Many Waters

Margaret Deland

Table of Contents

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I

WELL?"

"True bill; I'm awfully sorry."

Thomas Fleming took his cigar out of his mouth, and contemplated the lighted end. He did not speak, the other man, his lawyer, who had brought him the unwelcome news, began to make the best of it.

"Of course, it's an annoyance; but−−"

"Well, yes. It's an annoyance," Fleming said, dryly.

Bates chuckled. "It strikes me, Tom, considering the difference between this and the real thing, that 'annoyance' is just the right word to use!"

Fleming leaned over and knocked off the ashes from his cigar into his waste basket. He was silent.

"As for Hammond, he won't have a leg to stand on. I don't know what Ellis &Grew meant by letting him take the case before the Grand Jury. He won't have a leg to stand on!"

"Give me a light, will you, Bates? This cigar has gone out again."

"What has Hammond got, anyhow?" Bates continued, pulling a box of wax matches out of his waistcoat pocket; "what's he got to support his opinion that you pinched $3,000 from the Hammond estate? His memory of something somebody said twelve years ago, and an old check. Well, we won't do a thing to 'em!"

Fleming got up and began to pull down his desk top with a slow clatter. "Hammond's a fool," he said; "and you'll punch a hole in his evidence in five minutes. But it's−−well, as you say, it's 'annoying.'"

The lawyer rose briskly and reached for his hat. "What we want now is to get the case up near the head of the list as soon as we can. Get it over! Get it over! Then, if you want revenge, we can turn round and hit back with 'malicious prosecution'!" He laughed, good−naturedly, and shrugged himself into his overcoat.

His client stood absently locking and unlocking his desk. "I suppose it will be in the evening papers?" he said.

"Oh, I guess so," the younger man said, easily; "the findings of the Grand Jury were reported at eleven this morning. Plenty of time for the first editions."

"Then I'll take an early train home," Thomas Fleming said, quickly; "my wife−−" he paused.

"Doesn't Mrs. Fleming know about it?" the lawyer said, with a surprised look.

"No," the other man said, gloomily; "I didn't want her to worry over it, so I didn't say anything. But, of course, now she's got to know."

"Yes," Bates said, sympathetically; "but after all, Fleming, it's a small matter, except for the nuisance of it. You tell her I say it's a sure thing."

Fleming let his key−ring drop, jingling, into his pocket. Except for the occasional faint clangor of cars far down in the streets, the room, high up in the big office building, was quiet; but its quiet was the muffled, inarticulate, never−ending roar of living, rising from below. Fleming sighed, and, turning his back to his lawyer, stared absently out of the window. Before him, in the afternoon dusk, lay the struggling, panting city. Far off to the south he could see the water, and ferryboats crawling like beetles back and forth. Below, the deep canyons of the streets were blurred with creeping yellow fog; but higher up, above the crowding roofs and chimneys and occasional spires, the air was clearer; it was full of tumultuous movement−−sudden jets of white steam ballooning from hundreds of escape pipes; shuffling, shifting coils of black smoke; here and there the straining quiver of flags, whipping out from their masts. Fleming, his hands in his pockets, stood staring and listening−−with unseeing eyes, unhearing ears. The lawyer behind him, at the office door, hesitated.

"Fleming, really, it isn't going to amount to anything. Of course, I know how you feel about Mrs. Fleming, but−−"

The man at the window turned round. "Rather than have her disturbed, I'd compromise on it. I'd pay him. I'd−−"

The lawyer raised his eyebrows. "This time, I think, Hammond is honest. I guess he really believes he has a case; but Ellis &Grew are sharks, and you'd be encouraging blackmail to compromise. Anyway, you couldn't do it. Grew volunteered the information that their man couldn't be bought off'; he meant to put it through, Grew said. I told him they'd got the wrong pig by the ear. I told him that Thomas Fleming wasn't the kind of man who purchases peace at the cost of principle. They're shysters, and I gave 'em plain talk. Now, don't let Mrs. Fleming take it to heart. Tell her I say it will be a triumph!"

He went off, laughing; and a minute later Fleming heard his step in the corridor, and then the clang of the elevator door. He took up his black cloth bag and poked about in it among some papers; then unlocked his desk and found what he had been looking for−−a box of candy for his wife. He slipped it into his bag, and a minute or two later he was down in the muddy dusk of the street. As he moved along with the steady surge of the homeward−bound crowd, he looked doubtfully into the flower stores; he wished he had bought violets for Amy instead of candy; he had taken her candy last Saturday. He debated whether he had not better get the violets too, but decided against them, because Amy was stern with him when he was extravagant for her sake. She never saw extravagance in any purchase he made on his own account! He smiled to himself at the thought of her sweet severity.

"Amy keeps me in order," he used to say, whimsically; "she insists that I shall be her best; it appears that my own best isn't good enough for her!" This she would always deny, indignantly, and indeed justly; for Thomas Fleming stood on his own legs, morally, in his community. But in the ten years of their married life no doubt her ideals, in small matters, had created his. With his indolent good−nature, he had found it easier to agree with Amy's delicate austerities of thought than to dispute them. Her hair−splitting in matters of conscience always amused him, and sometimes touched him, but he accepted her standards of duty with real tenderness−− which, for all practical purposes, was as good as conviction. Gradually, too, she pushed him, gently, before he knew it, into civic affairs; not in any very large way; perhaps hardly more than in a readiness to do his part as a citizen; but such readiness was sincere, and had given him a reputation for public−spiritedness in which Amy took a quiet pride. He had never had time, though he had had opportunity, to hold office, because his business demanded his entire energy; and, in fact, he had to be energetic, for he had hardly any capital, his income being almost entirely dependent upon his earnings; so he was not at all a rich man−−except, indeed, as he was rich in the honor and respect of the community, and the love of a woman like Amy.

