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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WEB OF LIFE ***

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THE WEB OF LIFE

BY

ROBERT HERRICK

AUTHOR OF "THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM," "THE MAN WHO WINS,"
"LITERARY LOVE-LETTERS AND OTHER STORIES"

TO G. R. C.

"_Hear from the spirit world this mystery:
Creation is summed up, O man, in thee;
Angel and demon, man and beast, art thou,
Yea, thou art all thou dost appear to be!_"

THE WEB OF LIFE

PART I

CHAPTER I

The young surgeon examined the man as he lay on the hospital chair in which ward attendants had left him. The surgeon's fingers touched him deftly, here and there, as if to test the endurance of the flesh he had to deal with. The head nurse followed his swift movements, wearily moving an incandescent light hither and thither, observing the surgeon with languid interest. Another nurse, much younger, without the "black band," watched the surgeon from the foot of the cot. Beads of perspiration chased themselves down her pale face, caused less by sympathy than by sheer weariness and heat. The small receiving room of St. Isidore's was close and stuffy, surcharged with odors of iodoform and ether. The Chicago spring, so long delayed, had blazed with a sudden fury the last week in March, and now at ten o'clock not a capful of air strayed into the room, even through the open windows that faced the lake.

The patient groaned when the surgeon's fingers first touched him, then relapsed into the spluttering, labored respiration of a man in liquor or in heavy pain. A stolid young man who carried the case of instruments freshly steaming from their antiseptic bath made an observation which the surgeon apparently did not hear. He was thinking, now, his thin face set in a frown, the upper teeth biting hard over the under lip and drawing up the pointed beard. While he thought, he watched the man extended on the chair,

watched him like an alert cat, to extract from him some hint as to what he should do. This absorption seemed to ignore completely the other occupants of the room, of whom he was the central, commanding figure. The head nurse held the lamp carelessly, resting her hand over one hip thrown out, her figure drooping into an ungainly pose. She gazed at the surgeon steadily, as if puzzled at his intense preoccupation over the common case of a man "shot in a row." Her eyes travelled over the surgeon's neat-fitting evening dress, which was so bizarre here in the dingy receiving room, redolent of bloody tasks. Evidently he had been out to some dinner or party, and when the injured man was brought in had merely donned his rumpled linen jacket with its right sleeve half torn from the socket. A spot of blood had already spurted into the white bosom of his shirt, smearing its way over the pearl button, and running under the crisp fold of the shirt. The head nurse was too tired and listless to be impatient, but she had been called out of hours on this emergency case, and she was not used to the surgeon's preoccupation. Such things usually went off rapidly at St. Isidore's, and she could hear the tinkle of the bell as the hall door opened for another case. It would be midnight before she could get back to bed! The hospital was short-handed, as usual.

The younger nurse was not watching the patient, nor the good-looking young surgeon, who seemed to be the special property of her superior. Even in her few months of training she had learned to keep herself calm and serviceable, and not to let her mind speculate idly. She was gazing out of the window into the dull night. Some locomotives in the railroad yards just outside were puffing lazily, breathing themselves deeply in the damp, spring air. One hoarser note than the others struck familiarly on the nurse's ear. That was the voice of the engine on the ten-thirty through express, which was waiting to take its train to the east. She knew that engine's throb, for it was the engine that stood in the yards every evening while she made her first rounds for the night. It was the one which took her train round the southern end of the lake, across the sandy fields, to Michigan, to her home.

The engine puffed away, and she withdrew her gaze and glanced at the patient. To her, too, the wounded man was but a case, another error of humanity that had come to St. Isidore's for temporary repairs, to start once more on its erring course, or, perhaps, to go forth unfinished, remanded just there to death. The ten-thirty express was now pulling out through the yards in a powerful clamor of clattering switches and hearty pulsations that shook the flimsy walls of St. Isidore's, and drew new groans from the man on the chair. The young nurse's eyes travelled from him to a woman who stood behind the ward tenders, shielded by them and the young interne from the group about the hospital chair. This woman, having no uniform of any sort, must be some one who had come in with the patient, and had stayed unobserved in the disorder of a night case.

Suddenly the surgeon spoke; his words shot out at the head nurse.

"We will operate now!"

The interne shrugged his shoulders, but he busied himself in selecting and wiping the instruments. Yet in spite of his decisive words the surgeon

seemed to hesitate.

"Was there any one with this man,--any friend?" he asked the head nurse.

In reply she looked around vaguely, her mind thrown out of gear by this unexpected delay. Another freak of the handsome surgeon!

"Any relative or friend?" the surgeon iterated peremptorily, looking about at the attendants.

The little nurse at the foot of the patient, who was not impressed by the irregularity of the surgeon's request, pointed mutely to the figure behind the ward tenders. The surgeon wheeled about and glanced almost savagely at the woman, his eyes travelling swiftly from her head to her feet. The woman thus directly questioned by the comprehending glance returned his look freely, resentfully. At last when the surgeon's eyes rested once more on her face, this time more gently, she answered:

"I am his wife."

This statement in some way humanized the scene. The ward tenders and the interne stared at her blankly; the nurses looked down in unconscious comment on the twisted figure by their side. The surgeon drew his hands from his pockets and stepped toward the woman, questioning her meanwhile with his nervous, piercing glance. For a moment neither spoke, but some kind of mute explanation seemed to be going on between them.

She kept her face level with his, revealing it bravely, perhaps defiantly. Its tense expression, with a few misery-laden lines, answered back to the inquiry of the nonchalant outsiders: 'Yes, I am his wife, his wife, the wife of the object over there, brought here to the hospital, shot in a saloon brawl.' And the surgeon's face, alive with a new preoccupation, seemed to reply: 'Yes, I know! You need not pain yourself by telling me.'

The patient groaned again, and the surgeon came back at once to the urgent present--the case. He led the way to one side, and turning his back upon the group of assistants he spoke to the woman in low tones.

"This man, your husband, is pretty badly off. He's got at least two bullets in bad places. There isn't much chance for him--in his condition," he explained brusquely, as if to reconcile his unusual procedure with business-like methods.

"But I should operate," he continued; "I shall operate unless there are objections--unless you object."

His customary imperious manner was struggling with a special feeling for this woman before him. She did not reply, but waited to hear where her part might come in. Her eyes did not fall from his face.

"There's a chance," the surgeon went on, "that a certain operation now will bring him around all right. But to-morrow will be too late."

His words thus far had something foolish in them, and her eyes seemed to say so. If it was the only chance, and his custom was to operate in such cases,--if he would have operated had she not been there, why did he go through this explanation?

"There may be----complications in his recovery," he said at last, in low tones. "The recovery may not be complete."

She did not seem to understand, and the surgeon frowned at his failure, after wrenching from himself this frankness. The idea, the personal idea that he had had to put out of his mind so often in operating in hospital cases,--that it made little difference whether, indeed, it might be a great deal wiser if the operation turned out fatally,--possessed his mind. Could she be realizing that, too, in her obstinate silence? He tried another explanation.

"If we do not operate, he will probably have a few hours of consciousness--if you had something to say to him?"

Her face flushed. He humiliated her. He must know that she had nothing to say to _him_, as well as if he had known the whole story.

"We could make him comfortable, and who knows, to-morrow might not be too late!" The surgeon ended irritably, impatient at the unprofessional frankness of his words, and disgusted that he had taken this woman into his confidence. Did she want him to say: 'See here, there's only one chance in a thousand that we can save that carcass; and if he gets that chance, it may not be a whole one--do you care enough for him to run that dangerous risk?' But she obstinately kept her own counsel. The professional manner that he ridiculed so often was apparently useful in just such cases as this. It covered up incompetence and hypocrisy often enough, but one could not be human and straightforward with women and fools. And women and fools made up the greater part of a doctor's business.

Yet the voice that said, "I am his wife," rang through his mind and suggested doubts. Under the miserable story that he had instinctively imaged, there probably lay some tender truth.

"There's a chance, you see!" he resumed more tenderly, probing her for an evidence. "All any of us have, except that he is not in a condition for an operation."

This time her mouth quivered. She was struggling for words. "Why do you ask me?" she gasped. "What--" but her voice failed her.

"I should operate," the surgeon replied gently, anticipating her question. "I, we should think it better that way, only sometimes relatives object."

He thought that he had probed true and had found what he was after.

"It is a chance," she said audibly, finding her voice. "You must do what you think--best. I have nothing to say to him. You need not delay for

that."

"Very well," the surgeon replied, relieved that his irregular confidence had resulted in the conventional decision, and that he had not brought on himself a responsibility shared with her. "You had best step into the office. You can do no good here."

Then, dismissing the unusual from his mind, he stepped quickly back to the patient. The younger nurse was bathing the swollen, sodden face with a piece of gauze; the head nurse, annoyed at the delay, bustled about, preparing the dressings under the direction of the interne.

The wife had not obeyed the doctor's direction to leave the room, however, and remained at the window, staring out into the soft night. At last, when the preparations were completed, the younger nurse came and touched her. "You can sit in the office, next door; they may be some time," she urged gently.

As the woman turned to follow the nurse, the surgeon glanced at her once more. He was conscious of her calm tread, her admirable self-control. The sad, passive face with its broad, white brow was the face of a woman who was just waking to terrible facts, who was struggling to comprehend a world that had caught her unawares. She had removed her hat and was carrying it loosely in her hand that had fallen to her side. Her hair swept back in two waves above the temples with a simplicity that made the head distinguished. Even the nurses' caps betrayed stray curls or rolls. Her figure was large, and the articulation was perfect as she walked, showing that she had had the run of fields in her girlhood. Yet she did not stoop as is the habit of country girls; nor was there any unevenness of physique due to hard, manual labor.

As she passed the huddle of human flesh stretched out in the wheel-chair, a wave of color swept over her face. Then she looked up to the surgeon and seemed to speak to him, as to the one human being in a world of puppets. 'You understand; you understand. It is terrible!'

The surgeon's brown eyes answered hers, but he was puzzled. Had he probed her aright? It was one of those intimate moments that come to nervously organized people, when the petty detail of acquaintanceship and fact is needless, when each one stands nearly confessed to the other. And then she left the room.

The surgeon proceeded without a word, working intently, swiftly, dexterously. At first the head nurse was too busy in handling bowls and holding instruments to think, even professionally, of the operation. The interne, however, gazed in admiration, emitting exclamations of delight as the surgeon rapidly took one step after another. Then he was sent for something, and the head nurse, her chief duties performed, drew herself upright for a breath, and her keen, little black eyes noticed an involuntary tremble, a pause, an uncertainty at a critical moment in the doctor's tense arm. A wilful current of thought had disturbed his action. The sharp head nurse wondered if Dr. Sommers had had any wine that evening, but she dismissed this suspicion scornfully, as slander against the

ornament of the Surgical Ward of St. Isidore's. He was tired: the languid summer air thus early in the year would shake any man's nerve. But the head nurse understood well that such a wavering of will or muscle must not occur again, or the hairbreadth chance the drunken fellow had----

She watched that bared arm, her breath held. The long square fingers closed once more with a firm grip on the instrument. "Miss Lemoris, some No. 3 gauze." Then not a sound until the thing was done, and the surgeon had turned away to cleanse his hands in the bowl of purple antiseptic wash.

"My!" the head nurse exclaimed, "Dr. Trip ain't in it." But the surgeon's face wore a preoccupied, sombre look, irresponsible to the nurse's admiration. While she helped the interne with the complicated dressing, the little nurse made ready for removal to the ward. Then when one of the ward tenders had wheeled the muffled figure into the corridor, she hurried across to the office.

"It's all over," she whispered blithely to the wife, who sat in a dull abstraction, oblivious of the hospital flurry. "And it's going to be all right, I just know. Dr. Sommers is so clever, he'd save a dead man. You had better go now. No use to see him to-night, for he won't come out of the opiate until near morning. You can come tomorrow morning, and p'r'aps Dr. Sommers will get you a pass in. Visitors only Thursdays and Sunday afternoons usually."

She hurried off to her duties in the ward. The woman did not rise at once. She did not readjust her thoughts readily; she seemed to be waiting in the chance of seeing some one. The surgeon did not come out of the receiving room; there was a sound of wheels in the corridor just outside the office door, followed by the sound of shuffling feet. Through the open door she could see two attendants wheeling a stretcher with a man lying motionless upon it. They waited in the hall outside under a gas-jet, which cast a flickering light upon the outstretched form. This was the next case, which had been waiting its turn while her husband was in the receiving room,--a hand from the railroad yards, whose foot had slipped on a damp rail; now a pulpy, almost shapeless mass, thinly disguised under a white sheet that had fallen from his arms and head. She got up and walked out of the room. She was not wanted there: the hospital had turned its momentary swift attention to another case. As she passed the stretcher, the bearers shifted their burden to give her room. The form on the stretcher moaned indistinctly.

She looked at the unsightly mass, in her heart envious of his condition. There were things in this world much more evil than this bruised flesh of what had once been a human being.

CHAPTER II

The next morning Dr. Sommers took his successor through, the surgical ward. Dr. Raymond, whose place he had been holding for a month, was a young,

carefully dressed man, fresh from a famous eastern hospital. The nurses eyed him favorably. He was absolutely correct. When the surgeons reached the bed marked 8, Dr. Sommers paused. It was the case he had operated on the night before. He glanced inquiringly at the metal tablet which hung from the iron cross-bars above the patient's head. On it was printed in large black letters the patient's name, ARTHUR C. PRESTON; on the next line in smaller letters, Admitted March 26th. The remaining space on the card was left blank to receive the statement of regimen, etc. A nurse was giving the patient an iced drink. After swallowing feebly, the man relapsed into a semi-stupor, his eyes opening and closing vacantly.

As he lay under the covering of a sheet, his arms thrust out bare from the short-sleeved hospital shirt, his unshaven flushed face contrasting with the pallid and puffy flesh of neck and arms, he gave an impression of sensuality emphasized by undress. The head was massive and well formed, and beneath the bloat of fever and dissipation there showed traces of refinement. The soft hands and neat finger-nails, the carefully trimmed hair, were sufficient indications of a kind of luxury. The animalism of the man, however, had developed so early in life that it had obliterated all strong markings of character. The flaccid, rather fleshy features were those of the sensual, prodigal young American, who haunts hotels. Clean shaven and well dressed, the fellow would be indistinguishable from the thousands of overfed and overdrunk young business men, to be seen every day in the vulgar luxury of Pullman cars, hotel lobbies, and large bar-rooms.

The young surgeon studied the patient thoughtfully. He explained the case briefly to his successor, as he had all the others, and before leaving the bed, he had the nurse take the patient's temperature. "Only two degrees of fever," he commented mechanically; "that is very good. Has his wife--has any one been in to see him?" The head nurse, who stood like an automaton at the foot of the bed, replied that she had seen no one; in any case, the doorkeeper would have refused permission unless explicit orders had been given.

Then the doctors continued their rounds, followed by the correct head nurse. When they reached the end of the ward, Dr. Sommers remarked disconnectedly: "No. 8 there, the man with the gun-shot wounds, will get well, I think; but I shouldn't wonder if mental complications followed. I have seen cases like that at the Bicetre, where operations on an alcoholic patient produced paresis. The man got well," he added harshly, as if kicking aside some dull formula; "but he was a hopeless idiot."

The new surgeon stared politely without replying. Such an unprofessional and uncalled-for expression of opinion was a new experience to him. In the Boston hospital resident surgeons did not make unguarded confidences even to their colleagues.

The two men finished their inspection without further incident, and went to the office to examine the system of records. After Sommers had left his successor, he learned from the clerk that "No. 8" had been entered as, "Commercial traveller; shot three times in a saloon row." Mrs. Preston had called,--from her and the police this information came,--had been informed that her husband was doing well, but had not asked to see him. She had left

an address at some unknown place a dozen miles south.

The surgeon's knowledge of the case ended there. As in so many instances, he knew solely the point of tragedy: the before and the after went on outside the hospital walls, beyond his ken. While he was busy in getting away from the hospital, in packing up the few things left in his room, he thought no more about Preston's case or any case. But the last thing he did before leaving St. Isidore's was to visit the surgical ward once more and glance at No. 8's chart. The patient was resting quietly; there was every promise of recovery.

He left the grimy brick hospital, and made his way toward the rooms he had engaged in a neighborhood farther south. The weather was unseasonably warm and enervating, and he walked slowly, taking the broad boulevard in preference to the more noisome avenues, which were thick with slush and mud. It was early in the afternoon, and the few carriages on the boulevard were standing in front of the fashionable garment shops that occupied the city end of the drive. He had an unusual, oppressive feeling of idleness; it was the first time since he had left the little Ohio college, where he had spent his undergraduate years, that he had known this emptiness of purpose. There was nothing for him to do now, except to dine at the Hitchcocks' to-night. There would be little definite occupation probably for weeks, months, until he found some practice. Always hitherto, there had been a succession of duties, tasks, ends that he set himself one on the heels of another, occupying his mind, relieving his will of all responsibility.

He was cast out now from his youth, as it were, at thirty-two, to find his place in the city, to create his little world. And for the first time since he had entered Chicago, seven months before, the city wore a face of strangeness, of complete indifference. It hummed on, like a self-absorbed machine: all he had to do was not to get caught in it, involved, wrecked. For nearly a year he had been a part of it; and yet busy as he had been in the hospital, he had not sought to place himself strongly. He had gone in and out, here and there, for amusement, but he had returned to the hospital. Now the city was to be his home: somewhere in it he must dig his own little burrow.

Unconsciously his gait expressed his detachment. He sauntered idly, looking with fresh curiosity at the big, smoke-darkened houses on the boulevard. At Twenty-Second Street, a cable train clanged its way harshly across his path. As he looked up, he caught sight of the lake at the end of the street,—a narrow blue slab of water between two walls. The vista had a strangely foreign air. But the street itself, with its drays lumbering into the hidden depths of slimy pools, its dirty, foot-stained cement walks, had the indubitable aspect of Chicago.

Along the boulevard carriages were passing more frequently. The clank of metal chains, the beat of hoofs upon the good road-bed, sounded smartly on the ear. The houses became larger, newer, more flamboyant; richly dressed, handsome women were coming and going between them and their broughams. When Sommers turned to look back, the boulevard disappeared in the vague, murky region of mephitic cloud, beneath which the husbands of those women were

toiling, striving, creating. He walked on and on, enjoying his leisure, speculating idly about the people and the houses. At last, as he neared Fortieth Street, the carriages passed less frequently. He turned back with a little chill, a feeling that he had left the warm, living thing and was too much alone. This time he came through Prairie and Calumet Avenues. Here, on the asphalt pavements, the broughams and hansoms rolled noiselessly to and fro among the opulent houses with tidy front grass plots and shining steps. The avenues were alive with afternoon callers. At several points there were long lines of carriages, attending a reception, or a funeral, or a marriage.

The air and the relaxation of all purpose tired him. The scene of the previous evening hung about his mind, coloring the abiding sense of loneliness. His last triumph in the delicate art of his profession had given him no exhilarating sense of power. He saw the woman's face, miserable and submissive, and he wondered. But he brought himself up with a jerk: this was the danger of permitting any personal feeling or speculation to creep into professional matters.

* * * * *

In his new rooms on Twenty-Eighth Street, there was an odor of stale tobacco, permeating the confusion created by a careless person. Dresser had been occupying them lately. He had found Sam Dresser, whom he had known as a student in Europe, wandering almost penniless down State Street, and had offered him a lodging-place.

"How did it come out?" Sommers asked the big, blond young man with a beer-stained mustache.

The big fellow stopped, before answering, to stuff a pipe with tobacco, punching it in with a fat thumb.

"They'll give me a job--mean one--three dollars a day--nine to five--under the roof in a big loft, tenth story--with a lot of women hirelings. Regular sweatshop--educational sweatshop."

Sommers took up some letters from the table and opened them.

"Well, I've got to scare up some patients to live on, even to make three dollars a day."

"You!" Dresser exclaimed, eyeing the letters with naive envy. "You are pals with the fat-fed capitalists. They will see that you get something easy, and one of these days you will marry one of their daughters. Then you will join the bank accounts, and good-by."

He continued to rail, half jestingly, half in earnest, at McNamara and Hills,--where he had obtained work, thanks to a letter which Sommers had procured for him,--at his companion's relations with the well-to-do, which he exaggerated offensively, and at the well-to-do themselves.

"It was lucky for you," Sommers remarked good-humoredly, "that I was thick

enough with the bloodsuckers to get you that letter from Hitchcock. One of us will have to stand in with the 'swilling, fat-fed capitalist.'"

"Are those Hitchcocks rich?" Dresser asked, his eye resting wistfully on a square note that the young doctor had laid aside.

"I suppose so," Sommers answered. "Shall we go and have some beer?"

Dresser's blue eyes still followed the little pile of letters--eyes hot with desires and regrets. A lust burned in them, as his companion could feel instinctively, a lust to taste luxury. Under its domination Dresser was not unlike the patient in No. 8.

When they turned into the boulevard, which was crowded at this hour of twilight, men were driving themselves home in high carts, and through the windows of the broughams shone the luxuries of evening attire. Dresser's glance shifted from face to face, from one trap to another, sucking in the glitter of the showy scene. The flashing procession on the boulevard pricked his hungry senses, goaded his ambitions. The men and women in the carriages were the bait; the men and women on the street sniffed it, cravingly, enviously.

"There's plenty of swag in the place," Dresser remarked.

CHAPTER III

The Hitchcocks and the Sommerses came from the same little village in Maine; they had moved west, about the same time, a few years before the Civil War: Alexander Hitchcock to Chicago; the senior Dr. Sommers to Marion, Ohio. Alexander Hitchcock had been colonel of the regiment in which Isaac Sommers served as surgeon. Although the families had seen little of one another since the war, yet Alexander Hitchcock's greeting to the young doctor when he met the latter in Paris had been more than cordial. Something in the generous, lingering hand-shake of the Chicago merchant had made the younger man feel the strength of old ties.

"I knew your mother," Colonel Hitchcock had said, smiling gently into the young student's face. "I knew her very well, and your father, too,--he was a brave man, a remarkable man."

He had sympathetically rolled the hand he still retained in his broad palm.

"If Marion had only been Chicago! You say he died two years ago? And your mother long ago? Where will you settle?"

With this abrupt question, Dr. Sommers was taken at once into a kindly intimacy with the Hitchcocks. Not long after this chance meeting there came to the young surgeon an offer of a post at St. Isidore's. In the vacillating period of choice, the successful merchant's counsel had had a

good deal of influence with Sommers. And his persistent kindness since the choice had been made had done much to render the first year in Chicago agreeable. 'We must start you right,' he had seemed to say. 'We mustn't lose you.'

Those pleasant days in Paris had been rendered more memorable to the young doctor by the friendship that came about between him and Miss Hitchcock--a friendship quite independent of anything her family might feel for him. She let him see that she made her own world, and that she would welcome him as a member of it. Accustomed as he had been only to the primitive daughters of the local society in Marion and Exonia, or the chance intercourse with unassorted women in Philadelphia, where he had taken his medical course, and in European pensions, Louise Hitchcock presented a very definite and delightful picture. That it was but one generation from Hill's Crossing, Maine, to this self-possessed, carefully finished young woman, was unbelievable. Tall and finished in detail, from the delicate hands and fine ears to the sharply moulded chin, she presented a puzzling contrast to the short, thick, sturdy figure of her mother. And her quick appropriation of the blessings of wealth, her immediate enjoyment of the aristocratic assurances that the Hitchcock position had given her in Chicago, showed markedly in contrast with the tentativeness of Mrs. Hitchcock. Louise Hitchcock handled her world with perfect self-command; Mrs. Hitchcock was rather breathless over every manifestation of social change.

Parker Hitchcock, the son, Sommers had not seen until his coming to Chicago. At a first glance, then, he could feel that in the son the family had taken a further leap from the simplicity of the older generation. Incidentally the young man's cool scrutiny had instructed him that the family had not committed Parker Hitchcock to him. Young Hitchcock had returned recently to the family lumber yards on the West Side and the family residence on Michigan Avenue, with about equal disgust, so Sommers judged, for both milieux. Even more than his sister, Parker was conscious of the difference between the old state of things and the new. Society in Chicago was becoming highly organized, a legitimate business of the second generation of wealth. The family had the money to spend, and at Yale in winter, at Newport and Beverly and Bar Harbor in summer, he had learned how to spend it, had watched admiringly how others spent their wealth. He had begun to educate his family in spending,--in using to brilliant advantage the fruits of thirty years' hard work and frugality. With his cousin Caspar Porter he maintained a small polo stable at Lake Hurst, the new country club. On fair days he left the lumber yards at noon, while Alexander Hitchcock was still shut in behind the dusty glass doors of his office. His name was much oftener in the paragraphs of the city press than his parents': he was leading the family to new ideals.

Ideals, Sommers judged, that were not agreeable to old Colonel Hitchcock, slightly menacing even in the eyes of the daughter, whose horizon was wider. Sommers had noticed the little signs of this heated family atmosphere. A mist of undiscussed views hung about the house, out of which flashed now and then a sharp speech, a bitter sigh. He had been at the house a good deal in a thoroughly informal manner. The Hitchcocks rarely entertained in the "new" way, for Mrs. Hitchcock had a terror of formality. A dinner, as she understood it, meant a gathering of a few old friends,

much hearty food served in unpretentious abundance, and a very little bad wine. The type of these entertainments had improved lately under Miss Hitchcock's influence, but it remained essentially the same,--an occasion for copious feeding and gossipy, neighborly chat.

To-night, as Sommers approached the sprawling green stone house on Michigan Avenue, there were signs of unusual animation about the entrance. As he reached the steps a hansom deposited the bulky figure of Brome Porter, Mrs. Hitchcock's brother-in-law. The older man scowled interrogatively at the young doctor, as if to say: 'You here? What the devil of a crowd has Alec raked together?' But the two men exchanged essential courtesies and entered the house together.

Porter, Sommers had heard, had once been Alexander Hitchcock's partner in the lumber business, but had withdrawn from the firm years before. Brome Porter was now a banker, as much as he was any one thing. It was easy to see that the pedestrian business of selling lumber would not satisfy Brome Porter. Popularly "rated at five millions," his fortune had not come out of lumber. Alexander Hitchcock, with all his thrift, had not put by over a million. Banking, too, would seem to be a tame enterprise for Brome Porter. Mines, railroads, land speculations--he had put his hand into them all masterfully. Large of limb and awkward, with a pallid, rather stolid face, he looked as if Chicago had laid a heavy hand upon his liver, as if the Carlsbad pilgrimage were a yearly necessity. 'Heavy eating and drinking, strong excitements--too many of them,' commented the professional glance of the doctor. 'Brute force, padded superficially by civilization,' Sommers added to himself, disliking Porter's cold eye shots at him. 'Young man,' his little buried eyes seemed to say, 'young man, if you know what's good for you; if you are the right sort; if you do the proper thing, we'll push you. Everything in this world depends on being in the right carriage.' Sommers was tempted whenever he met him to ask him for a good tip: he seemed always to have just come from New York; and when this barbarian went to Rome, it was for a purpose, which expressed itself sooner or later over the stock-ticker. But the tip had not come yet.

As Sommers was reaching the end of his conversational rope with Porter, other guests arrived. Among them was Dr. Lindsay, a famous specialist in throat diseases. The older doctor nodded genially to Sommers with the air of saying: 'I am so glad to find you _here_. This is the right place for a promising young man.'

And Sommers in a flash suspected why he had been bidden: the good-natured Miss Hitchcock wished to bring him a little closer to this influential member of his profession.

"Shall we wait for them?" Dr. Lindsay asked, joining Sommers. "Porter has got hold of Carson, and they'll keep up their stories until some one hauls them out. My wife and daughter have already gone down. How is St. Isidore's?"

"I left to-day. My term is up. I feel homesick already," the young doctor answered with a smile. "Chicago is so big," he added. "I didn't know it before."

"It's quite a village, quite a village," Dr. Lindsay answered thoughtfully. "We'll have some more talk later, won't we?" he added confidentially, as they passed downstairs.

The Hitchcock house revealed itself in the floods of electric light as large and undeniably ugly. Built before artistic ambitions and cosmopolitan architects had undertaken to soften American angularities, it was merely a commodious building, ample enough for a dozen Hitchcocks to loll about in. Decoratively, it might be described as a museum of survivals from the various stages of family history. At each advance in prosperity, in social ideals, some of the former possessions had been swept out of the lower rooms to the upper stories, in turn to be ousted by their more modern neighbors. Thus one might begin with the rear rooms of the third story to study the successive deposits. There the billiard chairs once did service in the old home on the West Side. In the hall beside the Westminster clock stood a "sofa," covered with figured velours. That had once adorned the old Twentieth Street drawing-room; and thrifty Mrs. Hitchcock had not sufficiently readjusted herself to the new state to banish it to the floor above, where it belonged with some ugly, solid brass andirons. In the same way, faithful Mr. Hitchcock had seen no good reason why he should degrade the huge steel engraving of the Aurora, which hung prominently at the foot of the stairs, in spite of its light oak frame, which was in shocking contrast with the mahogany panels of the walls. Flanking the staircase were other engravings,--Landseer's stags and the inevitable Queen Louise. Yet through the open arch, in a pleasant study, one could see a good Zorn, a Venom portrait, and some prints. This nook, formerly the library, had been given over to the energetic Miss Hitchcock. It was done in Sheraton,--imitation, but good imitation. From this vantage point the younger generation planned an extended attack upon the irregular household gods.

Sommers realized for the first time how the Aurora and the Queen Louise must worry Miss Hitchcock; how the neat Swedish maids and the hat-stand in the hall must offend young Hitchcock. The incongruities of the house had never disturbed him. So far as he had noticed them, they accorded well with the simple characters of his host and hostess. In them, as in the house, a keen observer could trace the series of developments that had taken place since they had left Hill's Crossing. Yet the full gray beard with the broad shaved upper lip still gave the Chicago merchant the air of a New England worthy. And Alexander, in contrast with his brother-in-law, had knotty hands and a tanned complexion that years of "inside business" had not sufficed to smooth. The little habit of kneading the palm which you felt when he shook hands, and the broad, humorous smile, had not changed as the years passed him on from success to success. Mrs. Hitchcock still slurred the present participle and indulged in other idiomatic freedoms that endeared her to Sommers. These two, plainly, were not of the generation that is tainted by ambition. Their story was too well known, from the boarding-house struggle to this sprawling stone house, to be worth the varnishing. Indeed, they would not tolerate any such detractors from their well-earned reputation. The Brome Porters might draw distinctions and prepare for a new social aristocracy; but to them old times were sweet and old friends dear.

As the guests gathered in the large "front room," Alexander Hitchcock stood above them, as the finest, most courteous spirit. There was race in him--sweetness and strength and refinement--the qualities of the best manhood of democracy. This effect of simplicity and sweetness was heightened in the daughter, Louise. She had been born in Chicago, in the first years of the Hitchcock fight. She remembered the time when the billiard-room chairs were quite the most noted possessions in the basement and three-story brick house on West Adams Street. She had followed the chairs in the course of the Hitchcock evolution until her aunt had insisted on her being sent east to the Beaumanor Park School. Two years of "refined influences" in this famous establishment, with a dozen other girls from new-rich families, had softened her tones and prolonged her participles, but had touched her not essentially. Though she shared with her younger brother the feeling that the Hitchcocks were not getting the most out of their opportunities, she could understand the older people more than he. If she sympathized with her father's belief that the boy ought to learn to sell lumber, or "do something for himself," yet she liked the fact that he played polo. It was the right thing to be energetic, upright, respected; it was also nice to spend your money as others did. And it was very, very nice to have the money to spend.

To-night, as Sommers came across the hall to the drawing-room, she left the group about the door to welcome him. "Weren't you surprised," she asked him with an ironical laugh, "at the people, I mean--all ages and kinds? You see Parker had to be appeased. He didn't want to stay, and I don't know why he should. So we gave him Laura Lindsay." She nodded good-naturedly in the direction of a young girl, whose sharp thin little face was turned joyfully toward the handsome Parker. "And we added our cousin Caspar, not for conversation, but to give an illusion of youth and gayety. Caspar is the captain of the polo team. By the way, what do you think of polo?"

"I never had occasion to think," the young doctor replied, scrutinizing a heavy, florid-faced young man whom he took to be Caspar Porter.

"Well, polo is with us at breakfast and dinner. Papa doesn't approve, doesn't believe in young men keeping a stable as Caspar does. Mamma doesn't know what she believes. I am arbitrator--it's terrible, the new generation," she broke off whimsically.

"Which has the right of it?" Sommers asked idly. "The fathers who made the money, or the sons who want to enjoy it?"

"Both; neither," she laughed back with an air of comfortable tolerance. She might have added, 'You see, I like both kinds--you and Parker's set.'

"Do you know, Dr. Lindsay is here?"

Sommers smiled as he replied,--

"Yes; was it arranged?"

The girl blushed, and moved away.

"He was anxious to meet you."

"Of course," the doctor replied ironically.

"I could tell you more," she added alluringly.

"I have no doubt. Perhaps you had better not, however."

Miss Hitchcock ceased to smile and looked at him without reply. She had something on the tip of her tongue to tell him, something she had thought of pleasantly for the last three days, but she suspected that this man was not one who would like to take his good fortune from a woman's hand.

"Dr. Lindsay is an old friend; we have known him for years." She spoke neutrally. Sommers merely nodded.

"He is very successful, _very_," she added, giving in to her desire a little.

"Chicago is a good place for a throat specialist."

"He is said to be the most--"

"What?"

"You know--has the largest income of any doctor in the city." Sommers did not reply. At length the girl ventured once more.

"I hope you will be nice to him."

"There won't be any question of it."

"You can be so stiff, so set; I have counted a great deal on this."

"Politics, politics!" Sommers exclaimed awkwardly. "Who is the man with Mr. Porter?"

"Railway Gazette Carson? That's what he is called. He swallows railroads--absorbs 'em. He was a lawyer. They have a house on the North Side and a picture, a Sargent. But I'll keep the story. Come! you must meet Mrs. Lindsay."

"Politics, politics!" Sommers murmured to himself, as Miss Hitchcock moved across the room.

CHAPTER IV

At the table there were awkward silences, followed by spasmodic local bursts of talk. Sommers, who sat between Miss Hitchcock and Mrs. Lindsay,

fell to listening to his host.

"I was taken for you to-day, Brome," Mr. Hitchcock said, with a touch of humor in his voice.

Porter laughed at the apparent absurdity of the accusation.

"I was detained at the office over at the yards. The men and the girls had pretty nearly all gone. I was just about to leave, when a fellow opened the door--he looked like a Swede or a Norwegian.

"Is the boss here?' he asked.

"Yes,' said I; 'what can I do for you?'

"I wants a job, a job,' he shouted, 'and no foolin'. I worked for de boss ten years and never lost a day!'

"I thought the man was drunk. 'Who did you work for?' I asked. 'For Pullman, in de vorks,' he said; then I saw how it was. He was one of the strikers, or had lost his job before the strike. Some one told him you were in with me, Brome, and a director of the Pullman works. He had footed it clear in from Pullman to find you, to lay hands on you personally."

Porter laughed rather grimly.

"That's the first sign!" Carson exclaimed.

"They'll have enough of it before the works open," Porter added.

Parker Hitchcock looked bored. Such things were not in good form; they came from the trade element in the family. His cousin Caspar had Miss Lindsay's attention. She was describing a Polish estate where she had visited the preceding summer.

"Did you send him round to our office?" Porter asked jokingly.

Sommers's keen eyes rested on his host's face inquiringly.

"No-oh," Alexander Hitchcock drawled; "I had a talk with him."

"They are rather dangerous people to talk with," Dr. Lindsay remarked.

"He was a Norwegian, a big, fine-looking man. He was all right. He couldn't talk much English, but he knew that his folks were hungry. 'You gif me a job,' he kept saying, until I explained I wasn't in the business, had nothing to do with the Pullman works. Then he sat down and looked at the floor. 'I vas fooled.' Well, it seems he did inlaying work, fine cabinet work, and got good pay. He built a house for himself out in some place, and he was fired among the first last winter,--I guess because he didn't live in Pullman."

"That's the story they use," Brome Porter said sceptically. "You should

call the watchman; they're apt to be dangerous."

"A crowd of 'em," put in Carson, "were at the Pullman office this morning; wanted to _arbitrate_."

He spoke deprecatingly of their innocence, but Porter's tones were harsh.

"To arbitrate! to arbitrate! when we are making money by having 'em quit."

Miss Hitchcock turned apprehensively to her companion. Her handsome, clear face was perplexed; she was distressed over the way the talk was going.

"It's as bad as polo!" she exclaimed, in low tones. But the doctor did not hear her.

"Is it so," he was asking Colonel Hitchcock, "that the men who had been thrifty enough to get homes outside of Pullman had to go first because they didn't pay rent to the company? I heard the same story from a patient in the hospital."

By this time Caspar Porter had turned his attention to the conversation at the other end of the table. His florid face was agape with astonishment at the doctor's temerity. Parker Hitchcock shrugged his shoulders and muttered something to Miss Lindsay. The older men moved in their chairs. It was an unhappy topic for dinner conversation in this circle.

"Well, I don't know," Colonel Hitchcock replied, a slight smile creeping across his face. "Some say yes, and some say no. Perhaps Porter can tell you."

"We leave all that to the superintendent," the latter replied stiffly. "I haven't looked into it. The works isn't a hospital."

"That's a minor point," Carson added, in a high-pitched voice. "The real thing is whether a corporation can manage its own affairs as it thinks best or not."

"The thrifty and the shiftless," interposed Dr.

Lindsay, nodding to his young colleague.

"Well, the directors are a unit. That settles the matter," Porter ended dogmatically. "The men may starve, but they'll never get back now."

The young doctor's face set in rather rigid lines. He had made a mistake, had put himself outside the sympathies of this comfortable circle. Miss Hitchcock was looking into the flowers in front of her, evidently searching for some remark that would lead the dinner out of this uncomfortable slough, when Brome Porter began again sententiously:

"The laborer has got some hard lessons to learn. This trouble is only a small part of the bigger trouble. He wants to get more than he is worth. And all our education, the higher education, is a bad thing." He turned

with marked emphasis toward the young doctor. "That's why I wouldn't give a dollar to any begging college--not a dollar to make a lot of discontented, lazy duffers who go round exciting workingmen to think they're badly treated. Every dollar given a man to educate himself above his natural position is a dollar given to disturb society."

Before Sommers could accept the challenge in this speech, Miss Hitchcock asked,--

"But what did you do with your visitor, papa?"

"Well, we had some more talk," he replied evasively. "Maybe that's why I missed you, Brome, at the club. He stayed most an hour."

"Did he go then?" the girl pressed on mischievously.

"Well, I gave him a 'job' over at the yards. It wasn't much of a 'job' though."

This speech aroused some laughter, and the talk drifted on in little waves into safer channels. The episode, however, seemed to have made an undue impression upon Sommers. Miss Hitchcock's efforts to bring him into the conversation failed. As for Mrs. Lindsay, he paid her not the slightest attention. He was coolly taking his own time to think, without any sense of social responsibility.

"What is the matter?" his companion said to him at last, in her low, insistent voice. "You are behaving so badly. Why won't you do anything one wants you to?"

Sommers glanced at his companion as if she had shaken him out of a dream. Her dark eyes were gleaming with irritation, and her mouth trembled.

"I had a vision," Sommers replied coolly.

"Well!" The man's egotism aroused her impatience, but she lowered her head to catch every syllable of his reply.

"I seemed to see things in a flash--to feel an iron crust of prejudice."

The girl's brow contracted in a puzzled frown, but she waited. The young doctor tried again to phrase the matter.

"These people--I mean your comfortable rich--seem to have taken a kind of oath of self-preservation. To do what is expected of one, to succeed, you must take the oath. You must defend their institutions, and all that," he blundered on.

"I don't know what you mean," the girl replied coolly, haughtily, raising her head and glancing over the table.

"I am not very clear. Perhaps I make a great deal of nothing. My remarks sound 'young' even to me."

"I don't pretend to understand these questions. I wish men wouldn't talk business at dinner. It is worse than polo!"

She swept his face with a glance of distrust, the lids of her eyes half lowered, as if to put a barrier between them.

"Yes," Sommers assented; "it is harder to understand."

It was curious, he thought, that a woman could take on the new rights, the aristocratic attitude, so much more completely than a man. Miss Hitchcock was a full generation ahead of the others in her conception of inherited, personal rights. As the dinner dragged on, there occurred no further opportunity for talk until near the end, when suddenly the clear, even tones of Miss Hitchcock's voice brought his idle musing to an end.

"I hope you will talk with Dr. Lindsay. He is a very able man. And," she hesitated a moment and then looked frankly at him, "he can do so much for a young doctor who has his way to make."

"Don't you think that might make it harder for me to talk to him?" Sommers asked, irritated by her lack of tact.

The girl's face flushed, and she pressed her lips together as if to push back a sharp reply.

"That is unfair. We are going now--but sometime we must talk it out."

The men stretched themselves and rearranged their chairs in little groups. Parker Hitchcock, Carson, and young Porter--were talking horses; they made no effort to include the young doctor in their corner. He was beginning to feel uncomfortably stranded in the middle of the long room, when Dr. Lindsay crossed to his side. The talk at dinner had not put the distinguished specialist in a sympathetic light, but the younger man felt grateful for this act of cordiality. They chatted about St. Isidore's, about the medical schools in Chicago, and the medical societies. At last Dr. Lindsay suggested casually, as he refilled his liqueur-glass:

"You have made some plans?"

"No, not serious ones. I have thought of taking a vacation. Then there is another hospital berth I could have. Head of a small hospital in a mining town. But I don't like to leave Chicago, on the whole."

"You are right," the older physician remarked slowly. "Such a place would bury you; you would never be heard of."

Sommers smiled at the penalty held out, but he did not protest.

"There isn't any career in hospital work, anyway, for a steady thing. You get side-tracked."

"I like it better than family practice," Sommers jerked out. "You don't have to fuss with people, women especially. Then I like the excitement of it."

"That won't last long," the older man smiled indulgently. "And you'll have a wife some day, who will make you take a different view. But there are other things--office practice."

He dilated on the advantages of office practice, while the younger man smoked and listened deferentially. Office practice offered a pleasant compromise between the strenuous scientific work of the hospital and the grind of family practice. There were no night visits, no dreary work with the poor--or only as much as you cared to do,--and it paid well, if you took to it. Sommers reflected that the world said it paid Lindsay about fifty thousand a year. It led, also, to lectureships, trusteeships--a mass of affairs that made a man prominent and important in the community.

Sommers listened attentively without questioning the agreeable, tactful doctor. He could see that something was in the air, that Lindsay was not a man to talk with this degree of intimacy out of pure charity or vanity. But the great specialist said nothing very definite after all: he let fall, casually, the fact that good men for office work--men of experience who were skilful and tactful--were rare. He had just lost a valuable doctor from his staff.

When the men returned to the drawing-room, Parker Hitchcock and his cousin took themselves off. The Lindsays went soon after. Sommers, who had regained his good sense; tried to make his apologies to Miss Hitchcock.

"Don't go yet," she answered cordially. "They will all be disposed of soon, and we can have that talk. Go and look at my prints."

In a few moments she came up behind him as he was studying the brush work of a little canvas. "I have been thinking of what you said at the table, Dr. Sommers. I have tried to think what you mean, but I can't."

Her eyes opened in frank, tolerant inquiry. Sommers had seen her like this a few times, and always with a feeling of nearness.

"I don't believe that I can make you understand," he began.

"Try!"

"The feelings that make us act are generally too vague to be defended. All that I could do would be to describe a mood, a passion that takes me now and then, and makes me want to smash things."

She nodded her head comprehendingly.

"Yes, I know that."

"Not from the same reason," Sommers laughed.

"I will tell you what it is: you think the rich are unfair. You didn't like Uncle Brome's talk about the Pullman people."

"No, and more than that," he protested; "I don't know anything about the Pullman matter; but I hate the--successful. I guess that's about it."

"You think they are corrupt and luxurious and all that?"

As she spoke she waved one hand negligently toward the Aurora in the hall. They both laughed at the unspoken argument.

"If you feel like that _here_--"

"I feel that way pretty much all the time in America," he said bluntly. "It isn't this house or that, this man's millions or that man's; it's the whole thing."

Miss Hitchcock looked nonplussed.

"Life is based on getting something others haven't,--as much of it as you can and as fast as you can. I never felt that so constantly as I have the last few months. Do you think," he went on hastily, "that Lindsay, that any doctor, can _earn_ fifty thousand a year?"

"I don't know. I hate views." Her voice sounded weary and defeated.

Sommers rose to his feet, exclaiming, "I thought there were some pretty definite ones, this evening."

Miss Hitchcock started, but refused to take the challenge.

They faced each other for a moment without speaking. Sommers could see that his blundering words had placed him in a worse position than before. At the same time he was aware that he regretted it; that "views" were comparatively unimportant to a young woman; and that this woman, at least, was far better than views.

"Good night," she murmured, lowering her eyes as she gave him her hand. He hesitated a moment, searching for an intelligent word, but finally he turned away without any further attempt to explain himself.

It was good to be out in the soft March night, to feel once more the free streets, which alone carry the atmosphere of unprivileged humanity. The mood of the evening was doubtless foolish, boyish, but it was none the less keen and convincing. He had never before had the inner, unknown elements of his nature so stirred; had never felt this blind, raging protest.

It was a muddle of impressions: the picture of the poor soul with his clamor for a job; the satisfied, brutal egotism of Brome Porter, who lived as if life were a huge poker game; the overfed, red-cheeked Caspar, whom he remembered to have seen only once before, when the young polo captain was stupid drunk; the silly young cub of a Hitchcock. Even the girl was one of them. If it weren't for the women, the men would not be so keen on the

scent for gain. The women taught the men how to spend, created the needs for their wealth. And the social game they were instituting in Chicago was so emptily imitative, an echo of an echo!

There was Carson: he was your image of modern power--the lean, hungry, seamed face, surmounted by a dirty-gray pall. He was clawing his way to the top of the heap.

Sommers stopped to laugh at himself. His fury was foolish, a mere generalization of discontent from very little data. Still, it was a relief to be out in the purring night sounds. He had passed from the affluent stone piles on the boulevard to the cheap flat buildings of a cross street. His way lay through a territory of startling contrasts of wealth and squalor. The public part of it--the street and the sidewalks--was equally dirty and squalid, once off the boulevard. The cool lake wind was piping down the cross streets, driving before it waste paper and dust. In his preoccupation he stumbled occasionally into some stagnant pool.

Should he take Lindsay's job, if he had the chance? Obstinate his mind reverted to a newspaper paragraph that had caught his eye months before: on the occasion of some disturbance over women students in the Western Medical College, Dr. Lindsay had told the men that "physicians should be especially considerate of women, if for no other reason, _because their success in their profession would depend very largely on women_." Certainly, if he had to decide to-night, he would rather return to Marion, Ohio, than join his staff. Such a retreat from the glories of Chicago would be inconceivable to old Hitchcock and to the girl. He reflected that he should not like to put himself away from her forever.

