet, rubbing his eyes.

"Will you have the morning papers, sir?"

"What's the use?" Warrington shrugged indifferently.

"The majority was only six hundred and eighty−two, sir."

"Then we had them mightily scared for a time. Odd that the 'phone did not wake me up."

"I took it off the hook, sir, at midnight. I knew it would disturb you."

"Go down town and bring me up the sailing−lists and a few cabin−plans for ships bound for Japan. I intend to start for that country just as soon as I can dispose of the horses."

"Shall you need me, sir?"

"I couldn't get along without you, James."

"Thank you, sir. Breakfast is served, sir, if you wish it."

The telephone rang. The valet raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"I'll answer it," said Warrington. "Who is it? Jordan? Oh! You can say that I put up the best fight I knew how. ... No. Say nothing about the influence of the strike. Let it stand as it is. ... My plans? You may say that I shall sail in a few days for Japan. ... Oh, yes! This is my home. I shall return in the spring. Change of scene, that's all. Good−by."

The defeated candidate ate a respectable breakfast, after which he put his affairs in order. Trunks were brought down from the store−room, and cases and steamer−rolls. Warrington always traveled comfortably. He left the packing in charge of the valet.

A ten−o'clock edition of the Telegraph was being hawked outside, but Warrington had seen all he wanted of newspapers. By noon he had found a purchaser for his stable. The old housekeeper and her husband were to remain in care of the house. They were the only beings that loved him, now that the aunt was gone. Heigh−ho!

He declined lunch. He answered no more calls on the telephone. When Senator Henderson called the interview was pleasant but short.

"We'll try you again," said the senator genially.

"I'll think it over," replied Warrington.

"You'll win next time; you'll be stronger two years hence. You made a great fight. Bennington lost the fight for you. If he hadn't been your friend—"

"I had rather have John Bennington my friend than be president," laughing.

"There were six thousand−odd labor votes against you, and yet Donnelly's majority was only six hundred and

eighty−two. Hope you'll enjoy your trip to Japan. But McQuade's back again!" discouraged.

"Senator, if he acts nasty in any way, go to him personally and tell him that upon application at the bank you will open my deposit box. He'll understand; he'll be as docile as a lamb. And thank all the boys for their good work. I appreciate the honor that has been done me. To have been a candidate is something."

By three o'clock Warrington found time to sit down at his desk to write three letters. One was addressed to McQuade, another to John, Hotel de la Syrene, Sorrento, Italy. The third he began after some deliberation:

Patty: Presently I shall be on the way to Japan. I was going without a word because I had given a promise to your brother John. But it is not within human nature, at least mine, to leave without telling you again that I love you better than life, and that I am innocent of the wrong you were so ready to believe. Some day ask John; tell him that I have broken my word; he will tell you how truth was made a lie. I realize now that I ought to have stood my ground. I ought to have nailed the lie then. But my proofs were not such as would do away with all doubts. And besides, when I saw that you had believed without giving me the benefit of a doubt, I was angry. And so I left you, refusing to speak one way or the other. John will tell you. And if my cause is still in your thought and you care to write, mail your letter to my bankers. They will forward it. And if I should have the happiness to be wanted, even if I am at the ends of the world, I shall come to you.

He did not sign it, but he read it over carefully. There was nothing to cut, nothing to add. He folded it, then laid his head on his extended arms. A door opened and closed, but his ear was dull. Then everything became still. Scientists have not yet fully explained what it is that discovers to us a presence in the room, a presence that we have neither seen nor heard enter. So it was with Warrington. There was no train of collected thought in his mind, nothing but stray snatches of this day and of that the picture of a smile, a turn in the road, the sound of a voice. And all at once he became conscious that something was compelling him to raise his head. He did so slowly.

A woman was standing within a dozen feet of the desk.

"Patty!" he cried, leaping to his feet bewildered.

Patty did not move. Alas, she had left all her great bravery at the threshold. What would he think of her?

"Patty!" he repeated. "You are here?"

"Yes." All the blood in her body seemed to congest in her throat. "Are—is it true that you are going to Japan?" If he came a step nearer she was positive that she would fall.

"Yes, Patty; it is as true as I love you. But let us not speak of that," sadly.

"Yes, yes! Let us speak of it!" a wild despair in her voice and gesture. "Let us speak of it, since I do nothing but think of it, think of it, think of it! Oh! I am utterly shameless, but I can not fight any longer. I have no longer any pride. I should despise you, but I do not. I should hate you, but I can not ... No, no! Stay where you are."

"Patty, do you love me?" There was a note in his voice as vibrant as the second string of a cello.

"Yes."

"Do you still believe that I am a blackguard?"

"I care not what you are or what you have been; nothing, nothing. It is only what you have been to me and what you still are. Something is wrong; something is terribly wrong; I know not what it is. Surely God would not let me love you as I do if you were not worthy."

"No," he replied gravely; "God would not do that."

The tears rolled down Patty's cheeks, but there was no sound.

"Here, Patty; read this letter which I was about to send you."

She accepted it dumbly. Then, through her tears there came wonder and joy and sunshine. When she had done, he held out his hand for the letter; but she smiled and shook her head.

"No, Richard; this is my first love−letter."

The End