But then, if they were not rich in this world's goods, neither were they poor. There had been happy, anxious years, when they were first married, when they had ridiculously little to live on; but in those days Amy had steered their housekeeping bark between all rocks of hardship, as well as past breakers of extravagance. Even now, when

things were easier each year, Amy was still prudent and economical, at least where she herself was concerned.

So Fleming, smiling, forbore to add a bunch of violets to his box of candy. After all, it was his thought that would bring the delicate and happy color up into her face, not the gift itself. They were very happy, these two; perhaps because they were only two. There had been a baby, but it had only lived long enough to draw them very close together, and not, as sometimes happens, to push them apart again; and there were many friends. But they were alone in their household and in the real heart of life. Naturally, all the thwarted maternity of the woman was added to the wife's love; and the paternal instinct of the man (which is, for the most part, only amusement, and the sense of protecting and giving joy) was centred in his wife. So it was no wonder that that night, going home on the train, he winced at the thought of telling her that that "fool Hammond," who "would not have a leg to stand on," had prosecuted him criminally for misappropriation of funds as trustee of old Mrs. Hammond's estate. The trusts had been closed at her death a month or two before, and the estate handed over to her son−−this same Hammond who "thought he remembered" hearing old Smith say, twelve years before, that he, Smith, had paid the Hammond estate $17,400 for a parcel of land; whereas Fleming's trustee account put the sum received at $14,400.

Amy's husband set his teeth as he sat there in the train, planning how he should tell her. Her incredulous anger he foresaw; and her anxiety−−the anxiety of the woman unversed in legal matters. He damned Hammond in his heart; and pulled out his evening paper. There it was, in all the shamelessness of the flaring headline: "A Leading Citizen Indicted!" and so on. The big black letters were like a blow in the face. Fleming felt that every commuter on the train was looking over the top of his newspaper at him. He found himself glancing furtively across the aisle to see what page of the paper another passenger was reading; he thanked God that none of the men he knew well were on the five o'clock, so he would not have to listen to friendly assurances of astonishment at Hammond's impudence. His skin was prickly over his whole body; his ears were hot. And he had to tell Amy! He sank his head down between his shoulders and pulled his hat over his eyes, in pretence of a nap; then, suddenly, sat bolt upright. The fact was, Thomas Fleming had no experience in disgrace, and did not know how to conduct himself. When the door banged open at his station, he swung off on to the rainy platform, and plodded slowly up the lane in the darkness to his own house. It seemed to him as though his very feet hung back! As the gate closed behind him, he saw an instant crack of light at the front door; and when his foot touched the lowest step of the porch, the door opened wide, and Amy stood there−−it was rarely Jane who let him in or even his own latchkey!

"Go right into the house! You'll take cold," he commanded.

But she drew him inside with eager welcome. "Why, how did you manage to get the five o'clock? I heard the gate shut, and could hardly believe my ears! Oh, your coat is damp; has it begun to rain? Hurry! take it off. Then come into the library and get warm." She possessed herself of one of his hands, so that he had to dive into his bag as best he could with the other, to fish out her box of candy. She took it, smiling, with gay pretence of scolding, and then checked herself. "You look tired, Tom. When you've had your dinner (we have a good dinner to−night; I wish you had brought some man home with you!) you'll feel better,"

He dropped down into his chair by the fire in silence, frowning slightly, and drawing impatiently away from her. Thomas Fleming did not always like to be fussed over; there were times when, perhaps, he endured it with a mildly obvious patience. Every tender woman knows this patience of a good and bored man. Amy Fleming knew it, and smiled to herself, quite un− offended. Something had bothered him? Well, he should not be talked to! But she looked at him once or twice. In her soft gray dress, with her gray eyes, and the sweet color in her cheeks, she brooded over him like a dove. At dinner his silence continued. Amy, being wise beyond her sex, fell into a silence of her own−−the blessed, comprehending silence of love. When they came back from the dining−room to the library fireside, she let him smoke uninterruptedly, while she sewed. Sometimes her eyes rested on him, quietly content with his mere presence. But she asked no question. Suddenly, with a half−embarrassed cough, he said:

"Ah, Amy−−"

"Yes? Tell me; I knew you hadn't had a good day."

When he had told her, she sat dumb before him. Her face was white, and her eyes terror−stricken, But that was only for the first moment. Almost instantly there was the relief of anger. She stood up, her delicate face red, her voice strained.

"To accuse you! You!"

It was just what Bates had said. The first thought everywhere would be of the absurdity of such a charge against Thomas Fleming.

"It's blackmail," Amy said, trembling very much.

"Of course we shall have no difficulty in throwing them down," he said. "They bring their case, really, on Smith's old check to me for $17,400."

"I don't understand?" Amy said. It had always been a joke between them that Amy did not know anything about business, so she tried to smile when she asked him to explain.

"Oh," he said, impatiently, "it's simple enough. L. H. Smith owed me $3,000−−a personal matter. I once sold him some stock; he gave me his note; had to renew two or three times; thing sort of hung fire. You wouldn't understand it, Amy. But when he bought this Hammond property for $14,400, he made out the check for $17,400;−−he'd had a windfall, so he could pay me what he owed me, see? I got my money. Understand?"

"Perfectly," she said; "what a rascal Hammond is!"

"Oh, well, I suppose this time he really thinks he has a case; though on general principles I believe he's equal to blackmail! But he has succeeded in getting from the Smith heirs that old check for the total amount, and I suppose he thinks he has me. He'll find himself mistaken. But it's a nasty business," he ended, moodily; "there will always be people who will think− −"

"What do we care what such people think?" she said, passionately.

Her husband was silent. Amy's knees were shaking under her. "Oh, I could kill that man, I could kill him!"