St. Isidore's loomed ahead in the quiet street, its windows dark except for the night light in the ward kitchens. He should like to turn in there for a few minutes, to see how the fellow was coming on. The brute ought not to pull through. But it was too late: a new regime had begun; his little period of sway had passed, leaving as a last proof of his art this human jetsam saved for the nonce. And there rose in his heated mind the pitiful face of a resolute woman, questioning him: "You held the keys of life and death. Which have you given _me_?"

CHAPTER V

The Athenian Building raises its knife-like facade in the centre of Chicago, thirteen stories in all; to the lake it presents a broad wall of steel and glass. It is a hive of doctors. Layer after layer, their offices rise, circling the gulf of the elevator-well. At the very crown of the building Dr. Frederick H. Lindsay and his numerous staff occupy almost the entire floor. In one corner, however, a small room embedded in the heavy cornice is rented by a dentist, Dr. Ephraim Leonard. The dentist's office is a snug little hole, scarcely large enough for a desk, a chair, a case of instruments, a "laboratory," and a network of electric appliances. From the

one broad window the eye rests upon the blue shield of lake; nearer, almost at the foot of the building, run the ribboned tracks of the railroad yards. They disappear to the south in a smoky haze; to the north they end at the foot of a lofty grain elevator. Beyond, factories quietly belch sooty clouds.

Dr. Lindsay coveted this office, but Dr. Leonard clung tenaciously to his little strip, every inch that he could possibly pay rent for. He had been there since that story was finished. The broad view rested him. When he ceased to peer into a patient's mouth, he pushed up his spectacles and took a long look over the lake. Sometimes, if the patient was human and had enough temperament to appreciate his treasure, he would idle away a quarter of an hour chatting, enjoying the sun and the clear air of the lake. When the last patient had gone, he would take the chair and have the view to himself, as from a proscenium box.

The little office was a busy place: besides the patients there were coming and going a stream of people--agents, canvassers, acquaintances, and promoters of schemes. A scheme was always brewing in the dentist's office. Now it was a plan to exploit a new suburb innumerable miles to the west. Again it was a patent contrivance in dentistry. Sometimes the scheme was nothing more than a risky venture in stocks. These affairs were conducted with an air of great secrecy in violent whisperings, emphasized by blows of the fist upon the back of the chair. The favored patients were deftly informed of "a good thing," the dentist taking advantage of the one inevitable moment of receptivity for his thrifty promotions. The schemes, it must be said, had never come to much. If Dr. Leonard had survived without any marked loss a dozen years of venturing, he might be said to have succeeded. He had no time for other games; this was his poker. They were always the schemes of little people, very complex in organization, needing a wheel here, a cog there, finally breaking down from the lack of capital. Then some "big people" collected the fragments to cast them into the pot once more. Dr. Leonard added another might-have-been and a new sigh to the secret chamber of his soul. But his face was turned outward to receive the next scheme.

This time it happened to be a wonderful new process of evolving gas from dirt and city refuse. He had been explaining it gently to a woman in the chair, from pure intellectual interest, to distract the patient's mind. He was not tinkering with teeth this time, however. The woman was sitting in the chair because it was the only unoccupied space. She had removed her hat and was looking steadily into the lake. At last, when the little office clerk had left, the talk about the gas generator ceased, and the woman turned her wistful face to the old dentist. There was a sombre pause.

"Yes," the dentist muttered finally, "I saw it in the paper Tuesday, no, Monday--it was Monday, wasn't it? and I hoped you'd come in."

The woman moved her hands restlessly, as if to ask where else she could go.

"They most always do turn up," he continued bluntly; "them that no one wants, like your husband. What are you going to do?"

The woman turned her face back to the lake; it was evident that she had no plan.

"I thought," the dentist began, recalling her story, "I thought when you'd started in the schools--it was a mighty hard thing to do to get you in; it took all my pull on Mahoney."

The woman's face flushed. "I know," she murmured. "They don't want married women. But if it hadn't been for Mahoney--"

"Then," interrupted the dentist, "he'd been good enough to let you alone for most a year, and I thought you were out of your troubles."

"I knew he would come back," she interposed quietly.

"But now he comes back just as everything is nice, and worse, you come across him when he is nigh bein' shot to death. Then, worse yet, by what the papers said, you went to the hospital with him and gave the whole thing away. When I saw the name, Alves Preston, printed out, I swore."

Mrs. Preston smiled at his vehemence.

"Tell me, Alves," the old man asked in a rambling manner, "how did you ever come to marry him? I've wanted to ask you that from the first."

Mrs. Preston rose from the chair and pulled her cloak about her.

"I couldn't make you understand; I don't myself _now_."

"D'yer love him?" the dentist persisted, not ungently.

"Should I be here if I did?" she flashed resentfully. "I was a country girl away at school, more foolish than one of those dumb Swedes in my class, and he--"

But she turned again to the window, with an impatient gesture.

"It is something wrong in a woman," she murmured. "But she has no chance, no chance. I can't tell you now all the things."

"Well," the dentist said soothingly, "let's see just how bad it is. Has your boss, the superintendent, or the principal spoke to you, turned you out? I see the reporter went around to the school, nosing after something."

"They'd just transferred me--miles south," she answered indifferently. "I was glad of it. I don't have to meet the spying, talking teachers, and think all the time the pupils know it from their parents. They're all foreigners where I am now. They say the Everglade school is the next thing to the last. It's a kind of Purgatory, where they keep you for a few months before they dismiss you."

"I didn't know any one was ever dismissed from a Chicago school," the dentist remarked.

"Oh, sometimes when the superintendents or the supervisors don't want you. There is a supervisor in the Everglade district--" she stopped a moment, and then continued tranquilly--"he was very intimate at first. I thought he wanted to help me to get on in the school. But he wanted--other things. Perhaps when he doesn't--succeed--that will be the end."

"It'll blow over," the dentist said encouragingly. "If the supervisor troubles you much, I'll see Mahoney. You've changed your boarding-place?"

"Yes--but," she admitted in a moment, "they know it at the hospital."

Dr. Leonard rubbed his bristly face irritably.

"I've been to see him--it seemed I ought to--I was the only one who WOULD in the whole world--the only one to speak a word to him."

"That makes it worse," the dentist commented depressingly. "I don't know as you could get free now if you wanted to. You've put your hand to the plough again, my girl, and it's a long furrow."

"What do you mean?"

"The hospital folks know you're his wife, and they'll expect you to take him in when he gets better."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Preston admitted. "But I suppose, anyway, I should take care of him until he can go away."

Dr. Leonard threw up his hands in disgust.

"Alves, why don't you go straight off and get a divorce--for desertion?"

Mrs. Preston opened the heavy lids of her eyes; her face slowly flushed.

"That would be the end of it?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Of course! I'll give you the money, and testify for you. Go right ahead, now he is laid up, and have it all ready when he gets out."

"I couldn't do that," Mrs. Preston answered, the color fading from her face, and the white lids closing over the eyes. "Besides, he may never recover fully. I don't think they expect him to at the hospital."

"All the more reason," protested the dentist. "It's mighty hard," he added sympathetically. "Women are mostly children, the better sort, and you feel bad, even when they're in trouble through their own foolishness."

"There is no release, no divorce," Mrs. Preston continued. "A thing is done, and it's done. There's no ending it in this life. You can run away, or close your eyes, but you don't escape. He has been--my husband."

"That's silly! Now let me tell you what I'll do." The dentist squared

himself and raised the little lignum-vitae mallet, which he used to drive home his fillings.

"Don't you fool round any more. You can't love that fellow,--think you never did now,--and he's given you no reason to be very nice to him. You just drop him where you are, and start out alone and make the best of it. You can't do that in Chicago now. Get out of Chicago to-morrer. Go east. Take your maiden name; no one is goin' to be hurt by not knowin' you're married. I guess you ain't likely to try it again."

He paused for objections, and evidently found one himself.

"If you ain't got the money handy, I'll just fix you up. That gas generator I was talking to you about is going to make me mints of money. You can go right away to my sister-in-law in Worcester, Ohio. Guess _he_ won't trouble you much there. What do you say?"

She had nothing very cogent to say, but the dentist felt an impalpable obstruction of will, unintelligible and persistent. His enthusiasm grew as he perfected the details of his plan. It was a new kind of scheme, in which he took the artistic delight of the incorrigible promoter. His imagination once enlisted for the plan, he held to it, arguing, counselling, bullying. "If it's the money," he ended, "you needn't bother. I'll just put it on the bill. When I am rich, it won't make no difference, nor when you are, either."

Mrs. Preston took one of his furry hands in hers, and pressed it. She knew that the ventures had not yet made him rich. Thirty years in Chicago had not filled his purse.

"I'd do it for you, same as for one of my daughters. It's just as easy as having a tooth out, and you start over as good as new."

"It isn't that," she smiled. "You can't start over as good as new if you are a woman. I couldn't run away. I've put myself into it a second time, without thinking. I chose then just as before, when I followed him to the hospital. When the doctor asked me if he should try to save his life, I wanted him to die--oh, how I longed that the doctor would refuse to try! Well, he's alive. It is for life."

She seemed to see before her a long, toilsome ascent, to which she had been driven to put her feet.

"Think it over," the dentist counselled at last, despondently. "Sleep on it. There's Worcester, Ohio, and my sister-in-law."

Mrs. Preston smiled, and put on her hat.

"I've taken a lot of your time."

"That's no account, but I can't see what you came for. You won't let a feller help you."

"There wasn't any good reason. I came because I was awfully lonely. There isn't a soul that I can speak out to, except you. You don't know what that means. I go about in the schoolroom, and up and down the streets, and see things--horrible things. The world gets to be one big torture chamber, and then I have to cry out. I come to you to cry out,--because you really care. Now I can go away, and keep silent for a long time."

"You make too much of it," the dentist protested. He busied himself in putting the little steel instruments into their purple plush beds and locking the drawers.

"Yes, I make too much of it," Mrs. Preston acknowledged quietly, as she opened the door. "Good night."

"I guess she loves him still and don't like to own it. Women are generally so," the dentist commented, when he was left alone. He picked up a sheaf of stock certificates and eyed them critically. "They're nicer than the Placer Mining ones. They just look fit to eat."

He locked the certificates of stock in the new company into a tiny safe, and prepared to pull down the shade. In the railroad yards below, the great eyes of the locomotives glared through the March dusk. As the suburban trains pulled out from minute to minute, thick wreaths of smoke shot up above the white steam blasts of the surrounding buildings. The smoke and steam were sucked together into the vortex of a cross street.

'I wished I hadn't let her go alone,' the dentist mused. 'Some day she'll just go over there into the lake.'

When Mrs. Preston shut the dentist's door behind her, an office door on the opposite side of the hall opened abruptly, and a young man strode into the hall. She recognized him as the young surgeon who had operated upon her husband at St. Isidore's. She stepped behind the iron grating of the elevator well and watched him as he waited for the steel car to bob up from the lower stories. She was ashamed to meet him, especially now that she felt committed to the sordid future.

The little car arrived; the doctor stepped in and disappeared. The door from which he came was covered with a long list of names. She read the name freshly painted in at the bottom,--Dr. Howard Sommers.

CHAPTER VI

For Sommers had joined the staff of the great specialist, and resorted daily to the busy offices in the Athenian Building. A brief vacation had served to convince him of the folly that lay in indulging a parcel of incoherent prejudices at the expense of even that somewhat nebulous thing popularly called a "career." Dr. Lindsay made flattering offers; the work promised to be light, with sufficient opportunity for whatever hospital

practice he cared to take; and the new aspect of his profession--commercial medicine he dubbed it--was at least entertaining. If one wished to see the people of Chicago at near range,--those who had made the city what it is, and were making it what it will be,--this was pretty nearly the best chance in the world.

When he had mentioned Lindsay's offer to Dresser, who was rising at laborious hours and toiling in the McNamara and Hill's offices, he realized how unmentionable and trifling were his grounds for hesitation. Dresser's enthusiasm almost persuaded him that Lindsay had given him something valuable. And if he found it difficult to explain his distaste for the thing to Dresser, what would he have to say to other people--to the Hitchcocks? Yet he made his reservations to himself at least: he was not committed to his "career"; he should be merely a spectator, a free-lance, a critic, who keeps the precious treasure of his own independence. Almost at the start, however, he was made to realize that this nonchalance, which vindicated himself in his own eyes, could not be evident to others. As he was entering the Athenian hive one morning, he passed the Hitchcock brougham drawn up by the curb near a jeweller's shop. Miss Hitchcock, who was preparing to alight, gave him a cordial smile and an intelligent glance that was not without a trace of malice. When he crossed the pavement to speak to her, she fulfilled the malice of her glance:

"You find Dr. Lindsay isn't so bad, after all?" There was no time for explanation. She passed on into the jeweller's with another smile on her mobile face. He had to do his stammering to himself, annoyed at the quip of triumph, at the blithe sneer, over his young vaporings. This trivial annoyance was accentuated by the effusive cordiality of the great Lindsay, whom he met in the elevator. Sommers did not like this *_camaraderie_* of manner. He had seen Lindsay snub many a poor interne. In his mail, this same morning, came a note from Mrs. E. G. Carson, inviting him to dinner: a sign that something notable was expected of his career, for the Carsons were thrifty of their favors, and were in no position to make social experiments. Such was the merry way of the world, elsewhere as here, he reflected, as he turned to the routine of the day.

The office was in full blast: the telephones rang sharply every few minutes, telling in their irritable little clang of some prosperous patient who desired a panacea for human ailments; the reception-room was already crowded with waiting patients of the second class, those who could not command appointments by telephone. Whenever the door into this room opened, these expectant ones moved nervously, each one hoping to be called. Then, as the door into the private offices closed, the ones left behind fell back with sighs to the magazines and illustrated papers with which they sought to distract their fears or their ennui.

The thin, tall building shivered slightly at the blows of the fresh April wind. The big windows of the reception-room admitted broad bands of sunlight. The lake dazzled beneath in gorgeous green and blue shades. Spring had bustled into town from the prairies, insinuating itself into the dirty, cavernous streets, sailing in boisterously over the gleaming lake, eddying in steam wreaths about the lofty buildings. The subtle monitions of the air permeated the atmosphere of antiseptics in the office, and whipped

the turbulent spirits of Sommers until, at the lunch hour, he deserted the Athenian Building and telephoned for his horse.

This saddle horse was one of the compensations for conformity. He had been too busy lately, however, to enjoy it. From the bellow of the city he cantered down the boulevards toward the great parks. As he passed the Hitchcock house he was minded to see if Miss Hitchcock would join him. In the autumn she had ridden with him occasionally, waiving conventionalities, but lately she had made excuses. He divined that Parker Hitchcock had sneered at such countrified behavior. She was to go away in a few days for a round of visits in the South, and he wanted to see her; but a carriage drew up before the house, and his horse carried him briskly past down the avenue. From one boulevard to another he passed, keeping his eyes straight ahead, avoiding the sight of the comfortable, ugly houses, anxious to escape them and their associations, pressing on for a beyond, for something other than this vast, roaring, complacent city. The great park itself was filled with people, carriages, bicycles. A stream of carts and horse-back riders was headed for the Driving Club, where there was tennis and the new game of golf. But Sommers turned his horse into the disfigured Midway, where the Wreck of the Fair began. He came out, finally, on a broad stretch of sandy field, south of the desolate ruins of the Fair itself. The horse picked his way daintily among the debris of staff and wood that lay scattered about for acres. A wagon road led across this waste land toward the crumbling Spanish convent. In this place there was a fine sense of repose, of vast quiet. Everything was dead; the soft spring air gave no life. Even in the geniality of the April day, with the brilliant, theatrical waters of the lake in the distance, the scene was gaunt, savage. To the north, a broad dark shadow that stretched out into the lake defined the city. Nearer, the ample wings of the white Art Building seemed to stand guard against the improprieties of civilization. To the far south, a line of thin trees marked the outer desert of the prairie. Behind, in the west, were straggling flat-buildings, mammoth deserted hotels, one of which was crowned with a spidery steel tower. Nearer, a frivolous Grecian temple had been wheeled to the confines of the park, and dumped by the roadside to serve as a saloon.

Sommers rose in his stirrups and gazed about him over the rotting buildings of the play-city, the scrawny acres that ended in the hard black line of the lake, the vast blocks of open land to the south, which would go to make some new subdivision of the sprawling city. Absorbed, charmed, grimly content with the abominable desolation of it all, he stood and gazed. No evidence of any plan, of any continuity in building, appeared upon the waste: mere sporadic eruptions of dwellings, mere heaps of brick and mortar dumped at random over the cheerless soil. Above swam the marvellous clarified atmosphere of the sky, like iridescent gauze, showering a thousand harmonies of metallic colors. Like a dome of vitrified glass, it shut down on the illimitable, tawdry sweep of defaced earth.

The horse started: a human figure, a woman's dress, disturbing here in the desert expanse, had moved in front of him. Sommers hit the horse with his crop and was about to gallop on, when something in the way the woman held herself caught his attention. She was leaning against the wind, her skirt streaming behind her, her face thrust into the air. Sommers reined in his

horse and jumped down.

"How is your husband?" he asked brusquely.

Mrs. Preston looked up with a smile of glad recognition, but she did not answer immediately.

"You remember, don't you?" the doctor said kindly. "You are Mrs. Preston, aren't you? I am the doctor who operated on your husband a few weeks ago at the hospital."

"Yes, I remember," she replied, almost sullenly.

"How is he? I left St. Isidore's the next day. Is he still in the hospital?"

"They discharged him last Monday," Mrs. Preston answered, in the same dull tone.

"Ah!" The doctor jerked the bridle which he held in his left hand and prepared to mount. "So he made a quick recovery."

"No, no! I didn't say that," she replied passionately. "You knew, you knew _that_ couldn't be. He has--he is--I don't know how to say it."

Sommers slipped the bridle-rein over the horse's head and walked on by her side. She looked down at the roadway, as if to hide her burning face.

"Where is he now?" the doctor asked, finally, more gently.

"With me, down there." Mrs. Preston waved her hand vaguely toward the southern prairie. They began to walk more briskly, with a tacit purpose in their motion. When the wagon road forked, Mrs. Preston took the branch that led south out of the park. It opened into a high-banked macadamized avenue bordered by broken wooden sidewalks. The vast flat land began to design itself, as the sun faded out behind the irregular lines of buildings two miles to the west. A block south, a huge red chimney was pouring tranquilly its volume of dank smoke into the air. On the southern horizon a sooty cloud hovered above the mills of South Chicago. But, except for the monster chimney, the country ahead of the two was bare, vacant, deserted. The avenue traversed empty lots, mere squares of sand and marsh, cut up in regular patches for future house-builders. Here and there an advertising landowner had cemented a few rods of walk and planted a few trees to trap the possible purchaser into thinking the place "improved." But the cement walks were crumbling, the trees had died, and rank thorny weeds choked about their roots. The cross streets were merely lined out, a deep ditch on either side of an embankment.

"My God, what a place!" the young doctor exclaimed. "The refuse acres of the earth."

The woman smiled bitterly, tranquilly, while her glance roamed over the familiar landscape.

"Yet it is better than the rest, back there," she protested, in a low voice. "At least, there is something open, and a little green in spring, and the nights are calm. It seems the least little bit like what it used to be in Wisconsin on the lake. But there we had such lovely woodsy hills, and great meadows, and fields with cattle, and God's real peace, not this vacuum." Her voice grew faint.

"You liked it there?" the doctor asked musingly.

"It's all that I have ever known that was--as it should be. My father had a farm," she explained more easily, "and until he died and I was sent to Rockminster College to school, my life was there, by the lake, on the farm, at the seminary on the hill, where my brother was studying--"

The visions of the past developed with endless clues, which she could not follow aloud. After waiting for her to resume, Sommers asked tentatively:

"Why don't you go back, then?"

She flashed a rapid, indignant glance at him.

"Now! Go back to what?--With _him_!"

Her lips set tight. He had been stupid, had hit at random.

"No, no," she continued, answering her own heart; "they would never understand. There is never any going back--and, sometimes, not much going ahead," she ended, with an effort to laugh.

They stopped while the horse nibbled at a tall weed in the roadway. They had got fairly into the prairie, and now at some distance on left and right gawky Queen Anne houses appeared. But along their path the waste was unbroken. The swamp on either side of the road was filled with birds, who flew in and out and perched on the dry planks in the walks. An abandoned electric-car track, raised aloft on a high embankment, crossed the avenue. Here and there a useless hydrant thrust its head far above the muddy soil, sometimes out of the swamp itself. They had left the lake behind them, but the freshening evening breeze brought its damp breath across their faces.

"How came you to get into this spot?" the doctor asked, after his searching eyes had roamed over the misty landscape, half swamp, half city suburb.

"I was transferred--about the time of the operation. My school is over there," she pointed vaguely toward the southwest. "I could not afford to live any distance from the school," she added bluntly. "Besides, I wanted to be alone."

So she taught, Sommers reflected, yet she had none of the professional air, the faded niceness of face and manner which he associated with the city school-teacher.

"I haven't taught long," she volunteered, "only about a year. First I was

over by Lincoln Park, near where I had been living."

"Do you like the teaching?" Sommers asked.

"I hate it," she remarked calmly, without any show of passion. "It takes a little of one's life every day, and leaves you a little more dead."

They walked in silence for a few minutes, and then Mrs. Preston suddenly stopped.

"Why do you come?" she exclaimed. "Why do you want to know? It can do no good,--I know it can do no good, and it is worse to have any one--_you_--know the hateful thing. I want to crush it in myself, never to tell, no,--no one," she stopped incoherently.

"I shall go," the doctor replied calmly, compassionately. "And it is best to tell."

Her rebellious face came back to its wonted repose.

"Yes, I suppose I make it worse. It is best to tell--sometime."

CHAPTER VII

As they proceeded, more briskly now, she talked of her life in the Chicago schools. She had taken the work when nothing else offered in the day of her calamity. She described the struggle for appointment. If it had not been for her father's old friend, a dentist, she would never have succeeded in entering the system. A woman, she explained, must be a Roman Catholic, or have some influence with the Board, to get an appointment. Qualifications? She had had a better education in the Rockminster school than was required, but if a good-natured schoolteacher hadn't coached her on special points in pedagogy, school management, nature-study, etc., she would never have passed the necessary examinations.

In an impersonal way she described the life of a teacher in a great American school system: its routine, its spying supervision, its injustices, its mechanical ideals, its one preeminent ambition to teach as many years as it was necessary to obtain a pension. There were the superintendents, the supervisors, the special teachers, the principals--petty officers of a petty tyranny in which too often seethed gossip, scandal, intrigue. There were the "soft places"; the deceitful, the easy, the harsh principals; the teachers' institutes to which the poor teacher was forced to pay her scanty dollars. There were bulletins, rules, counter-rules. As she talked, Sommers caught the atmosphere of the great engine to which she had given herself. A mere isolated atom, she was set in some obscure corner of this intricate machine, and she was compelled to revolve with the rest, as the rest, in the fear of disgrace and of hunger. The terms "special teachers," "grades of pay," "constructive work,"

"discipline," etc., had no special significance to him, typifying merely the exactions of the mill, the limitations set about the human atom.

Her manner of telling it all was unpremeditated, incoherent, and discursive, and yet strangely effective. She described the contortions of her kaleidoscope as they came to mind haphazard, with an indifference, a precise objectivity that made the picture all the more real and universal, not the special story of the special case.

"The first weeks I was nearly lost; the drawing teacher didn't like me, and reported my room for disorder; the 'cat'--that is what they call the principal--kept running in and watching, and the pupils--there were seventy-five--I could barely keep them quiet. There was no teaching. How could one teach all those? Most of our time, even in 'good' rooms, is taken up in keeping order. I was afraid each day would be my last, when Miss M'Gann, who was the most friendly one of the teachers, told me what to do. 'Give the drawing teacher something nice from your lunch, and ask her in to eat with you. She is an ignorant old fool, but her brother is high up in a German ward. And give the cat taffy. Ask him how he works out the arithmetic lessons, and about his sassing the assistant superintendent, and make yourself agreeable.'

"I did as I was told," she ended with a smile, "and things went better for a time. But there was always the married teachers' scare. Every month or so some one starts the rumor that the Board is going to remove all married teachers; there are complaints that the married women crowd out the girls--those who have to support themselves."

They both laughed at the irony of the argument, and their laugh did much to do away with the constraint, the tension of their mood. More gayly she mentioned certain farcical incidents.

"Once I saw a principal hurl a book at a sleepy teacher, who was nodding in his lecture at the Institute. Poor woman! she is so nearly deaf that she can hear nothing, and they say she can never remember where the lessons are: the pupils conduct the recitations. But she has taught in that school for twenty-three years, and she is a political influence in the ward. Imagine it!"

They laughed again, and the world seemed lighter. Sommers looked at his companion more closely and appreciatively. Her tone of irony, of amused and impartial spectatorship, entertained him. Would he, caught like this, wedged into an iron system, take it so lightly, accept it so humanly? It was the best the world held out for her: to be permitted to remain in the system, to serve out her twenty or thirty years, drying up in the thin, hot air of the schoolroom; then, ultimately, when released, to have the means to subsist in some third-rate boarding-house until the end. Or marry again? But the dark lines under the eyes, the curve of experience at the mouth, did not warrant that supposition. She had had her trial of that alternative.

She did not question him, and evinced no curiosity about his world. She had touched it on the extreme edge, and she was content with that, satisfied

probably that this unexpected renewal of their connection was most casual--too fortunate to happen again. So she took him into a perfectly easy intimacy; it was the nearness that comes between two people when there is slight probability of a common future.

At last she turned into one of the streets that crossed the avenue at long intervals. This one was more developed than those they had passed: a row of gigantic telephone poles stretched along its side; two car tracks in use indicated that it was a thoroughfare. At the corner there was an advertising sign of The Hub Clothing House; and beneath, on one spoke of a tiny hub, "This is Ninety-first Street"; and at right angles on another spoke, "This is Washington Avenue". He remembered vaguely having seen a Washington Avenue miles to the north. The thing had been drawn on the map by a ruler, without regard to habitations; on the map it probably went on into Indiana, to the Ohio River,--to the Gulf for all he knew.

Yet the cross-road was more promising than anything they had met: a truck farm bordered one side; a line of tall willows suggested faintly the country. Just beyond the tracks of a railroad the ground rose almost imperceptibly, and a grove of stunted oaks covered the miniature hill. The bronzed leaves still hanging from the trees made something like shade beside the road.

"That is better," Sommers exclaimed, relieved to find a little oasis in the desert of sand and weeds.

The woman smiled. "It is almost a forest; it runs south for a block. And beyond there is the loveliest meadow, all tender green now. Over there you can see the Everglade School, where I spend my days. The people are Swedes, mostly,--operatives in the factories at Grand Crossing and on the railroads. Many of the children can scarcely understand a word of English,--and their habits! But they are better than the Poles, in the Halsted Street district, or the Russians in another West Side district. And we have a brick building, not rooms rented in a wooden house. And the principal is an old woman, too fat to climb all the stairs to my room. So I am left alone to reign among my young barbarians."

When they reached the grove, Mrs. Preston crossed the car tracks and entered a little grassy lane that skirted the stunted oaks. A few hundred feet from the street stood a cottage built of yellow "Milwaukee" brick. It was quite hidden from the street by the oak grove. The lane ended just beyond in a tangle of weeds and undergrowth. On the west side there was an open, marshy lot which separated the cottage in the trees from Stoney Island Avenue,--the artery that connects Pullman and the surrounding villages with Chicago.

An old German had lived in it, Mrs. Preston explained, until his death a year or two ago. He had a little chicken farm. As no one else wanted to live in such a desolate place, so far from the scattered hamlets, she had got it for a small rent. The house was a tiny imitation of a castle, with crenelated parapet and tower. Crumbling now and weather-stained, it had a quaint, human, wistful air. Its face was turned away from the road toward a

bit of garden, which was fenced off from the lane by arbors of grape-vines.

Sommers tied his horse to the gate post. Mrs. Preston did not speak after they reached the house. Her face had lost its animation. They stood still for some time, gazing into the peaceful garden plot and the bronzed oaks beyond, as if loath to break the intimacy of the last half hour. In the solitude, the dead silence of the place, there seemed to lurk misfortune and pain. Suddenly from a distance sounded the whirr of an electric car, passing on the avenue behind them. The noise came softened across the open lot--a distant murmur from the big city that was otherwise so remote.

The spring twilight had descended, softening all brutal details. The broad horizon above the lake was piled deep with clouds. Beyond the oak trees, in the southern sky, great tongues of flame shot up into the dark heavens out of the blast furnaces of the steel works. Deep-toned, full-throated frogs had begun their monotonous chant.

CHAPTER VIII

"Shall we go in?" the doctor asked at last.

Mrs. Preston started, and her hand closed instinctively upon the gate, as if to bar further entrance to her privacy. Then without reply she opened the gate, led the way across the tiny lawn, and unlocked the cottage door. They entered a large room, from which some narrow stairs led to the chambers above. Floor and walls were bare, and the only furniture consisted of two wooden chairs, a small coal-stove, and a pine table of considerable size. This was covered with books, school exercises, and a few dishes. Mrs. Preston brusquely flung off her cape and hat, and faced the doctor.

"I might as well tell you the main thing before you see him. He--"

"That is scarcely necessary," Sommers replied gently. "I probably know what you are thinking of."

A flush, caused by the revealed shame, crept over her face, lighting it to the extreme corners under the temples and ears. As she stood there, humiliated, yet defiant of him and of the world, Sommers remembered the first time he had seen her that night at the hospital. He read her, somehow, extraordinarily well; he knew the misery, the longing, the anger, the hate, the stubborn power to fight. Her deep eyes glanced at him frankly, willing to be read by this stranger out of the multitude of men. They had no more need of words now than at that first moment in the operating room at St. Isidore's. They were man and woman, in the presence of a fate that could not be softened by words.

"You are right," she said softly. "Yet sometime I want to tell you things--not now. I will go and see how he is."

When she had left the room, Sommers examined the few objects about him in the manner of a man who draws his conclusions from innumerable, imponderable data. Then he took a chair to the window and sat down. She was very real to him, this woman, and compelling, with her silences, her broken phrases. Rarely, very rarely before in his life, had he had this experience of intimacy without foreknowledge, without background--the sense of dealing with a human soul nakedly.

"Will you come now?"

Mrs. Preston had returned and held the stair-door open for him. Sommers looked at her searchingly, curious to find where this power lay. Her face had grown white and set. The features and the figure were those of a large woman. Her hair, bronzed in the sunlight as he remembered, was dark in the gloom of this room. The plain, symmetrical arrangement of the hair above the large brow and features made her seem older than she was. The deep-set eyes, the quivering lips, and the thin nostrils gave life to the passive, restrained face. The passions of her life lay just beneath the surface of flesh.

"He is very talkative, and wanders--"

The doctor nodded and followed her up the steep stairs, which were closed at the head by a stout door. The upper story was divided about equally into two rooms. The east room, to which Mrs. Preston opened the door, was plainly furnished, yet in comparison with the room below it seemed almost luxurious. Two windows gave a clear view above the little oak copse, the lines of empty freight cars on the siding, and a mile of low meadow that lay between the cottage and the fringe of settlement along the lake. Through another window at the north the bleak prospect of Stoney Island Avenue could be seen, flanked on one side by a huge sign over a saloon. Near this window on a lounge lay the patient.

Preston's personal appearance had not improved during his illness: his face, over the lower half of which a black beard had grown rankly, was puffy with convalescent fat. His hands that drummed idly against the couch were white and flabby. As he half rose and extended his hand to the doctor, he betrayed, indefinitely, remote traces of superior breeding.

"Excuse me, doctor," he said apologetically. "Mrs. Preston keeps me a close prisoner. But she won't have the whip-hand very long."

He laughed boisterously, as Sommers shook hands and sat down.

"Women know they've got you while you are sick. They like to keep an eye on a man, eh?"

He laughed again, confidentially, as if the doctor, being a man, would appreciate the point. Then he continued, nervously, without pause:

"But I have some business to attend to. I must get out of this as soon as you can patch me up so I can walk straight. I ought to have been in Denver a month ago. There's a man out there, who comes in from his ranch two

hundred miles to see me. He is a fine fellow, strapping, big six-footer. _He_ knows how to put in his time day and night, when he gets to town. I remember one time we were in Frisco together--ever been in Frisco? It's a great place for a good dinner, and all you want to drink. Drink--my! I've seen the time--"

He rambled on, now and then pausing to laugh boisterously at some recollection. As his whirligig tale touched upon indecent episodes, his voice lowered and he sought for convenient euphemisms, helped out by sympathetic nods. Mrs. Preston made several attempts to interrupt his aimless, wandering talk; but he started again each time, excited by the presence of the doctor. His mind was like a bag of loosely associated ideas. Any jar seemed to set loose a long line of reminiscences, very vaguely connected. The doctor encouraged him to talk, to develop himself, to reveal the story of his roadside debaucheries. He listened attentively, evincing an interest in the incoherent tale. Mrs. Preston watched the doctor's face with restless eyes.

Finally Preston ended his husky monotone in a querulous entreaty. "I need a little whiskey to keep me going. Tell _her_, won't you?--to let me have a little drink. My regular allowance was a pint a day, and I haven't had a drop for four weeks. Your Chicago whiskey is rotten bad, though, I tell you. I just stepped into a place to get a drink with Joe Campbell--his father owns a big pulp mill in Michigan--well--we had one or two drinks, and the first thing I knew there was shooting all over the place, and some one grabbed me, and I was thrown into the street--"

Mrs. Preston exclaimed, "Do you want to hear _more_?"

Sommers rose. "I'll come again to see you, Mr. Preston, and I will leave something that will help you. Good night."

"It was good of you to take this interest, doctor. I am glad to have met you, Doctor--?"

"Sommers," suggested the doctor, smiling at the evidences of forgotten breeding that cropped out of the general decay.

"Well, Dr. Sommers, I hope we shall meet again when I am more myself."

When they returned to the room below, Mrs. Preston lit a lamp. After some minutes Sommers asked, "How long has this been going on?"

"For years--before he left college; he was taken out of Yale because of it. All I know is what he tells when he is not--responsible."

"Ah!" the doctor exclaimed involuntarily.

"_I_ never knew," Mrs. Preston added quickly, "until we had been married a year. He was away so much of the time, and he was very different then--I mean he didn't ramble on as he does now. He was not flabby and childish, not before the operation."

The doctor turned his face away.

"About two years ago some of the men he was with brought him home, drunk. Afterward he didn't seem to care. But he was away most of the time, travelling, going from place to place, always living in hotels, always drinking until some illness brought him back."

"And this time?" the doctor asked.

Mrs. Preston shut her lips, as if there were things she could not say yet.

"I was not living with him." In a few moments, she continued quietly: "I suppose I should have been but for one thing. He told me he was going to New York, and I found him with another woman, living in a hotel not a mile from our home. I don't know why I should have made so much of that. I had suspected for months that there were other women; but seeing it, knowing that he knew I had seen it! I nearly starved before I got work."

Confession, the details, the whole story, appealed to her evidently as obvious, typical, useless. She tried to select simple words, to leave the facts undimmed by passionate speech.

"As I told you, an old friend of my father's helped me to get work. That kept me from ending it just there. As the months went on and he did not try to find me, I got used to the round, to the school, the living on, dead and alive. I thought of getting a divorce, of finding some country school in another state. Dr. Leonard urged me to. I might have--I don't know. But accidentally _he_ was brought back. I was going home from a teachers' meeting that night. I saw him lying on the pavement, thrown out of the saloon, as he told you. A crowd gathered. He was unconscious. I wanted to run away, to leave him, to escape. He groaned. I couldn't--I couldn't."

She sighed wearily at the memory of her illogical act. The doctor nodded sympathetically. It was a fatal moment, the point of decision in her life. He understood what it meant to her.

"There was no one else to take him--to be responsible. He had been mine. After all, the divorce would have made no difference; it never can. You have to take your failures; you have to endure."

"Has he any relatives?" Sommers asked.

"A few; they were done with him long ago. They had money, and they wanted to get rid of him. They put him into a business that would keep him away from them; that would give him the best chance to kill himself--going about everywhere, always travelling, always with men who drink and live in hotels as he has. They shoved him into the world to let the world, or any one who would, take care of him."

It had been her lot, because of the error of her incompetent heart, to take charge of this flotsam. That was so evident that she had given up seeking for escape.

"He is helpless now," she added, as for excuse. "It would be cruel."

For a moment the doctor's face looked hard. Was it, he seemed to be turning over in his mind, that she loved him a little in the depths of her heart? That was an irritating trait of feminine stupidity. But one intelligent glance at her calm face rendered that supposition impossible. She was merely largely human, with a sense of remote claims.

"And now what will you do?" he asked.

Her eyes were brooding on that now. Finally she exclaimed with an impatient gesture:

"How can I tell! He may get strong enough to leave me--in peace. He may come back again to rest and get well. And that may go on and on until one of us dies, or I am discharged. As I told you, they are trying now to exclude married teachers from the schools. And I am married!"

Sommers saw that she had faced the sordid situation; that she expected no relief from the clouds. He got up and looked at his watch.

"I shall come again. We will see what can be done."

This was a convention of the profession. Nothing could be done for that man, and he knew it. She knew it also. She smiled mournfully as they shook hands. Yet as he moved toward the door she asked in a low tone:

"Won't you tell me what you call it? There is no use in not telling me."

"Paresis," Sommers replied shortly. As her face was still inquiring, he added: "Brain trouble. In his case a kind of decay of the tissue; perhaps inherited, certainly hastened by his habits, probably precipitated by the operation."

His glance met hers, and they both fell silent before the common thought. In the practice of his profession he had done this for her, in obedience to the cowardly rules of that profession. He had saved life--animation--to this mass of corruption. Except for his skill, this waste being would have gone its way quietly to death, thereby purifying all life by that little. He added at last in a mechanical tone:

"That results sometimes from such an operation. You can't tell how it will affect the brain, especially when the history of the case is a bad one. He will have to be sent away to an institution if--; but the only thing now is to wait to see what will happen. Good night. I shall see you in a few days," he concluded abruptly.

He was determined to speculate no more, to give her no hopes that might prove groundless. The future was uncertain: the patient might have convulsions, paralysis, locomotor ataxia, mere imbecility with normal physical functions, or intermittent insanity. It was highly unprofessional to speculate in this loose fashion about the outcome of an operation.

Mrs. Preston watched him as he crossed the lawn and untied his horse. She had not thanked him for coming, for promising to come again, he reflected with relief. She was no weak, dependent fool. He rode down the sodded lane, and as his horse picked his way carefully toward the avenue where the electric cars were shooting back and forth like magnified fireflies, he turned in his saddle to look once more at the cottage. One light gleamed from the room he had just left. He could see the outline of the woman's form standing by the open window. The place was lonely and forbidding enough, isolated and withdrawn as the life of the woman within it. She was set apart with the thing that had been man stretched out above in stupor, or restlessly babbling over his dirty tale. God knew why! Yet, physician and unsentimental thinker that he was, he felt to a certain degree the inevitableness of her fate. The common thing would be to shake the dirt from one's shoes, to turn one's back on the diseased and mistaken being, "to put it away where it would not trouble,"--but she did not seek to escape.

And he had been the instrument to execute for her this decree of fate, to bind it permanently, a lifetime curse.

The frogs were making merry in the marshy fields along the avenue. Their robust chorus mingled with the whir of the cars. Soft, dark clouds were driving lakeward. The blast furnaces of the steel works in South Chicago silently opened and belched flame, and silently closed again. A rosy vapor, as from some Tartarean breathing, hovered about the mouths of the furnaces. Moment by moment these mouths opened and belched and closed. It was the fiery respiration of a gigantic beast, of a long worm whose dark body enveloped the smoky city. The beast heaved and panted and rested, again and again--the beast that lay on its belly for many a mile, whose ample stomach was the city, there northward, hid in smoke.

CHAPTER IX

Long after the horse's hoofs had ceased to beat in the still evening, Mrs. Preston sat by the open window in the bare cottage room, her head resting on her arms, her eyes peering into the soft darkness in the path of the shadowy figure that had passed down Stoney Island Avenue into the night beyond her ken. She had not asked him to return. But he had promised to. Indeed, he did not seem to be far away: she could feel his gentle eyes, his imperious face, his sympathetic voice. It was not much that she could make of him; but her imagination built gratefully on his few words and simple acts, until he became--as when he had spoken to her at the hospital--a masterful spirit, dominating that vague, warm land of dreams in which she took refuge during waking hours.

She should see him again--she must see him again, that was all. And yet what was the good of it? Only a new pain in thus revealing her sores--a pain mixed with a subtle anaesthetic, sweeter than anything she had known

in this life. In the end she would have to do without this anodyne; would have to meet her hard and brutal world. Just now, while the yoke was hot to the neck, she might take this mercy to temper the anguish. On the long hill road before her it would be a grateful memory. It seemed now that she had put herself to the yoke, had taken the hill road very lightly. She had not thought of accepting the dentist's advice. With the fierce energy of her crushed, spoiled youth, she had taken her measures: had found this little cottage, hid in the oak copse; had prepared it with her own hands; had gone to the hospital to fetch her husband. That never ending journey from the hospital to the cottage! His ceaseless babble, the foul overflow from his feeble mind, had sapped her courage.

Her head dropped weakly upon her arms; useless tears started. Before that day she had had some joy in this cottage. There were glorious sunrises from the lake and sunsets over the desolate marshes. The rank swamp grasses were growing long, covering decently the unkempt soil. At night, alone, she had comfort in the multitudinous cries from the railroads that ribbed the prairie in this outskirts of the city. The shrieks of the locomotives were like the calls of great savage birds, raising their voices melodiously as they fled to and fro into the roaring cavern of the city, outward to the silent country, to the happier, freer regions of man. As they rushed, they bore her with them to those shadowy lands far away in the sweet stillness of summer-scented noons, in the solemn quiet of autumn nights. Her days were beset with visions like these--visions of a cool, quiet, tranquil world; of conditions of peace; of yearnings satisfied; of toil that did not lacerate. Yes! that world was, somewhere. Her heart was convinced of it, as her father's had been convinced of the reality of paradise. That which she had never been, that which she could not be now--it must exist somewhere. Singularly childish it seemed even to herself, this perpetual obsession by the desire for happiness,--inarticulate, unformed desire. It haunted her, night and morning, haunted her as the desire for food haunts the famished, the desire for action the prisoned. It urged on her footsteps in the still afternoons as she wandered over this vast waste of houseless blocks. Up and down the endless checker-board of empty streets and avenues she had roamed, gleaning what joys were to be had in the metallic atmosphere, the stunted copses, the marshy pools spotted with the blue shields of fleur-de-lys. For even here, in the refuse corner of the great city, Nature doled out niggardly gifts of green growth--proofs of her unquenchable bounty.

This hunger for joy had included no desire for companionship. When her child died, the last person had slipped out of her world. To-night there was a strange, almost fearful sense that this vacant, tenantless life might change. Was there some one among these dull figures that would take life, speak, touch _her_?

There was a movement in the rooms above. She started. Had she locked the door securely? Preston had tried before to drag himself out of the cottage, across the intervening lot, to the saloon on Stoney Island Avenue, whose immense black and gold sign he could see from his chamber. That must not happen here, in the neighborhood of the Everglade School. She must keep him well concealed until he should be strong enough to go far away, on the old round of travel and debauch, from city to city, wearing out his brutishness and returning to her only when spent.

The movements above increased. He was pounding at the door.

"Are you going to let me starve? Where are you?" the sick man called out querulously.

She sprang up; she had forgotten to get supper. When she took the food upstairs, Preston was dragging himself about the room. He was excited, and anxious to talk.

"Did that doctor fix me up? I don't remember seeing him in the hospital."

"He operated when you were received. He left the next day," she answered.

"It must have been a neat job. I guess I was in a pretty tough state," he mused more quietly. "How did he happen to look me up?"

"I met him accidentally in the park," she explained briefly, anxious to have done with the subject. "He offered to come back with me to see you. Perhaps," she added more bitterly, "he wanted to see what he had done."

"I suppose he knows?"

She nodded.

"Well, I can't see why he bothers around. I don't want his attentions."

As she prepared to leave the room, after pulling down the shades and opening the bed, he said apologetically:

"It was pretty good of you to take me in after--I have treated you badly, Alves. But it's no use in going back over that. I guess I was made so. There are lots of men like that, or worse."

"I suppose so," she assented coldly.

"Why are you so stiff with me? You hardly look at me, and you touch me as if I were a piece of dirt. Supposing I take a brace and we start over, somewhere else? I am tired of knocking round. Come over and kiss me, won't you?"

Mrs. Preston paused in her work, the color mounting in her face. At first she made no reply, but as she crossed to the door, she said in a cool, distant tone:

"I don't think I shall ever kiss you again or let you touch me, if I can help it. Do you happen to remember where I saw you last--I mean before I found you in the street--six months ago?"

His face grew troubled, as if he were trying to recollect.

"Oh! that woman? Well, that's past."

"Yes, that woman. I took you here," she continued, her full voice gathering passion, "because you are helpless and an outcast. And because I had taken you before, ignorantly, I feel bound to defend you as you never defended _me_. But I am not bound to do more, and you have sense enough--"

"You were ready enough to bind yourself, if I remember."

She answered meekly:

"I can't think it was the same woman who did that--who was blind and cheap enough to do that. Something has shown me that I am other than the foolish creature you took so easily with a marriage ring, because you could not have her in an easier way! But the old, silly country girl has gone and left me this----Why did it have to be?" she exclaimed more incoherently.

"Why did you not let me read what you are? I had only a few wretched weeks to learn you--and I was ignorant and foolish and young. You had me helpless at Barrington! Was it such a clever thing to cheat a girl from a Wisconsin village?"

Preston answered apologetically,--

"Well, I married you."

"Married me! You make a good deal of that! Perhaps it would have been better if you had not married me. My child and I could have died together then. But I was _married_, and so I struggled. The child died, died, do you hear, because you had left me without money to get it what it needed. I sat and saw it die. You were--"

She closed her lips as if to repress further words. As she reached the door, she said in her usual neutral tones:

"So long as you are decent, keep from drinking, and don't get me into trouble at the school, you may stay and take what I can give you."

"May stay!" Preston roared, getting to his feet and making a step to intercept her before she closed the door. His legs trembled, and he fell. She knelt over him to see if he had injured himself, and then satisfied that he was not hurt, she left the room, barring the door from the outside. She was none too soon in taking this precaution, for as she swung the heavy oak bar into its socket,--a convenient device of the old German, who had the reputation of being a miser,--she could hear Preston dragging himself toward the door, cursing as he stumbled over the furniture. She crept wearily downstairs into the bare room. Some one was moving in the tiny kitchen beyond.

"Is that you, Anna?" Mrs. Preston called.

"Ye-es," a slow voice responded. Presently a young woman came forward. She was large and very fair, with the pale complexion and intense blue eyes of the Swede.

"I came in and found no one here, so I was cleaning up for you. I have

time. John has gone to a meeting--there are many meetings now and not much work. You will eat something?"

She went back to the kitchen and returned with warm food.

"Yes, I am faint." Mrs. Preston's arms trembled. She laughed nervously as she spilled her tea.

"You are not well? You cannot live so--it's no use," the strong Swede continued monotonously. "The men are bad enough when they are good; but when they are bad, a woman can do nothing."