Well as he knew her, he looked at her with astonishment−−this mild creature to speak with such deadly, vindictive passion! She came and knelt down beside him; he felt her heart pounding in her side.

"Oh," she said, brokenly, "I know−−"

"You know what?"

She spoke very softly. "I know how they felt; those women, 'looking on, afar off.' "

"Looking on?" he said, vaguely. And Amy, her face still hidden on his breast, said in a whisper:

"It must have been easier for−−for Him, on the cross, than for them to see Him there."

He moved abruptly in his chair; then, with a faint impatience, said she mustn't talk that way. "It's foolish!" he said, irritably. She kissed him, silently; and went back to her seat by the fire.

"I'll get out of it all right," Fleming said; "Bates says so. It's annoying"−−he found himself falling back on Bates's word−−"but there's nothing to it. You mustn't worry. Bates says Hammond is crazy to undertake it; Smith being dead, and−−" Then he stopped.

"I don't worry; in the sense of being afraid that−−" she could not even put into words the fear that she did not have. "But to have your name mixed up with anything dishonorable−−even though it will come out clear and shining as heaven!"

He made no answer. The fatigue of the day was showing in his face−−a heavy, handsome face, with a somewhat hard mouth. His wife, looking at him, said, quietly.

"Don't let's talk about it, dearest, any more tonight. It's only on the surface; it isn't a real trouble."

He nodded, gratefully; and they did not speak of it again.

But that night Amy Fleming, lying motionless in her bed, stared into the darkness until the glimmering oblong of the window told her that dawn had come.

II

"Trouble shows us our friends," Amy said, smiling. And indeed it did, in the Flemings' case. When the news of the indictment of Thomas Fleming fell upon his community, there was a moment of stunned astonishment; then of protest and disbelief.

"Hammond is up against it," men said to each other; "Fleming? What nonsense!"

The first day or two, while it was still a nine days' wonder, public confidence was almost an ovation. The small house behind the trim hedges was crowded with Amy's women friends, coming and going, and quoting (after the fashion of women friends) what their respective husbands said:

"Of course Mr. Hammond has no case, Amy, darling! My Tom−−or Dick or Harry−−says so."

Amy did not need such assurances. She knew her husband! So she held her head proudly, and with certainty. Not certainty of the outcome of the trial−−because, secretly, she had the unreasoning terror of most women of sheltered lives for the very word law; it meant power; wicked power, even! The opportunity of evil to get the better of goodness. But her pride and certainty were for Thomas Fleming's honor, and goodness, and courage. She was a little cold when these tender women friends tried to reassure her, quoting the opinion of their menfolk; she did not want, by eager agreement, to imply that she needed reassurance. She said, with gentle dignity, that she was sorry Mr. Hammond was so−−foolish. Tom had been trustee of the Hammond estate for nearly twenty years, and he had given time and service−−"service," she said, the coloring rising faintly in her face, "that money could not have paid for." And to have the Hammonds turn upon him now!−−"Though, of course, it is only Mr. Hammond," Amy corrected herself, carefully just; "the rest of the family are nice people. His mother was such an honorable woman. And his wife−−I am sorry for his wife." Amy thought a great deal about this wife. "She must know what he is, poor soul!" she said to herself. And knowing, she could not respect him. And without respect, love must have crumbled away. She said something like this to her most intimate friend, almost in a whisper, because expression was not easy to Amy. "When Mrs. Hammond realizes that he is a blackmailer, what will she do!"

"Poor thing!" said the other woman; "but, Amy, I suppose she is fond of him? He has been a good husband, they say."

"A good husband? How do you mean? Kind? A good provider?" Amy said, with a droop of her lip.

"Well, my dear, at least the man has been faithful to her; among all the horrid things that have been said about him, nobody has said−−that."

"They had better have said 'that'!" Amy said. "Oh, Helen, faithful to her with his body; but what about his mind? Don't you suppose a good woman could forgive the poor, sinful body? But the mind, the sinful mind! It is so much worse."

Her friend looked doubtful. "I suppose it is," she said; "but I think most wives could forgive the sinful mind more easily than−−other things. And she is fond of him," she repeated.

"Fond of him! when she can't respect him? Oh, no, no!"

"Perhaps she doesn't know how bad he is," the other said, thoughtfully.

"What!" said Amy, "when she has lived with him for fifteen years? Of course she knows him. And I truly pity her," she ended simply.

So in spite of her deep resentment at Hammond, Amy felt something like tenderness for Hammond's wife−−losing both respect and love, poor soul!

As the weeks passed before the day set for the trial, Amy grew perceptibly thinner and whiter. For beneath all her certainties, the fear of the Law remained. She brooded over instances of goodness suspected, of innocent men condemned, of the blunders and mistakes of Justice. It was not until three or four days before the trial that Bates realized what even Thomas Fleming had not understood, that she was consumed with fear. Fear of prison walls, of unmerited disgrace, of her house left unto her desolate. When the lawyer penetrated the tense cheerfulness with which she held herself in Tom's presence, and saw the fright below, he roared with laughter; which, though ill−mannered, was the best thing he could have done.

"You think I'm a fool?" she said, with a quivering smile.

"My dear lady, it would not he polite for me to use such a word; but certainly you−−well, you are mistaken."

"Oh, say I am a fool," she pleaded; "I would like to think I was a fool! But, Mr. Bates, the Law can be made to do such dreadful things. Innocent people have been put into jail; oh, you know they have," she said, her face trembling; "and at night I lie awake and think−−" He saw her hands grip each other to keep steady.

"Now let me explain it to you," he said kindly; "and then you won't be frightened; why, you'll be so sure you'll send out invitations for a dinner party on the 19th, so we can celebrate! And mind you have plenty of champagne."

Then, very explicitly, he laid before her the grounds of his confidence. Hammond, to start with, was a fool "He always has been a cheap fellow; a sort of smart Aleck, you know; but this time he's just a fool." He had fallen into the hands of a shyster firm, who were milking him−−"If you'll forgive the slang."

"Oh, go on, go on!" she entreated.

Hammond, being a fool, and having this vague idea about the price paid by Smith for the land, and having secured the old check to prove (as he thinks) that such a price was paid, falls into the hands of these sharks. "They know there is nothing to it, but they think they can pull out a plum somehow," said Mr. Bates. Then, carefully, he told

her the story point by point. Briefly, it was, that while there was no question that $17,400 had been paid to Thomas Fleming, Hammond could not disprove Fleming's defence that only $14,400 of it was to go to the Trust; and that the remaining $3,000 was in payment of Smith's debt to him. "See?" said Bates, kindly. As he spoke, the drawn look in her face lessened, and she drew one or two long breaths; and then, suddenly, she put her hands over her eyes, and he knew she wept. This sobered the rather voluble man. He protested, with friendly vociferation, that she must promise him not to give the matter another thought. And she, still trembling a little, looked up, smiling, and promised.

And, such being her temperament, she kept her promise. Perhaps it was the rebound from having gone down to the depths of fear; but certainly there was almost bravado in the reaction. She made up her mind to have the dinner party! Tom would come home, cleared, crowned with the vindication of his own integrity; and he would find love, and friendship, and respect ready to exult with him. Tom, however, objected to her project.

"It's all right," he said; "it's perfectly safe, as far as the verdict goes; but−−" he stopped and frowned. It was evident that the plan did not please him. But for the once Amy did not consult his pleasure. She had her own views; and she did actually invite a party of old friends to dine with them on the evening when it was expected that the verdict would be given.

III

Amy, in her dove−colored dress, entered the court−room with her husband. During the trial, very quietly, and with a beautiful serenity, she kept her place at his side. If the proceedings troubled her, there was no indication of it. She looked a little tired, and once or twice a little amused. Sometimes she smiled at Thomas Fleming, and sometimes exchanged a word or two with Mr. Bates. But for the most part she was silent; and her repose was a spot of refreshment and beauty in the dingy court−room. Bates looked at her occasionally, with rather jovial encouragement; but she displayed no need of encouragement, and returned his smile cheerfully. Once he leaned over and said:

"You make me think of a poem I read somewhere; now, what was the name of it? I can only remember two lines:

"'In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced or cried aloud!'

That's as far as I can go; but that's what you make me think of."

She turned, smiling, and finished the verse. "It's Henley's 'I am the captain of my soul,'" she said. "I have it somewhere: I copied it once, because I cared so much for it. I'll read it to you to−night, after dinner."

"Do!" Bates said heartily, and turned away to listen to Fleming, who was on the stand. Fleming's evidence was as straightforward as the man himself. Yes, Smith (now deceased) had paid him in March, 1887, the sum of $17,400. Of this, $3,000 was on a personal account; $14,400 was for a parcel of land belonging to the Hammond estate. The check was made to his order; he deposited it in his own bank account and immediately drew against it a check for $14,400 to the order of the Trust. Then followed a very clear and definite statement of that money Smith owed him; a debt which he was unable to corroborate by his books, for the simple reason that his books had been burned in the great fire of that year. Over and over, back and forth, round and round, the prosecution went, gaining not an inch.

Indeed, the end was obvious from the beginning. To assert that Thomas Fleming was an honest man was, so Bates told the jury, to utter a commonplace. He was so cheerful and kindly, in his reference to the unfortunate Mr. Hammond, that the jury grinned. The verdict, Bates declared, was a foregone conclusion. And so, in fact, it was, being rendered fifteen minutes after the jury had been charged.

"And now," said the good Bates, shaking hands with his client, "let's go and get something to eat! Come, Mrs. Fleming, you'll go with us? You look like an army with banners!"

But Amy, with proud eyes, said no; she must go home. "You will come out with Tom this evening?" she said. "Dinner is at half−past seven; you can dress at our house; and, of course, you must stay all night." Bates promised, and Fleming silently squeezed his wife's hand. Amy's heart was beating so that her words were a little breathless, but her eyes spoke to him.

She did not want to lunch with the two men; she had it in mind to go into a church which was near the court−house, and there, alone, in the silence and sacred dusk, return thanks upon her knees. And deep human experience gives the soul a chance to see God; and when Amy came out afterward into the roar of the street, her face shone like the face of one who has touched the garment hem of the Eternal, and bears back the Tables of Law...

The joyous and beautiful day passed; the afternoon was gay with congratulations; but the succession of friendly calls was fatiguing, and at half−past five she said, courageously, "Now, dear friends, I'll have to leave you! It's delightful to hear all these nice things about Tom, but I must go and lie down, or I shall go to sleep at dinner." So there was more handshaking and gayety, and then, at last, she had the house to herself. She reflected that it would be well to have a little nap, so that she might be bright and rested for the jubilant evening;−−oh, that poem Mr. Bates wanted to see! She had forgotten all about it; she must find it before she went upstairs. But she must first look into the dining−room to be sure about the candles and flowers and wine−glasses; three kinds of wine to−night! Generally Tom had just his glass of sherry; but to−night−−! The economical Amy would have broached the tun of malmsey if she had been able to secure it. The dinner, she knew, would be good. She had picked out the partridges herself, knowing well, under her calm exterior, that her market man, looking at her with sidewise, curious eyes, was thinking to himself, "My! and her husband to be tried for a State's prison offence!" The partridges were superb; and the salmon−−Amy's eyes sparkled with joy at the thought of such extravagance−−salmon in February! the salmon was perfect; and the salad, the ices, the coffee−−well, they would be worthy of the occasion!