"Tell me about the strike."

Anna Svenson laughed contemptuously, as if such affairs were a part of men's foolishness.

"They're talking of going out, all the railroad men, if the roads use the Pullmans. That's what John has gone to see about. Work is hard to find, so they're going to make less of it."

She stood easily, her arms by her side, watching Mrs. Preston eat, and talking in an even, unexcited tone.

"Father likes the job I told you about--over at the lumber yards. He came in last Sunday. He says the folks out his way are near starving. Svenson thinks of quitting his job."

She laughed gently.

"Life is like that," Mrs. Preston assented. "You can't manage it."

"No, why should one?" Anna Svenson replied coolly. "Children come, they die, they grow up, they fight, they starve, and they have children. It was so over there; it is so here--only more pay and more drink some days; less pay, less drink other days. I shall wash the dishes. Sit still."

She came and went quickly, noiselessly. When everything had been done, she opened a window and leaned out, looking into the darkness. The fact of her presence seemed to bring peace to the room.

"It is a good night," she said, drawing her head in. "There, Svenson has lit the lamp. I must go."

"Good night, Anna." Mrs. Preston took her hand. It was large and cool.

"You shake hands?" Mrs. Svenson asked, with a smile. "When I was working out, people like you never shook hands."

"People like me! What have I that makes me different from you?"

"Oh, nothing; not much," she replied tranquilly.

With a sigh Mrs. Preston took up a bundle of grammar exercises and sorted them. She was too weary for this task: she could not go on just yet. She drew her chair over to the window and sat there long quarter hours, watching the electric cars. They announced themselves from a great distance by a low singing on the overhead wire; then with a rush and a rumble the big, lighted things dashed across the void, and rumbled on with a clatter of smashing iron as they took the switches recklessly. The noise soothed her; in the quiet intervals she was listening for sounds from upstairs. The night was still and languorous, one of the peaceful nights of large spaces when the heavens brood over the earth like a mother over a fretful child. At last no more cars came booming out of the distance. She shut the windows and bolted the door; then she prepared slowly to undress.

For the first time in months she looked at herself curiously, taking an impersonal, calm survey of this body. She sought for signs of slovenly decay,--thinning rusty hair, untidy nails, grimy hands, dried skin,--those marks which she had seen in so many teachers who had abandoned themselves without hope to the unmarried state and had grown careless of their bodies. As she wound her hair into heavy ropes and braided them, it gave her a sharp sense of joy, this body of hers, so firm and warm with blood, so unmarked by her sordid struggle. It was well to be one's self, to own the tenement of the soul; for a time it had not been hers--she reddened with the shame of the thought! But she had gained possession once more, never, never to lose it.

She listened carefully for noises from above; then flung herself on the couch, utterly wearied. In a moment she was asleep, having shed the years of pain, and a frank smile crept over the calm face.

CHAPTER X

After giving the invalid his breakfast, and arranging him on his couch where he could see the cars pass, Mrs. Preston hurried over to the Everglade School, which was only two blocks west of Stoney Island Avenue. At noon she slipped out, while the other teachers gathered in one of the larger rooms to chat and unroll their luncheons. These were wrapped in little fancy napkins that were carefully shaken and folded to serve for the next day. As the Everglade teachers had dismissed Mrs. Preston from the first as queer, her absence from the noon gossip was rather welcome, though resented.

The recess hour gave Mrs. Preston enough time to carry upstairs a cold meal, to take a hasty nibble of food, and to hurry back across the vacant lots before the gong should ring for the afternoon session. At the close of school she returned to the cottage more deliberately, to finish her house work before taking her daily walk. Occasionally she found this work already performed; Anna Svenson's robust form would greet her as she entered the cottage, with the apologetic phrase, "My fingers were restless." Mrs. Svenson had an unquenchable appetite for work. The two women would have a

silent cup of tea; then Mrs. Svenson would smile in her broad, apathetic manner, saying, "One lives, you see, after all," and disappear through the oak copse. Thus very quickly between the school and the cottage Mrs. Preston's day arranged itself in a routine.

Three days after the unexpected visit from the doctor, Mrs. Preston found on her return from the school a woman's bicycle leaning against the gate. Under the arbor sat the owner of the bicycle, fanning herself with a little "perky" hat. She wore a short plaid skirt, high shoes elaborately laced, and a flaming violet waist. Her eyes were travelling over the cottage and all its premises.

"Miss M'Gann!" Mrs. Preston exclaimed.

"My!" the young woman responded, "but they did send you to kingdom come. You're the next thing, Alves, to Indiana. I do hope you can get out of this soon."

Mrs. Preston sat down beside her in the little arbor, and made polite inquiries about the school where they had taught together, about Jane M'Gann's "beaux," the "cat," and the "house" where she boarded.

"It was good of you to come all this way to see me," she concluded.

"I wanted a ride. We had a half day off--infectious disease in Rosa Macraw's room. Besides, I told the girls I'd hunt you out. How _are_ you? You look rather down. Say, you mustn't shut yourself off here where folks can't get at you. Why don't you live up town, at the house?"

"I can't," Mrs. Preston answered briefly.

"Do you know the news? The 'cat' has gone up higher. They made him supervisor, 'count of his sly walk, I guess. And we've got a new principal. He's fine. You can just do what you want with him, if you handle him right. Oh, do you know Rosemary King, the girl that used to dress so queer, has been discharged? She lived in bachelor-girl apartments with a lot of artists, and they say they were pretty lively. And Miss Cohen is going to be married, ain't coming back any more after this year. Some of us thought we could work it so as the new principal--Hoff's his name--would ask to have you transferred back to one of those places. There's just a chance. Now I've told all my news and everything!"

At that moment a man's figure appeared at an upper window. He was in a dressing-gown, and unshaven. Miss M'Gann's keen vision spied him at once.

"You'll get queer, if you stay here!" she said falteringly.

"I guess I am queer already," Mrs. Preston answered with a smile. "Let us go inside and have some tea."

Miss M'Gann looked the room over critically.

"You must come down to the house some night soon and meet the principal. He rides a wheel, and we girls see considerable of him. If you are nice to

him, he'll do anything--he is one of the soft kind, sweet on all women, and likes a little adoration."

"No, I don't believe I can." Mrs. Preston listened. There was noise in the chamber above. "Besides, I like it out here. I like the quiet," she added.

Miss M'Gann looked at her incredulously, as if she were waiting to hear more. As nothing came, she went on:

"We are having high times over the new readers. The 'cat' has done a set of readers for the fourth and fifth. McNamara and Hills are bringing 'em out. The Express Book Co. has a lot of money in the old ones, and they are fighting hard to keep the cat's out of the schools. They're sending men around to get reports from the teachers. There's a man, one of their agents, who comes over to the house pretty often. He's a college man, was a professor at Exonia."

"Excuse me," Mrs. Preston interrupted. The continued noise in the room overhead had made her more and more nervous. She had not heard Miss M'Gann's story, which would probably be the preface of a tender personal episode. "I will be back in a moment," she said, closing the sitting-room door carefully.

Miss M'Gann sat forward, listening intently. She could hear the stairs creak under Mrs. Preston's quick steps; then there was silence; then an angry voice, a man's voice. Excited by this mystery, she rose noiselessly and set the hall door ajar. She could hear Alves Preston's voice:

"You must not come down. You aren't fit."

"Thank you for your advice," a man's voice replied. "Who's your visitor? Some man? I am going to see. Don't make a scene."

There was the sound of a scuffle; then the cry of a woman, as she fell back exhausted from her physical struggle.

"P'r'aps he's murdering her!"

Miss M'Gann opened the door at the foot of the stairs wide enough to detect a half-clothed man trying to pry open with one arm a heavy door above. She hesitated for a moment, but when the man had shoved the door back a little farther, enough for her to see Mrs. Preston struggling with all her force, she called out:

"Can I help you, Mrs. Preston?"

"No, no, go back! Go out of the house!"

"Well, I never!" Miss M'Gann ejaculated, and retreated to the sitting room, leaving the door ajar, however.

The struggle ended shortly, and soon the man appeared, plunging, tumbling over the stairs. Wrenching open the front door he stumbled down the steps

to the road. He was hatless, collarless, and his feet were shod in slippers. As he reached the gate he looked at himself as if accustomed to take pride in his personal appearance, drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wound it negligently about his neck. Then, gazing about to get his bearings, he aimed for the road. Just as he crossed the car tracks, heading for the saloon with the big sign, Mrs. Preston entered the room. Her face was pale and drawn. Miss M'Gann was too embarrassed to speak, and she pretended to look into the kitchen.

"You will see now why I don't want a transfer," Mrs. Preston began, to break the awkward silence. "I must look after my husband."

"My!" Miss M'Gann exclaimed, and then restrained herself. She nodded her head slowly, and crossed to where Mrs. Preston had seated herself.

"But it's terrible to think of you here alone," she remarked gently. She had intended to put her arm about Mrs. Preston's waist, but something deterred her. "I wish I could come out and stay right on. I'm going to spend the night, anyway. Father was that kind," she added in a lower voice.

Mrs. Preston winced under her sympathy and shook her head. "No, no! I am better alone. You mustn't stay."

"You'd ought to have some woman here," the girl insisted, with the feminine instinct for the natural league of women. "At least, some one to look after the house and keep you company."

"I have thought of trying to find a servant," Mrs. Preston admitted. "But what servant--" she left the sentence unfinished, "even if I could pay the wages," she continued. "Anna comes in sometimes--she's a young Swede who has a sister in the school. But I've got to get on alone somehow."

"Well, if that's what getting married is, it's no wonder more of us girls don't get married, as I told Mr. Dresser."

There was a knock at the outside door. Miss M'Gann quickly barricaded herself behind the long table, while Mrs. Preston opened the door and admitted the visitor. Miss M'Gann came forward with evident relief, and Mrs. Preston introduced her visitors, "Dr. Sommers, Miss M'Gann."

Miss M'Gann greeted the doctor warmly.

"Why, this must be Mr. Dresser's Dr. Sommers." The young doctor bowed and look annoyed. Miss M'Gann, finding that she could get little from either of the two silent people, took her leave.

"I'll not forget you, dear," she said, squeezing Mrs. Preston's hand.

When she had ridden away, Mrs. Preston returned to the little sitting room and dropped wearily into a chair.

"He has just gone, escaped!" she exclaimed. "Just before you came."

The doctor whistled. "Do you know where he's gone to?"

She pointed silently to the low wooden building across the neighboring avenue.

"If he makes a row, it will all get out. I shall lose my place."

The doctor nodded.

"Has it happened before?"

"He's tried of late. But I have kept him in and barred the door. This time he forced it open. I was not strong enough to hold it."

The doctor hesitated a moment, and then, as if making a sudden resolve, he took his hat.

"I'll try to bring him back."

From the open window she could see him walk leisurely down the lane to the street, and pick his way carefully over the broken planks of the sidewalk to the avenue. Then he disappeared behind the short shutters that crossed the door of the saloon.

For some reason this seemed the one thing unbearable in her experience. The bitterness of it all welled up and overflowed in a few hot tears that stung her hands as they dropped slowly from the burning eyes. It was a long time before the little blinds swung out, and the doctor appeared with her husband. Preston was talking affably, fluently, and now and then he tapped the doctor familiarly on his shoulders to emphasize a remark. Sommers responded enough to keep his companion's interest. Once he gently restrained him, as the hatless man plunged carelessly forward in front of an approaching car. As the pair neared the house, the woman at the window could hear the rapid flow of talk. Preston was excited, self-assertive, and elaborately courteous.

"After you, doctor. Will you come upstairs to my room?" she caught as they entered the gate. "My wife, doctor, is all right, good woman; but, like the rest of them, foolish."

And the babbling continued until some one closed the heavy door at the head of the stairs. Then there was noise, as of a man getting into bed. In time it was quiet, and just as she was about to make the effort of finding out what had happened, Sommers came downstairs and signed to her to sit down.

"I have given him a hypodermic injection. He won't trouble you any more to-night," he said, staring dreamily out into the twilight.

"This is too much for you," Sommers observed finally.

After his meditation he had come to much the same obvious conclusion that Miss M'Gann had formed previously. The woman moved wearily in her chair.

"It can't go on," the doctor proceeded. "No one can tell what he might do in his accesses--what violence he would do to you, to himself."

"He may get better," she suggested.

Sommers shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid not; the only thing to be hoped for is that he will get worse, much worse, as rapidly as possible."

Mrs. Preston stood his questioning eyes as he delivered this unprofessional opinion.

"Meantime you must protect yourself. The least harm his outbreaks will do will be to make a scandal, to make it necessary for you to leave your school."

"What can I do?" she asked, almost irritably.

"There are institutions."

"I have no money."

"And I suppose they would not do, now, while he is apparently getting better. They would not help him, even if we should get him confined. His is one of those cases where the common law prescribes liberty."

There was nothing further to say in this direction. Sommers seemed to be thinking. At last, with an impulsive motion, he exclaimed:

"It should not have been! No, it should not have been."

He paused. Her eyes had lowered from his face. She knew his unexpressed thought.

"And more than that, if you and I and the world thought straight, he _would not be here now_."

"No, I suppose not," she acquiesced quietly, following his thought word by word. "Well, as it is, I guess it's for life--for _my_ life, at least."

"If one could only love enough--" he mused.

"Love!" she exclaimed passionately, at this blasphemous intrusion. "Does one love such as that,--the man who betrayed your youth?"

"Not you and I. But one who could love enough--"

Her disdainful smile stopped him.

"I followed him to the hospital. I took him here, I don't know why. I guess it's my fate. He was once mine, and I can't escape that--but as to love--do you think I am as low as that?"

"You have no duties except the duties love makes," the doctor suggested. "He is no longer even the man you married. He is not a man in any sense of the word. He is merely a failure, a mistake; and if society is afraid to rid itself of him, society must provide for him."

"Yes, yes," she murmured, as if all this were familiar ground to her mind. "But I am the nearest member of society--the one whose business it is to attend to this mistake. It's my contribution," she ended with a feeble smile.

"Society has no right to expect too much from any one. The whole sacrifice mustn't fall where it crushes. I say that such a case should be treated by the public authorities, and should be treated once for all."

She rose and looked into his eyes, as if to say, 'You were society, and you did not dare.' In a moment she turned away, and said, "Don't you believe in a soul?"

"Yes," he smiled back. "And that poor soul and others like it, many, many thousands, who cannot grow, should be at rest--one long rest; to let other souls grow, unblasted by their foul touch."

"I have thought so," she replied calmly, taking his belief as an equal. "To let joy into the world somewhere before death." Her wistful tone rang out into the room. "But that would be murder," she continued. "We should have to call it murder, shouldn't we? And that is a fearful word. I could never quite forget it. I should always ask myself if I were right, if I had the right to judge. I am a coward. The work is too much for me."

"We will not think of it," Sommers replied abruptly, unconsciously putting himself in company with her, as she had herself with him. "We have but to follow the conventions of medicine and wait."

"Yes, wait!"

"Medicine, medicine," he continued irritably. "All our medicine is but a contrivance to keep up the farce, to continue the ills of humanity, to keep the wretched and diseased where they have no right to be!"

"And you are a doctor! How can you be?"

"Because," he answered in the same tone of unprofessional honesty that he had used toward her, "like most men, I am a coward and conventional. I have learned to do as the others do. Medicine and education!" Sommers laughed ironically. "They are the two sciences where men turn and turn and emit

noise and do nothing. The doctor and the teacher learn a few tricks and keep on repeating them as the priest does the ceremony of the mass."

"That's about right for the teacher," she laughed. "We cut our cloth almost all alike."

Unconsciously they drifted farther and farther into intimacy. Sommers talked as he thought, with question and protest, intolerant of conventions, of formulas. They forgot the diseased burden that lay in the chamber above, with its incessant claims, its daily problems. They forgot themselves, thus strangely brought together and revealed to each other, at one glance as it were, without the tiresome preliminary acquaintanceship of civilization. It had grown dark in the room before Sommers came back to the reality of an evening engagement.

"You can get a train on the railroad west of the avenue," Mrs. Preston suggested. "But won't you let me give you something to eat?"

"Not this time," Sommers answered, taking his hat "Perhaps when I come again--in a few days. I want to think--what can be done."

She did not urge him to stay. She was surprised at her boldness in suggesting it. He had assumed the impersonal, professional manner once more. That precious hour of free talk had been but an episode, a relaxation. He gave directions as he went to the door.

"The patient will sleep till to-morrow. It will take two or three days to get over this relapse."

Then he took a pad from his pocket and scribbled a prescription.

"Should he grow unmanageable, you had better give him one of these powders--two, if necessary. But no more; they are pretty strong."

He placed the leaf of pencilled paper on the table. The next minute his rapid footsteps crunched on the gravel path. Even after he was gone and she was left quite alone in her old condition, the dead, nerveless sense of despair did not return. An unreasonable lightness of spirit buoyed her--a feeling that after a desolate winter a new season was coming, that her little world was growing larger, lighting indefinably with rare beauty.

CHAPTER XII

The engagement was not one to be missed, at least by a young professional man who had his way to make, his patients to assemble, in the fierce struggle of Chicago. The occasion was innocent enough and stupid enough,--a lecture at the Carsons' by one of the innumerable lecturers to the polite world that infest large cities. The Pre-Aztec Remains in Mexico, Sommers surmised, were but a subterfuge; this lecture was merely

one of the signs that the Carsons had arrived at a certain stage in their pilgrimage.

They had come from Omaha five years before; they were on their way to New York, where they would be due five years hence. From railroad law, Carson had grown to the business of organizing monopolies. Some of his handiworks in this order of art had been among the first to take the field. He was resting now, while the country was suffering from its prolonged fit of the blues, and his wife was organizing their social life. They had picked up a large house on the North Boulevard, a bargain ready for their needs; it had been built for the Bidwells, just before the panic.

A rapid glance over the rooms proved to Sommers that Mrs. Carson was as clever a manipulator of capitalists as her husband. There were a few of the more important people of the city, such as Alexander Hitchcock, Ferdinand Dunster, the Polot families, the Blaisdells, the Anthon's. There were also a few of the more distinctly "smart" people, and a number who might be counted as social possibilities. Sommers had seen something in a superficial way of many of these people. Thanks to the Hitchcocks' introduction, and also to the receptive attitude of a society that was still very largely fluid, he had gone hither and thither pretty widely during this past year. There were quieter, less pretentious circles than this in which the Carsons aspired to move, but he had not yet found them. Anything that had a retiring disposition disappeared from sight in Chicago. Society was still a collection of heterogeneous names that appeared daily in print. As such it offered unrivalled opportunities for aspiration.

Sommers had not come to the Carsons in the fulfilment of an aspiration. Mrs. R. Gordon Carson bored him. Her fussy conscious manners bespoke too plainly the insignificant suburban society in which she had played a minor part. He came because Dr. Lindsay had told him casually that Louise Hitchcock was in town again. He arrived late, when the lecture was nearly over, and lingered in the hall on the fringe of the gathering.

Carson had some reputation for his pictures. There was one, a Sargent, a portrait of the protagonist in this little drama of success, that hung in a recess of the hall at the foot of the stairs. R. Gordon Carson, as the great psychologist had seen him, was a striking person, an embodiment of modern waywardness, an outcropping of the trivial and vulgar. In a sacque coat, with the negligent lounging air of the hotel foyer, he stared at you, this Mr. R. Gordon Carson, impudently almost, very much at his ease. Narrow head, high forehead, thin hair, large eyes, a great protruding nose, a thin chin, smooth-shaven, yet with a bristly complexion,--there he was, the man from an Iowa farm, the man from the Sioux Falls court-house, the man from Omaha, the man now fully ripe from Chicago. Here was no class, no race, nothing in order; a feature picked up here, another there, a third developed, a fourth dormant--the whole memorable but unforgivably ordinary.

Not far away, standing in the doorway of the next room, was Carson himself. The great painter had undressed him and revealed him. What a comment to hang in one's own home! The abiding impression of the portrait was self-assurance; hasty criticism would have called it conceit. All the deeper qualities of humanity were rubbed out for the sake of this one great

expression of egotism.

When the lecture was finished, a little group formed about the host; he was telling his experience with the great master, a series of anecdotes that had made his way in circles where success was not enough.

"I knew he was a hard customer," Sommers overheard him saying, "and I gave him all the rope he wanted. 'It may be two years before I do anything on your portrait, Mr. Carson,' he said.

"Take five,' I told him.

"I shall charge five thousand.'

"Make it ten,' said I.

"I shall paint your ears.'

"And the nose too.'

"Well, he sent it to me inside of a year with his compliments. The fancy struck him, he wrote. It was easy to do; I was a good type and all that. Well, there it is."

He turned on an additional bunch of electric lights before the picture.

"Good, isn't it?" Miss Hitchcock exclaimed behind Sommers.

"Too good," he muttered. "I shouldn't have dared to hang it."

The girl's smooth brow contracted.

"Don't you think it was fine, though, his making up his mind out there in Sioux Falls that what he wanted was pictures, and the best pictures, and that he'd have Sargent do his portrait?"

"No more than it's fine for all the rest of these well-dressed men and women to make up their minds that they want to be rich and luxurious and important and all that."

Her face became still more puzzled.

"But it is fine! And the successful people are the interesting people."

"That has nothing to do with the matter," he returned dogmatically.

"Don't you think so?" she replied distantly, with a note of reproof in her voice. He was too young, too unimportant to cast such aspersion upon this comfortable, good-natured world where there was so much fun to be had. She could not see the possessing image in his mind, the picture of the afternoon--the unsuccessful woman.

"There is nothing honorable in wealth," he added, as she turned to examine

a delicate landscape. Her eyes flashed defiantly.

"It means--"

"All this," he moved his hand contemptuously. "Ah, yes, and a lot more," he added, as her lip trembled. "It shows power and ability and thrift and purpose and provides means for generosity and philanthropy. But it rots."

"What do you mean?"

"Because it turns the people who have it into a class that come to feel themselves divinely appointed. Whereas it is all a gamble, a lucky gamble!"

"Not all wealth is a lucky gamble!" she retorted hotly.

Sommers paused, discomfited at the personal turn to the thought.

"I think the most successful would be the first to admit it," he answered thoughtfully.

"I don't understand you," the girl replied more calmly. "I suppose you are a socialist, or something of that sort. I can't understand such matters well enough to argue with you. And I hoped to find you in another mood when I came back; but we fall out always, it seems, over the most trivial matters."

"I am afraid I am very blunt," he said contritely. "I came here to find _you_; what do you want me to talk about,--Stewart's engagement to Miss Polot? It was given the chief place in the newspaper this morning."

"Sh, sh!" Miss Hitchcock exclaimed cautiously. Little groups were moving in and out of the rooms, and at that moment a pale-faced, slight young man came up to Miss Hitchcock.

"May I offer my congratulations?" she said, turning to him with the smile that Sommers's remark had caused still on her lips. The young man simpered, uttered the requisite platitude, and moved away.

"Did you congratulate him on the Polot connection or on the girl?" the young doctor asked.

"You don't know Estelle Polot! She is _impossible_. But Burton Stewart has got _just_ what he wanted. No one thought that he would do as well as that. You know they are _fearfully_ rich--she can't escape having a number of millions. Don't you think a man of forty is to be congratulated on having what he has been looking for for twenty years?"

Miss Hitchcock's neat, nonchalant enunciation gave the picture additional relief.

"I don't see how he has the face to show himself. All these people are laughing about it."

"It is a bad case, but don't you believe that they are not envying him and praising him. He is a clever man, and he won't let the Polot money go to waste. He has taken the largest purse--the rest were too light."

Miss Hitchcock seemed to find infinite resources of mirth in the affair. Other people drifted by them. Several of the younger women stopped and exchanged amused glances with Miss Hitchcock.

"He's been attentive to all these," Miss Hitchcock explained to Sommers.

"The Polot money is very bad, isn't it?"

Miss Hitchcock shrugged her shoulders.

"It is current coin."

"The system is worse than the dot and mariage de convenance. There is no pretension of sentiment in that, at least. See him hanging over the girl--faugh!"

"You are crude," Miss Hitchcock admitted, candidly. "Let us move out of this crowd. Some one will overhear you."

They sauntered into the dimly lighted hall, where there were fewer people, and he continued truculently:

"I remember that side by side with the report of Miss Polot's engagement was a short account of the starvation at Pullman, and another column was headed, 'Nothing to arbitrate: Pullman says he has nothing to arbitrate.' Did you see that the reporters carefully estimated just how much Miss Polot's share of the plunder would be?"

"What you need is golf. I have been teaching papa at the Springs. It is a great resource, and it increases your sense of humor."

"It doesn't seem to have rested you," Sommers answered. "You are tired or worried."

"Worse yet!" she laughed nervously. "Clearly, you won't do. You must go back to Marion."

She looked up at him from her low seat with brilliant, mocking eyes.

"I have thought of that. It would not be the worst thing that could happen. Would you think it possible--Marion?" he asked clumsily.

Her eyes did not fall, but rested steadily on his face. Under this clear gaze his remark appeared to him preposterous. She seemed to show him how precipitate, unformed,--crude, as she said,--all his acts were. Instead of answering his question, she said gently:

"Yes, you are right. I am worried, and I came here tonight to escape it. But one doesn't escape worries with you. One increases them. You make me feel guilty, uncomfortable. Now get me something thoroughly cold, and

perhaps we can have that long-promised talk."

When Sommers returned with a glass of champagne, a number of men had gathered about Miss Hitchcock, and she left him on the outside, intentionally it seemed, while she chatted with them, bandying allusions that meant nothing to him. Sommers saw that he had been a bore. He slipped out of the group and wandered into the large library, where the guests were eating and drinking. A heavy, serious man, whom he had seen at various places, spoke to him. He said something about the lecture, then something about Miss Polot's engagement. "They'll go to New York," he ventured. "Stewart has some position there, some family." He talked about the Stewarts and the Polots, and finally he went to the dressing room to smoke.

Sommers had made up his mind to leave, and was looking for Mrs. Carson, when he came across Miss Hitchcock again.

"The man you were talking with is quite a tragedy," she said unconcernedly, picking up the conversation where she had dropped it. "I knew him when he left college. He was an athletic fellow, a handsome man. His people were nice, but not rich. He was planning to go to Montana to take a place in some mines, but he got engaged to the daughter of a very wealthy man. He didn't go. He married Miss Prudence Fisher, and he has simply grown fat. It's an old story--"

"And a tragic enough one. We ought to change the old proverb, 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a poor man to marry a rich man's daughter.'"

"It ought not to be so, if the man were a man."

She dwelt upon the last word until the young doctor's face flushed. Then with the sudden transition of mood, which so often perplexed Sommers, she said gently, confidently:

"You are quite right. My journey did me no good. There were worries, and we can't go away this summer. The business situation will keep papa here, and he is so lonely without me that I hadn't the heart to suggest leaving him. So we have taken a house at Lake Forest. I shall teach you golf at the new Country Club, if you will deign to waste your time on us. You will see more of these good people."

"You must think me--" Sommers began penitently.

"Yes, they would say 'raw' and 'green.' I don't know. I must go now."

A few minutes later, Sommers met Colonel Hitchcock in the dressing room. As he was leaving, the old merchant detained him.

"Are you going north? Perhaps you will wait for me and let me take you to the city. Louise is going on to a dance."

Sommers waited outside the room. From the bedroom at the end of the hall

came a soft murmur of women's voices. He hoped that Miss Hitchcock would appear before her father took him off. He should like to see her again--to hear her voice. Every moment some one nodded to him, distracting his attention, but his eyes reverted immediately to the end of the hall. Men and women were passing out, down the broad staircase that ended in front of the intelligent portrait. The women in rich opera cloaks, the men in black capes carrying their crush hats under their arms, were all alike; they were more like every other collection of the successful in the broad earth than one might have expected.

Sommers caught bits of the conversation.

"Jim has taken the Paysons' place."

"Is that so? We are going to York."

"--Shall join them in Paris--dinner last Friday--did you see _The Second Mrs. Tanqueray_--our horses are always ill--"

It sounded like the rustle of skirts, the stretching of kid. There was dulness in the atmosphere. Yet if it was dull, Sommers realized that it was his own fault--a conclusion he usually took away with him from the feasts of the rich which he attended. He lacked the power to make the most of his opportunities. The ability to cultivate acquaintances, to push his way into a good place in this sleek company of the well-to-do,--an ability characteristically American,--he was utterly without. It would be better for him, he reflected with depression, to return to Marion, Ohio, or some similar side-track of the world, or to reenter the hospital and bury himself in a quite subordinate position.

There was still an eddy of guests about the host and his wife near the great portrait. They were laughing loudly. Carson's thin face was beaming. Even Mrs. Carson's face had lost some of its tension. Sommers could watch her manner from his position in the upper hall. She was dismissing a minor guest with a metallic smile. 'To aspire to this!' he murmured unconsciously. 'This, the triumph of success!'

"Still waiting?"

Miss Hitchcock was passing, her long wrap trailing lightly behind. Her eyes glowed underneath a white mantilla.

"I am ready to go now," Sommers replied. "You are too tired for the dance."

"I must go--I can't bear to miss anything. It is stupid--but it is exciting at the same time. Good-by. Remember, Lake Forest in a fortnight. And learn to take it easily!"

She smiled and disappeared in the wake of Mrs. Porter. How easily she seemed to take it! The man she married would have to be of the world, as large a world as she could contrive to get. She would always be "going on." Imaginatively, with the ignorance of a young man, he attributed to her appetites for luxury, for power, for success. _He_ was merely an

instance of her tolerance. Really he was a very little thing in her cosmos, and if he wished to be more, he would have to take an interest in just this.

Colonel Hitchcock came out at last, in close conversation with old Blaisdell. They were talking business. Hitchcock's kindly face was furrowed and aged, Sommers noticed. The old merchant put his arm through the young doctor's, and with this support Sommers received the intimate farewell from Mrs. Carson.

Colonel Hitchcock ordered the driver to take them to the Metropolitan Club.

"Our talk may take us some time," he explained. "I have been trying to find you for several days. I have something to ask you to do for me. You may think it strange that I should go to you instead of to one of my old friends. But it is something Isaac would have done for me. It is for my boy."

The weariness of years was in his voice. As briefly and as simply as he could, he stated the matter. Parker had disappeared; he had gone to New York and there drawn heavily on his father. The journey which Colonel Hitchcock had made with his daughter had been largely for the purpose of finding Parker, and had failed. The boy was ashamed to come back. Now there was a clew, but it seemed unwise for the father to follow it up himself.

"I don't understand the boy," Colonel Hitchcock concluded. "I'm afraid everything I do is wrong. I get angry. I have no patience with his polo, his spending so much money uselessly--he spends ten times as much money as any man among my friends did at his age."

"You have ten times as much as any one of their fathers had," Sommers protested with a smile.

"Well, then, I guess I had better stop, if that's what it means. He may find there isn't so much after all. This panic is pushing me. _I_ can't leave Chicago another day. He should be here fighting with me, helping me--and he is sneaking in some hotel, with his tail between his legs."

He breathed heavily at the bitterness of the thought. Everything in his life had been honorable, open to all: he had fought fair and hard and long--for this.

"If it weren't for Louise and his mother, I would let him starve until he was ready to come home. But his mother is ill--she can't be troubled."

"And you can't let him disgrace himself publicly--do something that would make it hard for him to come back at all," Sommers suggested.

"No, I suppose not," the older man admitted, with a grateful glance. "I can't refuse to help him, poor boy; perhaps I have made him weak."

Sommers offered to do what he could,--to hunt Parker up, get him on his

feet, and bring him back to Chicago. He would leave that night. They had stopped at the club to finish their talk, and while Colonel Hitchcock was writing some letters, Sommers drove to his rooms for his bag. It was nearly midnight before he returned. As they drove over to the station, Colonel Hitchcock said:

"I have told him the whole thing: how hard pressed I am; how his mother is worrying and ill--well, I don't feel it will make much difference. He could _see_ all that."

"You must remember that he has always had every inducement to enjoy himself," the young doctor ventured. "He doesn't understand _your_ life. You sent him to a very nice private school, and whenever he failed got him tutors. You made him feel that he was a special case in the world. And he has always been thrown with boys and young men who felt _they_ were special cases. At college he lived with the same set--"

"His mother and I wanted him to start with every advantage, to have a gentleman's education. At home he's seen nothing of extravagance and self-indulgence."

Sommers nodded sympathetically. It was useless to discuss the matter. The upright, courageous old merchant, whose pride was that he had never committed one mean action in the accumulation of his fortune, could never understand this common misfortune. He belonged to a different world from that in which his son was to take his part. They turned to other topics--the business depression, the strike, the threatened interference of the American Railway Union.

"Blaisdell, who is the general manager of the C. K. and G.," Colonel Hitchcock remarked, "was saying tonight that he expected the Pullman people would induce the A. R. U. to strike. If they stir up the unions all over the country, business will get worse and worse. All we needed to make things as bad as can be was a great railroad strike."

"I suppose so," Sommers responded. "Why won't the Pullman people consent to arbitrate?"

The old merchant shook his head.

"They'd divide their twenty millions of surplus and go out of business first. They say they're saving money on the strike. Did you ever know of people with the whip-hand who had anything to arbitrate?"

CHAPTER XIII

Dr. Lindsay's offices were ingeniously arranged on three sides of the Athenian Building. The patient entering from the hall, just beside the elevators, passed by a long, narrow corridor to the waiting room, and

thence to one of the tiny offices of the attending physicians; or, if he were fortunate enough, he was led at once to the private office of the great Lindsay, at the end of the inner corridor. By a transverse passage he was then shunted off to a door that opened into the public hall just opposite the elevator well. The incoming patient was received by a woman clerk, who took his name, and was dismissed by another woman clerk, who collected fees and made appointments. If he came by special appointment, several stages in his progress were omitted, and he passed at once to one of the smaller offices, where he waited until the machine was ready to proceed with his case. Thus in the office there was a perpetual stream of the sick and suffering, in, around, out, crossed by the coming and going through transverse passages of the "staff," the attendants, the clerks, messengers, etc. Each atom in the stream was welling over with egotistic woes, far too many for the brief moment in which he would be closeted with the great one, who held the invisible keys of relief, who penetrated this mystery of human maladjustment. It was a busy, toiling, active, subdued place, where the tinkle of the telephone bell, the hum of electric annunciators, as one member of the staff signalled to another, vibrated in the tense atmosphere. Into this hive poured the suffering, mounting from the street, load after load, in the swiftly flying cages; their visit made, their joss-sticks burned, they dropped down once more to the chill world below, where they must carry on the burden of living.

The attending physicians arrived at nine. The "shop," as they called it, opened at ten; Lindsay was due at eleven and departed at three. Thereafter the hive gradually emptied, and by four the stenographers and clerks were left alone to attend to purely business matters. Sommers came late the day after his return from New York. The general door being opened to admit a patient, he walked in and handed his coat and hat to the boy in buttons at the door. The patient who had entered with him was being questioned by the neat young woman whose business it was to stand guard at the outer door.

"What is your name, please?"

Her tones were finely adjusted to the caste of the patient. Judging from the icy sharpness on this occasion, the patient was not high in the scale.

"Caroline Ducharme," the woman replied.

"Write it out, please."

The patient did so with some difficulty, scrawling half over the neat pad the clerk pushed toward her.

"You wish to consult Dr. Lindsay?"

"The big doctor,--yes, mum."

"Did he make an appointment with you?"

"What's that?"

"Have you been here before?"

"No, mum."

"You will have to pay the fee in advance."

"What's that, please?"

"Ten dollars."

"Ten?"

The clerk tapped irritably on her desk with her pencil.

"Yes, ten dollars for the first visit; five after that; operations from fifty to five hundred."

The woman clutched tightly a small reticule. "I hain't the money!" she exclaimed at last. "I thought it would be two dollars."

"You'll have to go to the hospital, then."

The clerk turned to a pile of letters.

"Don't he see nobody here without he pays ten?" the woman asked.

"No."

"Where is the hospital?"

"St. Isidore's--the clinic is every other Saturday at nine."

"But my head hurts awful bad. The doctor up our way don't know anything about it."

The clerk no longer answered; she had turned half around in her swivel-chair. Sommers leaned over her desk, and said,--

"Show her into my room, No. 3, Miss Clark."

"Dr. Lindsay is very particular," the clerk protested.

"I will be responsible," Sommers answered sharply, in the tone he had learned to use with hospital clerks when they opposed his will. He turned to get his mail. The clerk shrugged her shoulders with a motion that said, 'Take her there yourself.' Sommers beckoned to the woman to follow him. He took her to one of the little compartments on the inner corridor, which was lined with strange devices: electrical machines, compressed air valves, steam sprays--all the enginery of the latest invention.

"Now what is it?" he asked gruffly. He was vexed that the matter should occur at this time, when he was on rather cool terms with Lindsay. The case proved to be an interesting one, however. There were nervous complications; it could not be diagnosed at a glance. After spending half an hour in

making a careful examination, he gave the woman a preliminary treatment, and dismissed her with directions to call the next day.

"You will lose your eyesight, if you don't take care," he said. "We'll see to-morrow."

"No," the woman shook her head. "I've had enough of her lip. You're all right; but I guess I'll have to go blind. I can't stand your prices. Here's two dollars, all I got."

She held out a dirty bill.

"In the world?" Sommers added smilingly. It was a familiar formula.

"Just about," she admitted defiantly. "And if my eyes go back on me, I guess 'twill be St. Isidore, or St. Somebody. You see I need my eyes pretty bad just now for one thing."

"What's that?" the doctor asked good-naturedly, waving the money aside.

"To look for _him_. He's in Chicago somewheres, I know."

"Ducharme?" the doctor inquired carelessly.

The woman nodded, her not uncomely broad face assuming a strange expression of determined fierceness. At that moment an assistant rapped at the door with a summons from Dr. Lindsay.

"Turn up this evening, then, at the address on this card," Sommers said to Mrs. Ducharme, handing her his card.

He would have preferred hearing that story about Ducharme to charging old P. F. Wort with electricity. He went through the treatment with his accustomed deftness, however. As he was leaving the room, Dr. Lindsay asked him to wait.

"Mr. Porter is about to go abroad, to try the baths at Marienbad. I have advised him to take one of our doctors with him to look after his diet and comfort in travelling,--one that can continue our treatment and be companionable. It will just take the dull season. I'd like to run over myself, but my affairs--"

Lindsay completed the idea by sweeping his broad, fleshy hand over the large office desk, which was loaded with letters, reports, and documents of various kinds.

"What d'ye say, Sommers?"

"Do you think Porter would want me?" Sommers asked idly. He had seen in the paper that morning that Porter was out of town, and was going to Europe for his health. Porter had been out of town, persistently, ever since the Pullman strike had grown ugly. The duties of the directors were performed, to all intents and purposes, by an under-official, a third vice-president.

Those duties at present consisted chiefly in saying from day to day: "The company has nothing to arbitrate. There is a strike; the men have a right to strike. The company doesn't interfere with the men," etc. The third vice-president could make these announcements as judiciously as the great Porter.

"I have an idea," continued Sommers, "that Porter might not want me; he has never been over-cordial."

"Nonsense!" replied the busy doctor. "Porter will take any one I advise him to. All expenses and a thousand dollars--very good pay."

"Is Porter very ill?" Sommers asked. "I thought he was in fair health, the last time I saw him."

Lindsay looked at the young doctor with a sharp, experienced glance. There was a half smile on his face as he answered soberly:

"Porter has been living rather hard. He needs a rest--fatty degeneration may set in."

"Brought on by the strike?"

Lindsay smiled broadly this time.

"Coincident with the strike, let us say."

"I don't believe I can leave Chicago just now," the young doctor replied finally.

Lindsay stared at him as if he were demented.

"I've a case or two I am interested in," Sommers explained nonchalantly. "Nothing much, but I don't care to leave. Besides, I don't think Porter would be an agreeable companion."

"Very well," Lindsay replied indifferently. "French will go--a jolly, companionable, chatty fellow."

The young doctor felt that Lindsay was enumerating pointedly the qualities he lacked.

"Porter's connection will be worth thousands to the man he takes to. He's in a dozen different corporations where they pay good salaries to physicians. Of course, if you've started a practice already--"

"I don't suppose my cases are good for ten dollars."

Lindsay's handsome, gray-whiskered face expressed a polite disgust.

"There's another matter I'd like to speak about--"

"The patient Ducharme?" Sommers asked quickly.

"I don't know her name,--the woman Miss Clark says you admitted against my rules. You know there are the free dispensaries for those who can't pay, and, indeed, I give my own services. I cannot afford to maintain this plant without fees. In short, I am surprised at such a breach of professional etiquette."

Sommers got up from his seat nervously and then sat down again. Lindsay undoubtedly had the right to do exactly what he pleased on his own premises.

"Very well," he replied shortly. "It shan't occur again. I have told the Ducharme woman to call at my rooms for treatment, and I will give Miss Clark her ten dollars. She was an exceptionally interesting and instructive case."

Lindsay elevated his eyebrows politely.

"Yes, yes, but you know we specialists are so liable to be imposed upon. Every one tries to escape his fee; no one would employ Carson, for example, unless he had the means to pay his fee, would he?"

"The cases are not exactly parallel."

"All cases of employment are parallel," Lindsay replied with emphasis.

"Every man is entitled to what he can get, from the roustabout on the wharf to our friend Porter, and no more."

"I have often thought," Sommers protested rather vaguely, "that clergymen and doctors should be employed by the state to do what they can; it isn't much!"

"There are the hospitals." Lindsay got up from his chair at the sound of an electric bell. "And our very best professional men practise there, give their time and money and strength. You will have to excuse me, as Mr. Carson has an appointment, and I have already kept him waiting. Will you see Mrs. Winter and young Long at eleven thirty and eleven forty-five?"

As Sommers was leaving, Lindsay called out over his shoulder, "And can you take the clinic, Saturday? I must go to St. Louis in consultation. General R. P. Atkinson, president of the Omaha and Gulf, an old friend--"

"Shall be delighted," the young doctor replied with a smile.

As he stepped into the corridor, one of the young women clerks was filling in an appointment slip on the long roll that hung on a metal cylinder. This was an improved device, something like a cash-register machine, that printed off the name opposite a certain hour that was permanently printed on the slip. The hours of the office day were divided into five-minute periods, but, as two assisting physicians were constantly in attendance beside Sommers, the allotted time for each patient was about fifteen minutes.

"Mrs. Winter is in No. 3," the clerk told him. "Long in No. 1, and Mr. Harrison and a Miss Frost in the reception room."

So the machine ground on. Even the prescriptions were formularized to such an extent that most of them were stencilled and went by numbers. The clerk at the end of the corridor handed the patient a little card, on which was printed No. 3033, No. 3127, etc., as he circled by in the last turn of the office. There was an apothecary store on the floor below, where the patient could sit in an easy-chair and read the papers while the prescription called for by his number was being fetched by an elegant young woman.

Sommers hurried through with Mrs. Winter, who was a fussy, nervous little woman from the West Side; she resented having "a young feller" thrust on her.

"I knew Dr. Lindsay when he was filling prescriptions on Madison Street," she said spitefully.

Sommers smiled. "That must have been a good while ago, before Chicago was a big place."

"Before you was born, young man; before all the doctors who could come down here in a bunch and set up offices and asked fees enough of a body to keep 'em going for a year!"

Then young Long; then one, two, three new patients, who had to have physical examinations before being admitted to Lindsay. Once or twice Lindsay sent for Sommers to assist him in a delicate matter, and Sommers hurried off, leaving his half-dressed patient to cool his heels before a radiator. After the examinations there was an odd patient or two that Lindsay had left when he had gone out to lunch with some gentlemen at the Metropolitan Club. By two o'clock Sommers got away to take a hasty luncheon in a bakery, after which he returned to a new string of cases.

To-day "the rush," as the clerks called it, was greater than usual. The attendants were nervous and irritable, answered sharply and saucily, until Sommers felt that the place was intolerable. All this office practice got on his nerves. It was too "intensive." He could not keep his head and enter thoroughly into the complications of a dozen cases, when they were shoved at him pell-mell. He realized that he was falling into a routine, was giving conventional directions, relying upon the printed prescriptions and mechanical devices. All these devices were ingenious,--they would do no harm,--and they might do good, ought to do good,--if the cursed human system would only come up to the standard.

At last he seized his coat and hat, and escaped. The noiseless cage dropped down, down, past numerous suites of doctors' offices similar to Lindsay's, with their ground-glass windows emblazoned by dozens of names. This building was a kind of modern Chicago Lourdes. All but two or three of the suites were rented to some form of the medical fraternity. Down, down: here a druggist's clerk hailing the descending car; there an upward car stopping to deliver its load of human freight bound for the rooms of another great specialist,--Thornton, the skin doctor. At last he reached the ground floor

and the gusty street. Across the way stood a line of carriages waiting for women who were shopping at the huge dry-goods emporium, and through the barbaric displays of the great windows Sommers could see the clerks moving hither and thither behind the counters. It did not differ materially from his emporium: it was less select, larger, but not more profitable, considering the amount of capital employed, than his shop. Marshall Field decked out the body; Lindsay, Thornton, and Co. repaired the body as best they could. It was all one trade.

On State Street the sandwich men were sauntering dejectedly through the crowd of shoppers: "_Professor Herman Sorter, Chiropodist._" "_Go to Manassas for Spectacles_";--it was the same thing. Across the street, on the less reputable western side, flared the celluloid signs of the quacks: "_The parlors of famous old Dr. Green._" "_The original and only Dr. Potter. Visit Dr. Potter. No cure, no charge. Examination free._" The same business! Lindsay would advertise as "old Dr. Lindsay," if it paid to advertise,--paid socially and commercially. Dr. Lindsay's offices probably "took in" more in a month than "old Dr. Green" made in a year, without the expense of advertising. Lindsay would lose much more by adopting the methods of quackery than he could ever make: he would lose hospital connections, standing in the professional journals, and social prestige. Lindsay was quite shrewd in sticking to the conventions of the profession.

CHAPTER XIV

When Sommers reached his rooms that evening, he found Mrs. Ducharme waiting for him. She held in her hand his card.

"I thought you'd give me the go-by," she exclaimed, as he entered. "Your kind is smooth enough, but they don't want to be bothered. But I came all the same--on the chance."

"What have you been doing?" the doctor inquired, without noticing her surliness. "Walking about in the streets all day and making your inflammation worse?"

"Well, you see I must find him, and I don't know where to look for him."

"Well, you won't find your husband walking about the streets, especially if he's gone off with another woman; but you will get blind and have to go to the hospital!"

"Well, I'll kill her first."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said the doctor, wearily. "You'll make a fuss, and your husband will hit you again, and go away."

"He was all right, as nice a man as you could find before she came

to Peory. You see she is married to another man, a baker, and they lived in Decatur. Ducharme--he's a Frenchman--knew her in Decatur where he worked in a restaurant, and he came to Peory to get rid of her. And he got a job and was real steady and quiet. Then we got married, and Ducharme was as nice a man as you ever knew. But we wasn't married a week--we had a kafe together--before _she_ got wind o' his being married and come to town. He told me she was trying to get him to go away, and he said how he didn't want to; but she had influence with him and was worrying around. Well, the third day he sent me a note by a little boy. 'Caroline,' it said, 'you'se a good woman and an honest woman and we could get on first rate together; but, Caroline, I don't love you when she is about. She calls me, and I go.'"