The dining−room was satisfactory, with its ten friendly chairs drawn up about the sparkling table. And her best dress was upstairs spread out on the bed, with her slippers and gloves; her flowers−−Tom would bring her her flowers! She thought to herself that she would wear them, and then put them away with her wedding bouquet, that had been lying, dry and fragrant, for all these years, with her wedding dress and veil. Sighing with the joy of it all, she climbed wearily half−way upstairs; then remembered Mr. Bates's poem again, and went back to the library, with an uneasy look at the hall clock. She would not get much of a nap! And the chances of the nap lessened still more, because she could not at once find her Commonplace Book, in which she had copied the poem. Taking out one book after another, she shook her head and looked at her hands−−these shelves were very dusty; that told a housekeeping story that was disgraceful, she said to herself, gayly. Well, she would look after Jane, now that she could think and breathe again! So, poking about, pulling out one flexible, leather−covered volume after another, her fate fell upon her....

The book looked like her own Commonplace Book; Tom had more than once given her blank−books just like his own−−bound in red morocco, with mottled edges, and stamped, "Diary, 18−−." There was a whole row of these books on one of the bottom shelves of the bookcase that ran round three sides of the room, and she had been looking at them, one by one, hurriedly, for she knew she needed that rest upstairs before the company came. She pulled the books out, impatiently, fluttering the leaves over, and putting them back. One or two were her own note−books; but the rest were Tom's memoranda−−accounts, notes, etc., etc., back to−−"Why, dear me!" said Amy to herself, "they go back to before we were married!"

There was one date that caught her eye; she had heard it repeated and repeated in the last few weeks; she had heard it that very morning in court, when Thomas Fleming had said: "In March, 1887, L. F. Smith paid me in one

check $17,400; $14,400 for a piece of land belonging to the Hammond estate, and $3,000 which he owed my personal account."

The flexible, red−covered diary marked 1887 drew her hand with the fascination which comes with remembered pain. Ah! how she had suffered every time that date fell like a scalding drop of fear upon her heart! It is not true of spiritual pain that one remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a blessing has been born into the soul! She shivered as she opened the book. It occurred to her, with vague surprise, that this book would probably have settled the whole matter, if Tom had only remembered it. He had shown in court that records of that year had been among certain office books burned in the great March fire, when the building in which he had his office had been destroyed. Yes, this book might have cleared the whole matter up, easily and quickly, for, as she saw at a glance, here were entries about the Hammond Trust. She forgot her fatigue, and the nap she ought to have; she forgot the poem altogether; she sat down on the floor, running the pages over eagerly. It occurred to her, as a climax of the successful day, that she would bring this book out at dinner (if she could only find something about the $14,400) and show it as her final triumph. Then her eyes fell on the figures $17,000.

"Received from L. H. Smith, to−day, $17,400 for Hammond property, in Linden Hill." Then the comment, "A whacking good price. I hardly expected to get so much." The significance of this brief statement did not penetrate her joy. She began eagerly to look again for the other figures−− and then turned back, perplexed. $17,400 for the Hammond property? Suddenly her eye caught another familiar sum−−$3,000. Ah, now she would find it! Yes, verily, so she did.... "Borrowed $3,000 from Hammond Estate to pay back money borrowed from Ropes Estate."

Suddenly it seemed to this poor woman, sitting on the floor in the dark corner of the library, her fingers dusty, her whole slender body tingling with fatigue−−it seemed as if something fell, shuddering, down and down, and down in her breast. Strangely enough, this physical recognition informed her soul. She heard herself speak, as one falling into the unconsciousness of an anesthetic, hears, with vague astonishment, words faltering unbidden from the lips. "No. No. No," came the body's frightened denial.

"Then, in silence, the Soul: "He−−did it. He did it."

It was characteristic of Amy that she sought no loophole of escape. It never occurred to her that there could be an explanation. There were the figures; and the figures meant the facts. "A certain man named Ananias" (so, suddenly, the words ran in her mind) "sold a possession... and kept back part of the price."

Out in the hall the half−hour struck, muffled and mellow. Then silence.

"God, if he did it, I can't live−−can't live. God!"

Suddenly the happenings of the day seemed to blur and run together, and there was a moment, not of unconsciousness, but of profound indifference. Her capacity for feeling snapped. But when she tried to rise, her whole being was sick; so sick that again the soul forgot or did not understand, and heard, with dull curiosity, the body saying, "No. No." She steadied herself by holding on to the bookshelves; and then, somehow, she got upstairs. It was the sight of the soft, gray dress, with its pretty laces, that stung her awake. That dress: was it hers? Was she to put it on? Was she to go and sit at the head of that shining table down in the dining− room?

"But, you know, I−−can't," she said aloud, her voice hoarse and falling.

But she did.

By the time Fleming and his counsel came tramping up from the gate, at a quarter past seven, and stopped hilariously, to kick the snow off their boots before entering the hall, Amy Fleming had arisen to meet the summons of Life. She called Jane to fasten her dress, and when the woman, startled and shocked at the shrunken

face, cried out:

"Oh, good land! what's wrong wi' ye, Mrs. Fleming?" she was able to say, quietly:

"Jane, when Mr. Fleming comes in, tell him I've had to go down to the kitchen to see about some things. And say I put his dress suit out on the sofa in my room. Tell him the studs are in his shirt."

Jane, silenced, went back to the kitchen. "Say, Mary Ann," she said, "look a−here; there's something the matter upstairs." The presence of the accommodating waitress checked further confidences; but, indeed, when Amy Fleming, ghastly, in her pretty dinner dress, sought refuge in the kitchen (the one spot where her husband would not be apt to pursue her), and stood listening to the voices of the two men going upstairs, Mary Ann needed no information that there was "something the matter."

"She looks like she was dead," the frightened women told each other.

"Jane," her mistress said, "I wish you would open a bottle of champagne; one of the pints, not one of the big bottles, and give−−me−−a glass;" her voice was faint. Jane obeyed hurriedly, and as the cork popped one man upstairs called out gayly to the other, "Hullo! has it begun already?"

Amy drank the wine and handed the glass back to the anxious woman. "I was feeling faint, Jane. I am all right now, thank you. Oh, there's the door bell! I'll go into the library." And when the two rather early comers had taken off their wraps and made their way downstairs again, they found their hostess smiling whitely at them from the hearthrug.

"Oh, Amy dear!" the wife said, dismayed, "what is the matter?" And the husband protested in a friendly way that he was afraid Mrs. Fleming was tired out. "Of course it has been a wearing week for you, in spite of its triumph," he said, delicately.

Then Thomas Fleming and his lawyer came downstairs, and there was more handshaking and congratulations, and it was not until he looked at his wife at dinner that Fleming really saw her face; its haggard pallor struck him dumb in the midst of some gay story to the pretty neighbor on his right. He had been dull, just at first, and his gayety was a little forced, but after his first glass of champagne he brightened up very much, and had begun to tell a funny story. "And so the automobilist," he was saying−−and broke off, staring blankly at Amy. "I'm afraid my wife is not well," he said, anxiously. But the pretty neighbor reassured him.

"Oh, it's the reaction, Mr. Fleming. Amy has been perfectly splendid; but now, naturally, she feels the reaction."

Somehow or other, with its gayety and good fellowship, that dreadful evening passed. When the friendly folk streamed out into the starry winter night, there was some anxious comment. "How badly she looked!"

"My dear, can you wonder? Think what she's been through!"

But one woman, on her husband's arm, murmured a question: "You don't suppose he could have−−done anything?"

"Twelve good men and true have said he didn't; your remark is out of order."

"But tell me, honestly, do you suppose it is possible that−−that?"

"I don't know anything about it, Helen. I would bank on Tom Fleming as soon as on any man I know. But I don't know any man (myself included) who is not human. So, if you ask about 'possibilities'−−but no! honestly, as you

say, I'm sure Fleming is all right. And his wife is a noble woman. I've always admired Mrs. Fleming."

"She is the best woman in the world!" Amy's friend said, warmly. But in her own heart she was thinking that if it came to possibilities, she knew one man to whom wrongdoing was impossible! And, happily, she squeezed his arm, and brushed her cold, rosy cheek against his shoulder.

IV

When Fleming closed the door upon the last lingering guest, he turned anxiously to his wife. "Amy, I haven't had a chance to speak to you! You are worn out. Bates, look at her−−she's worn out!"

Bates, lounging in the library doorway, agreed. "Indeed she is; Mrs. Fleming, you ought not to have attempted a dinner party. I believe it's all my fault, because I suggested it."

"It's your fault because you got me off," Fleming said, jocosely. The dulness of the first part of the evening had quite disappeared; he was rather flushed and inclined to laugh buoyantly at everything; but his face was anxious when he looked at his wife. "Amy, you must go right straight to bed!"

"I am going now," she said, pulling and straightening the fingers of her long gloves. "Good−night, Mr. Rates. I−−will copy that poem for you−− sometime," she ended faintly.

Her husband put his arm about her to help her upstairs, but she drew away. "No; stay down and smoke with Mr. Bates." Then, as he insisted on coming up with her, she stopped on the first landing, and pushed his arm away, sharply. "Please−−don't! My head aches. Please−−go away."

Thomas Fleming, dumfounded, could not find his wits for a reply before she had slipped away from him, and he heard the door of their bedroom close behind her. He stood blankly upon the stairs for a moment, and then went back to Bates.

"I never knew Amy so upset," he said, stupidly. And, indeed, there are few things more bewildering than sudden irrational irritation in a sweet and reasonable soul.

"It's been a hard week for her," Bates explained, easily. But Fleming smoked morosely; he was plainly relieved when his guest said he thought he would go to bed. He suggested, in a perfunctory way, a last visit to the dining−room for a drink of whiskey, and when this was declined, arose with alacrity to conduct the sleepy lawyer to the spare−room door.

"We'll take the eight−fifteen in the morning, Bates," he said; and Bates, yawning, agreed.

Fleming went softly into his own room, and was half disappointed, half relieved, to find his wife lying motionless, with closed eyes. "A good night's sleep will set her up," he thought, tenderly. For himself, he stopped in the process of pulling off his boots, and, shutting his lips hard together, stared at the floor.

After a while he drew a long breath;−−"Well, thank the eternal Powers," he said; and pulled off his boots softly−−Amy must have a good night's sleep. Fleming himself had a good night's sleep. That Amy's eyes opened painfully to the dark, when all the house had sunk into silence, of course he did not know. She seemed to be sleeping soundly when he awoke the next morning; and again he crept about, not even daring to kiss her, lest she might be disturbed. Just before he and Bates made a dash for the eight− fifteen, he told Jane to ask Mrs. Fleming to call him up on the telephone when she came downstairs, so he might know how she was.

As for Amy, when she heard the front door close behind the two hurrying men, she got up and sat wearily on the side of the bed.

"Now, I've got time to think," she said. There was a certain relief in the consciousness of silence and of time. She could think all day; she could think until half−past six; how many hours? Ten! Ten hours−−in which to take up a new life. Ten hours in which to become acquainted with her husband.

"I have never known him," she said feebly to herself. Well, now she must think.... No doubt he had loved her; she was not questioning that. She was dully indifferent to the whole matter of love. The question was, what was she going to do? After restitution was made, what was she going to do? How were they to go on living? Mere restitution−−(which must be made on Monday. No, Monday was a holiday; they would have to wait until Tuesday. Oh, how could she bear the delay?) Well, on Tuesday, then, the money would be given to Mr. Hammond. But mere restitution would not change the fact of what he was. She dropped back against her pillows, hiding her face. "I never knew him."