"Well, that's all there is to it, isn't it?" Sommers asked, half amused.

"You can't keep him away from the other woman. Now you are a sensible, capable woman. Just give him up and find a place to work."

Mrs. Ducharme shook her head sorrowfully.

"That won't do. I just think and think, and I can't work. He was such a nice man, so gentlemanlike and quiet, so long as she stayed away. But I didn't tell you: I found 'em in Peory in a place not fit for hogs to live in, and I watched my chance and gave it to the woman. But Ducharme came in and he pushed me out, and I fell, and guess I cracked my head. That's when my eye began to hurt. The kafe business ran out, and I followed them to Chicago. And here I been for three months, doing most anything, housework generally. But I can't keep a place. Just so often I have to up and out on the road and try to find him. I'll brain that woman yet!"

She uttered this last assertion tranquilly.

"She don't amount to much,--a measly, sandy-haired, cheap thing. _I_ come of respectable folks, who had a farm outer Gales City, and never worked out 'fore this happened. But now I can't settle down to nothin'; it's always that Frenchman before my eyes, and _her_."

"Well, and after you have found her and disposed of her?" asked Sommers.

"Oh, Ducharme will be all right then! He'll follow me like a lamb. He doesn't want to mess around with such. But she's got some power over him."

"Simply he wants to live with her and not with you."

The woman nodded her head sadly.

"I guess that's about it; but you see if she weren't around, he wouldn't know that he didn't love me."

Mrs. Ducharme wiped away her tears, and looked at the doctor in hopes that he might suggest some plan by which she could accomplish her end. To him she was but another case of a badly working mechanism. Either from the blow on her head or from hereditary influences she had a predisposition to a fixed idea. That tendency had cultivated this aberration about the woman

her husband preferred to her. Should she happen on this woman in her wanderings about Chicago, there would be one of those blind newspaper tragedies,--a trial, and a term of years in prison. As he meditated on this an idea seized the doctor; there was a way to distract her.

"The best thing for you to do," he said severely, "is to go to work."

"Can't get no place," she replied despondently. "Have no references and can't keep a place. See a feller going up the street that looks like Ducharme, and I must go after him."

"I have a place in mind where you won't be likely to see many men that look like Ducharme!"

He explained to her the situation of the Ninety-first Street cottage, and what Mrs. Preston needed.

"You take this note there to-morrow morning, and tell her that you are willing to work for a home. Then I'll attend to the wages. If you do what I want,--keep that fellow well locked up and relieve Mrs. Preston of care,--I'll give you good wages. Not a word to her, mind, about that. And when you want to hunt Ducharme, just notify Mrs. Preston and go ahead. Only see that you hunt him in the daytime. Don't leave her alone nights. Now, let's see your eye."

The woman took the brief note which he scribbled after examining her, and said dejectedly:

"She won't want me long--no one does, least of all Ducharme."

Sommers laughed.

"Guess I better go straight down," she remarked more hopefully as she left.

He should have taken the woman to the cottage, he reflected after she had gone, instead of sending her in this brusque manner. He had not seen Mrs. Preston since his return, and he did not know what had happened to her in the meantime. To-morrow he would find time to ride down there and see how things were going with the sick man.

There was much mail lying on his table. Nothing had been forwarded by Dresser, in accordance with the directions he had telegraphed him. And he had seen nothing of Dresser yesterday or to-day. The rooms looked as if the man had been gone some time. Dresser owed him money,--more than he could spare conveniently,--but that troubled him less than the thought of Dresser's folly. It was likely that he had thrown up his position--he had chafed against it from the first--and had taken to the precarious career of professional agitator. Dresser had been speaking at meetings in Pullman, with apparent success, and his mind had been full of "the industrial war," as he called it. Sommers recalled that the man had been allowed to leave Exonia College, where he had taught for a year on his return from Germany, because (as he put it) "he held doctrines subversive of the holy state of wealth and a high tariff." That he was of the stuff that martyrs of speech

are made, Sommers knew well enough, and such men return to their haven sooner or later.

Sommers sorted his letters listlessly. The Ducharme affair troubled him. He could see that a split with Lindsay was coming; but it must not be brought about by any act of professional discourtesy on his part. Although he was the most efficient surgeon Lindsay had, it would not take much to bring about his discharge. Probably the suggestion about Porter was merely a polite means of getting him out of the office. Lindsay had said some pointed things about "the critical attitude." The "critical attitude" to Lindsay's kind was the last crime.

Ordinarily he would not have cared. The sacrifice of the three thousand dollars which Lindsay paid him would have its own consolation. He could get back his freedom. But the matter was not so simple as it had been. It was mixed now with another affair: if he should leave Lindsay, especially after any disagreement with the popular specialist, he would put himself farther from Miss Hitchcock than ever. As it was, he was quite penniless enough; but thrown on his own resources--he remembered the heavy, sad young man at the Carsons', and Miss Hitchcock's remark about him.

Yet this reflection that in some way it was complicated, that he could not act impulsively and naturally, angered him. He was shrewd enough to know that Lindsay's patronage was due, not to the fact that he was the cleverest surgeon he had, but to the fact that, well--the daughter of Alexander Hitchcock thought kindly of him. These rich and successful! They formed a kind of secret society, pledged to advance any member, to keep the others out by indifference. When the others managed to get in, for any reason, they lent them aid to the exclusion of those left outside. So long as it looked as if he were to have a berth in their cabin, they would be amiable, but not otherwise.

Among the letters on the desk was one from Miss Hitchcock, asking him to spend the coming Saturday and Sunday at Lake Forest. There was to be a small house party, and the new club was to be open. Sommers prepared to answer it at once--to regret. He had promised himself to see Mrs. Preston instead. In writing the letter it seemed to him that he was taking a position, was definitely deciding something, and at the close he tore it in two and took a fresh sheet. Now was the time, if he cared for the girl, to come nearer to her. He had told himself all the way back from New York that he did care--too much. She was not like the rest. He laughed at himself. A few years hence she would be like the rest and, what is more, he should not find her so absorbing now, if she were not like the rest, essentially.

He wrote a conventional note of acceptance, and went out to mail it. Possibly all these people were right in reading the world, and the aim of life was to show one's power to get on. He was worried over that elementary aspect of things rather late in life.

These days there were many people on the streets, but few were busy. The large department stores were empty; at the doors stood idle floor-walkers and clerks. It was too warm for the rich to buy, and the poor had no money. The poor had come lean and hungry out of the terrible winter that followed the World's Fair. In that beautiful enterprise the prodigal city had put forth her utmost strength, and, having shown the world the supreme flower of her energy, had collapsed. There was gloom, not only in La Salle Street where people failed, but throughout the city, where the engine of play had exhausted the forces of all. The city's huge garment was too large for it; miles of empty stores, hotels, flat-buildings, showed its shrunken state. Tens of thousands of human beings, lured to the festive city by abnormal wages, had been left stranded, without food or a right to shelter in its tenantless buildings.

As the spring months moved on in unseasonable, torrid heat, all the sores of the social system swelled and began to break. The bleak winter had seen mute starvation and misery, and the blasts of summer had brought no revival of industry. Capital was sullen, and labor violent. There were meetings and counter-meetings; agitators, panaceas, university lecturers, sociologizing preachers, philanthropists, politicians--discontent and discord. The laborer starved, and the employer sulked.

"The extravagant poor are unwilling to let the thrifty reap the rewards of their savings and abstinence," lectured the Political Economist of the standard school. "The law of wages and capital is immutable. More science is needed."

"The rich are vultures and sharks," shrieked the Labor Agitator.

"And will ye let your brother starve?" exhorted the Preacher.

"For it is as clear as the nose on your face that corporations corrupt legislatures, and buy judges, and oppress the poor," insinuated the Socialist.

"It's that wretched free trade," howled the hungry Politician, "and Cleveland and all his evil deeds. See what we will do for you."

"Yes, it's free trade," bawled one newspaper.

"It's nefarious England," snarled another.

"It's the greed of Wall Street, the crime against silver, the burden of the mortgage," vociferated a third.

"It's 'hard times,'" the meek sighed, and furbished up last year's clothes, and cut the butcher's bill.

"Yes, it's 'hard times,' a time of psychological depression and distrust," softly said the rich man. "A good time to invest my savings profitably. Real estate is low; bonds and mortgages are as cheap as dirt. Some day

people will be cheerful once more, and these good things will multiply and yield fourfold. Yea, I will not bury my talent in a napkin."

Thus the body social threw out much smoke, but no vital heat; here and there, the red glare of violence burst up through the dust of words and the insufferable cant of the world.

The first sore to break, ironically enough, was in the "model industrial town" of Pullman. That dispute over the question of a living wage grew bitterer day by day. Well-to-do people praised the directors for their firm resolve to keep the company's enormous surplus quite intact. The men said the officers of the company lied: it was an affair of complicated bookkeeping. The brutal fact of it was that the company rested within its legal rights. The unreasonable people were dissatisfied with an eighth of a loaf, while their employers were content with a half. Then there was trouble among the mines, and the state troops were called out. Sores multiplied; men talked; but capital could not be coerced.

But while politicians squabbled and capitalists sulked and economists talked, a strong tide of fellowship in misery was rising from west to east. Unconsciously, far beneath the surface, the current was moving,--a current of common feeling, of solidarity among those who work by day for their daily bread. The country was growing richer, but they were poorer. There began to be talk of Debs, the leader of a great labor machine. The A. R. U. had fought one greedy corporation with success, and intimidated another. Sometime in June this Debs and his lieutenant, Howard, came to Chicago. The newspapers had little paragraphs of meagre information about the A. R. U. convention. One day there was a meeting in which a committee of the Pullman strikers set forth their case. At the close of that meeting the great boycott had been declared. "Mere bluff," said the newspapers. But the managers of the railroads "got together." Some of them had already cut the wage lists on their roads. They did not feel sure that it was all "bluff."

* * * * *

It was the first day of the A. R. U. boycott. Sommers left the Athenian Building at noon, for Dr. Lindsay's clients carried their infirmities out of town in hot weather. He took his way across the city toward the station of the Northwestern Railroad, wondering whether Debs's threats had been carried out, and if consequently he should be compelled to remain in town over Sunday. On the street corners and in front of the newspaper offices little knots of men, wearing bits of white ribbon in their buttonholes, were idling. They were quiet, curious, dully waiting to see what this preposterous stroke might mean for them. In the heavy noonday air of the streets they moved lethargically, drifting westward to the hall where the A. R. U. committees were in session. Oblivious of his engagements, Sommers followed them, hearing the burden of their talk, feeling their aimless discontent, their bitterness at the grind of circumstances. This prodigal country of theirs had been exploited,--shamefully, rapaciously, swinishly,--and now that the first signs of exhaustion were showing themselves, the people's eyes were opening to the story of greed. Democracy! Say, rather, Plutocracy, the most unblushing the world had ever seen,--the aristocracy of THOSE WHO HAVE.

Thus meditating, he jostled against a group of men who were coming from a saloon. All but one wore the typical black clothes and derby hats of the workman's best attire; one had on a loose-fitting, English tweed suit. In this latter person Sommers was scarcely surprised to recognize Dresser. The big shoulders of the blond-haired fellow towered above the others; he was talking excitedly, and they were listening. When they started to cross the street, Sommers touched Dresser.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded abruptly.

"What are you doing? You had better get out of town along with your rich friends." He motioned sneeringly at the bag in Sommers's hand.

"I fancied you might be up to something of this kind," Sommers went on, unheeding his sneer.

"I had enough of that job of faking up text-books and jollyng schoolteachers. So I chucked it."

"Why did you chuck me, too?"

"I thought you might be sick of having me hang about, and especially now that I am in with the other crowd."

"That's rot," Sommers laughed. "However, you needn't feel it necessary to apologize. What are you doing with 'the other crowd'?"

"I'm secretary of the central committee," Dresser replied, with some importance.

"Oh, that's it!" Sommers exclaimed.

"It's better than being a boot-licker to the rich."

"Like the doctors? Well, we won't quarrel. I suppose you mean to give 'us' a hard time of it? Come in when it is all settled, and we will talk it over. Meantime you've got enough mischief on your hands to last you for some months."

"I don't blame you," Dresser said benignantly, "for your position. Perhaps if I had had the opportunities--"

"That's just it. Your crowd are all alike, at least the leaders; they are hungry for the fleshpots. If they had the opportunities, we should be served as they are now. That's the chief trouble,--nobody really cares to make the sacrifices. And that is why this row will be ended on the old terms: the rich will buy out the leaders. Better times will come, and we shall all settle down to the same old game of grab on the same old basis. But you," Sommers turned on the sauntering blue-eyed fellow, "people like you are the real curse."

"Why?"

"Because you are insincere. All you want is the pie. You make me feel that the privileged classes are right in getting what they can out of fools and--knaves."

"That's about enough. I suppose you are put out about the money--"

"Don't be an ass, Dresser. I don't need the hundred. And I don't want a quarrel. I think you are playing with dynamite, because you can't get the plunder others have got. Look out when the dynamite comes down."

"It makes no difference to me," Dresser protested sullenly.

"No! That's why you are dangerous. Well, good-by. Get your friends to leave the Northwestern open a day or two longer."

"There won't be a train running on the Northwestern to-morrow. I've seen the orders."

"Well, I shall foot it home, then."

They shook hands, and Dresser hurried on after his friends. Sommers retraced his steps toward the station. Dresser's vulgar and silly phrase, "boot-licker to the rich," turned up oddly in his memory. It annoyed him. Every man who sought to change his place, to get out of the ranks, was in a way a "boot-licker to the rich." He recalled that he was on his way to the rich now, with a subconscious purpose in his mind of joining them if he could. Miss Hitchcock's wealth would not be enormous, and it would be easy enough to show that he was not "boot-licker to the rich." But it was hard to escape caste prejudices, to live with those who prize ease and yet keep one's own ideals and opinions. If this woman had the courage to leave her people, to open a new life with him elsewhere--he smiled at the picture of Miss Hitchcock conjured up by the idea.

The streets were filthy as always, and the sultry west wind was sweeping the filth down the street canons. Here in the district of wholesale business houses a kind of midsummer gloom reigned. Many stores were vacant, their broad windows plastered with play-bills. Even in the warehouses along the river a strange stillness prevailed. "Nothing was doing," in the idiom of the street. Along the platforms of the railroad company's train house, however, a large crowd of idlers had assembled. They were watching to see whether the trainmen would make up the Overland Limited. Debs had said that this company would not move its through trains if it persisted in using the tabooed Pullmans. Stout chains had been attached to the sleepers to prevent any daring attempt to cut out the cars at the last moment. A number of officials from the general offices were hurrying to and fro apprehensively. There was some delay, but finally the heavy train began to move. It wound slowly out of the shed, in a sullen silence of the onlookers. In the yards it halted. There was a derisive cry, but in a few moments it started again and disappeared.

"I guess it's all bluff," a smartly dressed young man remarked to Sommers.

"There's the general manager getting into the Lake Forest two-ten, and Smith of the C., B. and Q., and Rollins of the Santa Fe, are with him. The

general managers have been in session most of last night and this morning. They're going to fight it out, if it costs a hundred millions."

The young man's views seemed to be the popular ones in the Lake Forest train. It was crowded with young business men, bound out of town for their holiday. Not a few were going to the country club at Lake Forest. In this time of business stagnation they were cultivating the new game of golf. There was a general air of blithe relief when the train pulled out of the yards, and the dirty, sultry, restless city was left behind. "Blamed fools to strike now," remarked a fat, perspiring stockbroker. "Roads aren't earning anything, anyhow."

The conductor who was taking the tickets smiled and kept his own counsel.

"Good time to buy rails, all the same," his companion answered.

"I guess this'll yank old Pullman back to town," another remarked, glancing up from his paper.

"You don't know him. It won't bother _him_. He's keeping cool somewhere in the St. Lawrence. It's up to the railroads now."

"Let's see your clubs. Did you get 'em straight from Scotland? That's a pretty iron."

Older men were chatting confidentially and shaking their heads. But the atmosphere was not gloomy; an air of easy, assured optimism prevailed. "I guess it will all come out right, somehow, and the men will be glad to get back to work.... If Cleveland and his free trade were in hell!..." And the train sped on through the northern suburbs, coming every now and then within eyeshot of the sparkling lake. The holiday feeling gained as the train got farther away from the smoke and heat of the city. The young men belonged to the "nicer" people, who knew each other in a friendly, well-bred way. It was a comfortable, social kind of picnic of the better classes.

Most of the younger men, and Sommers with them, got into the omnibus waiting at the Lake Forest station, and proceeded at once to the club. There, in the sprawling, freshly painted club-house, set down on a sun-baked, treeless slope, people were already gathered. A polo match was in progress and also a golf tournament. The verandas were filled with ladies. One part of the verandas had been screened off, and there, in a kind of outdoor cafe, people were lunching or sipping cool drinks. At one of the tables Sommers found Miss Hitchcock and Mrs. Porter, surrounded by a group of young men and women who were talking and laughing excitedly.

"Ah! you couldn't get the twelve-thirty," Miss Hitchcock exclaimed, as Sommers edged to her. "We waited luncheon for you until the train came; but you are in time for the polo. Caspar is playing--and Parker," she added in a lower tone. "Let us go down there and watch them."

Miss Hitchcock detached herself skilfully from the buzzing circle on the veranda, and the two stepped out on the springy turf. The undulating

prairie was covered with a golden haze. Half a mile west a thin line of trees pencilled the horizon. The golf course lay up and down the gentle turfy swells between the club-house and the wind-break of trees. The polo grounds were off to the left, in a little hollow beside a copse of oak. There were not many trees over the sixty or more acres, and the roads on either side of the club grounds were marked by dense clouds of dust. Yet it was gay--open to the June heavens, with a sense of limitless breathing space. And it was also very decorous, well-bred, and conventional.

As they strolled leisurely over the lawns in front of the club-house, Miss Hitchcock stopped frequently to speak to some group of spectators, or to greet cheerfully a golfer as he started for the first tee. She seemed very animated and happy; the decorative scene fitted her admirably. Dr. Lindsay came up the slope, laboring toward the ninth hole with prodigious welter.

"That's the way he keeps young," Miss Hitchcock commented approvingly. "He's one of the best golfers in the club. I like to see the older men showing that they have powers of enjoyment left."

"I guess there's no doubt about Lindsay's powers of enjoyment," Sommers retorted idly.

They passed Mrs. Carson, "ingeniously and correctly associated," as Miss Hitchcock commented, and little Laura Lindsay flirting with young Polot.

Miss Hitchcock quickened her pace, for the polo had already begun. They saw Caspar Porter's little pony fidgeting under its heavy burden. It became unmanageable and careered wildly up and down the field, well out of range of the players. Indeed, most of the ponies seemed inclined to keep their shins out of the melee. Sommers laughed rather ill-naturedly, and Miss Hitchcock frowned. She disliked slovenly playing, and shoddy methods even in polo. When the umpire called time, Parker Hitchcock rode up to where they were standing and shook hands with the young doctor. As he trotted off, his sister said earnestly:

"You have done so much for him; we can never thank you."

"I don't believe I have done so very much," Sommers replied. He did not like to have her refer to his mission in New York, or to make, woman-wise, a sentimental story out of a nasty little scrape.

"I think polo will help him; papa agrees with me now."

"Indeed!" Sommers smiled,

"What is it that you don't say?" the girl flashed at him resentfully.

"Merely, that this is a nice green paddock for a young man to be turned out in--when he has barked his shins. Do you know what happens to the ordinary young man who is--a bit wild?"

"Well, let us not go into it. I am afraid of you to-day."

"Yes, I am in one of my crude moods to-day, I confess. I had no business to come."

"Not at all. This is just the place for you. Nice people, nice day, nice sporty feeling in the air. You need relaxation badly."

"I don't think I shall get it exactly here."

"Why not?"

The girl looked out over the shaven turf, dotted with the white figures of the golfers, at the careering ponies which had begun the new round in the match, up the slope where the club verandas were gay with familiar figures,--and it all seemed very good. The man at her side could see all that and more beyond. He had come within the hour from the din of the city, where the wealth that flowered here was made. And there was a primitive, eternal, unanswerable question harassing his soul.

CHAPTER XVI

"Shall we walk over to the lake," the girl suggested gently, as if anxious to humor some incomprehensible child. "There is a lovely ravine we can explore, all cool and shady, and this sun is growing oppressive."

Sommers accepted gratefully the concession she made to his unsocial mood. The ravine path revealed unexpected wildness and freshness. The peace of twilight had already descended there. Miss Hitchcock strolled on, apparently forgetful of fatigue, of the distance they were putting between them and the club-house. Sommers respected the charm of the occasion, and, content with evading the chattering crowd, refrained from all strenuous discussion. This happy, well-bred, contented woman, full of vitality and interest, soothed all asperities. She laid him in subtle subjection to her. So they chatted of the trivial things that must be crossed and explored before understanding can come. When they neared the lake, the sun had sunk so far that the beach was one long, dark strip of shade. The little waves lapped coolly along the breakwaters. They continued their stroll, walking easily on the hard sand, each unwilling to break the moment of perfect adjustment. Finally the girl confessed her fatigue, and sat down beside a breakwater, throwing off her hat, and pushing her hair away from her temples. She looked up at the man and smiled. 'You see,' she seemed to say, 'I can meet you on your own ground, and the world is very beautiful when one gets away, when one gets away!'

"Why did you refuse to go abroad with Uncle Brome?" she asked suddenly. She was looking out idly across the lake, but something in her voice puzzled Sommers.

"I didn't want to go."

"Chicago fascinates you already!"

"There were more reasons than one," he answered, after a moment's hesitation, as if he could trust himself no farther. The girl smiled a bit, quite to herself. Her throat palpitated a little, and then she turned her head.

"Tell me about the cases. Are they so interesting?"

"There is one curious case," the young doctor responded with masculine literalness. "It's hardly a case, but an affair I have mixed myself up with. Do you remember the night of the dinner at your house when Lindsay was there? The evening before I had been at the Paysons' dance, and when I returned there was an emergency case just brought to the hospital. They had telephoned for me, but had missed me. Well, the fellow was a drunken brute that had been shot a number of times. His wife was with him."

Sommers paused, finding now that he had started on his tale that it was difficult to bring out his point, to make this girl understand the significance of it, and the reason why he told it to her. She was attentive, but he thought she was a trifle bored. Soon he began again and went over all the steps of the affair.

"You see," he concluded, "I was morally certain that, if the operation succeeded, the fellow would be worse than useless in this world. Now it's coming true. Of course I have no responsibility; I did what any other doctor should have done, I suppose; and, if it had been an ordinary hospital case, I don't suppose that I should have thought twice about it. But you see that I--this woman has got her load of misery saddled on her, perhaps for life, and partly through me."

"I think she did right," the girl responded quickly, looking at the case from an entirely different side.

"I am not sure of that," Sommers retorted brusquely.

"What kind of a woman is she?" the girl inquired with interest, ignoring his last remark.

"I don't think I could make you understand her. I don't myself now."

"Is she pretty?"

"I don't know. She makes you see her always."

The girl moved as if the evening wind had touched her, and put on her hat.

"She's a desperately literal woman, primitive, the kind you never meet--well, out here. She has a thirst for happiness, and doesn't get a drop."

"She must be common, or she wouldn't have married that man," Miss Hitchcock commented in a hard tone. She rose, and without discussion they took the

path that led along the bluff to the cottages.

"I didn't think so," the doctor answered positively. "And if you knew her, you wouldn't think so."

After a moment he said tentatively, "I wish you could meet her."

"I should be glad to," Miss Hitchcock replied sweetly, but without interest.

Sommers realized the instant he had spoken that he had made a mistake, that his idea was a purely conventional one. The two women could have nothing but their sex in common, and that common possession was as likely to be a ground for difference as for agreement. It was always useless to bring two people of different classes together. Three generations back the families of these two women were probably on the same level of society. And, as woman to woman, the schoolteacher, who travelled the dreary path between the dingy cottage and the Everglade School, was as full of power and beauty as this velvety specimen of plutocracy. It was sentimental, however, to ignore the present facts. Evidently Miss Hitchcock had followed the same line of reasoning, for when she spoke again she referred distantly to Mrs. Preston.

"Those people--teachers--have their own clubs and society. Mrs. Bannerton was a teacher in the schools before she was married. Do you know Mrs. Bannerton?"

"I have met Mrs. Bannerton," Sommers answered indifferently.

He was annoyed at the trivial insertion of Mrs. Bannerton into the conversation. He had failed to make Mrs. Preston's story appear important, or even interesting, and the girl by his side had shown him delicately that he was a bore. They walked more rapidly in the gathering twilight. The sun had sunk behind the trees, and the ravine below their path was gloomy. The mood of the day had changed, and he was sorry--for everything. It was a petty matter--it was always some petty thing--that came in between them. He longed to recall the moment on the beach when she had asked him, with a flicker of a smile upon her face, why he had decided to remain in Chicago. But they were strangers to each other now,--hopelessly strangers,--and the worst of it was that they both knew it.

* * * * *

There was a large house party at the Hitchcock cottage. The Porters and the Lindsays, with other guests, were there for the holidays of the Fourth, and some more people came in for dinner. The men who had arrived on the late trains brought more news of the strike: the Illinois Central was tied up, the Rock Island service was crippled, and there were reports that the Northwestern men were going out *en masse* on the morrow. The younger people took the matter gayly, as an opportune occasion for an extended lark. The older men discussed the strike from all sides, and looked grave. Over the cigars the general attitude toward the situation came out strongly: the strikers were rash fools; they'd find that out in a few

weeks. They could do a great deal of harm under their dangerous leaders, but, if need be, the courts, the state, the federal government, would be invoked for aid. Law and order and private rights must be respected. The men said these things ponderously, with the conviction that they were reciting a holy creed of eternal right. They were men of experience, who had never questioned the worth of the society in which they were privileged to live. They knew each other, and they knew life, and at the bottom it was as useless to kick against the laws of society as to interfere with the laws of nature. Besides, it was all very good--a fair enough field for any one.

Sommers was excited by the reports. It made him restless to be lolling here outside of the storm when such a momentous affair was moving down the lake under the leaden pall of the city smoke. He asked questions eagerly, and finally got into discussion with old Boardman, one of the counsel for a large railroad.

"Who is that raw youth?" old Boardman asked Porter, when the younger men joined the ladies on the veranda.

"Some protege of Alec's," Brome Porter replied. "Son of an old friend--fresh chap."

"I am afraid our young friend is not going to turn out well," Dr. Lindsay, who had overheard the discussion, added in a distressed tone. "I have done what I can for him, but he is very opinionated and green--yes, very green. Pity--he is a clever fellow, one of the cleverest young surgeons in the city."

"He talks about what he doesn't _know_," Boardman pronounced sententiously. "When he's lived with decent folks a little longer, he'll get some sense knocked into his puppy head, maybe."

"Maybe," Brome Porter assented, dismissing this crude, raw, green, ignorant young man with a contemptuous grunt.

Outside on the brick terrace the younger people had gathered in a circle and were discussing the polo match. Miss Hitchcock's clear, mocking voice could be heard teasing her cousin Caspar on his performance that afternoon. The heavy young man, whose florid face was flushed with the champagne he had taken, made ineffective attempts to ward off the banter. Parker Hitchcock came to his rescue.

"I say, Lou, it's absurd to compare us with the teams east. We haven't the stable. Who ever heard of playing with two ponies?"

He appealed to Sommers, who happened to be seated next him.

"Steve Bayliss buys ponies by the carload and takes his pick. You can't play polo without good ponies, can you?"

"I don't know," Sommers answered indifferently.

He was looking at the lights along the shore, and contriving some excuse to cut short his visit. It was clear that he was uncomfortably out of his element in the chattering circle. He was too dull to add joy to such a gathering, and he got little joy from it. And he was feverishly anxious to be doing something, to put his hand to some plough--to escape the perpetual irritation of talk.

The chatter went on from polo to golf and gossip until the group broke up into flirtation couples. As Sommers was about to stroll off to the beach, Lindsay came out of the dining room and sat down by him with the amiable purpose of giving his young colleague some good social doctrine. He talked admiringly of the manner in which the general managers had taken hold of the strike.

"Most of them are from the ranks, you know," he said, "fought their way up to the head, just as any one of those fellows could if he had the ability, and they _know_ what they're doing."

"There is no one so bitter, so arrogant, so proud as your son of a peasant who has got the upper hand," Sommers commented philosophically.

"The son of a peasant?" Lindsay repeated, bewildered.

"Yes, that's what our money-makers are,--from the soil, from the masses. And when they feel their power, they use it worse than the most arrogant aristocrats. Of course the strikers are all wrong, poor fools!" he hastened to add. "But they are not as bad as the others, as _those who have_. The men will be licked fast enough, and licked badly. They always will be. But it is a brutal game, a brutal game, this business success,--a good deal worse than war, where you line up in the open at least."

Sommers spoke nonchalantly, as if his views could not interest Dr. Lindsay, but were interesting to himself, nevertheless.

"That's pretty fierce!" Lindsay remarked, with a laugh. "I guess you haven't seen much of business. If you had been here during the anarchist riots--"

Sommers involuntarily shrugged his shoulders. The anarchist was the most terrifying bugaboo in Chicago, referred to as a kind of Asiatic plague that might break out at any time. Before Lindsay could get his argument launched, however, some of the guests drifted out to the terrace, and the two men separated.

Later in the evening Sommers found Miss Hitchcock alone, and explained to her that he should have to leave in the morning, as that would probably be the last chance to reach Chicago for some days. She did not urge him to stay, and expressed her regret at his departure in conventional phrases. They were standing by the edge of the terrace, which ran along the bluff above the lake. A faint murmur of little waves rose to them from the beach beneath.

"It is so heavenly quiet!" the girl murmured, as if to reproach his

dissatisfied, restless spirit. "So this is good-bye?" she added, at length.

Sommers knew that she meant this would be the end of their intimacy, of anything but the commonplace service of the world.

"I hope not," he answered regretfully.

"Why is it we differ?" she asked swiftly. "I am sorry we should disagree on such really unimportant matters."

"Don't say that," Sommers protested. "You know that it is just because you are intelligent and big enough to realize that they are important that--"

"We strike them every time?" she inquired.

"Laura Lindsay and Caspar would think we were drivelling idiots."

"I am not so sure they wouldn't be right!" She laughed nervously, and locked her hands tightly together. He turned away in discomfort, and neither spoke for a long time. Finally he broke the silence,--

"At any rate, you can see that I am scarcely a fit guest!"

"So you are determined to go in this way--back to your--case?"

At the scorn of her last words Sommers threw up his head haughtily.

"Yes, back to my case."

CHAPTER XVII

Mrs. Ducharme opened the door of the cottage in response to Sommers's knock. Attired in a black house dress, with her dark hair smoothly brushed back from round, fat features, she was a peaceful figure. Sommers thought there was some truth in her contention that "Ducharme ought to get a decent-looking woman, anyway."

"How is Mr. Preston?" he asked.

Mrs. Ducharme shook her head mournfully.

"Bad, allus awful bad--and pitiful. Calling for stuff in a voice fit to break your heart."

"Mind you don't let him get any," the doctor counselled, preparing to go upstairs.

"Better not go up there jest yet," the woman whispered. "He did get

away from us yesterday and had a terrible time over there." She hitched her shoulders in the direction of Stoney Island Avenue. "We ain't found out till he'd been gone 'most two hours, and, my! such goings on; we had to git two perlicemen."

"I suppose you were out looking for Ducharme?" the doctor asked, in a severe tone.

"It was the last time," the woman pleaded, her eyes downcast. "Come in here. Miss Preston ain't got back from school,--she's late to-day."

Sommers walked into the bare sitting room and sat down, while Mrs. Ducharme leaned against the door-post, fingering her apron in an embarrassed manner.

"I've got cured," she blurted out at last. "My eye was awful bad, and it's been most a week since you sent me here."

"Did you follow my treatment?"

"No! I was out one afternoon--after Mrs. Preston came back from school--and I had walked miles and miles. Comin' home I passed a buildin' down here a ways on the avenue where there were picter papers pasted all over the windows; the picters were all about healin' folks, heaps and heaps in great theaters, a nice white-haired old preacher doin' the healin'. While I was lookin' at the picters, a door opened and a young feller came along and helped 'em carry in a cripple in his chair. He turns to me arter finishin' with the cripple and says, 'Come in, lady, and be healed in the blood of the lamb.' In I went, sure enough, and there was a kind of rough church fitted up with texts printed in great show-bills, and they was healin' folks. The little feller was helpin' em up the steps to the platform, and the old feller was prayin', and at last the young feller comes to me and says, 'Want ter be healed?' and I just got up, couldn't help it, and walked to the platform, and they prayed over me--you aren't mad, are you?" she asked suspiciously.

Sommers laughed.

"Mrs. Preston said you'd be very angry with such nonsense. But at any rate the old fellow--Dr.--Dr.--Po--"

"Dr. Potz," Sommers suggested.

"That's him. He cured me, and I went back again and told him about Ducharme. And _he_ says that he's got a devil, and he will cast it out by prayin'. But he wants money."

"How much will it cost to cast out the devil?" the doctor inquired.

"The doctor says he must have ten dollars to loosen the bonds."

"Well," Sommers drew a bill from his pocket, "there's ten dollars on account of your wages. Now, don't you interfere with the doctor's work. You let him manage the devil his own way, and if you see Ducharme or the other

woman, you run away as hard as you can. If you don't, you may bring the devil back again."

The woman took the money eagerly.

"You can go right off to find the doctor," Sommers continued. "I'll stay here until Mrs. Preston returns. But let me look at your eye, and see whether the doctor has cast that devil out for good and all."

He examined the eye as well as he could without appliances. Sure enough, so far as he could detect, the eye was normal, the peculiar paralysis had disappeared.

"You are quite right," he pronounced at last. "The doctor has handled this devil very ably. You can tell Mrs. Preston that I approve of your going to that doctor."

"I wonder where Mrs. Preston can be: she's most always here by half-past four, and it's after five. He," the woman pointed upstairs to Preston's rooms, "is sleeping off the effects of the dose Mrs. Preston gave him."

"The powders?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, sir. She had to give him two before he would sleep. Well, I'll be back by supper time. If he calls you, be careful about the bar on the door."

After Mrs. Ducharme had gone, the doctor examined every object in the little room. It was all so bare! Needless so, Sommers thought at first, contrasting the bleak room with the comfortable simplicity of his own rooms. The strip of coarse thin rug, the open Franklin stove, the pine kitchen table, the three straight chairs--it was as if the woman, crushed down from all aspirations, had defiantly willed to exist with as little of this world's furniture as might be. On the table were a few school books, a teacher's manual of drawing, a school mythology, and at one side two or three other volumes, which Sommers took up with more interest. One was a book on psychology--a large modern work on the subject. A second was an antiquated popular treatise on "Diseases of the Mind." Another volume was an even greater surprise--Balzac's *Une Passion dans la Desert*, a well-dirtied copy from the public library. They were fierce condiments for a lonely mind!

His examination over, he noiselessly stepped into the hall and went upstairs. After some fumbling he unbolted the door and tiptoed into the room, where Preston lay like a log. The fortnight had changed him markedly. There was no longer any prospect that he would sink under his disease, as Sommers had half expected. He had grown stouter, and his flesh had a healthy tint. "It will take it out of his mind," he muttered to himself, watching the hanging jaw that fell nervelessly away from the mouth, disclosing the teeth.

As he watched the man's form, so drearily promising of physical power, he heard a light footstep at the outer door, which he had left unbarred. On

turning he caught the look of relief that passed over Mrs. Preston's face at the sight of the man lying quietly in his bed. What a state of fear she must live in!

Without a word the two descended, Sommers carefully barring and bolting the door. When they reached her room, her manner changed, and she spoke with a note of elation in her voice:

"I was so afraid that you would not come again after sending me help."

"I shall come as often and as long as you need me," Sommers answered, taking her hand kindly. "He has had another attack," he continued. "Mrs. Ducharme told me--I sent her out--and I suppose he's sleeping off the opiate."

"Yes, it was dreadful, worse than anything yet." She uttered these words jerkily, walking up and down the room in excitement. "And I've just left the schoolhouse. The assistant superintendent was there to see me. He was kind enough, but he said it couldn't happen again. There was scandal about it now. And yesterday I heard a child, one of my pupils, say to his companion, 'She's the teacher who's got a drunken husband.'"

Her voice was dreary, not rebellious.

"I don't know what to do. I cannot move. It would be worse in any other neighborhood. I thought," she added in a low voice, "that he would go away, for a time at least, but his mind is so weak, and he has some trouble with walking. But he gets stronger, stronger, O God, every day! I have to see him grow stronger, and I grow weaker."

"It is simply preposterous," the doctor protested in matter-of-fact tones, "to kill yourself, to put yourself in such a position for a man, who is no longer a man. For a man you cannot love," he added.

"What would be the use of running away from the trouble? He has ruined my life. Alves Preston is a mere thing that eats and sleeps. She will be that kind of thing as long as she lives."

"That is romantic rot," the doctor observed coldly. "No life is ruined in that way. One life has been wrecked; but you, you are bigger than that life. You can recover--bury it away--and love and have children and find that it is a good thing to live. That is the beauty of human weakness--we forget ourselves of yesterday."

In answer to his words her face, which he had once thought too immobile and passive for beauty, flamed with color, the dark eyes flashing beneath the broad white brow.

"Am I just caught in a fog?" she murmured.

"You are living in a way that would make any woman mad. I might twist myself into as many knots as you have. I might say that I had caused

this disaster; that March evening my hand was too true. For I knew then the man ought to die."

He blurted out his admission roughly.

"I knew you did," she said softly, "and that has made it easier."

His voice trembled when he spoke again. "But I live with facts, not fancies. And the facts are that that ruined thing should not clog you, ruin you. Get rid of him in any way you will,--I advise the county asylum. Get rid of him, and do it quickly before he crazes you."

When he had finished, there was an oppressive stillness in the room, as if some sentence had been declared. Mrs. Preston got up and walked to and fro, evidently battling with herself. She stopped opposite him finally.

"The only thing that would justify that would be to know that you grasped it all--real happiness in that one bold stroke. Such conviction can never come."

"Happiness!" he exclaimed scornfully. "If you mean a good, comfortable time, you won't find any certainty about that. But you can get freedom to live out your life--"

"You fail to understand. There is happiness. See,--come here."

She led him to the front window, which was open toward the peaceful little lawn. On the railroad track behind the copse of scrub oak an unskilful train crew was making up a long train of freight cars. Their shouts, punctuated by the rumbling reverberations from the long train as it alternately buckled up and stretched out, was the one discord in the soft night. All else was hushed, even to the giant chimneys in the steel works. One solitary furnace lamped the growing darkness. It was midsummer now in these marshy spots, and a very living nature breathed and pulsed, even in the puddles between the house and the avenue.

"You can hear it in the night air," she murmured; "the joy that comes rising up from the earth, the joy of living. Ah! that is why we are made--to have happiness and joy, to rejoice the heart of God, to make God live, for He must be happiness itself; and when we are happy and feel joy in living, He must grow stronger. And when we are weak and bitter, when the world haunts us as I felt this afternoon on leaving the superintendent, when men strike and starve, and others are hard and grasping--then He must shrink and grow small and suffer. There is happiness," she ended, breathing her belief as a prayer into the solitude and night.

"What will you do to get it?" Sommers asked, shortly.

"Do to get it?" She drew back from the window, her figure tense. "When it comes within my grasp, I will do everything, everything, and nothing shall hinder me."

"Meantime?" the doctor questioned significantly.

"Don't ask me!" She sank into a chair and covered her eyes with her hand. And neither spoke until the sound of footsteps was heard on the walk.

"There is Mrs. Ducharme coming home from the charmer of devils. It is time for me to go," Sommers said.

The room was so dark that he could not see her face, as he extended his hand; but he could feel the repressed breathing, the passionate air about her person.

"Remember," he said slowly, "whenever you need me--want me for anything--send a message, and I shall come at once. We will settle this thing together."

There was a sharp pressure on his hand, her thin fingers drawing him toward her involuntarily. Then his hand dropped, and he groped his way to the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

The cars were still whirring up and down Stoney Island Avenue when Sommers left the cottage, but he did not think to stop one. Instead, he walked on heedlessly, mechanically, toward the city. Frequently he stumbled and with difficulty saved himself from falling over the dislocated planks of the wooden walk. The June night was brilliant above with countless points of light. A gentle wind drew in shore from the lake, stirring the tall rushes in the adjacent swamps. Occasionally a bicyclist sped by, the light from his lantern wagging like a crazy firefly. The night was strangely still; the clamorous railroads were asleep. Far away to the south a solitary engine snorted at intervals, indicating the effort of some untrained hand to move the perishing freight. Chicago was a helpless giant to-night. When he came to the region of saloons, which were crowded with strikers, he turned away from the noise and the stench of bad beer, and struck into a grass-grown street in the direction of the lake. There he walked on, unmindful of time or destination, in the marvellous state of conscious dream.

The little space of one day separated him from that final meeting with Miss Hitchcock in the pleasant cottage above the lake. He had gone there, drawn by her, and he had gone away repelled, at strife with himself, with her. Nothing had happened since, and yet everything. As he had said to another woman, Mrs. Preston was a woman you remembered. And he had said that of a woman very different from the one he had seen and spoken with this night. That stricken, depressed creature of the night of the operation had faded away, and in her place was this passionate, large-hearted woman, who had spoken to him bravely as an equal in the dark room of the forbidding cottage. She had thrown a spell into his life this night, and his steps

were wandering on, purposeless, unconscious, with an exhilaration akin to some subtle opiate.

Her life was set in noisome places. Yet the poor mass of clay in the upper room that had burdened her so grievously--what was it, after all, but one of the ephemeral unrealities of life to be brushed aside? Decay, defeat, falling and groaning; disease, blind doctoring of disease; hunger and sorrow and sordid misery; the grime of living here in Chicago in the sharp discords of this nineteenth century; the brutal rich, the brutalized poor; the stupid good, the pedantic, the foolish,--all, all that made the waking world of his experience! It was like the smoke wreath above the lamping torch of the blast-furnace. It was the screen upon which glowed the rosy colors of the essential fire. The fire,--that was the one great thing,--the fire was life itself.

As he walked on in the tumultuous sensations of dream, the discords of living were swept away: the beautiful flesh that rotted; the noble human figures that it was well to have covered; the shame of woman's form, of man's corrupted carcass; the world that has, with its beauty and charm, side by side with the world that has not, with its grime and its nastiness. In the dream that he dreamed the difference between the woman who had adornment and the other sad one back there in the cottage was as nothing. The irritating paradox of life was reconciled: there was great reasonableness in things, and he had found it.

Men fought and gambled to-day in the factories, the shops, the railroads, as they fought in the dark ages, for the same ends--for sensual pleasures, gross love of power, barbaric show. They would fight on, glorifying their petty deeds of personal gain; but not always. The mystery of human defeat in the midst of success would be borne in upon them. The barbarians of trade would give way, as had the barbarians of feudal war. This heaving, moaning city, blessedly quiet tonight, would learn its lesson of futility. His eyes that had been long searching the dark were opened now, and he could bide his few years of life in peace. He had labored too long in the charnel house.

He forgave life for its disgusting manifestations, for the triviality of Lindsay, for the fleshy Porter with his finger in the stock market, for the ambitious Carson who would better have rested in his father's dugout in Iowa. They were a part of the travailing world, without which it could not fulfil its appointed destiny. It was childish to dislike them; with this God-given peace and understanding one could never be impatient, nor foam at the mouth. He could enter into himself and remove them from him, from her. Some day they two would quietly leave it all, depart to a place where as man and woman they could live life simply, sweetly. Yes, they had already departed, had faded away from the strife, and he was no longer in doubt about anything. He had ceased to think, and for the first moment in his life he was content to feel.

All emotion over life must come to be transmuted to this--an elemental state of conviction transforming the tawdry acts of life. There was but this one everlasting emotion which equalized everything, in which all manifestations of life had their proper place and proportion, according to

which man could work in joy. She and he were accidents of the story. They might go out into darkness to-night; there was eternal time and multitudes of others to take their place, to feel the ancient, purifying fire--to love and have peace.

CHAPTER XIX

The Fourth, of July had never before been kept in the like manner in Chicago. There was a row or two at Grand Crossing between the strikers and the railroad officials, several derailed cars and spiked switches, a row at Blue Island, and a bonfire in the stock yards. People were not travelling on this holiday, and the main streets were strangely silent and dull.

Sommers had found no one at the office in the Athenian Building. Lindsay had not been in since the strike began. Probably he would not appear until the disorderly city had settled down. Sommers had taken the clinic yesterday; to-day there was nothing for him to do except exercise his horse by a long ride in the blazing sunshine. Before he left the office a telegram came from Lake Forest, announcing that a postponed meeting of the board of managers of the summer sanitarium for poor babies would be put off indefinitely. Sommers knew what that meant--no appropriation for carrying on the work. At the last meeting the board of managers, who were women for the most part, had disagreed about the advisability of undertaking the work this season, when every one was feeling poor. Some women had been especially violent against supporting the charity in those districts where the strikers lived.

Miss Hitchcock, who was the secretary, and Sommers had got the heated members of the board to suppress their prejudices for the present, and vote a temporary subsidy. The telegram meant that under the present circumstances it would be hopeless to try to extract money from the usual sources. The sanitarium and creche would have to close within a week, and Sommers was left to arrange matters. After he had taken the necessary measures, he started on his ride. He had in mind to ride out of the city along the lines of railroad to the southwest to see whether the newspaper reports of the strike were justified or, as he suspected, grossly exaggerated. The newspapers, at first inclined to side with the Pullman men in their demand for arbitration, had suddenly turned about and were denouncing the strikers as anarchists. They were spreading broadcast throughout the country violent reports of incendiarism and riot.

Outside of the stations and the adjacent yards Sommers found little to see. A great stagnation had settled over the city this hot July day. Somewhat disappointed in his search for excitement he came back at nightfall to the cool stretches of the South Parks. He turned into the desolate Midway, where the unsightly wheel hung an inert, abortive mass in the violet dusk. His way home lay in the other direction, and his horse trotted languidly. He had determined to turn back, when suddenly a tongue of flame shot up a mile away toward the lake. This first long tongue ran out, followed by

another and another, and yet others that raced north and south and up into the night.

"The Fair Buildings!" a man on a bicycle shouted, and sped away.

The broad flames now illuminated the dome of the Administration Building and the facades of the Court of Honor. Sommers spurred his horse, while the loungers suddenly, with one cry, poured from the park along the rough paths of the Midway, streaming out across the prairie toward the fire. He plunged into the cool gulf under the Illinois Central tracks, then out into a glare of full day, before the wild, licking flames. The Court of Honor with its empty lagoon and broken bridges was more beautiful in the savage glow of the ravaging fire than ever on the gala nights of the exposition. The fantastic fury of the scene fascinated man and beast. The streaming lines of people raced on, and the horse snorted and plunged into the mass. Now the crackling as of paper burning in a brisk wind could be heard. There was a shout from the crowd. The flames had gained the Peristyle--that noble fantasy plucked from another, distant life and planted here above the barbaric glow of the lake in the lustrous atmosphere of Chicago. The horseman holding his restive steeds drove in a sea of flame. Through the empty arches the dark waters of the lake caught the reflection and sombrely relighted the scene.

Sommers almost knocked over a woman who was gazing in speechless absorption at the panorama of flame. In the light of the fire he could see that it was Mrs. Preston. She seemed entranced, fascinated like an animal by the savagery of the fierce fire.

"It is grand, beautiful," she murmured to Sommers, who had dismounted. Her large frame trembled with suppressed excitement, and her face glowed.

"Beauty eating beauty," Sommers replied sadly.

"They ought to go, just like this--shoot up into the sky in flame and die, expire in the last beauty."

The excitement of the scene loosened her tongue, gave her whole being expression, and made her words thrill. She took off her hat as if to free her body, even by that little, while she drank in the scene of leaping flames, the crescendo of light, the pathetic, noble emptiness between the fire-eaten pillars of the Peristyle.

"That is better than the Fair itself. It is fiercer--not mere play."

"Nature has taken a hand," Sommers said grimly, "and knocks about man's toys. Look!"

He pointed to the fairylike brightness of the island in the lagoon. The green leafage of the shrubbery was suffused in tender light; the waters reflected calmly all their drapery, but none of the savage desolation of the pyre in the Court of Honor. Beyond where the gracious pile of the Art Building stretched across the horizon the light clouds of smoke floated, a gray wreath in the night. The seething mass of flame began to abate, to

lessen almost imperceptibly, exhausting itself slowly with deep groans like the dying of a master passion.

Sommers suggested that they should circle the fire to the south, where they could see to better advantage the Peristyle now burning almost alone. They made the circuit slowly, Sommers leading his frightened animal among the refuse of the grounds. Mrs. Preston walked tranquilly by his side, her face still illuminated by the fading glow. The prairie lay in gloomy vastness, lighted but a little way by the waning fire. Along the avenue forms of men and women--mere mites--were running to and fro. The figures were those of gnomes toiling under a gloomy, uncertain firmament, or of animals furtively peeping out of the gloom of dusk in a mountain valley. Helpless shapes doomed to wander on the sandy strand of the earth!

The two found a place above the little inlet, directly across from the burning Peristyle. The fire had burned itself out now, and was dying with protests of reviving flame spurting here and there from the dark spots of the Court. The colossal figure rising from the lagoon in front of the Peristyle was still illuminated,--the light falling upon the gilded ball borne aloft,--solemnly presiding even in the ruins of the dream. And behind this colossal figure of triumph the noble horseman still reined in his frightened chargers. The velvet shadows of the night were falling once more over the distant Art Building, creeping over the little island, leaving the lagoons in murky silence. The throngs of curious people that had clustered about the western end of the fire were thinning out rapidly. A light night breeze from the empty spaces of prairie wafted the smoke wreaths northward toward the city of men whose plaything had been taken. At their feet a white column of staff plunged into the water, hissed and was silent. The passion was well-nigh spent.

Mrs. Preston sighed, like a child waking from a long reverie, a journey into another land.

"I never felt that the fierce things, the passions of life, could bring their happiness too. It seemed that happiness was something peaceful, like the fields at night or this lake when it is still. But that is but one kind. There are many others."

Her low voice, powerful in its restraint, took up the mood of the place.

"It dies," Sommers replied. "Burnt out!"

"No," she protested eagerly; "it remains in the heart, warming it in dull, cold times, and its great work comes after. It is not well to live without fierceness and passion."

The last lights from the fire flickered over her dark hair and sombre face. She was breathing heavily close by his side, throwing into the soft night a passionate warmth of feeling. It set his pulses beating in response.

"You are so insistent upon happiness," the man cried.

"Yes," she nodded. "To die out without this"--her hand pointed to the

blackened Court of Honor--"is to have lived unfulfilled. That is what I felt as a child in the rich fields of Wisconsin, as a girl at the chapel of the seminary."

And she began, as if to explain herself, to tell the story of the Wisconsin farm, sleeping heavily in the warm sun among the little lakes; of the crude fervor that went on under the trees of the quiet seminary hill; of the little chapel with its churchyard to the west, commanding the lakes, the woods, the rising bosom of hills. The story was disconnected, lapsing into mere exclamations, rising to animated description as one memory wakened another in the chain of human associations. Bovine, heavy, and animal, yet peaceful, was that picture of Wisconsin farm lands, saturated with a few strong impressions--the scents of field and of cattle, the fertile soil, and the broad-shouldered men, like Holstein cattle.

The excitement of the evening had set free the heart, and a torrent of feelings and memories surged up--disordered, turbulent, yet strangely unified by the simple nature, the few aims of the being that held them. The waters of the past had been gathering these past weeks, and now she found peace in their release, in the abandonment of herself through speech. The night crept on, cooler now and clouded, the heavens covered with filaments of gray lace; the horse tied near by stamped and whinnied. But the two sitting on the shore of the silent lake felt neither the passing of time nor the increasing cold of the night.

At the end of her tale the dominant note sounded once more: "Eight or wrong, happiness! for if we make happiness in the world, we know God. God lives upon our happiness."

This belief, which seemed laboriously gathered from the tears of tortured experience, had become an obsession. She was silent, brooding over it; but she herself was there, larger, less puzzling and negative than hitherto--an awakening force. The man lost his anchor of convention and traditional reasoning. He felt with her an excitement, a thirst for this evanescent treasure of joy.

"If you think that--if your whole story turns out that way--why did you--"
But he paused, unwilling to force her by a brutal proof of illogicality.

"How is he?" he asked at last, with effort.

Her head had drooped forward, but with this question she moved quickly, as if suddenly lashed.

"He is better, always better."

"My God!" the man groaned.

"But his mind is weaker--it wanders. Sometimes it is clear; then it is dreadful."

"You must not endure it!"

She laid her hand lightly upon his arm, warning him of the inutility of his protest.

"I think we must endure it now. If it had been done earlier, before--" she answered tranquilly; and added definitely, "it is too late now for any relief."

It was on his lips to cry out, "Why, why?" but as his eyes looked into her face and met her warm, wistful glance, he acquiesced in the fate she had ordained. He took her hand, the one that had touched him, and for the time he was content that things should be as they were. She was looking out into the ruined buildings, where embers hissed; at last she lowered her eyes, and whispered:

"It is very good even as it is, now."

But he rebelled, manlike, unwilling to be satisfied with mere feeling, desirous of retrieving the irretrievable. "Fool," he muttered, "a weak fool I have been! I have fastened this monstrous chain about you--about us."

"Let us not think of it---to-night," she murmured, her eyes burning into his face.

* * * * *

The first gray of the morning was revealing the outlines of the scrub oaks in the field as the two came back to the cottage. Sommers tied his horse to a fence-post at the end of the lane, and went in to warm himself from the chill of the night air. Mrs. Preston prepared some coffee, while he built a fire in the unused stove. Then she drew up her work-table before the fire and poured out the coffee into two thick cups. As there was no cream, she remarked with a little smile, "It is very late for after-dinner coffee!"

She moved and spoke with extreme caution, not to disturb Mrs. Ducharme and Preston, who became excitable when awakened suddenly. They drank their coffee in silence, and Sommers had stood up to leave.

"I shall come very soon," he was saying, and her face responded with a little smile that lit up its sober corners and hard lines. Suddenly it grew rigid and white, and her eyes stared beyond the doctor into the gloom of the room. Sommers turned to follow her gaze. The door moved a little. There was some one outside, peering in. Sommers strode across the floor and threw the door open. In the dim light of the dawn he could see Preston, half dressed. He had slunk back from the door.

"Come in," the doctor ordered sternly.

The man obeyed, shambling into the room with an air of bravado.

"Oh, it's you, is it, doctor?" he remarked quite naturally, with an air of self-possession. "Haven't seen you for a long time; you don't come this way often, at least to see me," he added insinuatingly, looking at his

wife. "I heard voices, and I thought I would come down to see what my wife was up to. Women always need a little watching, doctor, as you probably know."

He walked toward the table. As he stood there talking in a sneering voice, in full flesh, shaved and clean, he certainly did not look like a man stricken with paresis. Yet the doctor knew that this fitful mood of sanity was deceitful. The feeble brain had given a momentary spurt.

"Coffee?" Preston continued, as the others remained silent. "Haven't you got anything better than coffee? Where have you been, Mrs. Preston and Dr.--?"

Mrs. Preston tremblingly poured out some coffee and handed it to him. The act enraged the doctor. It seemed symbolical. Preston threw the cup to the floor.

"None of your rot," he shouted. "I bet you have had something more than coffee, you--" he glared at his wife, his limbs trembling and twitching as the nervous irritation gained on him. Sommers sprang forward.

"Go upstairs," he commanded sternly. "You are not fit to be here."

"Who are you to give me orders in my own house before my wife?" The man balanced himself against the table. "You get out of this and never come back. I am a gentleman, I want you to know, and I may be a drunkard and all that, but I am not going to have any man hanging--"

Sommers seized Preston by the collar of his shirt and dragged him to the stairs. The man fought and bit and cursed. A black slime of words fell from his lips, covering them all with its defilement. Finally the struggles subsided, and with one mighty effort the doctor threw him into the upper chamber and closed the door behind them. In a few moments he came downstairs, bolting the door carefully. When he entered the room, he saw Mrs. Preston staring at the door as if entranced, her face marble with horror.

"I gave him a hypodermic injection. He will sleep a few hours," Sommers muttered, throwing himself into a chair.

Mrs. Preston sat down at the table and folded her arms about her face. Her figure shook with her silent sobs.

CHAPTER XX

"When the men confront bayonets, you know, they'll give in quick enough. I have reason to believe that the President has already ordered United States troops to protect lives and property in Chicago. The general managers will get an injunction restraining Debs and his crew. When the courts take a

hand--"

"So it's to be made into a civil war, is it?" Sommers interposed sarcastically. "I saw that the bankrupt roads had appealed to the government for protection. Like spendthrift sons, they run to their guardian in time of trouble."

"Oh! you know this thing can't go on. It's a disgrace. I was called to go to Detroit on an important case; it would mean two thousand dollars to me,--but I can't get out of the city."

Dr. Lindsay was in an ill humor, having spent three early morning hours in driving into town from Lake Forest. Sommers listened to his growling, patiently if not respectfully, and when the eminent physician had finished, he spoke to him about a certain operation that was on the office docket for the following week.

"You haven't asked my opinion, doctor," he said, in conclusion; "but I have been thinking over the case. I was present at General Horr's examination, and have seen a good deal of the case these last days while you were out of town." Lindsay stared, but the young man plunged on. "So I have ventured to remonstrate. It would do no good, and it might be serious."

The day was so hot that any feeling sent beads of perspiration to the face. Sommers paused when Lindsay began to mop his head.

"I may say to start with," Lindsay answered, with an irascible air, as if he intended to take this time to finish the young man's case, "that I am in the habit of consulting my attending physicians, and not having them dictate to me--"

"Who is dictating?" Sommers asked bluntly. "That old man can't possibly get any good from an operation--"

"It will do him no harm?" Lindsay retorted, with an interrogation in his tone that made the younger surgeon stare. What he might have said when he realized the full meaning of Lindsay's remark was not clear in his own mind. At that moment, however, one of the women employed in the office knocked at the door. She had a telephone message.

"Somebody, I think it was Mrs. Prestess or Preton, or something--"

"Preston," suggested Sommers.

"That's it. The message was she was in trouble and wanted you as soon as possible. But some one is at the wire now."

Sommers hastened out without making excuses. When he returned, Dr. Lindsay had dried his face and was calmer. But his aspect was sufficiently ominous; he was both pompous and severe.

"Sit down, doctor, will you. I have a few words--some things I have been

meditating to say to you a long time, ever since our connection began, in fact."

Sommers did not sit down. He stood impatiently, twirling a stethoscope in his hand. He had passed the schoolboy age and was a bit overbearing himself.

"As a young man of good promise, well introduced, and vouched for by some of our best people, I have naturally looked for great things from you."

Sommers stopped the rotation of the stethoscope and squared about. His face was no longer flushed with irritation. Some swift purpose seemed to steady him. As Sommers made no reply to this exordium, Lindsay began again, in his diagnostic manner:

"But I have been disappointed. Not that you haven't done your work well enough, so far as I know. But you have more than a young man's self-assurance and self-assertion. I have noticed also a note of condescension, of criticism in your bearing to those about you. The critical attitude to society and individuals is a bad one for a successful practitioner of medicine to fall into. It is more than that--it is illiberal; it comes from a continued residence in a highly exotic society, in a narrow intellectual circle. Breadth of mind--"

Sommers made an impatient gesture. Every sentence led the florid practitioner farther and farther into the infinite. Another time the young surgeon would have derived a wicked satisfaction from driving the doctor around the field in his argument. To-day the world, life, was amove, and more important matters waited in the surcharged city. He must be gone. He said nothing, however, for another five minutes, waiting for some good opportunity to end the talk. But Lindsay had once lectured in a college; he did not easily finish his exposition. He vaguely sketched a social philosophy, and he preached the young specialist successful as he preached him on graduating days of the medical school. He was shrewd, eloquent, kind, and boresome. At last came the clause:

"If you are to continue your connection with this office--"

"I should like to talk that over with you some other day," Sommers interposed positively, "when I have more time. I am sorry that I shall have to leave at once." After a moment, he added, "And if you have any one in mind for my place, don't bother--"

Lindsay waved his hand.

"We never have to 'bother' about any member of our force."

"Oh! very well. I didn't want to leave you in a hole. Perhaps I was presumptuous to suppose I was of any importance in the office."

Sommers stepped briskly to the door, while Lindsay wheeled to his desk. Before he opened the door, he paused and called back pleasantly:

"But really I shouldn't operate on the General. Poor old man! And he hasn't much money--'the usual fee' would come hard on him."

Lindsay paid no attention to the remark. Sommers had passed from his world altogether; there would be a long, hard road for this young man in the practice of his profession in Chicago, if Dr. Lindsay, consulting surgeon at St. Isidore's, St. Martha's, the Home for Incurables, the Institute for Pulmonary Diseases, etc., could bring it about.

Sommers hastily rifled certain pigeonholes of his desk, tossing the letters into his little black bag, and seizing his hat hurried out. He stopped at the clerk's desk to leave a direction for forwarding his mail.

"Going away for a vacation?" Miss Clark queried.

"Yes, for a good long one," the young surgeon answered. As the door slammed behind him, the black-haired Miss Clark turned to the assistant stenographer with a yawn.

"He's got his travelling papers. I knew there was a fuss when I called him to the 'phone. I guess he wasn't tony enough for this office."

Sommers was now sinking down to the heated street, unmindful whether he was "tony" enough for the Athenian Building or not. Mrs. Ducharme had whispered over the telephone: "He's gone. Come quick. Mrs. Preston wants you bad."

For an instant he asked himself if he had made a mistake when he had given Preston the injection of morphine two days before. A glance at the little instrument reassured him. Perhaps the woman meant merely that he had got away again from the cottage. Why, then, such agitation over the creature's disappearance? But she wanted him "bad." He hurried into the torrid street out of the cool, marble-lined hall, like a factory hand dismissed from his job. It was the first break with the order of things he had grown into. But he had no time for regrets.

He crossed the deserted streets where the women usually shop, and turned into the strip of park bordered by the Illinois Central tracks. Possibly a train might be going out, under a heavy guard of deputy sheriffs, and in that case he would save much time in reaching Ninety-first Street. Exhilarated by his new freedom, he walked briskly, threading his way among the groups of idle workmen who had gathered in the park. As he skirted a large group, he recognized Dresser, who was shouting a declamatory speech. The men received it apathetically, and Dresser got off the bench on which he had stood and pushed his way through the crowd.

"Well," Sommers said, as Dresser came by him. "How does the good work move? You've got the courts down on you, and pretty soon there'll be the troops to settle with. There's only one finish when the workingmen are led by a man like Debs, and the capitalists have an association of general managers as staff. Besides, your people have put the issue badly before the public. The public understands now that it is a question of whether it, every one of them, shall do what he wants to or not. And the general public says it won't be held up in this pistol-in-your-face fashion. So Pullman and the

others get in behind the great public opinion, and there you are!"

"All that newspaper talk about riot and destruction of property is a mass of lies," Dresser exclaimed bitterly. "Which, way are you going? I will walk along with you."

As the two men proceeded in the direction of the big station, Dresser continued:

"I _know_ there isn't any violence from the strikers. It's the tough element and the railroads. They're burning cars themselves so as to rouse public opinion."

Sommers laughed.

"You don't believe it? I suppose you won't believe that the general managers are offering us, the leaders, money,--money down and a lot of it, to call the strike off."

"Yes, I'll believe that; but you won't get any one to believe the other thing. And you'd better take the money!"

"We'll have every laboring man in Chicago out on a strike in a week," Dresser added confidentially. "There hasn't been a car of beef shipped out of the stock yards, or of cattle shipped in. I guess when the country begins to feel hungry, it will know something's on here. The butchers haven't a three days' supply left for the city. We'll _starve_ 'em out!"

Sommers knew there was some truth in this. The huge slaughter-houses that fed a good part of the world were silent and empty, for lack of animal material. The stock yards had nothing to fill their bloody maw, while trains of cars of hogs and steers stood unswitched on the hundreds of sidings about the city. The world would shortly feel this stoppage of its Chicago beef and Armour pork, and the world would grumble and know for once that Chicago fed it. Inside the city there was talk of a famine. The condition was like that of the beleaguered city of the Middle Ages, threatened with starvation while wheat and cattle rotted outside its grasp. But the enemy was within its walls, either rioting up and down the iron roadways, or sipping its cooling draughts and fanning itself with the garish pages of the morning paper at some comfortable club. It was a war of injunctions and court decrees. But the passions were the same as those that set Paris flaming a century before, and it was a war with but one end: the well-fed, well-equipped legions must always win.

"They're too strong for you," Sommers said at last. "You will save a good many people from a lot of misery, if you will sell out now quietly, and prevent the shooting."

"That's the cynicism of _your_ crowd."

"You can't say my crowd any longer; they never were my crowd, I guess."

"Have you been fired?" Dresser asked, with childish interest.

"Not exactly, but I fancy Lindsay and I won't find each other's society healthy in the future."

"It isn't the same thing, though. Professional men like you can never get very far from the rich. It isn't like losing your bread and butter."

"Pretty much that, at present. And I think I shall get some distance from the rich--perhaps go out farther west into some small town."

Dresser did not reply; he kept on with Sommers, as if to express his sympathy over a misfortune. The court that led to the Park Row station was full of people. Men wearing white ribbons were thickly sprinkled in the crowd. The badge fluttered even from the broad breasts of the few apathetic policemen.

The crowd was kept off the tracks and the station premises by an iron fence, defended by a few railway police and cowed deputy sheriffs. Every now and then, however, a man climbed the ugly fence and dropped down on the other side. Then he ran for the shelter of the long lines of cars standing on the siding. A crew of men recruited from the office force of the railroad was trying to make up a train. The rabble that had gained entrance to the yards were blocking their movements by throwing switches at the critical moment. As Sommers came up to the fence, the switching engine had been thrown into the wrong siding, and had bunted up at full speed against a milk car, sending the latter down the siding to the main track. It took the switch at a sharp pace, was derailed, and blocked the track. The crowd in the court gave a shout of delight. The switching engine had to be abandoned.

At this moment Sommers was jostled against a stylishly dressed woman, who was trying to work her way through the seething mass that swayed up and down the narrow court. He turned to apologize, and was amazed to see that the young woman was Louise Hitchcock. She was frightened, but keeping her head she was doing her best to gain the vestibule of a neighboring store. She recognized Sommers and smiled in joyful relief. Then her glance passed over Sommers to Dresser, who was sullenly standing with his hands in his pockets, and ended in a polite stare, as if to say, 'Well, is that a specimen of the people you prefer to my friends?'

"You've got one of your crowd on your hands," Dresser muttered, and edged off into the mob.

"What are you doing here?" Sommers demanded, rather impatiently.

"I drove down to meet papa. He was to come by the Michigan Central, and Uncle Brome telephoned that the railroad people said the train would get through. But he didn't come. I waited and waited, and at last tried to get into the station to find out what had happened. I couldn't get through."

Sommers had edged her into a protected corner formed by a large telephone post. The jostling people stared impudently at the prettily dressed young woman. To their eyes she betrayed herself at a glance as one of the

privileged, who used the banned Pullman cars.

"Whar's your kerridge?" a woman called out over Sommers's shoulder. A man pushed him rudely into his companion.

"Why don't you take your private kyar?"

"The road is good enough for _me_!"

"Come," Sommers shouted in her ear, "we must get out of this at once. Take my arm,--no, follow me,--that will attract less attention."

The girl was quite at ease, now that this welcome friend had appeared opportunely. Another prolonged shout, almost a howl of derision, went up by the fence at some new trick played upon the frantic railroad officials.

"What people!" the girl exclaimed scornfully. "Where are the police?"

"Don't speak so loud," Sommers answered impatiently, "if you wish to escape insult. There the police are, over there by the park. They don't seem especially interested."

The girl closed her lips tightly and followed Sommers. It was no easy task to penetrate the hot, sweating mob that was packing into the court, and bearing down toward the tracks where the fun was going on. Sommers made three feet, then lost two. The crowd seemed especially anxious to keep them back, and Miss Hitchcock was hustled and pushed roughly hither and thither until she grasped Sommers's coat with trembling hands. A fleshy man, with a dirty two weeks' beard on his tanned face, shoved Sommers back with a brutal laugh. Sommers pushed him off. In a moment fists were up, the young doctor's hat was knocked off, and some one threw a stone that he received on his cheek.

Sommers turned, grasped the girl with one arm, and threw himself and her upon the more yielding corner of the press. Then he dragged his companion for a few steps until the jam slackened at the open door of a saloon. Into this the two were pushed by the eddying mob, and escaped. For a moment they stood against the bar that protected the window. The saloon was full of men, foul with tobacco smoke, and the floor was filthy. Flies sluggishly buzzed about the pools of beer on the bar counter. The men were talking excitedly; a few thin, ragged hangers-on were looting the free-lunch dishes surreptitiously. Miss Hitchcock's face expressed her disgust, but she said nothing. She had learned her lesson.

"Wait here," Sommers ordered, "while I find out whether we can get out of this by a back door."

He spoke to the barkeeper, who lethargically jerked a thumb over his shoulder. They elbowed their way across the room, Miss Hitchcock rather ostentatiously drawing up her skirts and threading her way among the pools of the dirty floor. The occupants of the bar-room, however, gave the strangers only slight attention. The heavy atmosphere of smoke and beer, heated to the boiling point by the afternoon sun, seemed to have soddened

their senses. Behind the bar the two found a passage to the alley in the rear, which led by a cross alley into a deserted street. Finally they emerged on the placid boulevard.

"Your face is bleeding!" Miss Hitchcock exclaimed. "Are you hurt?"

"No," Sommers answered, mopping his brow and settling his collar. "They were good enough to spare the eye."

"Brutes!"

"I wouldn't say that," her companion interrupted sharply. "We are all brutes each in our way," he added quietly.

The girl's face reddened, and she dropped his arm, which was no longer necessary for protection. She raised her crushed and soiled skirt, and looked at it ruefully.

"I wonder what has become of poor papa!" she exclaimed. "This strike has caused him so much worry. I came in from Lake Forest to open the house for him and stay with him until the trains begin to run again."

She seemed to expect sympathy for the disagreeable circumstances that persisted in upsetting the Hitchcock plans. But Sommers paid no attention to this social demand, and they walked on briskly. Finally Miss Hitchcock said coldly:

"I can go home alone, now, if you have anything to do. Of course I should like to have you come home and rest after this--"

"I shall have to return to my room for a hat," Sommers replied, in a matter-of-fact way. "I will leave you at your house."

Miss Hitchcock insensibly drew herself up and walked more quickly. The boulevard, usually gay with carriages in the late afternoon, was absolutely deserted except for an occasional shop-boy on a bicycle. Sommers, hatless, with a torn coat, walking beside a somewhat bedraggled young woman, could arouse no comment from the darkened windows of the large houses. As they passed Twenty-second Street, Miss Hitchcock slackened her pace and spoke again.

"You don't think they are right, surely?"

"No," the doctor replied absent-mindedly. He was thinking how he had been delayed from going to Mrs. Preston's, and how strange was this promenade down the fashionable boulevard where he had so often walked with Miss Hitchcock on bright Sundays, bowing at every step to the gayly dressed groups of acquaintances. He was taking the stroll for the last time, something told him, on this hot, stifling July afternoon, between the rows of deserted houses. In twenty-four hours he should be a part of them in all practical ways--a part of the struggling mob, that lived from day to day, not knowing when the bread would give out, with no privileges, no pleasant vacations, no agreeable houses to frequent, no dinner parties at

the close of a busy day. He was not sorry for the change, so far as he had thought of it. At least he should escape the feeling of irritation, of criticism, which Lindsay so much deplored, that had been growing ever since he had left hospital work. The body social was diseased, and he could not make any satisfactory diagnosis of the evil; but at least he should feel better to have done with the privileged assertive classes, to have taken up his part with the less Philistine, more pitiably blind mob.

With the absolute character of his nature and the finality of youth, he saw in a very decisive manner the plunge he was about to make. He was to leave one life and enter another, just as much as if he should leave Chicago and move to Calcutta--more so, indeed. He was to leave one set of people, and all their ways, and start with life on the simplest, crudest base. He should not call on his Chicago friends, who for the most part belonged to one set, and after a word from Lindsay they would cease to bother him. He would be out of place among the successful, and they would realize it as well as he. But he should be sorry to lose sight of certain parts of this life,--of this girl, for example, whom he had liked so much from the very first, who had been so good to him, who was so sincere and honest and personally attractive.

Yet it was strange, the change in his feelings toward her brought about in the few days that had elapsed since they had parted at Lake Forest. It was so obvious today that they could never have come together. While he had tried to do the things that she approved, he had been hot and restless, and had never, for one moment, had the calm certainty, the exquisite fulness of feeling that he had now--that the other woman had given him without a single outspoken word.

If things had gone differently these past months,--no, from his birth and from hers, too,--if every circumstance of society had not conspired to put them apart, who knows! They might have solved a riddle or two together and been happy. But it was all foolish speculation now, and it was well that their differences should be emphasized at this last chance meeting; that she should be hostile to him. He summed the matter up thus, and, as if answering her last remark, said:

"_They_, my dear Miss Hitchcock, are wrong, and you are wrong, if we can use pronouns so loosely. But I have come to feel that I had rather be wrong with them than wrong with you. From to-day, when you speak of 'them,' you can include me."

And to correct any vagueness in his declaration, he added,--

"I have left Lindsay's shop, and shall never go back."

He could feel that she caught her breath, but she said nothing.

"I should never be successful in that way, though it wasn't for that reason that I left."

"Do you think you can do more for people by putting yourself--away, holding off--"

Her voice sank.

"That is a subterfuge," Sommers answered hotly, "fit only for clergymen and beggars for charities. I am not sure, anyway, that I want 'to do for' people. I think no fine theories about social service and all that settlement stuff. I want to be a man, and have a man's right to start with the crowd at the scratch, not given a handicap. There are too many handicaps in the crowd I have seen!"

Miss Hitchcock pressed her lips together, as if to restrain a hot reply. She had grown white from the fatigue and excitement and heat. They were almost at her father's house, walking along the steaming asphalt of the quiet avenue. A few old trees had been allowed to remain on these blocks, and they drooped over the street, giving a pleasant shade to the broad houses and the little patches of sward. Just around the corner were some rickety wooden tenements, and a street so wretchedly paved that in the great holes where the blocks had rotted out stood pools of filthy, rankly smelling water.

"I have merely decided to move around the corner," the young man remarked grimly.

Miss Hitchcock's lips trembled. She walked more slowly, and she tried to say something, to make some ill-defined appeal. As she had almost found the words, a carriage approached the Hitchcock house and drew up. Out of it Colonel Hitchcock stepped heavily. His silk hat was crushed, and his clothes were covered with dust.

"Papa!" his daughter exclaimed, running forward anxiously. "What has happened? Where have you been? Are you hurt?"

"No, yes, I guess not," the old man laughed good-naturedly. "Howdy do, doctor! They stopped the train out by Grand Crossing, and some fellows began firing stones. It was pretty lively for a time. I thought you and your mother would worry, so I got out of it the best way I could and came in on the street cars."

"Poor papa!" the girl exclaimed, seizing his arm. She glanced at Sommers defiantly. Here was her argument. Sommers looked on coolly, not accepting the challenge.

"Won't you come in, doctor?" Colonel Hitchcock asked. "Do come in and rest," his daughter added.

But the young doctor shook his head.

"I think I will go home and brush up--around the corner," he added with slight irony.

The girl turned to her father and took his arm, and they slowly walked up the path to the big darkened house.

CHAPTER XXI

Sommers did not go to his rooms, however. He could delay no longer reaching Mrs. Preston. From the quiet decorous boulevard, with its clean asphalt pavement and pleasant trees, he turned at once into the dirty cross street. The oasis of the prosperous in the expanse of cheap houses and tawdry flat-buildings was so small! It was easy, indeed, to step at least physically from the one world to the other.

At a little shop near the cable line he bought a hat and tie, and bathed his face. Then he took the cable car, which connected with lines of electric cars that radiated far out into the distant prairie. Along the interminable avenue the cable train slowly jerked its way, grinding, jarring, lurching, grating, shrieking--an infernal public chariot. Sommers wondered what influence years of using this hideous machine would have upon the nerves of the people. This car-load seemed quiescent and dull enough--with the languor of unexpectant animals, who were accustomed to being hauled mile by mile through the dirty avenues of life. His attention was caught by the ever repeated phenomena of the squalid street. Block after block, mile after mile, it was the same thing. No other city on the globe could present quite this combination of tawdriness, slackness, dirt, vulgarity, which was Cottage Grove Avenue. India, the Spanish-American countries, might show something fouler as far as mere filth, but nothing so incomparably mean and long. The brick blocks, of many shades of grimy red and fawn color, thin as paper, cheap as dishonest contractor and bad labor could make them, were bulging and lopping at every angle. Built by the half mile for a day's smartness, they were going to pieces rapidly. Here was no uniformity of cheapness, however, for every now and then little squat cottages with mouldy earth plots broke the line of more pretentious ugliness. The saloons, the shops, the sidewalks, were coated with soot and ancient grime. From the cross streets savage gusts of the fierce west wind dashed down the avenue and swirled the accumulated refuse into the car, choking the passengers, and covering every object with a cloud of filth. Once and again the car jolted across intersecting boulevards that presented some relief in the way of green grass and large, heavy-fronted houses. Except for these strips of parklike avenues, where the rich lived,--pieced into the cheaper stuff of the city, as it were,--all was alike, flat-building and house and store and wooden shanty,--a city of booths, of extemporized shifts.

Sommers picked up a newspaper that some passenger had thrown aside and endeavored to distract his mind from the forlorn sight. The sheets were gritty to the touch, and left a smutch upon the fingers. His clothes were sifted over with dust and fine particles of manure. The seat grated beneath his legs. The great headlines in the newspaper announced that the troops were arriving. Columns of childish, reportorial prattle followed, describing the martial bearing of the officers, the fierceness of the "bronzed Indian fighters." The city was under martial law. He read also the bickering telegrams exchanged between the state authorities and the

federal government, and interviews with leading citizens, praising the much-vilified President for his firm act in upholding law and order. The general managers were clever fellows! Sommers threw the grimy sheet aside. It was right, this firm assertion of the law; but in what a cause, for what people!

He turned to the street once more.

This block, through which the car was grinding its way, had a freakish individuality in sidewalks. Each builder had had his own idea of what the proper street level should be, and had laid his sidewalk accordingly. There were at least six different levels in this one block. The same blunt expression of wilful individuality was evident in every line of every building. It was the apotheosis of democratic independence. This was not a squalid district, nor a tough one. Goose Island, the stock yards, the Bohemian district, the lumber yards, the factories,--all the aspects of the city monstrous by right, were miles away. But Halsted Street, with its picturesque mutations of poverty and its foreign air, was infinitely worthier than this. Sommers shuddered to think how many miles of Cottage Grove Avenue and its like Chicago contained,--not vicious, not squalid, merely desolate and unforgivably vulgar. If it were properly paved and cleaned, it would be bearable. But the selfish rich and the ignorant poor make bad housekeepers.

On, on they jolted and jarred, dropping along the cross streets a cargo of indifferent souls, and taking in a new cargo of white-ribboned men, who talked in loud voices or spat ruminatively over the floors. Sommers sank back listless. It was well that he had taken this way of entering the new life. To have galloped south through the cool parks would have been absurd, like playing at charity. This was the life of the people,--not the miserably poor, but the mean and small, the mass in this, our prosperous country. Through the dirty, common avenues, without one touch of beauty, they were destined to travel all their days, and he with them.

He shut his eyes and thought of the woman to whom he was journeying. Hers was the face he had seen in imagination in all his moods of revolt, of disgust with the privileged. She was the figure, paramount, of those who had soul enough to thirst for beauty, happiness, life, and to whom they were denied. The machine of society whirled some aloft--the woman he had just left--but it dragged her down. It was the machine that maddened him. He was taking himself away from those who governed the machine, who ran it and oiled it, and turned it to their own pleasures. He had chosen to be of the multitude whom the machine ground. The brutal axioms of the economists urged men to climb, to dominate, and held out as the noblest ideal of the great commonwealth the right of every man to triumph over his brother. If the world could not be run on any less brutal plan than this creed of _success, success_, then let there be anarchy--anything.

With a final groan the cable train came to a halt, and the hypnotic sleep of the pilgrimage through Cottage Grove Avenue ended. Sommers started up--alert, anxious, eager to see _her_ once more, the glow of enchantment, of love renewed in his soul. Yet at the very end of his journey he was fearful for the first time. How could they meet, after the

foul scene with Preston?

Mrs. Ducharme opened the cottage door, and recognizing the young doctor in the twilight sighed with relief. Her placid countenance was ruffled.

"Where is Mrs. Preston?" he demanded hastily.

"She's gone out for a moment. I made her take a turn."

"How is Mr. Preston?"

Mrs. Ducharme's face assumed a frightened expression. She spoke in low tones, as if the patient might still overhear.

"He's rested for good, poor man! He won't want no more liquor this life, I guess." Then more solemnly she ended, "He's at peace."

Without further words Sommers went upstairs. The outer door was unbarred, and the door into the room open. Preston was lying, clean and quiet, in a clean bed with a fresh counterpane. His face was turned to one side, as if he were sleeping. His eyes were suspiciously reddened under the lids, and his cheeks had rather more bloat than the doctor remembered. He was dead, sure enough, at peace at last, and the special cause for the ending was of little importance. Sommers proceeded to make an examination, however; he would have to sign a certificate for the health officers. As he bent over the inert form, he had a feeling of commiseration rather than of relief. Worthless clay that the man was, it seemed petty now to have been so disturbed over his living on, for such satisfactions as his poor fragment of life gave him. Like the insignificant insect which preyed on its own petty world, he had, maybe, his rights to his prey. At all events, now that he had ceased to trouble, it was foolish to have any feeling of disgust, of reproach, of hatred. God and life had made him so, as God and life had made the mighty....

Suddenly the doctor's eye detected something that arrested his attention, and he proceeded to look at the dead man more carefully. Then he started back and called out to the woman below. When she came panting up the stairs, he asked sternly:

"Was he given anything?"

"What?" she asked, retreating from the room.

"Any medicine?" the doctor pursued, eying her sharply.

"He was took bad last night, and Mrs. Preston went to see what was the matter. She might have given him somethin' to rest him. I dunno."

The doctor went back to the dead man and examined him again; the woman crawled away. Again Sommers abandoned his task, nervously twitching the bedclothes over the cold form. He went to the window and opened it, and stood breathing the night air. There was another step upon the stair, and Sommers turned. It was Mrs. Preston. She started on seeing the doctor, and

he noticed how pale her face appeared, even in the darkening room. He was also conscious of the start she had given.

"I have looked for you so long!" she exclaimed eagerly, hastening toward him, and then stopping in embarrassment.

"I was detained, hindered in every possible way," the doctor replied. His tone was chilling, preoccupied.

"He was ill last night, but I thought nothing of it. When I returned from an errand this noon, he had fallen into a kind of stupor--last night he was so excited--and I was alarmed. I had Mrs. Ducharme telephone for you then. He did not come out of his stupor," she added in a low tone.

Sommers stepped back to the bedside. "Did you--" he began involuntarily, but he left his sentence unfinished, and turned away again.

"I have completed my examination," he said at last. "Let us go downstairs."

When they had reached the sitting room, Mrs. Preston lighted a lamp and placed it on the table beside the doctor. The strong light increased the pallor of her face. Sommers noticed that the eyes were sunken and had black circles. His glance rested on her hands, as she leaned with folded arms on the table. They were white and wan like the face. The blood seemed to have left her body.

Sommers raised his eyes and looked at her face. She returned his glance for a moment, then flushes of color spread over her face and died down, and she dropped her face. He laid his hand softly upon hers, and spoke her name for the first time, "Alves." A tear dropped on his hand beneath the lamp, then another and another. He started up from his seat and strode to the window, keeping his back turned to the quiescent woman. It was terrible! He knew that he was a fool, but none the less something awesome, cruel, forbidding, tainted the atmosphere.

At last he said in a dull voice:

"Mrs. Preston, will you get me pen and ink. I must fill out the usual certificate, stating the disease that caused death," he added meaningfully, wheeling about.

She started, stung by his formal words, and fetched writing materials. As he wrote out the certificate, she went into the next room. When she returned, Sommers got up and crossed toward her, impelled by an irresistible desire _to know_.

"I have said that death was due to congestion of the brain, indirectly resulting from illness and operation for the removal of a bullet."

Mrs. Preston stared at him, her face curiously blank, as though to say, 'Why are you so cruel?' He offered her the wisp of paper.

"Put it there!" she cried, motioning to the mantelpiece.

The doctor placed the certificate on the mantel, and then returned to his chair by the lamp.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked abruptly.

"I have done--the necessary things--he will be buried to-morrow afternoon."

Her words came with an effort, as if every voluntary act caused her pain.

"I am sorry that I did not come earlier, to save you these tasks," the doctor answered more gently. "Isn't there some one you would like to send for, some relative or friend?"

She shook her head, looking at him with beseeching eyes. Then they were silent, until the silence was too much to be borne. Sommers rose hastily to take leave.

"I can do nothing more to-night," he said hastily. "I shall come to-morrow."

She made no reply and did not rise. Outside, the place seemed so deadly still! The house was dark; the neighboring avenue, unusually deserted. Sommers shivered. After he had reached the end of the lane, he turned back, and walked swiftly to the cottage. At the corner he looked into the room where they had been sitting. She was still in the same place where he had left her, by the lamp, her white, almost stern face, with its large, severe lines, staring fiercely into space. It made him uneasy, this long, tense look that betrayed a mind fixed upon one idea, and that idea! He crept away into the lane to flee from it, and walked swiftly down the cross street toward the lake.

CHAPTER XXII

"It could not be!" he muttered, as he stumbled on in the dark. He was oversuspicious. But how else could the facts be explained? Such deaths, he knew, did not occur to men in Preston's condition,--calm, easy deaths, without the agony of convulsion. _No_, it _must be_. Science was stronger than desire, than character, than human imagination. To disbelieve his scientific knowledge would be to deny the axioms of life.

And why should it not be? Was it not what he had reproached himself for not doing, and reproached his medical brethren as cowards for not daring to do in so many cases? The horror of it, the uncanniness of it, thus stopping the human animal's course as one would stop an ill-regulated watch, had never appealed to him before. "Prejudice!" he cried aloud. His involuntary drawing back was but an unconscious result of the false training of centuries. As a doctor, familiar with death, cherishing no illusions about the value of the human body, he should not act like a nervous woman, and

run away! How brutal he had been to her!

His mind passed on, traversing vast areas of speculation by a kind of cerebral shorthand. What would be the result upon humanity if all doctors took this liberty of decision? Where could you draw the distinction between murder and medicine? Was science advanced enough as yet to say any certain thing about the human body and mind? There were always mysterious exceptions which might well make any doctor doubtful of drastic measures. And the value of human life, so cheap here in this thirsty million of souls, cheap in the hospitals; but really, essentially, at the bottom of things, who knew how cheap it was?

Thus for an hour or more his mind was let loose among the tenebra of life, while his feet pushed on mechanically over the dusty roads that skirted the lake. He had nowhere to go, now that he had broken with the routine of life, and he gave himself up to the unaccustomed debauch of willless thinking. He was conscious at length of traversing the vacant waste where the service-buildings of the Fair had stood. Beyond were the shattered walls of the little convent, wrapped in the soft summer night. There they had sat together and watched the fire die out, while she told her story, and he listened in love.

The real thing--was the woman. This thought stung him like a reproach of cowardice. He had forgotten her! And she was but the instrument in the deed, for he had taught her that this care of a worthless life was sentimental, hysterical. He had urged her to put it away in some easy fashion, to hide it at least, in some sort of an asylum. That she had steadfastly refused to do. Better death outright, she had said. And that which he had feared to undertake, she had done, fearlessly. He had recoiled; it made him tremble to think of her in that act. What cowardice! These were the consequences of his teaching, of his belief.

What had made her take this resolution so suddenly? There was time, all the time in the world, and having once neglected the thing at the very start, it was curious that she should now, at this late date, make her desperate resolve. Preston had not been worse, more difficult to handle. In fact, when the two women had grown used to his case, the management had been simple enough. He had thought she was inured to the disgust and the horror--placid almost, and taking the thing like one accustomed to pain. What was the cause of her revolt from her burden? Those filthy words the night they had come back late, when the fellow had stolen downstairs and spied upon them at their coffee. Had the shame of it before him stung her past enduring? Had it eaten into her mind and inflamed her?

But his feverish imagination was not content with this illumination of the facts. Something more lay behind it all. He sat down beside a prostrate column to penetrate the gloom. As he gazed before him into the dark heavens, the blast furnace winked like an evil eye, then silently belched flame and smoke, then relapsed into its seething self. The monster's breath illumined the dusky sky for a few moments. Blackness then fell over all for two minutes, and again the beast reappeared. Far away to the west came through the night a faint roar, like the raving of men. There was a line of light against the horizon: the mob was burning freight cars. Soon the

bonfire died down. The cries sounded more and more faintly, and more distinctly came the sharp reports of revolvers or military rifles. The law had taken a hand in the game.

It was a night like this when the first glow of joy had suffused his life; and then had come that night, that wonderful night, which began, in the lurid fire, and ended foully with Preston's words. Here was the key: she too loved, as he had, and this feeling which had drawn them together from the very moment when he had looked from the helpless form on the hospital chair to her had grown, surging up in her heart as in his--until, until she had taken this last stern step, and had--

He had begun to walk once more, heading south, retracing his steps by the most direct line. To leave her thus, with all the horror; thus when she had reached out to him--oh, the shame, the brutality of it! He hastened his steps almost to a run. Perhaps it was already too late; his cold, hard manner had killed her love, crushed her, and she had gone on to the next step. The night was cold now, but his hands were damp with a feverish sweat. How blind, not to have read at once, as she would have done, the whole deed! What she had done, she had done for him, for both, and he had left her to carry the full burden alone. Like a boy, he had wavered at the sight of what she had accomplished so swiftly, so competently, for their sake. To love shamefully, that was not in her, and she had put the cause of shame away. As he hurried on southwards, his thoughts flew out on this new track. She had made the way clear; he must go to her, take her, accept her acts with her love. They were one now.

It was late, past midnight, when he reached the long cross street that led to the lane of the cottage, and the buzz of the passing cars no longer disturbed the hoarse chorus of frogs. Sommers crept up the lane stealthily to the dark cottage, afraid for what he might find, chilled by the forbidding aspect of the place. Instead of entering the door, he paused by the open window and peered in. Within the gloom of the room he could make out her bent figure, her head fallen forward over her arms. She was sitting where he had left her, but the spell of her tense gaze had broken. She had laid her head upon the table to weep, and had not raised it all these hours. The night wind soughed into the room through the open window, drifting a piece of paper about the floor, poking into the gloom of the interior beyond.

Sommers noiselessly pushed open the door and entered the room. The bent figure did not heed the tread of his steps. He stood over her, knelt down, and wrapped her in his arms.

"Alves!" he whispered.

She roused herself as from a dream and turned her face to his, wonderingly.

"Alves," he stammered, reading eagerly the sombre lines of her face, "I have come back--for always."

Then she spoke, and her voice had a mechanical ring, as if for a long time it had not been used.

"But you left me--why did you come back?"

"You know," he answered, his feverish face close to her white forehead.

"You know!" The face was so cold, so large and sombre, that it seemed to chill his fever.

"I have come to share--to have you, because I love, because we loved--from the first, all through."

At his slow, trembling words, the woman's face filled with the warm blood of returning life. Her flesh paled and flushed, and her eyes lit slowly with passion; her arms that had rested limply on the table took life once more and grasped him. The feeling sweeping into her lifeless body thrilled him like fire. She was another woman--he had never known her until this communicating clasp.

"You love me?" she asked, with a moan of inarticulate abandonment.

"Love you, love you, love you, Alves," he repeated in savage iteration.

"Now,--" he kissed her lips. They were no longer cold. "You are mine, mine, do you understand? Nothing shall touch you. _That_ has passed!"

For a moment she looked at him in question. But instantly her face smiled in content, and she flashed back his passion. She kissed him, drawing him down closer and closer into her warm self.

With this long kiss a new love put forth its strength, not the pale beatitude of his dream, with its sweet wistfulness, its shy desires. That was large and vague and insubstantial, permeating like an odor the humdrum purlieu of the day. This was savage, triumphant, that leaped like flame from his heart to his mouth, that burned blood-red on the black night. It swept away hesitation, a sick man's nicety and doubts, all the prejudices of all times! This was love, unchained, that came like waters from the mountains to quench the thirst of blazing deserts: parched, dry, in dust; now slaked and yet ever thirsty.

"How could it have been otherwise," he murmured, more to himself than to her.

"What?" she asked, startled, withdrawing herself.

"Don't think, don't think!" he exclaimed, in fear of the ebbing of the waters.

Her doubts were calmed, and she yielded to his insistence, slipping into his arms with an unintelligible cry, the satisfied note of desire. For all the waiting of the empty years came this rich payment--love that satisfied, that could never be satisfied.

* * * * *

In the first light of the morning the Ducharme woman, creeping from her

room in the rear, caught sight of them. Mrs. Preston's head was lying on the doctor's arm, while he knelt beside the table, watching her pale face in its undisturbed sleep. At the footfall, he roused her gently. Mrs. Ducharme hastily drew back. She, too, did not seem to have passed a peaceful night. Her flabby fat face was sickly white, and she trembled as she opened the side door to the hot morning sun. She threw some small thing into the waste by the door; then looking around to see that she was not observed, she hurled with all her strength a long bottle toward the swamp across the fence. The bottle fell short of the swamp, but it sank among the reeds and the fleurs-de-lys of the margin. Then the woman closed the door softly.