Oh, this would not do! She must think.

Poor soul! She had no thoughts but that one. Over and over the words repeated themselves, until her very mind was sore. But she did her best; the habit of common−sense was a great help. She had some coffee, and dressed and went down to the library−−recoiling, involuntarily, at the sight of that corner where the books were still in some slight disorder. She even called Jane and bade her bring her duster. When the dusting was done, she told the woman that she would not see any one, all day. "I have a headache," she explained; "don't let any one in." And when Jane left her, she drew her little chair up to the hearth; "Now, I'll think," she said. But her eye caught the flash of sunlight on a crystal ball on the mantelpiece, and it seemed as if her mind broke into a glimmering kaleidoscope: those partridges had been a little overcooked last night... the gilt on the narrow, old−fashioned mirror over the mantel was tarnishing... the $3,000 had been "borrowed" from one Trust to pay another.... Borrowing from Peter to pay Paul.... How clear the crystal was.

Two thefts.... Jane must dust those shelves better.... Then she started with dismay−−she was not thinking! Well, restitution, first of all;−−on Tuesday. They would sell a bond, and take some money out of the bank. But after restitution they must go on living. She must try to understand him, to help him to be good, to be patient with him. "But I don't know him," came over and over the dreadful refrain, checked by the instant determination: "Oh, I must think!"

So the day passed. She told Jane to telephone her husband that she was up and feeling better; and he sent back some anxious message−−she must rest, she must not overdo. He could not, unfortunately, come out on an early train, as he had hoped to do, being detained by some business matters, so he would have to dine in town. He would come out on the eight−thirty. She grasped at the delay with passionate relief; two hours more to think. Then it came over her that she was glad not to see him. What did that mean? She wondered, vaguely, if she had stopped loving him? Not that it made any difference whether she loved him or not. Love had no meaning to her. "Perhaps this is the way people who are dead feel about us," she thought. Then she wondered if she hated him, this stranger, this−−thief? No, she did not hate him either. But when respect, upon which love is built, is wrenched away, what happens? There is no love, of course. She thought, vaguely, that she had pitied Mrs. Hammond. And yet she herself did not care, apparently. How strange not to care! Pulling her wedding−ring off, slipping it on, pulling it off again, she said to herself, numbly, that she did not understand why she did not care. However, she could not go into this question of love and hate. Neither mattered. She beat her poor mind back to its task of "thinking."

The long, sunny winter afternoon faded into the dusk; a gleam of sunset broke yellow across the pleasant room, and catching with a glimmering flash on the crystal, melted into a bloom of gray, with the fire, like the spark of an opal, shifting and winking on the hearth.

When Fleming came hurriedly up the garden path to his own door, he had to pull out his latchkey to let himself into the house. This slight happening made him frown; so she was not well enough to come down? He took off his coat and started immediately upstairs, then he caught sight of her in the library, standing motionless, her back to the door, one hand resting on the mantelpiece, the other drooping at her side, the fingers between the pages of a book. He came in quickly, with a gayly derisive laugh.

"You didn't hear me!" Then, as she did not turn, he sobered. "Amy, what is it? Why, Amy! Is there anything the matter? Is anything wrong?" His face was keenly disturbed, and he put his hand on her shoulder to make her look at him, but she lifted it away, gently, still keeping her eyes fastened on the fire.

"Yes. There is something−−wrong."

"Amy!" he said, now thoroughly alarmed, "what is the matter? Tell me!"

"I will tell you. Sit down. There: at the library table. I will−−show you."

He sat down, blankly, his lower−lip falling open with perplexity. She sighed once, and brushed her hand over her eyes; then came, quietly, away from the hearth, and, going round the table, stood behind him and laid the book down beside him. She pressed it open, and in silence ran her finger down the page.

V

The fire sputtered a little; then everything was still. She had left him, and had gone back to the hearthrug, and stood as before, one hand on the mantelpiece, the other, listless, at her side. The silence was horrible.

Then, suddenly, Thomas Fleming ripped and tore the pages out of the book, and threw them on the logs: the quick leap of the flames shone on his white face and his furious eyes. A minute afterward he spoke.

Under that storm of outrageous words she bent and shrunk a little, silently. Once she looked at him with a sort of curiosity. So this was her husband? Then she looked at the fire.

When, choking with anger, he paused, she said, briefly, that she had been hunting for her Commonplace Book, down on that lower shelf, and had found− −this.

"What the devil were my diaries doing on your lower shelf? One of those damned women of yours poking−−"

"When we moved they were put there. They had been in your old desk in the other house. They were locked up there. I suppose you forgot to lock them up here," she ended, simply.

That next hour left its permanent mark on those two faces; agony and shame were cut into the wincing flesh, as by some mighty die. At first Fleming was all rage; then rage turned into sullenness, and sullenness to explanation and excuse. But as he calmed down, shame, an old, old shame, that he had loathed and lived with for a dozen years, a shame that, except when Amy was too tenderly proud of him, he was sometimes able for days, or even weeks, to forget−−this old shame reared its deadly head, and looked out of his abased and shifting eyes. Yet he had his glib excuses and explanations. Amy, in the midst of them, sat down in her little low chair by the fire. She did not speak. She had her handkerchief in her hand, and kept pulling it out on her knee; smoothing it; then folding it; and a minute later, spreading it out again. At last, after a labored statement−− how he had only borrowed it; how it had been at a time when he had been horribly pressed; how he had always meant to return it, of course; how, in fact, he had returned it by giving an enormous amount of work for which he had never had any credit, or any money, either! (though, as it happened, he had never been in a, position to pay it back in actual cash); after this miserable

and futile explanation had been repeated and repeated, he stopped to get his breath; and then, still pulling the hem of her handkerchief straight on her knee, his wife said, in a lifeless voice:

"Need we talk about it any more? On Tuesday we will send it back. (Monday is a holiday. You can't send it until Tuesday.) Then we will never talk about it any more."