CHAPTER XXIII

That morning Sommers returned to the city. Mrs. Preston had asked him to notify Dr. Leonard and Miss M'Gann, the only friends she had in Chicago, that the funeral would take place late in the afternoon. In the elevator of the Athenian Building, Sommers met Dr. Lindsay with Dr. Rupert, the oldest member of the office staff. The two men bowed and edged their backs toward Sommers. He was already being forgotten. When the elevator cage discharged its load on the top floor, Rupert, who was popularly held to be a genial man, lingered behind his colleague, and tried to say something to the young doctor.

"Private practice?" he asked sympathetically, "or will you try hospital work again?"

"I haven't thought anything about it," Sommers replied truthfully.

Rupert, a man of useful, mediocre ability, eyed the younger man with curiosity, thinking that doubtless he had private means; that it was a pity he and Lindsay had fallen out, for he was a good fellow and clever.

"Well--glad to see you. Drop in occasionally--if you stay in Chicago."

The last phrase stung Sommers. It seemed to take for granted that there could be nothing professionally to keep him in Chicago after the fiasco of his introduction. He would have to learn how much a man's future depended upon the opinion of men whose opinion he despised.

Dr. Leonard came out of his den, where he was filling a tooth. His spectacles were pushed up over his shaggy brows, and little particles of gold and of ground bone clung untidily to the folds of his crumpled linen jacket. His patients did not belong to the class that is exacting about small things.

"So the feller has taken himself off for good," he observed, after listening to the doctor's brief statement. "That's first-rate, couldn't be better for Alves."

Sommers started at the familiar use of the first name. "She's never had a show. Preston wasn't much except as a looker. The first time she came in here I could see how things stood. But you couldn't budge her from him--jest like a woman--she loved him."

Sommers must have shown some irritation, for Dr. Leonard, watching him closely, repeated:

"Yes! she loved _him_, would have him back, though I argued with her against it. Well, I'm glad it's settled up now so clever. Of course I'll be out to the funeral. Alves ain't got any folks near connected, and Preston--well, it's no use harboring hard thoughts about dead folks. They'll have to settle with some one else, won't they?"

From the Athenian Building Sommers went to an ambitious boarding-house that called itself a hotel, where Miss M'Gann boarded. A dirty negro boy opened the door, and with his duster indicated the reception room. Miss M'Gann came down, wearing a costume of early morning relaxation. She listened to the news with the usual feminine feeling for decorum, compounded of curiosity, conventional respect for the dead, and speculation for the future.

"Poor Mrs. Preston! I'll go right down and see her. I've been thinking for a week that I'd take a run on my bike down that way. But things have been so queer, you know, that I didn't feel--you understand?"

The doctor nodded and rose to go. Miss M'Gann's note was more jarring than the kindly old dentist's.

"Oh, you aren't going!" Miss M'Gann protested regretfully. "I want to ask so many questions. I am _so_ glad to see you. I feel that I know you _very_ well. Mr. Dresser, your intimate friend, has spoken to me about you. Such an interesting man, a little erratic, like a genius, you know."

As Sommers remained stiffly mute, Miss M'Gann's remarks died away.

"There is nothing more to tell," he said, getting up. "Of course Mrs. Preston has had a very serious strain, and I,--her friends,--must see that she has rest."

"Sure," Miss M'Gann broke in warmly; "now a lot of us girls are going up to Plum Lake, Michigan, for four weeks. It would be good for her to be with a nice party--"

"We will see," the doctor said coldly.

Later Miss M'Gann said to one of her friends: "Talkin' to him is like rubbing noses with an iceberg. He's one of your regular freeze-you-up, top-notch eastern swells."

"Perhaps it would be well if Mrs. Preston came here to stay with you for a few days. I will ask her," Sommers suggested, as he shook hands.

"Certainly," Miss M'Gann replied warmly, "first-class house, good society, reasonable rates, and all that."

But the doctor was bowing himself out.

'He's taking some interest in the fair widow's welfare,' Miss M'Gann commented, as she watched him from behind the hall-door curtain. 'I hope he won't get the d. t.'s like number one, and live off her. Think she'd have had warning to wait a reasonable time.'

Meantime Sommers was musing over the "breezy" and "lively" Miss M'Gann, who, he judged, contributed much to the gayety of the Keystone Hotel. He had been hasty in suggesting that Alves might find a refuge in the Keystone. It would be for a few days, however, for he planned--he was rather vague about what he had planned. He wondered if there would be much of Miss M'Gann in the future, their future, and he longed to get away, to take Alves and fly.

He was tired; the sun was relentless. But he must make arrangements to sell his horse as soon as possible, and to give up his rooms. For the first time in his life he was conscious that he wanted to talk with a man, to see some friend. But of all the young professional men he had met in Chicago, there was not one he could think of approaching. On his way to his rooms he passed the Lake Front Park, where some companies of troops were encamped. Tents were flapping in the breeze, a Gatling gun had been placed, and sentries mounted. The bronzed young soldiers brought in from the plains were lounging about, watching the boulevard, and peering up at the massive walls of the Auditorium. The street was choked with curious spectators, among whom were many strikers. The crowd gaped and commented.

"They'll _shoot_," one of the onlookers said almost proudly. "There ain't no use in foolin' with the reg'lars. Those fellows'd pop you or me as soon as a jack-rabbit or a greasy Injun."

The sinewy sentry shifted his gun and tramped off, his blue eyes marvelling at the unaccustomed sights of the great city, all the panoply of the civilization that he was hired to protect.

The city was under martial law, but it did not seem to mind it. The soldiers had had a few scuffles with rowdies at Blue Island and the stock yards. They had chased the toughs in and out among the long lines of freight cars, and fired a few shots. Even the newspapers couldn't magnify the desultory lawlessness into organized rebellion. It was becoming a matter of the courts now. The general managers had imported workmen from the East. The leaders of the strike--especially Debs and Howard--were giving out more and more incendiary, hysterical utterances. All workingmen were to be called out on a general strike; every man that had a trade was to take part in a "death struggle." But Sommers could see the signs of a speedy collapse. In a few days the strong would master the situation; then would follow a wrangle in the courts, and the fatal "black list" would appear. The revenge of the railroads would be long and sure.

Sommers went to his rooms and sought to get some rest before the time set for the funeral. The driving west wind, heated as by a furnace in its mad rush over the parched prairies, fevered rather than cooled him. His mind began to revolve about the dead man, lying with heavy, red-lidded eyes in the cottage. Was it,--was it murder? He put the thought aside laboriously, only to be besieged afresh, to wonder, to argue, to protest. After three hours of this he dressed and took the cable car for the cottage. He might find some pretext to examine the dead man again before the others came.

At the cottage gate, however, he overtook the good dentist, bearing a large florist's box. Miss M'Gann was already within the little front room, and Alves was talking in low tones with a sallow youth in a clerical coat. At the sight of the newcomers the clergyman withdrew to put on his robes. Dr. Leonard, having surrendered the pasteboard box to Miss M'Gann, grasped Mrs. Preston's hand.

"Alves," he began, and stopped. Even he could feel that the commonplaces of the occasion were not in order. "Alves, you know how mighty fond of you I am."

She smiled tranquilly. Her air of calm reserve mystified the watchful young doctor. The clergyman returned, followed by Mrs. Ducharme and Anna Svenson. The Ducharme woman's black dress intensified the pallor of her flabby face. Her hands twitched nervously over the prayer-book that she held. Subject to apoplexy, Sommers judged; but his thoughts passed over her as well as Miss M'Gann, who stood with downcast eyes ostentatiously close to Mrs. Preston, and the grave old dentist standing at the foot of the coffin, and the clergyman whose young voice had not lost its thrill of awe in the presence of death. He had no eyes for aught but the woman, who was bound to him by firmer ties than those whose dissolution the clergyman was recording. She stood serene, with head raised above theirs, revealing a face that sadness had made serious, grave, mature, but not sad. She displayed no affected sorrow, no nervous tremor, no stress of a reproachful mind. Unconscious of the others, even of the minister's solemn phrases, she seemed to be revolving truths of her own, dismissing a problem private to her own heart. To the man who tried to pierce beneath that calm gaze, the woman's complete control was terrible.

The minister's grave voice went on, pronouncing the grave sentences of the service. The ceremonial words sounded all the more fateful said over this poor body. The little of life that he had had,--the eating and drinking in restaurants and hotels, the chaffing and trading with his own kind, the crude appeasements of crude desires,--all these were taken away, and thus stripped it was easy to see how small was his responsibility in the matter of life. He had crushed and injured this other human being, his wife, to whom he had come nearest, just as a dirty hand might soil and crumple a fine fabric. But she no longer reproached him, if she ever had; she understood the sad complexity of a fate that had brought into the hand the fabric to be tarnished. And what she could accept, others must, the world must, to whom the Prestons are but annoyances and removable blemishes.

Sommers felt the deaconlike attitude of the dentist, the conventional solemnity of the schoolteacher and of the immobile Swede, the shaking,

quavering terror of Mrs. Ducharme, mumbling to herself the words of the service. Why should the old woman be so upset, he wondered. But his vagrant thoughts always came back to the woman near the coffin, the woman he loved. How could she summon up such peace! Was hers one of those mighty souls that never doubted? That steadfast gaze chilled his heart.

"The resurrection of the dead." Her glance fell, and for one swift moment rested on the dead man. She was debating those noble words, and denying their hope to _him_, to such as were dead in this life. Then once more her glance rose and fell upon Sommers, and swiftly it effaced his doubts.

She was so beautiful, a woman in the full tide of human experience! And the night before she had been so simple and tender and passionate. He felt her arms about his heart, teaching him how to live. This moment, this careful putting away of the past must be over soon, in a few hours; whereupon he and she would cast it out of their hearts as they would leave this gloomy cottage and waste marshes. He would not think of the body there and its death, of anything but her. How exquisite would be this triumph, over her balked, defeated past! 'Alves, Alves,' he murmured in his heart, 'only you who have suffered can love.' It seemed that an answering wave of color swept over her pale face.

* * * * *

There was a movement. The service was ended. The burial was the only thing that remained to be done. Sommers went to the cemetery with the minister and Dr. Leonard. He did not wish to be with Alves until they could be alone. The grave was in the half-finished cemetery beside the Cottage Grove cable line, among the newest lots. It was a fit place for Preston, this bit of sandy prairie in the incomplete city. The man who came and went from town to town, knowing chiefly the hotel and the railroad station, might well rest here, within call of the hoarse locomotives gliding restlessly to and fro.

As the little company retraced their steps from the grave, Alves spoke to Sommers for the first time.

"You will come back with me?" she asked.

"Not now," he answered hastily, instinctively. "I must go back to town. The others will be there. Not to-day."

CHAPTER XXIV

At the gate of the cemetery he fled from the little company. Dr. Leonard wanted to return to the city with him, but he shook off the talkative dentist. He must escape all sense of participation in the affair. So he made the long journey in the cable train, thinking disconnectedly in unison with the banging, jolting, grinding of the car. The panorama of his one

short year in Chicago rose bit by bit into his mind: the hospital, the rich, bizarre town, the society of thirsty, struggling souls, always rushing madly hither and thither, his love for the woman he had just left, and this final distracting event.

What if she had doubled the dose of the anodyne? Probably the fellow was abusive. It might have been some shameful extremity that had forced upon her this act in self-defence. But such a situation would have called for violence, some swift blow. The man had died in insidious calm. He had counselled it, believed in it. But not that _she_--the woman he loved--should be brave with that desperate courage. Yet it was over now, beyond sight and thought, and he loved her--yes, loved her more than if it had not been so.

Once in town, he felt intolerably lonely, as a busy man who has had his round of little duties in a busy world soon comes to feel when any jar has put him out of his usual course. As he sauntered among the strange faces of the city streets, looking out for a familiar being, he began to realize how completely he had cut himself off from the ordinary routine of life. He was as much a stranger as if he had been dropped into the bustling crowd for the first time. He had sat in judgment, and the world would give a fig for his judgments. A week ago he might have taken refuge in a dozen houses. To-night he stood upon street corners and wistfully eyed the passing stream.

He walked to the river aimlessly, and then walked back, examining the blank faces of the people. He spied through the lowered window of a carriage Brome Porter and Carson, going in the direction of the Northwestern station. The carriage skirted the curb near him, but the occupants were looking the other way. He recalled that Carson had been induced to leave the famous portrait on exhibition at the Art Institute. Whenever in the future he might care to refresh his mind with the vision of this epitome of success, he had but to drop into the dusky building on the lake front and have it all--with the comment of the great artist.

As he moved on his restless course, he thought of Porter and Carson, of Polot, and then of many others, whose faces came out of the memories of the past year. How many of them were "good fellows," human and kind and strong! They fought the world's fight, and fought it fairly. Could more be expected of man? Could he be made to curb his passion for gain, to efface himself, to refuse to take what his strong right hand had the power to grasp? Perhaps the world was arranged merely to get the best out of strong animals.

He turned into a restaurant, where usually he could find a dozen people of his acquaintance in the prosperous world. The place was crowded, but he spied no one he had ever seen. Evidently the people who knew how to make themselves comfortable had contrived to get out of this besieged city. They were at the various country clubs, at Wheaton, Lake Forest, Lake Geneva, Oconomowoc, keeping cool, while the general managers, the strikers, and the troops fought out their differences. The menu was curtailed this evening.

"'Twon't be long, sir," the waiter explained, "'fore we'll have to kill

them cab horses as they done in Paris. Game and fruit and milk can't be had."

But for the present the food was not of the famine order, and the noisy crowd eat joyously, as if sure of enough, somehow, as long as they needed it and had the money to pay. As Sommers was idling over his coffee, Swift, a young fellow whom he had seen at the University Club, a college man connected with one of the papers, sat down at his table, and chatted busily.

"They telephoned from the stock yards that there was a big mob down there," he told Sommers. "I thought I'd go over and see if I couldn't get an extra story out of it. Want to come along? It's about the last round of the fight. The managers have got five thousand new men here already or on the way. That will be the knock-out," he chatted briskly.

Sommers drifted along to the scene of the riot with the reporter, happier in finding himself with some one, no matter who he might be. Swift talked about the prospects of ending the strike. He regarded it as a reportorial feast, and had natural regrets that such good material for lurid paragraphs was to be cut off. As they passed through the Levee, he nodded to the proprietors of the "places," with ostentatious familiarity. From the Levee they took an electric car, which was crowded with officers and deputies bound for the stock yards. The long thoroughfare lined with rotting wooden houses and squalid brick saloons was alive with people that swarmed over the roadbed like insects. A sweltering, fetid air veiled the distances. Like a filthy kettle, the place stewed in its heat and dirt. Here lived the men who had engaged in the foolish fight!

At a cross street the officers dropped off the car, and Swift and Sommers followed them.

"Where's the fun?" the reporter asked the sergeant.

The officer pointed languidly toward a tangle of railroad tracks at one end of the vast enclosure of the stock yards. They trudged on among the lines of deserted cars in the fading glare of the July heat. The broad sides of the packing houses, the lofty chimneys surrounded by thin grayish clouds, the great warehouses of this slaughter yard of the world, drew nearer. All at once a roar burst on their ears, and they came out from behind a line of cars upon a stretch of track where a handful of soldiers were engaged in pressing back a rabble of boys, women, and men. The rabble were teasing the soldiers, as a mob of boys might tease a cat. Suddenly, as the officers and deputies appeared, some one hurled a stone. In a moment the air was thick with missiles, revolver shots followed, and then the handful of soldiers formed in line with fixed bayonets.

Sommers heard in the midst of all the roar the piteous bellowing of cattle, penned up in the cars. He saw a dark form stealing around the end of a car; in a moment a light spurted out as if a match had been touched to kerosene; there was a gleam of light, and the stock-car with its load of cattle was wrapped in flames. The dark figure disappeared among the cars; Sommers followed it. The chase was long and hot. From time to time the fleeing man

dodged behind a car, applied his torch, and hurried on. At last Sommers overtook him, kneeling down beside a box car, and pouring oil upon a bunch of rags. Sommers kicked the can out of reach and seized the man by the collar. They struggled in the dark for a few moments. Then the man put his hand to his pocket, saying,--

"I suppose you're a damned, sneaking deputy."

"Hold on, you drunken fool!" Sommers exclaimed. "It's lucky for you I am not a deputy."

He could hear the mob as it came down the yards in the direction of the burning cars.

"If you don't want to be locked up, come on with me."

The fellow obeyed, and they walked down through the lane of cars until they reached a fence. Sommers forced his companion through a gap, and followed him. Then the man began to run, and at the corner ran into a file of soldiers, who were coming into the yards. Sommers turned up the street and walked rapidly in the direction of the city. The first drops of a thunder-shower that had been lowering over the city for hours were falling, and they brought a pleasant coolness into the sultry atmosphere. That was the end! The "riot" would be drowned out in half an hour.

The sense of overwhelming loneliness came back, and instinctively he turned south in the direction of the cottage. From the loneliness of life, the sultry squalor of the city, the abortive folly of the mob, he fled to the one place that was still sweet in all this wilderness of men.

* * * * *

The cottage windows were dark when he arrived an hour later, but Alves met him at the door.

"I have been waiting for you," she said calmly. "I knew you would come as soon as you could."

"Didn't Miss M'Gann stay?" he asked remorsefully.

"I sent her away with Dr. Leonard. And our old Ducharme has gone out to one of her doctor's services. She is getting queerer and queerer, but such a good soul! What should I have done without her! You sent her to me," she added tenderly.

They sat down by the open window within sound of the gentle, healing rain. Sommers noticed that Alves had changed her dress from the black gown she had worn in the afternoon to a colored summer dress. The room had been rearranged, and all signs of the afternoon scene removed. It was as if she willed to obliterate the past at once. How fast she lived!

Her manner was peaceful. She sat resting her head against a high-backed chair, and her arms, bare from the elbow, fell limply by her side. She

seemed tired, merely, and content to rest in the sense of sweet relief.

"Alves," he cried, taking one of her hands and pressing the soft flesh in his grip, "I could not stay away. I meant to--I did not mean to meet you again here--but it was too lonely, too desolate everywhere."

"Why not here and at once?" she asked, with a shade of wonder in her voice. "Haven't we had all the sorrow here? And why should we put off our joy? It is so great to be happy to the full for once."

The very words seemed to have a savor for her.

"Are you happy?" he asked curiously.

"Why not! It's as if all that I could ever dream while I walked the hot streets had come to me. It has come so fast that I cannot quite feel it all. Some joy is standing outside, waiting its turn."

Smilingly she turned her face to his for response.

"What shall you do?" he asked.

"Do? I can't think _now_. There is so much time to think of that."

"But you can't stay here!" he exclaimed, with undue agitation.

"Not if you dislike it. But I feel differently. I found this refuge, and it served me well. I have no need to leave it."

Sommers let her hand fall from his clasp, and rose to his feet.

"You must! You cannot stay here after--"

"As you wish. We will go away."

"But until we are married?"

"Married?" she repeated questioningly. "I hadn't thought of that."

After a moment she said hesitatingly:

"Do we have to be married? I mean have the ceremony, the oath, the rest of it? I have been married. Now I want--love."

"Why, it is only natural--" the man protested.

"No, no, it is not natural. It may kill all this precious love. You may come to hate me as I hated him, and then, then? No," she continued passionately. "Let us not make a ceremony of this. It would be like the other, and I should feel it so always. We will have love, just love, and live so that it makes no difference. You cannot understand!"

Sommers knelt beside her chair.

"Love, love," he repeated. "You shall have it, Alves, as you will--the delirium of love!"

"That is right," she whispered, trembling at his touch. "Talk to me like that. Only more, more. Make my ears ring with it. Your words are so weak!"

"There are no words."

"No, there is not one perfect one in all the thousands!" she uttered, with a low cry. "And they are all alike--all used and common. But this,"--she kissed him, drawing him closer to her beating heart. "This is you and all!"

Thus she taught him the fire of love--so quickly, so surely! From the vague boyish beatitude had sprung this passion, like the opulent blossom out of the infolding bosom of the plant. Her kiss had dissipated his horrid suspicions. Her lips were bond and oath and sacrament.

That night they escaped the world with its fierce cross-purposes, its checker-board scheme. The brutality of human success, the anguish of strife,--what is it when man is shut within the chamber of his joy! Outside the peaceful rain fell ceaselessly, quenching the flame and the smoke and the passion of the city.

PART II

CHAPTER I

"Next week Monday is the tenth," Alves announced, glancing at the calendar that hung beside the writing-table.

"Well?" Sommers answered. He was preparing to make the daily trip to the post-office on the other side of Perota Lake.

"The Chicago schools open this year on the tenth," Alves continued slowly.

"What difference does that make?"

For reply Alves took from the drawer of the table the old leather purse that was their bank. The mute action made Sommers smile, but he opened the purse and counted the bills. Then he shoved them back into the purse, and replaced it in the drawer.

"I don't know why I haven't heard about my horse," he mused.

"That would only put the day off another month or two," Alves answered. "We

have had our day of play--eight long good weeks. The golden-rod has been out for nearly a month, and the geese have started south. We saw a flock yesterday, you remember."

"But you aren't going back to the school!" Sommers protested. "Not to the Everglade School."

"I got the notices last week. They haven't discharged me! Why not?" she added sanely. "You know that it will be hard to build up a practice. And Miss M'Gann wrote me that we could get a good room at the Keystone. That won't be too far from the school."

"I had thought of returning to Marion, where my father practised," Sommers suggested. "If we could only stay _here_, in this shanty three miles from a biscuit!"

Alves smiled, and did not argue the point. They went to the shore where their little flat-bottomed boat was drawn up. Perota Lake, on which the tiny frame cottage stood, was a shallow, reedy pond, connecting by sluggish brooks with a number of other lakes. The shore on this side of the lake was a tangled thicket; the opposite shore rose in a gentle slope to fields of sun-dried grain. The landscape was rich, peaceful, uneventful, with wide spaces of sun and cloud and large broad Wisconsin fields. The fierce west wind came cool and damp from the water. Sommers pulled out of the reedy shore and headed for a neighboring lake. After rowing in silence for some time, he rested on his oars.

"Why couldn't we stay here? That is what I want to do--to keep out of the city with its horrible clatter of ambitions, to return to the soil, and live like the primitive peasant without ambition."

The Wisconsin woman smiled sympathetically. She had grown strong and firm-fleshed these summer weeks, sucking vitality from the warm soil.

"The land is all owned around here!" she laughed. "And they use herb doctors or homeopaths. No, we should starve in the midst of harvests. There is only one thing to do, to go back where we can earn a bit of bread."

Sommers started to row, but put down the oars again.

"Do _you_ want to go back?"

"I never think about it. It is so arranged," she answered simply. "Perhaps it will not be always so."

"Which means that we may be more fortunate than our neighbors?"

"I don't know--why think? We have until Monday," and she leaned forward to touch his hand.

Why think! That is what she had taught him. They had sloughed off Chicago at the first, and from the day they arrived at Perota they had sunk into a

gentle, solitary routine. Sommers had been content to smoke his pipe, to ruminate on nothings, to be idle with no strenuous summoning of his will. There had been no perplexity, no revolt, no decision. Even the storm of their love subdued itself to a settled warmth, like that of the insistent summer sun. They had little enough to do with, but they were not aware of their poverty. Alves had had a long training in economy, and with the innate capability of the Wisconsin farmer's daughter, adjusted their little so neatly to their lives that they scarcely thought of unfulfilled wants.

Now why, the man mused, must they break this? Why must they be forced back into a world that they disliked, and that had no place for them? If he were as capable as she, there would be no need. But society has discovered a clever way of binding each man to his bench! While he brooded, Alves watched the gentle hills, straw-colored with grain, and her eyes grew moist at the pleasant sight. She glanced at him and smiled--the comprehending smile of the mothers of men.

"You would not want it always."

They landed at the end of the lake; from there it was a short walk over the dusty country road to the village. The cross-roads hamlet with its saloons and post-office was still sleeping in midday lethargy. Alves pointed to the unpainted, stuffy-looking houses.

"You would not like this."

At the post-office they met a young fellow wearing a cassock, a strangely incongruous figure in the Wisconsin village. "Are you coming to vespers?" the young priest asked. His brown, heavy face did not accord with the clerical habit or with the thin clerical voice.

"I think so--for the last time," Alves answered.

"Guy Jones will be there. You remember Guy, Alves? He used to be quite sweet on you in the old days when your brother was at the seminary."

"Yes, I remember Guy," Alves answered hurriedly. She seemed conscious of Sommers's bored gaze. The young priest accompanied them along the dusty road.

"Guy'll be glad to see you again. He's become quite a man out in Painted Post, Nebraska--owns pretty much the whole place--"

"We shall be at vespers," Alves repeated, interrupting the talkative young man.

When his cassock had disappeared up the dusty road between the fields of corn, she added,

"And that, too, you would not like, nor Guy Jones."

After beaching the boat in front of the cottage they walked to the seminary chapel by a little path through the meadows along the lake, then across a

wooded hill where the birds were singing multitudinously. The buildings of the Perota Episcopal Seminary occupied the level plateau of a hill that lay between two lakes. A broad avenue of elms and maples led to the rude stone cloisters, one end of which was closed by the chapel. To Sommers the cheap factory finish of the chapel and the ostentatious display of ritualism were alike distasteful. The crude fervors of the boy priests were strangely out of harmony with the environment. But Alves, to whom the place was full of associations, liked the services. As they entered the cloisters, a tiny bell was jangling, and the students were hurrying into the chapel, their long cassocks lending a foreign air to the Wisconsin fields. Only one other person was seated on the benches beneath the choir, a broad-faced young American, whose keen black eyes rested upon Alves. She was absorbed in the service, which was loudly intoned by the young priest. The candles, the incense, the intoned familiar words, animated her. Sommers had often wondered at the powerful influence this service exerted over her. To the training received here as a child was due, perhaps, that blind wilfulness of self-sacrifice which had first brought her to his notice.

"The remission and absolution of sins--" Alves was breathing heavily, her lips murmuring the mighty words after the priest. Was there a sore hidden in her soul? Did she crave some supernatural pardon for a desperate deed? The memory of miserable suspicions flashed over him, and gravely, sadly, he watched the quivering face by his side. If she sought relief now in the exercise of her old faith, what would come as the years passed and heaped up the burden of remorse!

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The service ended, and the three lay participants sauntered into the graveyard outside the west door. The setting sun flooded the aisle of the little chapel, even to the cross on the altar. The tones of the organ rolled out into the warm afternoon. The young man approached Alves with extended hand.

"The boys told me I could find you here. It's real good to see you again. Yes, I'm back to have a look at the old place. Wouldn't return to _stay_ for worlds. It's a great place out there, where a man counts for what he is. Won't you make me acquainted with your husband?"

Sommers felt instinctively the hesitation in Alves's manner. She turned to him, however.

"Howard, this is my brother's old friend, Mr. Jones,--Dr. Sommers."

The young man shook hands with great warmth, and joined them in their walk home, talking rapidly all the way. When he left the cottage, he extended a cordial invitation to Sommers to establish himself in Painted Post. "We want a good, live, hustling doctor, one that is up in all the modern school theories," he explained.

After he had gone, they sat in silence, watching the deepening twilight in the cool woods. The day, the season, the fair passion of life, seemed to wane. Like the intimations of autumn that come in unknown ways, even in

August, surely in September, this accidental visitor brought the atmosphere of change.

"The struggle begins, then, next Monday," Sommers remarked at last.

She kissed him for reply.

To love, to forget unpleasant thoughts, to love again, to refrain from an ignoble strife--alas! that it could not be thus for a lifetime.

CHAPTER II

The Keystone Hotel was in full blast when the doctor and Alves returned from Wisconsin. Miss M'Gann met them and introduced them to the large, parlor-floor room she had engaged for them. The newcomers joined the household that was taking the air on the stone steps of the hotel. The step below Miss M'Gann's was held by a young man who seemed to share with Miss M'Gann the social leadership of the Keystone. He was with the Baking Powder Trust, he told Sommers. He was tall and fair, with reddish hair that massed itself above his forehead in a shiny curl, and was supplemented by a waving auburn mustache. His scrupulous dress, in the fashion of the foppish clerk, gave an air of distinction to the circle on the steps. Most of this circle were so average as scarcely to make an impression at first sight,--a few young women who earned their livelihood in business offices, a few decayed, middle-aged bachelors, a group of widows whose incomes fitted the rates of the Keystone, and several families that had given up the struggle with maids-of-all-work. One of these latter,--father, mother, and daughter--had seats at table with Sommers and Alves. The father, a little, bald-headed man with the air of a furtive mouse, had nothing to say; the mother was a faded blond woman, who shopped every day with the daughter; the daughter, who was sixteen, had the figure of a woman of twenty, and the assurance born in hotels and boarding-houses. Her puffy rounded face, set in a thick roll of blond hair, had the expression of a precocious doll. When she had sounded Alves on the subject of silk waists, she relapsed into silence and stared amiably at the doctor.

Sommers arranged to hang his little celluloid sign, _Howard Sommers, M. D., Physician and Surgeon_, beneath his window. The proprietor of the Keystone thought it gave a desirable, professional air to the house. But Webber, the young man in the Baking Powder Trust, was sceptical of its commercial value to the doctor. Certainly the results from its appearance were not ascertainable. Sommers had no patients. The region about the Keystone was a part of the World's Fair territory, and had been greatly overbuilt. It had shrunk in these stagnant months to one-tenth of its possible population. There was, besides, an army of doctors, at least one for every five families Sommers judged from the signs. They were for the most part graduates of little, unknown medical schools or of drug stores. Lindsay had once said that this quarter of the city was a nest of charlatans. The two or three physicians of the regular school had private

hospitals, sanitariums, or other means of improving their business. Many of the doctors used the drug stores as offices and places of rendezvous. Their signs hung, one below another, from a long crane at the entrances of the stores. It was an impartial, hospitable method of advertising one's services. There was one such bulletin at the shop on the corner of the neighboring avenue; the names were unfamiliar and foreign--Jelly, Zarnshi, Pasko, Lemenuville. Sommers suspected that their owners had taken to themselves *_noms de guerre_*.

At first Sommers avoided these places, and got the few drugs he needed at a well-known pharmacy in the city. He had an idea that matters would improve when people returned from the country or the seashore. But these people did not take long vacations. He had had but one case, the wife of a Swedish janitor in a flat-building, and he had reason to believe that his services had not pleased. Every morning, as Alves hurried to reach the Everglade School, his self-reproach increased. He hated to think that she was in the same treadmill in which he had found her. His failure was a matter of pride, also; he began to suspect that the people in the house talked about it. When Webber spoke to him of Dr. Jelly's success, he felt that the Keystone people had been making comparisons. They were walking to the railroad station after breakfast--the clerk on his way south to the baking powder works; he, for a daily paper. The young clerk nodded to a black-whiskered, sallow man, and said:

"He's Doc. Jelly, and has the biggest practice around here. He's thick with the drug-store people,--has an interest in it, I have heard. I haven't seen your sign over there. Why don't you hang it out?"

Sommers did not like to say that it was in bad professional form. After he had left the friendly clerk, however, he walked over to the drug store and made some inquiries in a general way. The place was a shameful pretence of a prescription pharmacy. Cigars, toilet articles, and an immense soda-water fountain took up three-fourths of the floor space. A few dusty bottles were ranged on some varnished oak shelves; there was also a little closet at one side, where the blotchy-faced young clerk retired to compound prescriptions. The clerk hailed him affably, calling him by his name. He seemed to know that Sommers used up-town pharmacies and had no practice; and he, too, good-naturedly offered his advice.

"Goin' to settle in the neighborhood? Shall be glad to have your slab to add to the collection." He pointed jocularly to the filigree-work of signs that were pendent above the door.

"Well, I am not settled yet," Sommers replied, as easily as he could.

"Mostly homeopaths hereabouts," the clerk went on, rolling out a handful of cigars for a purchaser to make his selection. "Makes no difference, I say; any one with a diploma is welcome to hang out and try his chances with the rest. But all these"--he waved the hand which held the cigars at the signs--"are fine men. They do a rushin' business."

Sommers left the shop; he was not quite ready to do a "rushin' business" and to advertise for it from the corner drug store. As he retreated the

clerk looked at him with a cynical smile. In the clerk's vernacular, he wasn't "in the push," not "the popular choice."

These days Sommers had so little to do that he could meet Alves at the close of the afternoon session. At first he had gone to the Everglade School and waited while the pupils bustled out. He disliked seeing her in the performance of her petty duties, giving commands and reproofs. The principal and the teachers stared at them when they walked away from the school, and he gathered that his appearance there was embarrassing to Alves. So they came to have a rendezvous at the rear of a vacant lot not far from the deserted cottage, which lifted its ill-favored roof above the scrub oaks. Then they would traverse the familiar walks in and out of the deserted streets.

When he told her of his conversation with Webber and the drug clerk's remarks, she counselled unexpectedly:

"Why don't you do it? Miss M'Gann says they all do it in Chicago,—that is, the doctors who aren't swells."

He smiled sadly at the idea that his holding aloof from this advertising custom might be set down to his ambition of being a "swell doctor." The method, however, seemed entirely proper to Alves, who hadn't the professional prejudices, and whose experience with the world had taught her to make the fight in any possible way, in any vulgar way that custom had pointed out.

"Well, if you want me to," he conceded drearily.

"It isn't a great matter," she replied. "I don't want you to do anything that you don't feel like doing. Only," she sighed, "there's so much opposition to married women's teaching, and we must live somehow."

"I'll do it to-morrow," Sommers replied quickly, stung by the unintentional implication of the speech.

They walked to their favorite haunt on the lake shore, beneath the crumbling walls of the little convent. During these hot September days this spot had become the brightest place in their lives. They had come there to find themselves, to avoid the world. They had talked and planned, had been silent, had loved, and had rested. Today they watched the fiery sun sinking in its bed of shining dust, and did not speak. Alves was unusually weary, and he was sad over the decision he had just made, weakly, it seemed to him. A good deal of the importance of his revolt against commercial medicine disappeared. Lindsay tried oily, obsequious means of attracting attention. He was to hang his sign from a corner store. Some dim idea of the terrible spectre that haunts the days and nights of those without capital or position confronted him. If he had never been rich, he had always the means to give him time to look about, to select from a number of opportunities. If he could manage to wait, even six months, some hospital place might turn up. His old associates at Philadelphia would have him in mind. He did not dare to write them of his necessity; even his friends would be suspicious of his failure to gain a foothold in this hospitable,

liberal metropolis.

He rose at last to escape these gloomy thoughts. Alves followed him without a word. He did not offer her his arm, as he was wont to do when they walked out here beyond the paths where people came. She respected his mood, and falling a step behind, followed the winding road that led around the ruined Court of Honor to the esplanade. As they gained the road by a little footpath in the sandy bank, a victoria approached them. The young woman who occupied it glanced hastily at Sommers and half bowed, but he had turned back to give Alves his hand. The carriage drove on past them, then stopped.

"That lady wishes to speak to you," Alves said.

"I think not," Sommers replied quickly, turning in the opposite direction. As they walked away the carriage started, and when Alves looked around it had already passed over the rough wooden bridge that crossed the lagoon.

"Was it some one you knew?" she asked indifferently.

"It was Miss Hitchcock," Sommers replied shortly. He told her something about the Hitchcocks. "She was the first woman I knew in Chicago," he concluded musingly. Alves looked at him with troubled eyes, and then was silent. Territories unknown in her experience were beginning to reveal themselves in the world of this man.

CHAPTER III

The next day Sommers applied at the drug store for permission to hang his sign beneath the others. The question was referred to Jelly, who seemed to be the silent partner in the business, and in a few days consent was given. The little iron sign with gilt letters shone with startling freshness beneath the larger ones above. But no immediate results were visible. Sommers dropped into the store as nonchalantly as he could almost daily, but there were no calls for him. He met Jelly, who looked him over coldly, while he lopped over the glass show-case and smoked a bad cigar. Sommers thought he detected a malicious grin on the clerk's face when Jelly questioned him one day about his practice. The successful physician seemed to sum him up in a final speech.

"What people want hereabouts is a practical, smart man. They don't take much stock in schools or training; it's the _man_ they want."

Leaving the clear impression that the young doctor was not the man for their money, he grasped his black bag and lounged out of the door, puffing at his cigar and spitting as he went. The Keystone, also, did not find Sommers the man they could rely upon. When the overfed daughter of the family at his table was taken ill with a gastric fever, the anxious mamma sent for Jelly. Webber took this occasion to give him advice. Apparently his case was exciting sympathy in the hotel,--at least Miss M'Gann and the

clerk had consulted about it.

"You don't get acquainted with the folks," Webber explained. "You go and shut yourself up in your room after every meal, instead of talking to people and being sociable like the rest of us. And you haven't formed any church connection. That helps a man, especially in your profession. You ought to get connected with a good church, and go to the meetings and church sociables. Join the young people's clubs and make yourself agreeable. It don't make any difference how much you know in this world. What people want is a good, open-hearted fellow, who meets 'em easily and keeps in sight."

'In different circles, different customs,' thought Sommers. 'Lindsay frequents dinners, and I must attend church sociables!'

"You and Mrs. Sommers hold yourselves apart," Webber went on with friendly warmth, "as if you were too good for ordinary company. Now I know you don't really think so at all. As soon as you break the ice, you will be all right. There was Lemenuenville. He started in here the right way, took to the Presbyterian church, the fashionable one on Parkside Avenue, and made himself agreeable. He's built up a splendid practice, right there in that congregation!"

"Are there any good churches left?" Sommers inquired.

"Well, I shouldn't be bashful about cutting into the Presbyterian. You're as good as Lemenuenville."

Decidedly, Sommers thought, this simple society had its own social habits. If he did not take this well-meant advice, he must justify himself by his own method. He made up his mind to go to the next meeting of the medical society. His clothes were a trifle shabby, but as the meeting was in the evening, he could go in his evening dress--drop in casually, as it were, from an evening entertainment. That silly bit of pride, however, angered him with himself. He went in his shabby everyday suit. The experience was the most uncomfortable one he had had. The little groups of young doctors did not open to him. They had almost forgotten him. Even his old colleagues at the hospital scarcely recognized him, and when they did stop to chat after the meeting, they examined him indifferently, as if they were making notes. Lindsay had probably spread his story, with some imaginative details. According to the popular tale Sommers had been "thrown down" by Miss Hitchcock because he had mixed himself up with a married woman. Then he had been discharged by Lindsay for the same reason, and had sunk, had run away with the woman, and had come back to Chicago penniless. The woman was supporting him, some one said. Enough of this pretty tale could be read in the bearing of the men to make Sommers sorry that he had come, and sorrier that he had come in the hope of bettering his condition. He slipped out unobserved and walked the six miles back to the Keystone.

The fight was on; he was placed, as he had wished, without handicap; he closed his jaws and summoned all his will to take the consequences. The pity was that he had brought himself to make any concessions to the obsequiousness of the world. As he passed down Michigan Avenue he overtook

a shabby laboring man, who begged of him. Sommers found out that he was a striker, a fireman on the Illinois Central, who had lost his job by being blacklisted after the strike. He had walked the streets since the middle of July.

"You were a fool," Sommers remarked calmly, "to think that you and yours could make any impression on the General Managers' Association. You have had your lesson, and the next time you find yourself hanging on to the world, no matter how, don't kick over the traces. There's a quarter. It's more than I can afford to give, and I think you're a fool."

The man hesitated.

"I don't want none of your money," he growled at last. "If you had to work for a living, you silk stocking--"

"Come, don't call me names. I am a fool, too. I am in the same boat. I'd give a good deal for a job, any job to earn my living. I didn't say it wasn't natural what you did, but it's against the facts, against the facts."

The man stared, took the quarter, and dived into a cross street.

"I have lost twenty cents by walking home," Sommers reported to Alves, "but I have realized--a few facts."

The following day, as Sommers was passing the drug store, the clerk beckoned to him. A messenger had just come, asking for immediate help. A woman was very ill--third house north on Parkside Avenue.

"There's your chance," the clerk grinned. "They're rich and Jelly's people. He won't be back before two. Just show Dr. Sommers the way," he added, to the servant who had brought the message.

Sommers had his doubts about going, for Jelly was an "eclectic" and probably would refuse to consult with him. The matter seemed urgent, however, and he followed the servant. The case, he found on examination, was serious and at a critical stage. It was an affair of mismanaged confinement. Jelly, Sommers could see, was brutally ignorant. The woman, if she survived, would probably be an invalid for life. He did what he could and remained in the house, waiting for Jelly, who would be sure to come. About three the black-whiskered doctor arrived and hurried upstairs, his sallow face scowling. Sommers explained what he had done, and suggested that a certain operation was necessary at once to save matters at all. Jelly interrupted him.

"See here, young feller, this is my case, and you're not wanted, nor your advice. You can send your bill to me."

Sommers knew that he should bow and withdraw. Jelly was within his professional rights, but the man's brutal ignorance maddened him, and he spoke recklessly.

"A first-year interne could tell you the same thing. The woman has been nearly killed, if you want to know the truth. And I don't know that I shall leave you to complete the job."

"What are you going to do about it?" Jelly asked insolently.

Sommers paused. He was clearly in the wrong, professionally. There was not a well-trained doctor in Chicago who would abet him in his act. But it mattered little; his own desperate situation gave him a kind of freedom.

"I shall present the facts to her husband." He found the husband in the room below and stated the case.

"What I am doing," he concluded, "is entirely unprofessional, but it's the thing I should want any man to do for me. You needn't take my word, but call up either Dr. Fitz or Dr. Sloper by telephone, and ask one of them to come out at once. They are the best surgeons in the city. As to Dr. Jelly, I prefer not to say anything, and I don't expect you to take my advice."

The husband was anxious and worried. All doctors seemed to him a game of chance.

"She's always hankered after the Science people; but she kind of took to Jelly, and our friends think an awful sight of him," he remarked doubtfully.

"You are taking tremendous risks," Sommers urged.

"Well, I'll see Jelly."

Sommers waited until the man returned.

"Well, I guess it isn't so bad as you think. We'll wait a day or two, I guess. I am obliged to you for your kindness."

Sommers made no reply and left the house. The only result of this affair was that he found it disagreeable to call at the drug store. Besides, it was useless; no practice had come from his assiduous attendance. Finally, he saw one morning that his modest sign no longer waved from the pendent ladder. He did not take the trouble to inquire why it had been removed.

* * * * *

The winter was wearing on,—the slow, penurious winter of exhaustion after the acute fury of the spring and summer. These were hard times in earnest, not with the excitement of failures and bankruptcies, but with the steady grind of low wages, no employment, and general depression. The papers said things would be better in the fall, when the republican candidates would be elected. But it was a long time to wait for activity. Meanwhile the streets down town were filled with hungry forms, the remnant of the World's Fair mob swelled by the unemployed strikers. The city was poor, too. The school funds were inadequate. The usual increase in salary could not be paid.

Instead, the board resolved to reduce the pay of the grade teachers, who had the lowest wages. Alves received but forty dollars a month now, and had been refused a night school for which she had applied.

When Alves timidly suggested that it would be cheaper for them to rent one of the many empty cottages in the vast region south of the parks, he put her off. That would be too much like the experience in the Ninety-first Street cottage, and he fought against the idea. There were a few dollars still left from the sale of his horse, his microscope, and other possessions. A few dollars each week came in from some work he had found in preparing plates for a professor of anatomy in the new university. Some weeks he could almost pay his board without drawing from his capital. They would hang on in this way.

Not that the Keystone Hotel was in itself very attractive. In spite of Webber's advice, he and Alves found it hard to mix with the other "guests." After they had been in the house several months, he fancied that the people avoided them. The harmless trio left their table, and in place of them came a succession of transient boarders. For a time he thought he was oversensitive, inclined to suspect his neighbors of avoiding him. But one evening Alves came into their room, where he was working at the anatomy plates, her face flushed with an unusual distress.

"What reason have they?" Sommers asked, going directly to the heart of the matter.

"None--unless Miss M'Gann has been talking carelessly. And she knows nothing--"

"No, she knows nothing," the doctor replied, looking at Alves intently. "And there is nothing to be known."

"We think not!" she exclaimed. "I am not so sure that an unpleasant story couldn't be made."

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"Why, the--my husband's condition--the death, our going away so quickly afterward. There are elements there of a good-sized boarding-house scandal."

"Yes, there are elements!" Sommers admitted, putting away his work. "We may as well leave as soon as we can. You are right; we had better fight it out alone."

"Yes, _alone_, " she responded, with a glad note in her voice.

The next afternoon they looked at the cheap, flimsy cottages they passed in their walk with more interest than ever. The only places they could afford were far removed from the populous districts where patients live. They would have to pay for heat, too, and though they could starve the body, they could not freeze. So the matter was put off for the present, and they drew into themselves more and more, leaving the Keystone people to chatter

as they willed.

CHAPTER IV

The great strike was fast being forgotten, as a cause argued and lost or won as you looked at it. A commission was holding many meetings these months, and going over the debris, taking voluminous testimony. It was said to be prejudiced in favor of the strikers, but the victors cared little. Its findings in the shape of a report would lie on the table in the halls of Congress, neither house being so constituted that it could make any political capital by taking the matter up. The Association of General Managers had lapsed. It had been the banded association of power against the banded association of labor. It had fought successfully. The issue was proved: the strike was crushed, with the help of marshals, city police, and troops. And with it the victors prophesied was crushed the sympathetic strike forever. It had cost, to be sure, many millions in all, but it paid. It was such a tremendous example!

The statistical side of passion was interesting and ironical. It gave the matter the air of a family row: the next day the heads of the factions were sitting down to make the inventory of broken glass, ruined furniture and provisions. A principle had been preserved, people said, talking largely and superficially, but the principle seemed elusive. The laborers, too, had lost, more heavily in proportion to their ability to bear--millions in wages, not to reckon the loss of manhood to those who were blacklisted for participation in the fracas.

The Commission went into the Pullman affair, quite unwarrantedly, according to the corporation, which was comfortably out of the mess. And there were minor disputes over the injunctions against Debs, and a languid stirring of dead bones in the newspapers. Every one was tired of the affair and willing to let it drop, with its lesson for this party or that. Sommers, having nothing more urgent to do, attended the meetings of the Commission and listened eagerly to get some final truth about the matter. But it seemed to him that both sides merely scratched the surface of the argument, and were content with the superficial "lessons" thereby gained. What good could come of the hearings? The country would get out of its doldrums sooner or later; employment would be easy to find; wages would rise, a little; every one would have his bellyful; and then, some years later, another wave of depression would set in, the bitter strife would be repeated, both parties unlessoned by this or any other experience. The world, at least this civilization, belonged to the strong; the poor would remain weak and foolish and treacherous.

It was whispered about on the first days of the hearing that an official of the American Railway Union would take the stand and make disclosures. He would show how the strike was finally ended, not by the law and the sword, but by money. The official's name was Dresser, Sommers heard, and every day he looked for him to take the stand. But the rumor passed away, and no

"revelations" by Dresser or any one else who knew the inner facts appeared. Sommers learned them unexpectedly after the Commission had taken itself to Washington to prepare its report.

It happened one evening at the Keystone Hotel. He had come in after dinner and found Miss M'Gann in his room, calling upon Alves. She had brought Dresser with her. He was well dressed, his hair was cut to a conventional length, and he carried a silk hat--altogether a different person from the slouchy, beery man who had grumbled at McNamara and Hills. Sommers's glance must have said something of this, for Dresser began to explain,

"I've given up agitating--doesn't go, what with the courts granting injunctions and the railroads throwing money about."