"Send what back?"

"The money. To Mr. Hammond!"

"Are you out of your senses?" he said roughly.

She looked up, confusedly. "You can't send it until Tuesday," she repeated, mechanically.

He brought his fist down violently on the table. "I will never send it back! Never! You are insane! Why, it would be acknowledging−−"

"It would be confession," she agreed.

"Well! that would be ruin."

"Ruin?"

"Why, if people knew−−" he began.

"It is ruin, anyhow," she said, dully. "Don't you see? The only thing left is restitution."

"I can't make what you call−−'restitution,' without−−ruin; absolute ruin! Do you realize what it would mean to me, in this town, to have it known that I−−borrowed from the Trust, and−−and had not yet returned it? On the stand, of course, I had to protect myself; and that would be−−against me. And it would be known. Hammond would never let it be settled privately! He couldn't prosecute me on the old charge; but I suppose he might make a claim of−−of perjury. Anyhow, just the publicity would ruin me. And he would make it public. Trust Hammond! Besides, I've given it back ten times over in unpaid−for work to the Estate−−" He stopped abruptly. Amy had fainted....

Sunday was a long day of struggle. The immediate hour of violence was over; he was ashamed; and he loved her; and he was frightened. But he was immovable. His hardness was worse than his violence.

"I can not do it, Amy; I will not do it. The thing is done. It's over. It's settled. I'm sorry; I−−regret it; nobody regrets it as much as I do. But I will not destroy myself, and destroy you−−you, too!−−by returning it." Then, sullenly, "Anyway, I don't owe it, morally. I've more than made it up to them."

Monday, the holiday (and holidays had always been such joy to them; a whole day at home together!)−−Monday, they struggled to the death.

It was in the afternoon that she suddenly flagged. She had been kneeling beside him, entreating him; and he had been hard and violent and childish by turns; but he would not. And toward dusk there came a dreadful pause. Partly, no doubt, it was because she was exhausted; but it was more than that. It was a sudden blasting consciousness that the man must save or lose his own soul. If she forced him to make restitution, the restitution would not be his, but hers. If she pushed him into honesty, he would still be dishonest. If he preferred the mire, he would be filthy if plucked out against his will and set on clean ground. A prisoner in heaven is in hell! No, he

must save himself. She could not save him.

She drew away and looked at him; then she covered her face with her hands. "I am done," she said, faintly.

The suddenness of her capitulation left him open−mouthed. But before he could speak she went away and left him. He heard her slip the bolt of their bedroom door; and then he heard her step overhead. After that all was still.

The afternoon was very long; once he went and walked drearily about the snowy lanes, avoiding passersby as well as he could. But for the most part he sat in the library and tried to read or smoke; but he forgot to turn over the pages, and he had to keep reaching for a match to relight his cigar. He said to himself that his life was over. Amy would leave him, of course; she had said as much. Well, he couldn't help it. Better the misery of a broken home than public shame, and disgrace, and ruin. And he had made restitution (as she called it); he had made it many times over!

It was late at night, as he was saying something like this to himself for the hundredth time, that his wife came back into the room. She stood up in the old place, on the hearthrug. Very gently she told him what she had to say. She did not look at him; her eyes were fixed on the Japanese crystal resting in its jade bowl on the mantelpiece; once she took it up, and turned it over and over in the palm of her hand, looking at it intently as she spoke. But probably she did not even see it.

"I have thought it all out," she began in a low voice; "and I see I was wrong−−" He started. "I was wrong. You must save your own soul. I can't do it for you. Oh, I would! but I can't. I shall not ever again insist. Yes, the Kingdom of God must be within you. I never understood that before."

"Amy," he began, but she checked him.

"Please 1−−I am not through yet. I shall pay the money back, somehow, sometime. (Oh, wait−−wait; don't interrupt me!) Of course, I shall not betray you. My paying it shall not tell the truth, because, unless the truth is from you, it can not help you. It must be your truth, not mine. But I shall save, and save, and save, and pay it back−−to clear my own soul. For I−−I have lived on that three thousand dollars too," she said with a sick look. She put the crystal back into its bowl. "It will take−−a long time," she said, faintly.

She stopped, trembling from the effort of so many calm words. Thomas Fleming, looking doggedly at the floor, said: "I suppose you'll get a separation?"

"Get a separation?" she glanced at him for an instant. "Why, we are separated," she said. "We can't be any more separated than we are. I suppose we have never been together. But I won't leave you, if that is what you mean."

"You'll stay with me?" he burst out; "I thought you despised me!"

"Why, no," she said, slowly; "I don't think I despise you. I don't think I do. But of course−−" She looked away, helplessly. "Of course, I have no respect for you."

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry. But there's nothing I can do about it."

Amy turned, listlessly, as if to go upstairs again; but he caught her dress.

"You really mean you won't−−leave me?"

"No, I won't leave you."

"Of course," he said, roughly, "you don't love me; but−−" His voice faltered into a sort of question.

She turned sharply from him, hiding her face in her arm, moving blindly, with one hand stretched out to feel her way, toward the door. "Oh," she said; "oh−−I'm afraid−−I−−"

And at that he broke.... Poor, weak Love, poor Love that would have denied itself for very shame; Love brought him to his knees; his arms around her waist, his head against her breast, his tears on her hand.

"Amy! I will do it! I will give it back. Oh, Amy, Amy−−"