"Do you mean _that_ was why the strike collapsed?" Sommers asked eagerly.

"Sure!" Dresser thundered heartily. "_I_ KNOW IT. Do you know where the leaders are? Well, one of 'em has got the finest little ranch you ever saw out in Montana. And another," he winked slowly and put his hand to his pocket. "They were poor men when the strike began, and they aren't working now for any dollar and a half a day."

"I don't believe it," Sommers replied promptly. "The managers had the affair in hand, anyway."

Dresser protested loudly, and irritated by the doctor's scepticism began to leak, to tell things he had seen, to show a little of the inside of the labor counsels. He had evidently seen more than Sommers had believed possible, and his active, ferreting mind had imagined still more. The two women listened open-mouthed to his story of the strike, and feeling where the sympathy lay Dresser spoke largely to them.

"You seem to have found something to do?" Sommers remarked significantly at the close.

"I'm assistant editor of a paper," Dresser explained.

Sommers laughed. "Herr Most's old sheet?"

"_The Investor's Monthly_."

Sommers shrieked with laughter, and patted Dresser on the back. "Sammy, you're a great man! I have never done you justice."

"The management has been changed," Dresser said gruffly. "They wanted a man of education, not a mere reporter."

"Who owns it?"

"R. G. Carson has the controlling interest."

Sommers relapsed into laughter. "So this is your ranch in Montana?"

Dresser rose with an offended air.

"Oh! sit down, man. I am complimenting you. Haven't you a place as office boy, compositor, or something for a needy friend?"

"I don't see what you're so funny about, doctor," Miss M'Gann expostulated.

"Spoiling the Philistines, you see," Dresser added, making an effort to chime in with Sommers's irony.

They talked late. Webber, the stylish young clerk, dropped in, and the conversation roamed over the universal topics of the day,--the hard times, the position of the employee in a corporation, etc. The clerk in the Baking Powder Trust was inclined to philosophical acceptance of present conditions. Abstractly there might not be much justice for the poor, but here in the new part of the country every man had his chance to be on top, to become a capitalist. There was the manager of the B. P. T. He had begun on ten dollars a week, but he had bided his time, bought stock in the little mill where he started, and now that the consolidation was arranged, he was in a fair way to become a rich man. To be rich, to have put yourself outside the ranks of the precarious classes--that was the clerk's ambition. Dresser was doubtful whether the good, energetic young clerk could repeat in these days the experience of the manager of the B. P. T. The two women took part in the argument, and finally Alves summed the matter up:

"If we could, all of us would be rich, and then we should feel like the rich, and want to keep what we could. But as we have to labor hard for a little joy, it's best to get the joy, as much as you can, and not fret over the work."

* * * * *

Dresser found the Keystone so agreeable that he came there to live. The doctor and Alves and Miss M'Gann with Webber and Dresser had a table to themselves in the stuffy basement dining room. Miss M'Gann accepted impartially the advances of both young men, attending church with one and the theatre with the other. The five spent many evenings in Sommers's room, discussing aimlessly social questions, while the doctor worked at the anatomy slides. Dresser's debauch of revolt seemed to have sobered him. He bought himself many new clothes, and as time went on, picked up social relations in different parts of the city. He still talked sentimental socialism, chiefly for the benefit of Alves, who regarded him as an authority on economic questions, and whose instinctive sympathies were touched by his theories. As the clothes became more numerous and better in quality, he talked less about socialism and more about society. _The Investor's Monthly_ interested him: he spoke of becoming its managing editor, hinting at his influence with Carson; and when the doctor jeered, Dresser offered him a position on the paper. Webber was openly envious of Dresser's prosperity, which he set down to the account of a superior education that had been denied him. When Dresser began to mention casually the names of people whom the Baking Powder clerk had read about in the newspapers, this envy increased. Dresser's evolution impressed Miss M'Gann

also; Sommers noticed that she was readier to accept Dresser's condescending attentions than the devotion of the plodding clerk. Webber was simple and vulgar, but he was sincere and good-hearted. He was striving to get together a little money for a home. Sommers told Alves that she should influence Miss M'Gann to accept the clerk, instead of beguiling herself with the words of a talker.

"You are unfair to Sammy," Alves had replied, with some warmth. "She would do very well to marry him; he is her superior."

Sommers gave Alves a look that troubled her, and said:

"Because the fellow is settling into an amiable Philistine? He will never marry Jane M'Gann; it would hurt his prospects."

A few days later Dresser mentioned that he had met Miss Laura Lindsay, "the daughter of your former partner, I believe."

"My former boss," Sommers corrected, looking at Alves with an amused smile. He listened in ironical glee to Dresser's description of little Laura Lindsay. Dresser thought her "a very advanced young woman, who had ideas, a wide reader." She had asked him about Dr. Sommers and Alves.

"You had better not appear too intimate with us," Sommers advised. "Her papa doesn't exactly approve of me."

When he had left the room, Sommers added: "He will marry Laura Lindsay. An ideal match. He won't remain long in the Keystone, and I am glad of it. The converted Philistine is the worst type!"

Alves held her own opinion. She should be sorry to lose Dresser from their little circle. She permitted herself one remark,--"He is so much of a gentleman."

"A gentleman!" Sommers exclaimed scornfully. "Are any of us gentlemen in the American sense?"

It seemed probable, however, that Sommers and Alves would be the first to leave the Keystone. Although the sultry June weather made them think longingly of the idyllic days at Perota Lake, the journey to Wisconsin was out of the question. Struggle as he might, Sommers was being forced to realize that they must give up their modest position in the Keystone. And one day the proprietor hinted broadly that she had other uses for their room. They had been tolerated up to this point; but society, even the Keystone form of society, found them too irregular for permanent acceptance. And now it was impossible to move away from Chicago. They had no money for the venture.

A change, even so small a change as from one boarding-house to another, is caused by some definite force, some shock that overcomes the power of inertia. The eleventh of June Sommers had gone to meet Alves at their usual rendezvous in the thicket at the rear of Blue Grass Avenue. The sultry afternoon had made him drowse, and when he awoke Alves was standing over him, her hands tightening nervously.

"They have dropped you," he said, reading the news in her face.

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, until they had plodded down the avenue for several blocks.

"Why did they do it!" she murmured rebelliously. "They gave me no reason. It isn't because I teach badly. It isn't because of the married teachers' talk: there are hundreds of married women in the schools who haven't been dismissed."

"Well," Sommers responded soothingly, "I shouldn't hunt for a rational reason for their act. They have merely hastened the step we were going to take some day."

"What shall we do!" she gasped, overpowered by the visions her practical mind conjured up. "We could just get along with my forty dollars, and now--Oh! I've been like a weight about your neck. I have cut you off from your world, the big world where successes are made!"

Her large eyes filled with pleading tears. She was generously minded to take the burden of their fate upon herself.

"You seem to have been making most of the success," he responded lightly. "The big world where Dresser is succeeding doesn't call me very hard. And it's a pretty bad thing if a sound-bodied, well-educated doctor can't support himself and a woman in this world," he added more gloomily. "I _will_, if I have to get a job over there."

He jerked his head in the direction of the South Chicago steel works. But the heavens seemed to repel his boast, for the usual cloud of smoke and flame that hung night and day above the blast furnaces was replaced by a brilliant, hard blue sky. The works were shut down. They had reached the end of Blue Grass Avenue at the south line of the park. It was a spot of semi-sylvan wildness that they were fond of. The carefully platted avenues and streets were mere lines in the rough turf. A little runnel of water, half ditch, half sewer, flowed beside the old plank walk.

They sat down to plan, to contrive in some way to get a shelter over their heads. From the plank walk where they sat nothing was visible for blocks around except a little stucco Grecian temple, one of those decorative contrivances that served as ticket booths or soda-water booths at the World's Fair. This one, larger and more pretentious than its fellows, had been bought by some speculator, wheeled outside the park, and dumped on a sandy knoll in this empty lot. It had an ambitious little portico with a

cluster of columns. One of them was torn open, revealing the simple anatomy of its construction. The temple looked as if it might contain two rooms of generous size. Strange little product of some western architect's remembering pencil, it brought an air of distant shores and times, standing here in the waste of the prairie, above the bright blue waters of the lake!

"That's the place for us!" Sommers exclaimed, gazing intently at the time-stained temple. Alves looked at the building sceptically, for woman-wise she conceived of only conventional abiding-places. But she followed him submissively into the little stucco portico, and when he spoke buoyantly of the possibilities of the place, of the superb view of park and lake, her worn face gained color once more. The imitation bronze doors were ajar, and they made a thorough examination of the interior. With a few laths, some canvas, and a good cleaning, the place could be made possible--for the summer.

"That's four months," Sommers remarked. "And that is a long time for poor people to look ahead."

The same evening they hunted up the owner and made their terms, and the next day prepared to move from the Keystone. They had some regrets over leaving the Keystone Hotel. The last month Sommers had had one or two cases. The episode with Dr. Jelly had finally redounded to his credit, for the woman had died at Jelly's private hospital, and the nurse who had overheard the dispute between the two doctors had gossiped. The first swallow of success, however, was not enough to warrant any expenditure for office rent. He must make some arrangement with a drug store near the temple, where he could receive calls.

They invited Miss M'Gann, Webber, and Dresser to take supper with them their first Sunday in the temple. Alves had arranged a little kitchen in one corner of the smaller of the two rooms. This room received the pompous name of "the laboratory"; the other room--a kind of hall into which the portico opened--was bedroom and general living room.

"We will throw open the temple doors," she explained to Sommers, "and have supper on the portico between the pillars."

From that point the lake could be seen, a steely blue line on the horizon. But it rained on Sunday, and the visitors arrived so bedraggled by the storm that their feast seemed doomed. Sommers produced a bottle of Scotch whiskey, and they warmed and cheered themselves. The Baking Powder clerk grew loquacious first. The Baking Powder Trust was to be reorganized, he told them, as soon as good times came. There was to be a new trust, twice as big as the present one, capitalized for millions and millions. The chemist of the concern had told him that Carson was engineering the affair. The stock of the present company would be worth double, perhaps three times as much as at present. He confided the fact that he had put all his savings into the stock of the present company at its greatly depressed present value. The company was not paying dividends; he had bought at forty. His air of financial success, of shrewd speculative insight impressed them all. Miss M'Gann evidently knew all about this; she smiled as if the world were a pretty good place.

Dresser, too, had his boast. He had finally been given charge of _The Investor's Monthly_, which had absorbed the _La Salle Street Indicator_. The policy of the papers was to be changed: they were to be conservative, but not critical, and conducted in the interests of capital which was building up the country after its financial panic.

"In the prospective return of good times many new interests will seek public patronage," he explained to the company. "A new era will dawn--the era of business combinations, of gigantic cooperative enterprises."

"Vulgarly known as trusts," Sommers interjected. "And your paper is going to boom Carson's companies. Well, well, that's pretty good for Debs's ex-secretary!"

"You must understand that people of education change their views," Dresser retorted uncomfortably. "I have had a long talk with Mr. Carson about the policy of the paper. He doesn't wish to interfere, not in the least, merely advises on a general line of policy agreeable to him and his associates, who, I may say, are very heavily engaged in Chicago enterprises. We are interested at present in the traction companies which are seeking extensions of their franchises."

"He's joined the silk-hat brigade," Webber scoffed. "The Keystone ain't good enough for him any longer. He's going north to be within call of his friends."

"How is Laura Lindsay?" Sommers asked.

"I saw her last night, and I met Mr. Brome Porter and young Polot, too."

"Did you tell 'em where you were going to-night?" Sommers asked, rather bitterly.

"Say, Howard," Dresser replied, pushing back his chair and resting one arm confidentially on the table, "you must have been a great chump. You had a soft thing of it at Lindsay's--"

"I suppose Miss Laura has discussed it with you. I didn't like the set quite as well as you seem to."

"Well, it's no use making enemies, when you can have 'em for friends just as easily as not," Dresser retorted, with an air of superior worldly wisdom.

* * * * *

Miss M'Gann had drawn Alves out of the talk among the men, and they sat by themselves on the lower step of the temple.

"I saw Dr. Leonard the other day at a meeting of the Cymbals Society," Miss M'Gann told Alves. "He asked where you were."

"I hope he'll come to see us."

Miss M'Gann looked at the men and lowered her voice.

"I think he knows what was the reason for dismissing you. He wouldn't tell me; but if I see him again, I am going to get it out of him."

"Why, what did he say?" Alves asked.

"Nothing much. Only he asked very particularly about you and the doctor; about what kind of man the doctor was, and just when you were married and where."

Alves moved nervously.

"Where were you married, Alves?" Miss M'Gann pursued anxiously. "Here or in Wisconsin? You were so dreadfully queer about it all."

"We were not married," Alves replied, in a quiet voice, "at least not in a church, with a ceremony and all that. I didn't want it, and we didn't think it necessary."

The younger woman gasped.

"Alves! I'd never think it of you--you two so quiet and so like ordinary folks!"

"We are like other people, only we aren't tied to each other by a halter. He can go when he likes," Alves retorted. "I want him to go," she added fiercely, "just as soon as he finds he doesn't love me enough."

"Um," Miss M'Gann answered. "Lucky you haven't any children. That's where the rub comes."

Alves straightened herself with a little haughtiness.

"It wouldn't make any difference to him. He would do right by them if he had them."

"I don't see how he could, at present," Miss M'Gann proceeded, with severe logic. "It's all very well so long as things go easily. But I had rather have the ring."

After a little silence, she continued: "It must have had something to do with that, I guess, your being dropped. Did any one know?"

"I never said anything about it," Alves replied coldly. She would have liked to add an entreaty, for his sake, that Miss M'Gann keep this secret. But her pride prevented her.

"That Ducharme woman must have been talking," Miss M'Gann proceeded acutely. "I saw her around last year, looking seedy, as if she drank."

"Possibly," Alves assented, "though she didn't know anything."

"Well, my advice to you is to make that right just as soon as ever you can. He's willing?"

"I should never let him," Alves exclaimed vehemently; "least of all now!"

"Well, I suppose folks must live their own way. But you don't catch me taking a man in that easy fashion, so that he can get out when he wants to."

Alves tried to change the subject, but her admission had so startled her friend that the usual gossip was impossible. When the visitors rose to go, Sommers proposed showing them the way back by a wagon road that led to the improved part of the park, across the deserted Court of Honor. He and Alves accompanied them as far as the northern limits of the park. The rain clouds were gone, and a cold, clear sky had taken their place. On their return along the esplanade beside the lake Sommers chatted in an easy frame of mind.

"I guess Webber will get Miss M'Gann, and I am glad of it. Dresser wouldn't do anything more than fool with her. He will get on now; those promoters and capitalists are finding him a clever tool. They will keep him steady. It isn't the fear of the Lord that will keep men like Dresser in line; it's the fear of their neighbors' opinions and of an empty stomach!"

"Don't you--wish you had a chance like his?" Alves asked timidly.

The young doctor laughed aloud.

"You don't know me yet. It isn't that I don't want to. It's because I _can't_--no glory to me. But, Alves, we are all right. I can get enough in one way or another to keep the temple over our heads, and I can work now. I have something in view; it won't be just chasing about the streets."

This reference to his own work both pleased and saddened her. The biologist, who had befriended him before, had given him some work in his laboratory. The work was not well paid, but the association with the students, which aroused his intellectual appetites, had given him a new spur. What saddened her was that it was all entirely beyond her sphere of influence, of usefulness to him. Living, as they should, in an almost savage isolation, she dreaded his absorption in anything apart from her. There were other reliefs, consolations, and hopes than those she held. He was slipping away into a silent region--man's peculiar world--of thought and dream and speculation, an intangible, ideal, remote, unloving world. Some day she would knock at his heart and find it occupied.

She leaned heavily upon his arm, loath to have his footsteps so firm, his head so erect, his eyes so far away, his voice so silent.

"You are not sorry," she murmured, ashamed of iterating this foolish question, that demanded one answer--an answer never wholly satisfying.

"For what?" he asked, interrupting his thought and glancing out into the black waters.

"For me--for all this fight for life alone away from the people who are succeeding, for grinding along unrecognized--"

He stopped and kissed her gently, striving to quiet her excited mood.

"For if you did, I would put myself there, in the water beside the piers," she cried.

He smiled at her passionate threat, as at the words of an emotional child. Underneath his gentleness, his kindness, his loving ways, she felt this trace of scepticism. He did not bother his head with what was beginning to wring her soul. In a few minutes she spoke again:

"Miss M'Gann thinks Dr. Leonard knows why I was dismissed. Mrs. Ducharme, she said, had been hanging about the Everglade School district. I remember having seen her several times."

Sommers dropped her arm and strode forward.

"What did she know?" he asked harshly.

"I don't see how she could know anything except suspicions. You know she was queer and a great talker."

Sommers's face worked. He was about to speak when Alves went on.

"I told Jane we had never been married; she asked me where we were married. I suppose I ought not to have told her. I didn't want to."

"It is of no importance," Sommers answered. "It's our own business, anyway; but it makes no difference as we live now whether she knows it or not."

"I am glad you feel so," Alves replied with relief. Then in a few moments she added, "I was afraid she might tell people; it might get to your old friends."

Sommers replied in the same even tone,

"Well? and what can they do about it?"

"I wonder what a woman like Miss Hitchcock thinks about such matters,--about us, if she knew."

"She would not think. She would avoid the matter as she would a case of drunkenness."

The arm within his trembled. She said nothing more until they reached the little portico. She paused there, leaning against one of the crumbling columns, looking out into the night. From the distance beyond the great

pier that stretched into the lake came the red glare of the lighthouse.

Sommers had gone in and was preparing the room for the night. She could hear him whistle as he walked to and fro, carrying out dishes, arranging the chairs and tables. He maintained an even mood, took the accidents of his fate as calmly as one could, and was always gentle. He had some well of happiness hidden to her. She went in, took off her cloak, and prepared to undress. His clothes, the nicety he preserved about personal matters, had taught her much of him. Her clothes had always been common, of the wholesale world; he had had his luxuries, his refinements, his individual tastes. Gradually, as his more expensive clothes had worn out, he had replaced them with machine-made articles of cheap manufacture. His belongings were like hers now. She was bringing him a little closer to her in such ways,--food and lodging and raiment. But not in thought and being. Behind those deep-set eyes passed a world of thought, of conjecture and theory and belief, that rarely expressed itself outwardly.

She let down her hair and began to take off her plain, unlovely clothes. Thus she approached the common human basis, the nakedness and simplicity of life. Her eyes lingered thoughtfully on her body; she touched herself as she unbuttoned, unlaced, cast aside the armor of convention and daily life.

"Howard!" she cried imperiously. He stopped his whistling and looked at her and smiled.

"Do you like me, Howard?" She blushed at the childishness of her eager question. But she demanded the expected answer with the insistence of unsatisfied love. And when he failed to reply at the moment, surprised by her mood, she knelt by his chair and grasped his knees.

"Isn't it all that you want, just the temple and me? Am I not enough to make up for the world and success and pleasure? I can make you love, and when you love you do not think."

She rose and faced him with gleaming eyes, stretching out her bare arms, deploying her whole woman's strength and beauty in mute appeal.

"Why do you ask?" he demanded, troubled.

"O Howard, you do not feel the mist that creeps in between us, though we are close together. Sometimes I think you are farther away than even in the old times, when I first saw you at the hospital. You think, think, and I can't get at your thought. Why is it so?"

He yielded to her entreating arms and eyes, as he had so often before in like moments, when the need to put aside the consciousness of existence, of the world as it appears, had come to one of them or both. Yet it seemed that this love was like some potent spirit, whose irresistible power waned, sank, each time demanding a larger draught of joy, a more delirious tension of the nerves.

"Nothing makes any difference," he answered. "I was born and lived for this."

She had charmed the evil mood, and for the time her heart was satisfied.

But when she lay by his side at night her arm stole about his, as if to clutch him, fearful lest in the empty reaches of sleep he might escape, lest his errant man's thoughts and desires might abandon her for the usual avenues of life. Long after he had fallen into the regular sleep of night, she lay awake by his side, her eyes glittering with passion and defeat. Even in these limits of life, when the whole world was banned, it seemed impossible to hold undisturbed one's joy. In the loneliest island of the human sea it would be thus--division and ultimate isolation.

CHAPTER VI

The summer burned itself out, and the autumn winds pierced the rotten staff walls of the temple. They were no nearer to moving into better quarters than they had been in the spring. The days had come when there was little food, and the last precarious dollar had been spent. They lived on the edge of defeat, and such an existence to earnest people is sombre.

Finally the tide turned. The manager of a large manufacturing plant in Burnside, one of the little factory hamlets south of the city, asked Sommers to take charge of an epidemic of typhoid that had broken out among the operatives. The regular physician of the corporation had proved incompetent, and the annual visitation of the disease threatened to be unprecedented. Sommers spent his days and nights in Burnside for several weeks. When he had time to think, he wondered why the manager employed him. If the Hitchcocks had been in the city, he should have suspected that they had a hand in the matter. But he remembered having seen in a newspaper some months before that the Hitchcocks were leaving for Europe. He did not trouble himself greatly, however, over the source of the gift, thankful enough for the respite, and for the chance of renewed activity. When the time for settlement came, the manager liberally increased the amount of the doctor's modest bill. The check for three hundred dollars seemed a very substantial bulwark against distress, and the promise of the company's medical work after the new year was even more hopeful. Alves was eager to move from the dilapidated temple to an apartment where Sommers could have a suitable office. But Sommers objected, partly from prudential reasons, partly from fear that unpleasant things might happen to Alves, should they come again where people could talk. And then, to Alves's perplexity, he developed strange ideas about money getting.

"The physician should receive the very minimum of pay possible for his existence," he told her once, when she talked of the increase in his income. "He works in the dark, and he is in luck if he happens to do any good. In waging his battle with mysterious nature, he only unfits himself by seeking gain. In the same way, to a lesser degree, the law and the ministry should not be gainful professions. When the question of personal gain and advancement comes in, the frail human being succumbs to

selfishness, and then to error. Like the artist, the doctor, the lawyer, the clergyman, the teacher should be content to minister to human needs. The professions should be great monastic orders, reserved for those who have the strength to renounce ease and luxury and power."

The only tangible comfort that Alves derived from this unusually didactic speech was the assurance that he would not be drawn away from her. She bowed to his conception, and sought to help him. While he was attending the cases in Burnside, she did some work as nurse. Beginning casually to help on an urgent case, she went on to other cases, training herself, learning to take his place wherever she could. She thought to come closer to him in this way, but she suspected that he understood her motive, that her work did not seem quite sincere to him. She was looking for payment in love.

When she was not engaged in nursing, she was more often alone than she had been the year before. The Keystone people visited the temple rarely. Miss M'Gann seemed always a little constrained, when Alves met her, and Dresser was living on the North Side. One December morning, when Alves was alone, she noticed a carriage coming slowly down the unfinished avenue. It stopped a little distance from the temple, and a woman got out. After giving the coachman an order, she took the foot-path that Alves and Sommers had worn. Alves came out to the portico to meet the stranger, who hastened her leisurely pace on catching sight of a person in the temple. At the foot of the rickety steps the stranger stopped.

"You are Miss Hitchcock," Alves said quickly. "Won't you come in?"

"How did you know!" Miss Hitchcock exclaimed, and added without waiting for a reply: "Let's sit here on the steps--the sun is so warm and nice. I've been a long time in coming to see you," her voice rippled on cordially, while Alves watched her. "But we've been out of the city so much of the time,--California, North Carolina, and abroad."

Alves nodded. The young woman's ease of manner and luxurious dress intimidated her. She sat down on the step above Miss Hitchcock, and she had the air of examining the other woman without committing herself.

"But, how did you know me?" Miss Hitchcock exclaimed, with a little laugh of satisfaction.

"Dr. Sommers has told me about you."

"Did he! He didn't tell any one of his marriage." The bluntness of the speech was relieved by the confidential manner in which Miss Hitchcock leaned forward to the other woman.

"It was sudden," Alves replied coolly.

"I know! But we, my father and I, had a right to feel hurt. We knew him so well, and we should have liked to know you."

"Thank you."

"But we had no cards--you disappeared--hid yourselves--and you turn up in this unique place! It's only by chance that I've found you now."

"We didn't send out cards. We are such simple people that we don't expect--"

Miss Hitchcock blushed at the challenge, and interrupted to save the speech from its final ungraciousness.

"Of course, but we are different. We have always been so interested in Dr. Sommers. He was such a promising man."

Alves made no effort to reply. She resented Miss Hitchcock's efforts to reach her, and withdrew into her shell. This young woman with her attendant brougham belonged to the world that she liked to feel Sommers had renounced for her sake. She disliked the world for that reason.

"Is he doing well?" Miss Hitchcock asked bluntly. "He was so brilliant in his studies and at the hospital! I was sorry that he left, that he felt he ought to start for himself. He had a good many theories and ideals. We didn't agree,"--she smiled winningly at the grave woman, "but I have had time to understand somewhat--only I couldn't, I can't believe that my father and his friends are all wrong." Miss Hitchcock rushed on heedlessly, to Alves's perplexity; she seemed desperately eager to establish some kind of possible understanding between them. But this cold, mature woman, in her plain dress, repelled her. She could not prevent herself from thinking thoughts that were unworthy of her.

Why had he done it! What had this woman to give that the women of her set could not equal and more than equal? The atmosphere of her brougham, of her costly gown and pretty hat contrasted harshly with the dingy temple and dead weeds of the waste land. Dr. Lindsay had said much, and insinuated more, about the entanglement that had ruined the promising young surgeon. Was it this woman's sensual power--she rejected the idea on the instant. Dr. Sommers was not that kind, in spite of anything that Lindsay might say. She could not understand it--his devotion to this woman, his giving up his chances. It was all a part of some scheme beyond her power to grasp fully.

"I want to know you," she said at last, after an awkward silence. "Won't you let me?"

Alves leaned slightly forward, and spoke slowly.

"You are very kind, but I don't see any good in it. We don't belong to your world, and you would show him all the time what he has to get along without. Not that he wouldn't do it again," she added proudly, noticing the girl's lowered gaze. "I don't think that he would like to have me say that he had given up anything. But he's got his way to make, here, and it is harder work than you imagine."

"I don't see, then, why you refuse to let me--his old friends--help him." Miss Hitchcock spoke impatiently. She was beginning to feel angry with this impassive woman, who was probably ignorant of the havoc she had done.

"He doesn't want any help!" Alves retorted. "We are not starving now. _I_ can help him. I will help him and be enough for him. He gave it up for me."

"Can you get him friends and practice?" Miss Hitchcock asked sharply. "Can you make it possible for him to do the best work, and stand high in his profession? Will you help him to the place where he can make the most of himself, and not sell his soul for bread?"

These questions fell like taunts upon the silent woman. She seemed to feel beneath them the boast, 'I could have done all that, and much more!' These words were like the rest of this fashionable young woman--her carriage, her clothes, her big house, her freshness of person--all that she did not have. Alves retorted:

"He won't let any one push him, I know. What he wants, he will be glad to get by himself. And," she added passionately, "I will help him. If I stand in his way,--and he can't do what he wants to do,--I will take myself out of his life."

Boast for boast, and the older woman's passionate words seemed to ring the stronger. They looked at each other defiantly. At last Miss Hitchcock pulled her wrap about her, and rose to go. A final wave of regret, of yearning not to be thrust out in this way from these lives made her say:

"I am sorry you couldn't have let me be a little friendly. I wanted to have you to dinner,"--she smiled at the dull practicality of her idea; "but I suppose you won't come."

"He may do as he likes," Alves said, in a more conciliatory manner.

"But he can't!" the girl smiled back good-humoredly. "One doesn't go to dinner without one's wife, especially when one's wife doesn't like the hostess."

Alves laughed at the frank speech. She might have liked this eager, fresh young woman, who took things with such dash and buoyancy, if she could have known her on even terms. As they stood facing each other, a challenge on Miss Hitchcock's face, Alves noticed the doctor's figure in the road beyond.

"I think that is Dr. Sommers coming. He can answer your question for himself."

Sommers was approaching from Blue Grass Avenue; his eyes were turned in the direction of the lake, so that he did not see the women on the steps of the temple until Miss Hitchcock turned and held out her hand. Then he started, perceptibly enough to make Alves's lips tighten once more.

"I have been calling on your wife," Miss Hitchcock explained, talking fast. "But she doesn't like me, won't ask me to come again."

"We shall be very glad to see you," Alves interposed quickly. "But I make no calls."

Miss Hitchcock declined to sit down, and Sommers accompanied her to the waiting carriage. Alves watched them. Miss Hitchcock seemed to be talking very fast, and her head was turned toward his face.

Miss Hitchcock was answering Sommers's inquiries about Colonel and Mrs. Hitchcock. The latter had died over a year ago, and Colonel Hitchcock had been in poor health.

"He has some bitter disappointments," Miss Hitchcock said gravely. "His useful, honorable, unselfish life is closing sadly. We have travelled a good deal; we have just come back from Algiers. It is good to be back in Chicago!"

"I have noticed that the Chicagoan repeats that formula, no matter how much he roams. He seems to travel merely to experience the bliss of returning to the human factory."

"It isn't a factory to me. It is home," she replied simply.

"So it is to us, now. We are earning our right to stay within its gates."

"Are things--going better?" Miss Hitchcock asked hesitatingly. She scanned the doctor's face, as if to read in the grave lines the record of the year.

"We are alive and clothed," he replied tranquilly.

"What a frightful way to put it!"

"The lowest terms--and not very different from others." His eye rested upon the glossy horses and the spotless victoria.

"No!" Miss Hitchcock answered dispiritedly. "But I _won't_ think of it that way. I am coming to see you again, if I may?"

"You were very good to look us up," he answered evasively.

They lingered, speaking slowly, as if loath to part in this superficial manner. He told her of his employment in Burnside, and remarked slowly,

"I wonder who could have put the manager on my track."

"I wonder," she repeated, looking past him.

"You see I didn't start quite at the scratch," he added, his face relaxing into a smile.

"I shouldn't quarrel about _that_ handicap."

"No, I am not as ready to quarrel as I once was."

Her face had the eager expression of interest and vitality that he remembered. She seemed to have something more that she wanted to say, but she simply held out her hand, with a warm "good-by," and stepped into the carriage.

When he returned to the temple, Alves was busy getting their dinner. She paused, and glancing at Sommers remarked, "How beautiful she is!"

"She is a good woman. She ought to marry," he responded.

"Why?"

"Because she is so sound and fine at bottom."

"You were glad to see her again."

"Did I show it unduly?"

"I knew you were, and she knows it."

When he looked at her a few moments later, her eyes were moist.

CHAPTER VII

"Pshaw! pshaw!" Dr. Leonard exclaimed, in a coaxing tone. "I'm disappointed, Alves. 'Tain't natural. I mean to see him and show him what harm it is."

"No, no, don't speak of it again, at least to him," Alves pleaded anxiously. "He would do that, or anything, if he thought I wanted it. I don't want it, I tell you; I'm happier as it is."

"S'pose there are children?" the old dentist asked, in a convincing tone.

"I hope there never will be."

"Now, that shows how wrong you are, how fussed up--why, what's marriage for if it ain't for children? I guess I've had as hard a struggle as most to keep head to the tide, but I couldn't spare the children. Now, I'll get our minister to do the job. You and the doctor come out next Sunday to my house, and after the evening service we'll slip over to the church and make it all right."

Alves smiled at the earnest kindness of the old dentist, but shook her head firmly. Dr. Leonard gathered up his overcoat and silk hat, but seemed loath to go. He peered out of the windows that Sommers had put into the big doors of the temple.

"It's like your living out here in this ramshackle old chicken-coop, when

you might have a tidy flat on Paulina Street; and the doctor could have a desk in my office next door to his old boss." Dr. Leonard spoke testily, and Alves laid her hand soothingly on his arm.

"I guess we aren't made to be like other people."

"You won't have any happiness so long as you defy God's law."

"Did I have any when I lived according to it?"

The dentist, at the end of his arguments, turned the door-knob.

"Some day, Alves, he will reproach you justly for what you've done."

"I shall be dead before that day."

"I've no patience with you, talking of death and hoping you'll never have children."

The old dentist stumbled out into the portico, and, without further words, trudged down the road. Alves lingered in the open door in spite of the intense cold, and watched him, with an unwonted feeling of loneliness. The few people that touched her solitary life seemed to draw back, repelled by something unusual, unsafe in her and her situation. Why was she so obstinate about this trivial matter of a ceremony that counted for so much with most people? At first her refusal had been a sentiment, merely, an instinctive, unreasoned decision. Now, however, there were stronger causes: she would not consent to tie his hands, to make him realize the irrevocableness of his step. Time might come when...

And why had she so stoutly denied a wish for children? These days her thoughts went back often to her dead child--the child of the man she had married. Preston's share in the child was so unimportant now! To the mother belonged the child. Perhaps it was meant to be so in order that something might come to fill the empty places of a woman's heart. If she had children, what difference would that ignorance of the man she loved, that division from him, make? The man had his work, his ideas--the children of his soul; and the woman had the children of her body. Each went his way and worked his life into the fabric of the world. Love! Love was but an episode, an accident of the few blossoming years of life. To woman there was the gift of children, and to man the gift of labor. She wondered if this feeling would increase as the years passed. Would she think more and more of the child she had had, the other man's child? And less of him whom she loved?

"Trying to make an icicle of yourself?" a jovial voice called out; the next moment Dresser came up the steps. The portico shook as he stamped his feet. He wore a fur-lined coat, and carried a pair of skates. His face, which had grown perceptibly fuller since his connection with The Investor's Monthly, was red with cold.

"The ice on the lake is first-rate, Alves, and I skated up the shore to see if I could get you for a spin."

"I am glad you came," Alves said, with new life. "I was kind of lonely and blue, and the doctor is off on a case the other side of nowhere."

"Just the time," responded Dresser, who seemed to have the good luck at present of making "right connections."

They skated down the lagoon to the blackened Court of Honor, through this little pond, around the dismantled figure of Chicago, out into the open lake beside the long pier. The ice was black and without a scratch. They dashed on toward the centre of the lake, Alves laughing in pure exultation over the sport. They had left far behind the few skaters that had ventured beyond the lagoon, and taking hands they flew for a mile down the shore. Then Alves proposed that they should go back to the temple for a cup of tea. The wind was up, beating around the long, black pier behind them, and when they turned, they caught it full in the face. Alves, excited by the tussle, bent to the task with a powerful swing; Dresser skated fast behind her. As they neared the long pier, instead of turning in toward the esplanade, Alves struck out into the lake to round the obstruction and enter the yacht pool beyond. Dresser kept the pace with difficulty. As she neared the end of the pier, she gave a little cry; Dresser saw her leap, then heard a warning shout,

"Look out--the pool!" As he scuttled away from the oily water where the drifts opened, he saw Alves clinging to the rim of ice on the piles.

"Don't be afraid," she called back. "I can crawl under the pier and get up on the cross-bars. Go on to the shore."

While he protested she vanished, and in a minute he saw her reappear above, waving her hand to him. She took off her skates leisurely, wrung out her skirt, and walked along the pier. He skated up as close as he could, stammering his admiration and fears. When he reached the shore, she was already running down the path to the temple. He followed more leisurely, and found her, in a dry skirt, stirring up the fire in the stove.

"That was a close call," he gasped admiringly, throwing his skates into the corner.

"Wasn't it fine?" she laughed. "I'd like days and days of that--flying ahead, with a hurricane behind."

She shovelled some coal into the ugly little stove, and gayly set about preparing tea. Dresser had never seen her so strong and light-hearted as she was this afternoon. They made tea and toasted crackers, chaffing each other and chattering like boy and girl. After their meal Dresser lit his pipe and crouched down by the warm stove.

"I wish you were like this oftener," he murmured admiringly. "Gay and ready for anything!"

"I don't believe I shall be as happy as this for weeks. It comes over me sometimes."

She leaned forward, her face already subdued with thought.

"It makes you beautiful to be happy," Dresser said, with clumsy self-consciousness.

Alves's eyes responded quickly, and she leaned a little farther forward, pondering the words. Suddenly Dresser took her hand, and then locked her in his arms. Even in the roughness of his passion, he could not fail to see her white face. She struggled in his grasp without speaking, as if knowing that words would be useless. And Dresser, too embarrassed by his act to speak, dragged her closer to him.

"Don't touch me," she gasped; "what have I done!"

"I _will_ kiss you," the man cried. "What difference is it, anyway?"

He wrested her from the low chair, and she fell without power to save herself, to struggle further. The room was swimming before her eyes, and Dresser had his arms about her. Then the door opened, and she saw Sommers enter. Her eyes filled with tears.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, looking sharply about at the upset chair, the prostrate form, and Dresser's red face.

"She has fallen--fainted," Dresser stammered.

Alves seemed to acquiesce for a moment, and her head sank back; then she opened her eyes and looked at Sommers pitifully.

"No, Howard. Help me."

Sommers raised her, his face much troubled. While he held her, she spoke brokenly, trying to hide her face.

"You must know. He kissed me. I don't know why. Make him go away. O Howard, what am I?"

Sommers dropped his arm from Alves and started toward Dresser, who was edging away.

"What is this?"

His dictatorial tone made Dresser pause.

"She told you. I was a fool. I tried to kiss her."

Sommers took him by the arm without a word.

"Yes, I am going. Don't make a row about it. You needn't get into a state about it. She isn't Mrs. Sommers, you know!"

"Oh!" Alves groaned, closing her eyes again. "How can he say that!"

Sommers dropped his arm.

"Who told you that Alves was not my wife?" he asked drearily.

"Every one knows it. Lindsay has the whole story. You--"

"Don't say anything more," Sommers interrupted sternly. "You are too nasty to kill."

His tone was quiet. He seemed to be questioning himself what he should do. Finally, opening the door, he grasped Dresser by the neck and flung him into the sand outside. Then he closed the door and turned to Alves. She was crouching before the fire, sobbing to herself. He stroked her hair soothingly.

"We must conform," he said at last.

She shook her head. "It is too late to stop that talk. I was wrong to care about not having the ceremony, and it was foolish to tell Jane. But--to have him think, his touch--how can you ever kiss me again! You let him go," she added, her passion flaming up; "I would have killed him. Why didn't you let me kill him?"

"That is savage," he replied sadly. "What good is it to answer brutality by crime? You cannot save your skirts from the dirt," he concluded softly to himself. "I knew the fellow was bad; I knew it eight years ago, when he took a Swiss girl to Augsburg and left her there. But I said to myself then that, like many men, he had his moods of the beast which he could not control, and thought no more about it. Now his mood of the beast touches me. Society keeps such men in check; he will marry Laura Lindsay and make an excellent, cringing husband, waiting for Lindsay's savings. You see," he ended, turning to his work-table, "I suppose he felt released from the bonds of society by the way we live, by--it all."

Alves rose and walked to and fro.

"Do you think," she asked at last, "that anything I could have done--he could have felt that I--encouraged him?"

"I don't think anything more about it," Sommers answered, closing his lips firmly. "It is part of the mire; we must avert our eyes, Alves."

But in spite of his mild, even gentle way of dealing with the affair, he could not fall into his routine of work. He got up from the table and, finding the room too warm, threw open a window to let the clear, cold winter air rush over his face. He stood there a long time, plunged in thought, while Alves waited for him to come back to her. At last she could bear it no longer. She crept over to his side and placed her head close to his.

"I wish you would even hate me, would be angry, would feel it," she whispered. "Will you ever care to kiss me again?"

"Foolish woman!" Sommers answered, taking her face in his hands. "Why should _that_ make any difference to me, any more than if a drunken brute had struck you?"

"But it does," she asserted sadly. "Everything does, Howard--all the past: that I let my husband touch me; that I had to live with him; that you had to know it, him--it all makes, oh, such a difference!"

"No," he responded, in a high voice. "By God, it makes no difference--only one thing." He paused. Then with a wrench he went on, "Alves, did you--did you--" But he could not make himself utter the words, and before he had mastered his hesitation she had broken in impetuously:

"No, I am right; the great happiness that I wanted to give you must come from the spirit and body of a woman untouched by the evil of living in the world. The soiled people like me should not--"

He closed her lips with a kiss.

"Don't blaspheme our life," he answered tenderly. "One cannot live unspotted except in the heart."

He kissed her again, tenderly, lovingly. But the kiss did not assuage her burning shame; it savored of pity, of magnificent charity.

CHAPTER VIII

One still, frozen winter day succeeded another in changeless iteration. The lake was a solid floor of gray ice as far as one could see. Along the shore between the breakwaters the ice lay piled in high waves, with circles of clear, shining glass beyond. A persistent drift from the north and east, day after day, lifted the sheets of surface ice and slid them over the inner ledges. At night the lake cracked and boomed like a battery of powerful guns, one report starting another until the shore resounded with the noise. The perpetual groaning of the laboring ice, the rending and riving of the great fields, could be heard as far inshore as the temple all through the still night.

Early every morning Sommers with Alves would start for the lake. At this hour only an occasional fisherman could be seen, cutting fresh holes in the ice and setting his lines. Sommers preferred to skate in the mornings, for later in the day the smooth patches of inshore ice were frequented by people from the city. He loved solitude, it seemed to Alves, more and more. In the Keystone days he had been indifferent to the people of the house; now he avoided people except as they needed him professionally. She attributed it, wrongly, to a feeling of pride. In reality, the habit of self-dependence was gaining, and the man was thrusting the world into the background. For hours Sommers never spoke. Always sparing of words,

counting them little, despising voluble people, he was beginning to lose the power of ready speech. Thus, living in one of the most jostling of the world's taverns, they lived as in the heart of the Arizona desert.

They skated in these long silences, enjoying the exhilaration of the exercise, the bitter air, the views of the huge, silent city. Now and then they paused instinctively to watch the scene, without speaking, like great lovers that are mute. Starting from the sheltered pool, where the yachts lay in summer, they skirted the dark piles of the long pier, around which the black water gurgled treacherously. Beyond the pier there was a snakelike, oozing crack, which divided the inshore ice from the more open fields outside. This they followed until they found a chance to cross, and then they sped away toward the little island made by the "intake" of the water works.

These windless mornings the bank of city smoke northward was like gray powder, out of which the skyscrapers stretched their lofty heads. The buildings along the shore, etched in the transparent air, breathing silently white mists of steam, lay like a mirage wonderfully touched with purplish shadows. The great steel works rose to the south, visibly near, mysteriously remote. The ribbons of fiery smoke from their furnaces were the first signs of the city's awakening from its lethargic industrial sleep. The beast was beginning to move along its score of miles of length. But out here in the vacancies of the lake it seemed still torpid.

Eastward, beyond the dot which the "intake" made, the lake was a still arctic field, furrowed by ice-floes, snowy here, with an open pool of water there, ribbed all over with dark crevasses of oozing water. In the far east lay the horizon line of shimmering, gauzy light, as if from beyond the earth's rim was flooding in the brilliance of a perpetual morning. North and south, east and west, along the crevasses the lake smoked in the morning sun, as the vapor from the water beneath rose into the icy air. Savage, tranquil, immense, the vast field of ice was like the indifferent face of nature, like unto death.

One morning, as they waited breathlessly listening to the silence of the ice sea, the lake groaned close beside them, and suddenly the floe on which they stood parted from the field nearer shore. In a few minutes the lane of open water was six feet in width. Sommers pointed to it, and without a word they struck out to the north, weaving their way in and out of the floes, now clambering over heaved-up barriers of ice, now flying along an unscarred field, again making their way cautiously across sheets of shivered surface ice that lay like broken glass beside a crevasse. Finally, they reached the inner field. Sommers looked at his watch, and said:

"We might as well go ashore here. That was rather a narrow chance. I must look in at the Keystone to see how Webber is. I shouldn't wonder if he had typhoid."

"I wish we could go on," Alves replied regretfully. "I was hoping the lane ran on and on for miles."

She put her hands under his coat and leaned against him, looking wistfully

into the arctic sea.

"Let me go back!" she pleaded. "I should like to skate on, on, for days!"

"You can't go back without me. Some day, if this weather keeps up, we'll try for the Michigan shore."

"I should like to end things in this way," she continued musingly; "just us two, to plunge on and on and on into that quiet ice-field, until, at last, some pool shot up ahead--and then! To go out like that, quenched right in the heat of our lives; not chilled, piece by piece."

Sommers moved impatiently.

"It isn't time for that."

"No?" she asked rather than assented, and turned her face to the city. "I am not sure; sometimes I think it is the ripe time. There can be nothing more."

Sommers did not answer, but began to skate slowly. Half an hour later they climbed over the hills of shore ice, and he hurried away to the Keystone. Alves walked slowly south on the esplanade. The gray sea of ice was covered now with the winter sun. The pools and crevasses sent up sheets of steam. Her eyes followed the ice lingeringly. Once she turned back to the lake, but finally she started across the frozen grass plots in the direction of the temple. She could see from a distance a black figure seated on the portico, and she hastened her steps. She recognized the familiar squat, black-clothed person of Mrs. Ducharme. There, in the sunlight between the broken pillars, this gloomy figure seemed of ill omen. Alves regretted that she had turned back from the ice.

Mrs. Ducharme showed no sign of life until Alves reached the steps. She was worn and unkempt. A ragged straw hat but partly disguised her rumbled hair. Alves recalled what Miss M'Gann had said about her drinking.

"I've been to see you two, three times," Mrs. Ducharme said, in a hoarse, grumbling tone; "but you're always out. This time I was a-going to wait if I'd stayed all night."

"Come in," Alves answered, unlocking the door. The woman dragged herself into the temple.

"Not so tidy a place as you and the other one had," she remarked mournfully.

Alves waited for her to declare her errand; but as she seemed in no haste to speak, she asked,

"Did you ever find Ducharme?"

The Duchesse nodded sombrely, closing her eyes.

"The woman shook him time of the strikes, when his money was gone."

"Well, isn't that what you wanted?"

Mrs. Ducharme nodded her head slowly.

"She made him bad. He drinks, awful sometimes, and whenever I say anything, he says he's going back to Peory, to that woman."

Alves waited for the expected request for money. "They'se awful, these men; but a woman can't get on without _'em_, no more than the men without _us_. Only the men don't care much which one. Any one will do for a time. Do you find the new one any better?"

"I am very happy," Alves replied with a flush; "but I don't care to talk about my affairs."

"You needn't be so close," the woman exclaimed irritably. "I know all about _you_. The _real_ one was a fine gentleman, even if he did liquor bad."

"I told you," Alves repeated, "that I didn't care to talk of my affairs. What do you want?"

"I've come here to talk of your affairs," Mrs Ducharme answered insolently. "And I guess you'll listen. He,--I don't mean the doctor,--the real 'un, came of rich, respectable folks. He told me all about it, and got me to write 'em for money, and his sister sent him some."

"So that was where he obtained the money to drink with when he got out of the cottage!" Alves exclaimed.

The woman nodded, and added, "He gave me some, too."

Alves rose and opened the door.

"I don't see why you came here," she said briefly, pointing to the door.

But Mrs. Ducharme merely laughed and kept her seat.

"Did he, the doctor feller, ever ask you anything about his death?" she asked.

Alves looked at her blankly.

"When he signed that paper you gave the undertaker?" continued the Duchesse.

"I don't know what you mean!" Alves exclaimed, closing the door and walking away from the woman.

"How did _he_ die?" Mrs. Ducharme whispered.

"You know as well as I," Alves cried, terrified now by the mysterious air the woman assumed.

"Yes!" Mrs. Ducharme whispered again. "I know as well as you. I know, and I can tell. I know how the wife gave him powders,--sleeping powders the doctor ordered,--the doctor who was hanging around, and ran off with her just after the funeral."

The woman's scheme of extracting blackmail flashed instantly into Alves's mind.

"You foul creature," she gasped, "you know it is an abominable lie--"

"Think so? Well, Ducharme didn't think so when I told him, and there are others that 'ud believe it, if I should testify to it!"

Alves walked to and fro, overwhelmed by the thoughts of the evil which was around her. At last she faced Mrs. Ducharme, who was watching her closely.

"I see what it means. You want money--blackmail, and you think you've got a good chance. But I will not give you a cent. I will tell Dr. Sommers first, and let him deal with you."

"The doctor! What does he say about his dying quiet and nice as he did? I guess the doctor'll see the point."

Alves started. What did Sommers think? What were his half-completed inquiries? What did his conduct the night of Preston's death mean? This wretched affair was like a curse left to injure her by the miserable creature she had once been tied to. But Sommers would believe her! She had given Preston but one powder, and he had said two were safe. She must tell him exactly what she had done.

"You had better go now," she said to the woman more calmly. "I shall let Dr. Sommers know what your story is. He will answer you."

"Better not tell him," the woman replied, with a laugh. "He knows all he wants to--or I'd 'a' gone to him at once. When he hears about the scrape, he'll run and leave you. You ain't married, anyway!"

"Go," Alves implored.

Mrs. Ducharme rose and stood irresolutely.

"I don't want much, not to trouble you. I'll give you a day to think this over, and to-morrer morning I'll be here at nine sharp to get your answer."

When the woman had gone, Alves tried to reason the matter out calmly. She had been too excited. The charge was simply preposterous, and, inexperienced as she was, she felt that nothing could be made of it in any court. But the mere suggestion of a court, of a public inquiry, alarmed her, not for herself but for Sommers, who would suffer grievously. And it did not seem easy to discuss the matter with him as she must now; it would

bring up distressing scenes. Her face burned at the thought. The woman's tale was plausible. Had Sommers wondered about the death? Gradually it came over her that Sommers had always suspected this thing. She was sure of it. He had not spoken of it because he wished to protect her from her own deed. But, now, he would not believe her. The Ducharme woman's tale would fit in with his surmises. No! he must believe her. And beside this last fear, the idea of publicity, of ventilating the old scandal, thus damning him finally and hounding him out of his little practice, faded into inconsequence. The terrible thing was that for eighteen months he had carried this belief about her in his heart.

She tried to divert her excited mind from the throng of suspicions and fears by preparing dinner. One o'clock came, then two, and Sommers did not arrive. Mrs. Ducharme might have waited for him at the entrance to the avenue, and he might have turned back to debate with himself what he should do. But she acquitted him of that cowardice.

* * * * *

As the afternoon wore on, her mind turned to the larger thoughts of their union. She saw with sudden clearness what she had done to this man she loved. She had taken him from his proper position in the world; she had forced him to push his theories of revolt beyond sane limits. She had isolated him, tied him, and his powers would never be tested. A man like him could never be happy, standing outside the fight with his equals. Worse yet, she had soiled the reverences of his nature. What was she but a soiled thing! The tenderness of his first passion had sprung amid the rank growth of her past with its sordid little drama. And the soil in her fate had tarnished their lives ever since, until this grievous...

And what had she given him? Love,--every throb of her passionate body, every desire and thought. Was this enough? There sounded the sad note of defeat: it was not, could not be, would never be enough! No man ever lived from love alone. Passion was a torrid desert. Already she had felt him fading out of her life, withdrawing into the mysterious recesses of his soul. He did not know it; he did not willingly put her away. But as each plant of the field was destined to grow its own way, side by side with its fellows, so human souls grew singly by themselves from some irresistible inner force. And she was but the parasite that fed upon this soul.

The room stifled her. She fetched her cape and hat. They were lying upon his table, and as she took them she could see the sheets of an unfinished letter. The writing was firm and fine, with the regular alignment and spacing of one who is deft about handwork. Her eye glanced over the page; the letter was in answer to a doctor in Baltimore, who had asked him to cooperate in preparing a surgical monograph. "I should like extremely to be with you in this," ran the lines, like the voice of the speaking man, "but--and the refusal pains me more than you know--I cannot in honesty undertake the work. I have not suitable conditions. It is eighteen months since I entered a hospital, and I am behind the times. And, for the present, I see no prospect of being in a condition to undertake the work. I advise you to try Muller, or--" There the letter broke off, unfinished. She raised it to her lips and kissed it. This was another sign, and she would

heed it. To be a full man he must return to the poor average world, or be less than the trivial people he had always despised.

When she opened the door, the level rays of the western sun blinded her. There was no wind. Eastward the purple shadows had thickened, effacing the line of light along the horizon. The frozen lake stretched, ridged and furrowed, into the gloom. Toward it she walked,--slowly, irresistibly drawn by its limitless bosom.

She had boasted to Miss Hitchcock, "I will take myself out of his life, if need be." It was not an empty, woman's boast. She was strong enough to do what she willed. The time had come. She would not see him again. To break with words the ties between them would but dishonor them both. They must not discuss this thing. At the shore of the pool where they had put on their skates in the morning she paused, shaken with a new thought. The woman would come back on the morrow, and, without one word of denial from her, would tell him that terrible lie, confirming his old suspicions. She must see him,--she could not leave him with that foul memory,--and she returned to the temple in the hope that he was already there. The little building, however, was empty and desolate, and she sat down by the fire to wait.

The story, the denial of it, no longer seemed important. She would write him what she had to say, and go away. She would tell him that she had not poisoned her husband like a sick dog, and he would believe the solemn last words. She took a sheet of paper from his table and wrote hesitatingly:

"Dear Howard: I am leaving you----forever." Then she began again and again, but at last she came back to the first words and wrote on desperately: "I cannot make you understand it all. But one thing I must tell you, and you must believe it. That horrible woman, Mrs. Ducharme, was here this morning and told me that I had given opiates to my husband when he was ill in the cottage, and had killed him, _and that you knew it_. Somehow I remembered things that made me know you thought so, had always thought so. Perhaps you will still think it must have been so, her story is so terribly probable.

"O Howard, you used to think that it would be right--but I couldn't. I might have in time, but I couldn't then. I did nothing to hasten his death. Believe this, if you love me the least.

"That isn't the sole reason why I leave you. But it is all like that. I ruin the world for you. Love is not all,--at least for a man,--and somehow with me you cannot have the rest and love. We were wrong to rebel--I was wrong to take my happiness. I longed so! I have been so happy!

"Alves."

It seemed pitifully inadequate--a few wavering lines--to tell the tale of the volumes in her heart. But with a sigh she pushed back the chair and gathered her hat and cape. Once more she hesitated, and seeing that the fire in the stove was low, replenished it. Then she turned swiftly away, locked the door,--putting the key where they hid it, in the hollow of a

pillar,--and walked rapidly in the direction of the lake.

It was already nearly dusk. Little groups of skaters were sauntering homeward from the lagoons and the patches of inshore ice. The lake was gray and stern. She gained the esplanade, with a vague purpose of walking into the city, of taking the train for Wisconsin. But as she passed the long pier, the desire to walk out on the ice seized her once more. With some difficulty she gained the black ice after scrambling over the debris piled high against the beach. When she reached the clear spaces she walked slowly toward the open lake. The gloom of the winter night was already gathering; as she passed the head of the pier, a park-guard hailed her, with some warning cry. She paid no attention, but walked on, slowly picking her way among the familiar ice hills, in and out of the floes.

Once beyond the head of the pier she was absolutely alone in the darkening sea of ice. The cracks and crevasses were no longer steaming; instead, a thin shell of ice was coating over the open surfaces. But she knew all these spots and picked her way carefully. The darkness had already enveloped the shore. Beyond, on all sides, rose small white hills of drifted ice, making a little arctic ocean, with its own strange solitude, its majestic distances, its titanic noises; for the fields of ice were moving in obedience to the undercurrents, the impact from distant northerly winds. And as they moved, they shrieked and groaned, the thunderous voices hailing from far up the lake and pealing past the solitary figure to the black wastes beyond. This tumult of the lake increased in fury, yet with solemn pauses of absolute silence between the reports. At first Alves stood still and listened, fearful, but as she became used to the noise, she walked on calm, courageous, and strangely at peace in the clamor. Once she faced the land, where the arc lights along the esplanade made blue holes in the black night. Eastward the radiant line of illumined horizon reappeared, creating a kind of false daybreak.

So this was the end as she had wished it--alone in the immensity of the frozen lake. This was like the true conception of life--one vast, ever darkening sphere filled with threatening voices, where she and others wandered in sorrow, in regret, in disappointment, and, also, in joy. Oh! that redeemed it. Her joy had been so beautiful, so true to the promise of God in the pitiful heart of man. She said to herself that she had tasted it without sin, and now had the courage to put it away from her before it turned to a draught bitter to her and to others. There were more joys in this life than the fierce love for man: the joy over a child, which had been given to her and taken away; the joy of triumph, the joy--but why should she remember the others? Her joy had its own perfection. For all the tears and waste of living, this one passion had been given--a joy that warmed her body in the cold gloom of the night.

There loomed in her path a black wall of broken ice. She drew herself slowly over the crest of the massed blocks. Beyond lay a pleasant blackness of clear water, into which she plunged,--still warm with the glow of her perfect happiness.

CHAPTER IX

Webber had a well-developed case of typhoid, and Sommers had him moved to St. Isidore's. The doctor accompanied him to the hospital, and once within the doors of his old home, he lingered chatting with the house physician, who had graduated from the Philadelphia school shortly after Sommers had left. The come and go of the place, the air of excitement about the hospital, stirred Sommers as nothing in months had done. Then the attention paid him by the internes and the older nurses, who had kept alive in their busy little world the tradition of his brilliant work, aroused all the vanity in his nature. When he was about to tear himself away from the pleasant antiseptic odor and orderly bustle, the house physician pressed him to stay to luncheon. He yielded, longing to hear the talk about cases, and remembering with pleasure the unconventional manners and bad food of the St. Isidore mess-table. After luncheon he was urged to attend an operation by a well-known surgeon, whose honest work he had always admired. It was late in the afternoon when he finally started to leave, and then a nurse brought word that Webber was anxious to see him about some business. He found Webber greatly excited and worried over money matters. To his surprise he learned that the foppish, quiet-mannered clerk had been dabbling in the market. He held some Distillery common stock, and, also, Northern Iron--two of the new "industrials" that were beginning to sprout in Chicago.

"You must ask the brokers to sell if the market is going against me," the clerk exclaimed feverishly. "Perhaps, if I am to be tied up here a long time, they'd better sell, anyway."

"Yes," Sommers assented; "you must get it off your mind."

So, with a promise to see White and Einstein, the brokers, at once, and look after the stock, he soothed the sick man.

"You're a good fellow," Webber sighed. "It's about all I have. I'll tell you some time why I went in--I had very direct information."

Sommers cut him short and hastened away. By the time he had found White and Einstein's office, a little room about as large as a cigar shop in the basement of a large building on La Salle Street, the place was deserted. A stenographer told him, with contempt in her voice, that the Exchange had been closed for two hours. Resolving to return the first thing in the morning, he started for the temple. He had two visits to make that he had neglected for Webber's case, but he would wait until the evening and take Alves with him. He had not seen her for hours. For the first time in months he indulged himself in a few petty extravagances as he crossed the city to get his train. The day had excited him, had destroyed the calm of his usual controlled, plodding habits. The feverish buoyancy of his mood made it pleasant to thread the chaotic streams of the city streets. It was intoxicating to rub shoulders with men once more.

At Sixtieth Street he left the train and strode across the park, his

imagination playing happy, visionary tunes. He would drop in to-morrow at St. Isidore's on his way back from White and Einstein's. He must see more of those fellows at Henry's clinic; they seemed a good set. And he was not sure that he should answer the Baltimore man so flatly. He would write for further details. When he reached the temple, he found the place closed, and he thought that Alves had gone to see one of his cases for him. The key was in its usual hiding-place, and the fire looked as if it had been made freshly. He had just missed her. So he filled a pipe, and hunted along the table for the unfinished letter to the Baltimore man. It was blotted, he noticed, and he would have to copy it in any case. As he laid it aside, his eyes fell upon a loose sheet of note-paper covered with Alves's unfamiliar writing. He took it up and read it, and then looked around him to see her, to find her there in the next room. The letter was so unreal!

"Alves!" he called out, the pleasant glow of hope fading in his heart. How he had forgotten her! She must be suffering so much! Mechanically he put on his hat and coat and left the temple, hiding the key in the pillar. She could not have been gone long,--the room had the air of her having just left it. He should surely find her nearby; he must find her. Whipped by the intolerable imagination of her suffering, he passed swiftly down the sandy path toward the electric lights, that were already lamping silently along the park esplanade. He chose this road, unconsciously feeling that she would plunge out that way. What had the Ducharme woman said? What had made her take this harsh step, macerating herself and him just as they were beginning to breathe without fear? He sped on, into the gullies by the foundations of the burnt buildings, up to the new boulevard. After one moment of irresolution he turned to the right, to the lake. That icy sea had fascinated her so strongly! He shivered at the memory of her words. Once abreast of the pier he did not pause, but swiftly clambered over the ice hills and groped his way along the black piles of the pier. The vastness of the field he had to search! But he would go, even across the floes of ice to the Michigan shore. He was certain that she was out there, beyond in the black night, in the gloom of the rending ice.

Suddenly, as he neared the end of the pier, the big form of a man, bearing, dragging a burden, loomed up out of the dark expanse. It came nearer, and Sommers could make out the uniform of a park-guard. He was half-carrying, half-dragging the limp form of a woman. Sommers tried to hail him, but he could not cry. At last the guard called out when he was within a few feet:

"Give me a hand, will you. It's a woman,--suicide, I guess," he added more gently.

Sommers walked forward and took the limp form. The drenched garments were already frosting in the cold. He turned the flap of the cape back from the face.

"It is my wife," he said quietly.

"I saw her from the pier goin' out, and I called to her," the guard replied, "but she kept on all the faster. Then I went back to the shore and got on the ice and followed her as fast as I could, but--"

Together they lifted her and carried her in over the rough shore ice up to the esplanade.

"We live over there." Sommers pointed in the direction of the temple. The man nodded; he seemed to know the young doctor.

"I shall not need your help," Sommers continued, wrapping the stiff cape about the yielding form. He took her gently in his arms, staggered under the weight, then started slowly along the esplanade. The guard followed for a few steps; but as the doctor seemed able to carry his burden alone, he turned back toward the city.

Sommers walked on slowly. The stiff cape slipped back from Alves's head, revealing in the blue electric light the marble-white pallor of the flesh, the closed eyes. Sommers stopped to kiss the cold face, and with the movement Alves's head nestled forward against his hot neck. Tears rose to his eyes and fell against her cheek; he started on once more, tracing carefully the windings of the path.

* * * * *

So this was the end! The little warmth and love of his cherishing arms about her cold body completed the pittance of happiness she had craved.

The story was too dark for him to comprehend now--from that first understanding moment in St. Isidore's receiving room to this. Here was his revolt, in one cold burden of dead love. She had left him in some delusion that it would be better thus, that by this means he would find his way, free and unshackled, back to the world of his fellows. And, perhaps, like a creature of love, she had blindly felt love's slow, creeping paralysis, love's ultimate death. Even now, as he staggered along the lighted avenue of the park, in the silence of death and of night, that pregnant reproach oppressed his heart. He had not loved her enough! She had felt a wall that was building impalpably between them, a division of thought and of feeling. She had put her arms against his man's world of secret ambition and desire and had found it cold.

She had struggled for her bit of happiness, poor, loving woman! She had suffered under her past error, her marriage with Preston, and had endured, until, suddenly relieved, she had embraced her happiness, only to find it slowly vanishing in her warm hands. He had suspected her of grasping this happiness without scruple, clamorously; but her sweet white lips spoke out the falseness of this accusation. It was bitter to know that he had covered her with this secret suspicion. He owed her a sea of pardons!

So he labored on into the dark stretches of the park, among the debris of the devastated buildings, up the little sandy hills, out of the park to the lonely temple. Already his self-reproach seemed trivial. He knew how little his concealed suspicions had to do with bringing about this catastrophe. That misunderstanding was but a drop in the stream of fate, which was all too swift for her strength. He paused at the last turn of the road and rested, settling his burden more closely in his arms, drawing her to him in the unavailing embrace of regret. Another kind of life, he said,--some

average marriage with children and home would have given her more fully the human modicum of joy. But his heart rejected also this reproach. In no other circumstance could he place her justly. She was so amply made for joy--so strong to love, to endure; so true to the eternal passions. But not mere household love, the calm minutes of interlude in the fragments of a busy day! They would not satisfy the deep thirst for love in her heart. He had given the best he had--all, nearly all, as few men could give, as most men never give. He must content himself there.

He started again and strode on to the end of the journey. Within the temple he placed her on their bed, taking off her stiff clothes and preparing her for sleep. Then he remade the fire, and opening a window for the low night wind to draw across her face as she liked to have it, he sat down for his vigil.

Yes, it was the end! It was the end of his little personal battle with the world, the end of judging and striving, the end of revolt. He should live on, strangely enough, into many years, but not as they had tried to live in self-made isolation. He should return to that web of life from which they had striven to extricate themselves. She bade him go back to that fretwork, unsolvable world of little and great, of domineering and incompetent wills, of the powerful rich struggling blindly to dominate and the weak poor struggling blindly to keep their lives: the vast web of petty greeds and blind efforts. He should return, but humbly, with the crude dross of his self-will burnt out. They had rebelled together; they had had their wills to themselves; and that was ended. It could not have been otherwise. They could never have known each other in the world; they had to withdraw themselves apart. He looked at her afresh, lying on the pillow by his side, her hair twining carelessly about the white arm. She was infinitely greater than he,--so undivided and complete a soul! She had left him for the commoner uses of life. And all the stains of their experience had been removed, washed out by the pure accomplishment of her end.

Already so cold, so sweetly distant, that face,--so done with life and with him! He leaned over it and burst into tears. The dream of the summer night had passed away.

CHAPTER X

Mrs. Ducharme returned to the temple at an early hour the next morning. Sommers saw her mumbling to herself as she came across the park. Before she knocked, he opened the door; she started back in fear of the sombre, bearded face with the blood-shot eyes that seemed lying in wait for her.

"Is the missus at home?" she murmured, drawing back from the door.

"Come in," the doctor ordered.

As soon as she entered, Sommers locked the door.

"Now," he said quietly, pointing to a chair, "the whole story and no lies."

The woman looked at the doctor and trembled; then she edged toward the inner door. Sommers locked this, flung the key on the table, and pointed again to the chair.

"What did you tell her yesterday?" he demanded.

Mrs. Ducharme began an incoherent tale about her head hurting her, about the sin which the "healer" commanded her to rid her conscience of. Sommers interrupted her.

"Answer my questions. Did you threaten _her_?"

The woman nodded her head.

"Did you accuse her of drugging her husband?"

She nodded her head again reluctantly; then cried out,--"Let me go! I'll have the police on you two."

Sommers stood over the woman as if he were about to lay hands on her.

"You know the facts. Tell them. What happened to Preston that day?"

"He'd been drinking."

"You got him the liquor?"

She nodded.

"Then you gave him a powder from that box in Mrs. Preston's room?"

The woman looked terrified, and did not answer.

"If you don't tell me every word of truth," Sommers said, slowly drawing a little syringe from his pocket, "you will never see anything again."

"Yes, I gave him a powder."

"One?"

She nodded, her hands shaking.

"Two?"

"Yes," she gasped. "I was afraid Mrs. Preston would find out what I had done, and one powder wasn't enough, didn't keep him quiet. So I put two more in--thought it wouldn't do no harm. Then I guess Mrs. Preston gave him some, when she came in. But you can't touch me," she added impudently. "The healer said you had done a criminal act in signing that certificate. You and she better look out."

Sommers stepped across the room and opened the inner door. Mrs. Ducharme gave one glance at the silent figure and shrieked:

"You killed her! You killed her! Let me out!"

Sommers closed the door softly and returned to the shrieking creature.

"Keep quiet," Sommers ordered sternly, "while I think what to do with you."

She held her tongue and sat as still as her quaking nerves permitted. Sommers reviewed rapidly the story as he had made it out. At first it occurred to him, as it had to Alves, that the woman had been drinking. But his practised eyes saw more surely than Alves, and he judged that her conduct had been the result of mental derangement. Probably the blow over the eye, from which she was suffering when she came to Lindsay's office, had hurt the brain. Otherwise, she would not have been silly enough to go to Alves with her foolish story. It was possible, also, that the night of Preston's death she had not known what she was doing. His resentment gave place to disgust. The sole question was what to do with her. She would talk, probably, and in some way he must avoid that danger for a few days, at least. Then it would not matter to Alves or to him what she said.

Finally he turned to the miserable, shaking figure, and said sternly:

"You have committed one murder, and, perhaps, two. But I will not kill you _now_, or put out your eyes, unless you get troublesome. Have you any money? I thought not. You are going with me to the railroad station, where I shall buy you a ticket."

He unlocked the door and motioned to the woman. She followed him to the station without protest, fascinated by his strong will. Sommers bought a ticket to St. Louis and handed it to her with a dollar.

"Remember, if I see or hear of you again,"--he put his finger in his waistcoat pocket, significantly. "And there are other powders," he added grimly.

"Ducharme has gone back to Peory. I s'pose I can stop off there?" she asked timidly, as the express arrived.

"You can stop off anywhere on your way to hell," the doctor replied indifferently. "But keep away from Chicago. There is no quicker way of making that journey to hell than to come back here."

Mrs. Ducharme trembled afresh and bundled herself on board the train.

Sommers returned to the temple, feeling assured that the next few hours would not be disturbed by the ill-omened creature. This vulgar, brutal act had to be performed; he had been preparing himself for it since daylight, when his mind had resumed the round of cause and effect that answers for

life. It was over now, and he could return to Alves. There were other petty things to be done, but not yet. As he came across the park he noticed that the door of the temple was open. Some one had entered while he was away. At his step on the portico a figure rose from the inner room and came to meet him. It was Louise Hitchcock. The traces of tears lay on her face.

"I knew this morning," she said gently. "I thought you might be alone--and so I came."

"Sit down," Sommers replied wearily. In a few moments he added, "I suppose you saw it in the papers--the guard must have told. Strange! that even in death the world must meddle with her, the world that cared nothing for her."

"I am sorry." Miss Hitchcock blushed as she spoke. "I will go away--I didn't mean to intrude--I thought--"

"No, don't go! I didn't mean you. I wanted to be alone, all alone for a little while, but I am glad now that you came, that you cared to come. You didn't know Alves."

"She wouldn't let me know her," Miss Hitchcock protested gently.

"Yes, I remember. You see, our life was peculiar. I think Alves was afraid of you, of all the world."

"I knew how you loved her," Miss Hitchcock exclaimed irrelevantly.

Sommers tried to answer. He felt like talking to this warm-hearted woman; he wanted to talk, but he could not phrase the complex feeling in his heart. Everything about Alves had something in it he could not make another, even the most sympathetic soul in the world, understand. It was like trying to explain an impression of a whole life.

"There is so much I can't tell any one," he said at last, with a wan smile.

"Don't misunderstand--you'd have to know the whole, and I couldn't begin to make you know it."

"Don't try," she said, tears coming to her eyes. "I know that it has been noble and generous--on both sides," she added.

"It has ended," he answered drearily. "I don't know where to begin."

"Can't I send for some one, some friend?" she suggested.

"I haven't any friend," he replied absently. "And Alves wouldn't want any one. She would have done everything for me. I will do everything for her."

"Then I will stay here, while you are away," Miss Hitchcock replied quickly. "Don't hurry. I will wait here in this room."

Sommers thought a moment and then answered gently:

"I think not. I think Alves would rather be alone. Let me go back to the

city with you. I have some errands there."

Miss Hitchcock's face expressed her disappointment. She had triumphed impulsively over so many conventions in coming to him unasked that she felt doubly hurt.

"Very well. Only you will not always put me outside, in this way?" she implored, bravely stifling her pride. "It will not be so easy to say it later, and it will hurt if you refuse to have anything to do with my father and me."

"_I_ shall not refuse," Sommers responded warmly. "I am grateful for what you want to do."

"You know--" She completed the sentence with a sigh and prepared to accompany him. Sommers locked the door, putting the key in the usual hiding-place, and together they crossed the park to the railroad station. There they separated.

"I shall not come out to-morrow," Miss Hitchcock said, as if she had arrived at the decision after some wavering.

He did not urge her to come, and they shook hands.

"Remember," she said hesitatingly, "that ideas don't separate people. You must _trust_ people, those who understand and care."

"I shan't forget," he answered humbly.

On the train he remembered Webber's business, and as soon as he reached the city he went to the brokers' office. The morning session of the Exchange had just closed, and Einstein was fluttering in and out of his private office, sending telegrams and telephone messages. Sommers got his ear for a moment and explained his errand.

"I don't know anything about the stocks," he concluded. "But I think you had best close his account, as it will be some weeks before he should be troubled with such things."

"Damn shame!" Einstein remarked irritably, removing his cigar from his mouth. "I could have got him out even this morning. Now, it's too late."

As Sommers seemed ignorant of the market, the broker went on to explain, meanwhile sending a telegram:

"Most of his is Consolidated Iron--one of Carson's new promotions. Porter is in it, and a lot of big men. Splendid thing, but these new industrials are skittish as colts, and the war talk is like an early frost. Yesterday it was up to ninety, but to-day, after that Venezuelan business in the Senate, it backed down ten points. That about cleans our friend out."

"He doesn't own the stock, then?" Sommers asked.

Einstein looked at the doctor pityingly.

"He's taken a block of two hundred on margins. We hold some Baking Powder common for him, too. But he owns that."

Sommers lingered about, irresolute. He didn't like to take the responsibility of selling out Webber, nor the equal responsibility of doing nothing. Miss M'Gann's hopes, he reflected, hung on this stock trade.

"What is the prospect to-morrow?" Sommers asked timidly. He felt out of place in all the skurry of the brokers' office, where men were drinking in the last quotations as the office boy scratched them on the board.

"Dunno. Can't tell. Good, if the Senate doesn't shoot off its mouth any more."

"How much is Webber margined for?"

"Say, Phil," Einstein sang out to his partner, who came out from another cubbyhole, "how much has Webber on Iron?"

"Six points," White replied. He nodded to Sommers. The doctor remembered White as one of the negative figures of his early months in Chicago,--a smiling, slim, youthful college boy. Evidently he was the genteel member of the firm. Sommers thought again. He could not wait. "Will you carry him five points more?" he asked.

"Can you put up the money?" White replied indifferently.

"No," the doctor admitted. "But I will try to get it at once."

Einstein shook his head. But White asked, good-naturedly, "Are you sure?"

"I think so," the doctor replied.

"Well, that'll tide him over; the market is sure to go back next week."

Sommers escaped from the heated room with its noise and jostling men. He realized vaguely that he had made himself responsible for a thousand dollars--foolishly, he thought now. He had done it on the spur of the moment, with the idea that he would save Webber from a total loss, and thereby save Miss M'Gann. He felt partly responsible, too; for if he had not lingered at St. Isidore's yesterday, he could have delivered the order before the reaction had set in. He wondered, however, at his ready promise to find the thousand dollars for the extra margin. As he had told Miss Hitchcock, he had not a friend in the world to whom he could apply for help. Even the last duties to Alves he must perform alone, and to those he turned himself now.

As he passed the Athenian Building, he remembered Dr. Leonard and went up to his office. The old dentist was the one friend in Chicago whom Alves would want near her to-morrow. Dr. Leonard came frowning out of his office, and without asking Sommers to sit down listened to what he had to say.

"Yes," he replied, without unwrinkling his old face, "I saw it in the papers. I'll come, of course I'll come. I set an awful store by Alves, poor girl! There weren't nothing right for her in this world. Maybe there will be in the next."

Sommers made no reply. He felt the kind old dentist's reproach.

"Young feller," the dentist exclaimed sharply as Sommers turned to go, "I mistrust you have much to answer for in that poor girl's case. Does your heart satisfy you that you have treated her right?"

Sommers bowed his head humbly before this blunt speech. In the sense that Dr. Leonard meant, perhaps, he was not guilty, but in other ways he was not sure. It was a difficult thing to treat any human soul justly and tenderly. The doctor took his silence for confession.

"Well," he added, turning away and adjusting his spectacles that were lodged above his watery blue eyes, "I ain't no call to blame you. It's enough blame anyway to have hurt _her_--there wasn't a nicer woman ever born."

As Sommers left the Athenian Building, his mind reverted to the talk with the brokers. He was glad that he had undertaken to save Webber from his loss. Alves would have liked it. Miss M'Gann had been kind to her when she was learning how to teach. Probably Webber would lose the money in some other venture, but he would do what he could to save the clerk's little capital now. Where could he get the money? There was but one person on whom he could call, and overcoming his dislike of the errand he went at once to Miss Hitchcock.

The house was pleasantly familiar. As he waited for Miss Hitchcock in the little library that belonged especially to her, he could detect no changes in the conglomerate furnishing of the house. He had half expected to find that it had yielded to the younger generation, but something had arrested the march of innovation. The steel engravings still hung in the hall, and the ugly staircase had not been reformed. Colonel Hitchcock came into the house, and without looking into the study went upstairs. Sommers started to intercept him in the hall, but restrained the impulse. Miss Hitchcock appeared in a few moments, advancing to greet him with a frank smile, as if it were the most natural thing to meet him there.

"I have come to ask you to do something for me," Sommers began at once, still standing, "because, as I told you, I have no one else to ask for help."

"You take the bloom off kindnesses in a dreadfully harsh way," Miss Hitchcock responded sadly.

"But it's something one doesn't usually ask of a young woman," Sommers added. He told her briefly the circumstances that led to his visit. "I haven't literally any friend of whom I could properly ask five cents."

"Don't say that. It sounds so forlorn!"

"Does it? I never thought about it before. I suppose it is a reflection upon a man that at thirty-three he hasn't any one in the world to ask a favor of. It looks as if he had lived a pretty narrow life."

"Hard, not narrow," Miss Hitchcock interposed quickly. "I will send the money to-morrow. John will take it to the brokers, if you will write them a note."

As he still stood, she went on, to avoid the awkward silence: "Those horrid industrials! I am sure Uncle Brome will lose everything in them. He's a born gambler. Mr. Carson has got him interested in these new things."

"Is his picture still on exhibition?" Sommers inquired, with a faint smile.

"I don't know. I haven't seen much of them lately." She spoke as if Carson and his kind were completely indifferent to her. Her next remark surprised Sommers.

"I think I can see now why you felt as you did about--well, Mr. Carson. He is a sort of shameless ideal held up before such people as this young man who is speculating. Isn't that it?"

Sommers nodded.

"Uncle Brome, too? When he makes several hundred thousand dollars in Consolidated Iron, every clerk, every little man who knows anything about it has all his bad, greedy, envious passions aroused."

The doctor smiled at the serious manner in which the young woman explored the old ground of their differences.

"But," she concluded, "they aren't all like Mr. Carson and Uncle Brome. You mustn't make that mistake. And Uncle Brome is so generous, too. It is hard to understand."

"No," Sommers said, preparing to leave. "Of course they are not all alike, and it is hard to judge. No man knows what he is doing--to any great extent."

"What will you do?" Miss Hitchcock asked abruptly.

As Sommers's careworn face flushed, she added hurriedly,--"How cruel of me! Of course you don't know. That will settle itself."

"I have had some notion of trying for a hospital again. It doesn't take much to live. And I don't believe in a doctor's making money. If it isn't the hospital--well, there's enough to do."

Miss Hitchcock thought a moment, and then remarked unexpectedly, "I like that idea!"

"About all my kick over things has come to that point. There are some people who should be willing to--no, not willing, who should _want_ to do things without any pay. The world needs them. Most people are best off in the struggle for bread, but the few who see how--unsatisfying that end is, should be willing to work without profits. Good-by."

As they shook hands, Sommers added casually: "I shouldn't wonder if I went away from Chicago--for a time. I don't know now, but I'll let you know, if you care to have me."

"Of course I shall care to know!"

Miss Hitchcock's voice trembled, and then steadied itself, as she added,--"And I am glad you are thinking of it."

* * * * *

With a sense of relief Sommers found himself alone, and free to return to the temple, to Alves, for the last time. The day had been crowded with insistent, petty details, and he marvelled that he had submitted to them patiently. In the chamber where the dead woman lay it was strangely still--deserted by all things human. He locked the doors and sat down for his second night of watch, reproaching himself for the hours he had lost this day. But when he looked at the cold, white face upon the pillow, that already seemed the face of one who had travelled far from this life, he felt that it had been best as it was. He kissed the silent lips and covered the face; he would not look at it again. Alves had gone. To-morrow he would lay this body in the little burial plot of the seminary above the Wisconsin lakes.

Already Alves had bequeathed him something of herself. She had returned him to his fellow-laborers with a new feeling toward them, a humbleness he had never known, a desire to adjust himself with them. He was sensitive to the kindness of the day,--White's friendly trust, Leonard's just words, Miss Hitchcock's generosity. As the sense of this life faded from the woman he loved, the dawn of a fairer day came to him. And his heart ached because she for whom he had desired every happiness might never respond to human joy.

CHAPTER XI

During the next two years the country awoke from its torpor, feeling the blood tingle in its strong limbs once more, and rubbing its eyes in wonder at its own folly. Some said the spirit of hope was due to the gold basis; some said it was the good crops; some said it was the prospect of national expansion. In any event the country got tired of its long fit of sulks; trade revived, railroads set about mending their tracks, mills opened--a current of splendid vitality began to throb. Men took to their business with renewed avidity, content to go their old ways, to make new snares and

to enter them, all unconscious of any mighty purpose. Those at the faro tables of the market increased the stakes and opened new tables. New industrial companies sprung up overnight like mushrooms, watered and sunned by the easy optimism of the hour. The rumors of war disturbed this hothouse growth. But the "big people" took advantage of these to squeeze the "little people," and all worked to the glory of the great god. In the breast of every man on the street was seated one conviction: 'This is a mighty country, and I am going to get something out of it.' The stock market might bob up and down; the gamblers might gain or lose their millions; the little politicians of the hour might talk blood and iron by the pound of _Congressional Record_; but the great fact stared you in the face--every one was hopeful; for every one there was much good money somewhere. It was a rich time in which to live.

Remote echoes of this optimism reached Sommers. He learned, chiefly through the newspapers, that Mr. R. G. Carson had emerged from the obscurity of Chicago and had become a celebrity upon the metropolitan stage after "the successful flotation of several specialties." Mr. Brome Porter, he gathered from the same source, had built himself a house in New York, and altogether shaken the dust of Chicago from his feet. Sommers passed him occasionally in the unconsolidated air of Fifth Avenue, but the young doctor had long since sunk out of Brome Porter's sphere of consciousness. Sommers thought Porter betrayed his need of Carlsbad more than ever, and he wondered if the famous gambler had beguiled Colonel Hitchcock into any of his ventures. But Sommers did not trouble himself seriously with the new manifestations of gigantic greed. Unconscious of the fact that from collar-button to shoe-leather he was assisting Mr. Carson's industries to yield revenues on their water-logged stocks, he went his way in his profession and labored. For the larger part of the time he was an assistant in a large New York hospital, where he found enough hard work to keep his thoughts from wandering to Carson, Brome Porter, and Company. In the feverish days that preceded the outbreak of the Cuban war, he heard rumors that Porter had been caught in the last big "flotation," and was heavily involved. But the excitement of those days destroyed the importance of the news to the public and to him.

Sommers resolved to find service in one of the military hospitals that before long became notorious as pestholes. From the day he arrived at Tampa, he found enough to tax all his energies in trying to save the lives of raw troops dumped in the most unsanitary spots a paternal government could select. In the melee created by incompetent officers and ignorant physicians, one single-minded man could find all the duties he craved. Toward the close of the war, on the formation of a new typhoid hospital, Sommers was put in charge. There one day in the heat of the fight with disease and corruption he discovered Parker Hitchcock, who had enlisted, partly as a frolic, an excuse for throwing off the ennui of business, and partly because his set were all going to Cuba. Young Hitchcock had come down with typhoid while waiting in Tampa for a transport, and had been left in Sommers's camp. He greeted the familiar face of the doctor with a welcome he had never given it in Chicago.

"Am I going to die in this sink, doctor?" he asked, when Sommers came back to him in the evening.

"I can't say," the doctor replied, with a smile. "You are a good deal better off on this board floor than most of the typhoids in the camps, and we will do the best we can. Shall I let your people know?"

"No," the young fellow said slowly, his weak, white face endeavoring to restrain the tears. "The old man is in a bad place--Uncle Brome, you know--and I guess if it hadn't been for my damn foolishness in New York--"

He went off into delirious inconsequence, and on the way back Sommers stopped to telegraph Miss Hitchcock. A few days later he met her at the railroad station, and drove her over to the camp. She was worn from her hurried journey, and looked older than Sommers expected; but the buoyancy and capability of her nature seemed indomitable. Sommers repeated to her what Parker had said about not letting his people know.

"It's the first time he ever thought of poor papa," she said bluntly.

"I thought it might do him good to fight it out by himself. But loneliness kills some of these fellows."

"Poor Parker!" she exclaimed, with a touch of irony in her tone. "He thought he should come home a hero, with flags flying, all the honors of the season, and forgiveness for his little faults. The girls would pet him, and papa would overlook his past. The war was a kind of easy penance for all his sins. And he never reached Cuba even, but came down with typhoid--due to pure carelessness, I am afraid."

"That is a familiar story," the doctor observed, with a grim smile, "especially in his set. They took the war as a kind of football match--and it is just as well they did."

"You are the ones that really know what it means--the doctors and the nurses," Miss Hitchcock said warmly.

"Here is our San Juan," Sommers replied dryly, pointing to the huddle of tents and pine sheds that formed the hospital camp.

After they had visited Parker Hitchcock, Sommers conducted her over the camp. Some of the cots were occupied by gaunt figures of men whom she had known, and at the end of their inspection, she remarked thoughtfully:

"I see that there is something to do here. It makes me feel alive once more."

The next month, while Parker dragged slowly through the stages of the disease, Miss Hitchcock worked energetically with the nurses. Sommers met her here and there about the camp and at their hurried meals. The heat and the excitement told upon her, but her spirited, good-humored mood, which was always at play, carried her on. Finally, the convalescents were sent north to cooler spots, and the camp was closed. Parker Hitchcock was well enough to be moved to Chicago, and Sommers, who had been relieved, took charge of him and a number of other convalescents, who were to return to

the West.

The last hours of the journey Sommers and Miss Hitchcock spent together. The train was slowly traversing the dreary stretches of swamp and sand-hills of northern Indiana.

"I remember how forlorn this seemed the other time--four years ago!" Sommers exclaimed. "And how excited I was as the city came into view around the curve of the lake. That was to be my world."

"And you didn't find it to your liking," Miss Hitchcock replied, with a little smile.

"I couldn't understand it; the thing was like raw spirits. It choked you."

"I think I understand now what the matter has always been," she resumed after a little interval. "You thought we were all exceptionally selfish, but we were all just like every one else,--running after the obvious, common pleasures. What could you expect! Every boy and girl in this country is told from the first lesson of the cradle, over and over, that success is the one great and good thing in life. The people here are young and strong, and you can't blame them if they interpret that text a little crudely. But I am beginning to understand what you feel."

"We can't escape the fact, though," Sommers responded. "Life must be based, to a large extent, on gain, on mere living. Nature has ordered it."

"Only in cases like yours," she murmured. "_I_ can never free myself from the order of nature. I shall always be the holder of power accumulated by some one else."

As Sommers refrained from making the platitudinous reply that such a remark seemed to demand, they were silent for several minutes. Then she asked, with an air of constraint:

"What will you do? I mean after your visit to us, for, of course, you must rest."

Sommers smiled ironically.

"That is the question every one asks. 'What will you do? what will you do?' Suppose I should say _'Nothing'_? We are always planning. No one is ready to wait and turn his hand to the nearest job. To-morrow, next month, in good time, I shall know what that is."

"It puts out of the question a career, personal ambition."

"Yes," he answered quickly. "And could you do that? Could you care for a man who will have no career, who has no 'future'?"

Sommers's voice had taken a new tone of earnestness, unlike the sober speculation in which they had been indulging. Miss Hitchcock turned her face to the faded landscape of the suburban fields, and failed to reply.

"I have lived out my egotism," he continued earnestly. "What you would call ambition has been dead for long months. I haven't any lofty ambition even for scientific work. Good results, even there, it seems to me, are not born of personal desire, of pride. I am content to be a failure--an honest failure," he ended sharply.

"Don't say that!" she protested, looking at him frankly. "I shall never agree to that."

The people around them began to bestir themselves with the nervous restlessness of pent-up energy. Parker Hitchcock came into the car from the smoking-room.

"We can get off at Twenty-second Street," he called out eagerly. "You're coming, doctor?"

Sommers shook his head negatively, and Miss Hitchcock, who was putting on her veil, did not urge him to join them. The Hitchcock carriage was waiting outside the Twenty-second Street station, and, as the train moved on, Sommers could see Colonel Hitchcock's bent figure through the open window.

When Sommers left the train at the central station, the September twilight had already fallen; and as he crossed the strip of park where the troops had bivouacked during the strike, the encircling buildings were brilliantly outlined in the evening mist by countless points of light. The scene from Twelfth Street north to the river, flanked by railroad yards and grim buildings, was an animated circle of a modern inferno. The cross streets intersecting the lofty buildings were dim, canon-like abysses, in which purple fog floated lethargically. The air was foul with the gas from countless locomotives, and thick with smoke and the mist of the lake. And through this earthy steam, the myriad lights from the facades of the big buildings shone with suffused splendor. It was large and vague and, above all, gay, with the grim vivacity of a city of shades. Streams of people were flowing toward the railroad, up and down the boulevard, in and out of the large hotels. A murmur of living, striving humanity rose into the murky air; and from a distance, through the abysses of the cross streets, sounded the deeper roar of the city.

The half-forgotten note of the place struck sharply upon the doctor's ear. It excited him in some strange way. Two years had dropped from his life, and again he was turning, turning, with the beat of the great machine.

CHAPTER XII

"Yes, he lost that--what was left when you sold for him," Miss M'Gann admitted dejectedly. "And so we had to start over again. Part of it was mine, too."

"Did he put your savings in?" Sommers asked incredulously.

"It was that Dresser man. I wish we'd never laid eyes on him--he kept getting tips from Carson, the man who owned most of his paper. I guess Carson didn't take much interest in giving _him_ the right tip, or perhaps Dresser didn't give _us_ what he knew straight out. Anyway, Jack's been losing!"

"So you aren't married?" Sommers asked.

"Jack's pride is up. You see he wanted to begin with a nice flat, not live on here in this boarding-house. And I was to leave the school. But I guess there isn't much chance _now_. You've been away a long time--to the war?"

They were sitting on the steps of the Keystone, which at this hour in the morning they had to themselves. Miss M'Gann's glory of dress had faded, together with the volubility of her talk, and the schoolroom air had blanched her high color.

"Jack wanted to go off to Cuba," she continued. "But he got sick again, worrying over stocks, and I guess it was just as well. If he don't keep straight now, and brace up, I'll let him go. I'm not the one to hang around all my life for a silly."

"Perhaps that's what made him try the market again," Sommers suggested.

"No, it was Dresser. He was sporting a lot of money and going with high-toned folks, and it made Jack envious."

"You had better marry him, hadn't you?"

Miss M'Gann moved uneasily on the stone seat.

"He's down there again to-day, I just know. He's given up the Baking Powder place--they crowded him out in the reorganization,--and Dresser got him a place down town."

"Do you mean he's at the broker's?"

Miss M'Gann nodded and then added:

"Do you remember Dr. Leonard? Well, he made a pile out of a trust, some dentist-tools combine, I think."

"I am glad of it," Sommers said heartily, "and I hope he'll keep it."

"Are you going to stay in Chicago?" Miss M'Gann asked, with renewed curiosity. "We shall be glad to see you at the Keystone."

Sommers got up to leave, and asked for Webber's address in the city. "I may look him up," he explained. "I wish you could keep him away from Dresser. The converted socialist is likely to be a bad lot."

"Socialist!" Miss M'Gann exclaimed disdainfully. "He isn't any socialist. He's after a rich girl."

* * * * *

Sommers left Miss M'Gann with a half-defined purpose of finding Webber and inducing him to give up the vain hope of rivalling the editor of *The Investor's Monthly*. He had always liked the clerk, and when he had helped to pull him out of the market without loss before, he had thought all would go well. But the optimism of the hour had proved too much for Webber's will. Carson's cheap and plentiful stocks had made it dangerously easy for every office boy to "invest." If Webber had been making money these last months, it would be useless to advise him; but if the erratic market had gone against him, he might be saved.

On the way to the city he called at St. Isidore's to see if any one in that hive would remember him. The little nurse, whom he recalled as one of the assistants at Preston's operation, had now attained the dignity of the "black band." There was hardly any one else who knew him, except the elevator boy; and he was leaving when he met Dr. Knowles, an old physician, who had a large, old-fashioned family practice in an unfashionable quarter of the city. Dr. Knowles had once been kind to the younger doctor, and now he seemed glad to meet him again. From him Sommers learned that Lindsay had about given up his practice. The "other things," thanks to his intimacy with Porter, and more lately with Carson, had put him outside the petty needs of professional earnings. Dr. Knowles himself was thinking of retiring, he told Sommers, not with his coffers full of trust certificates, but with a few thousand dollars, enough to keep him beyond want. They talked for a long time, and at the end Dr. Knowles asked Sommers to consider taking over his practice. "It isn't very swell," he explained good-humoredly. "And I don't want you to kill off my poor patients. But there are enough pickings for a reasonable man who doesn't practise for money." Sommers promised to see him in a few days, and started for the office where Webber worked.

Lindsay's final success amused him. He had heard a good deal about Porter and Carson; their operations, reported vaguely by the public, interested him. They formed a kind of partnership, evidently. Porter "financed" the schemes that Carson concocted and talked into being. And a following of small people gleaned in their train. Lindsay probably had gleaned more than the others. It was all the better, Sommers reflected, for the state of the medical profession.

As he sauntered down La Salle Street, the air of the pavement breathed the optimism of the hour. Sommers was amazed at the number of brokers' offices, at the streams of men going and coming around these busy booths. The war was over, or practically over, and speculation was brisker than ever. To be sure, the bills for the war were not paid, but success was in the air, and every one was striving to exploit that success in his own behalf. Sommers passed the blazing sign of WHITE AND EINSTEIN; the firm had taken larger offices this year. Sommers stopped and looked at the broad windows, and then, reflecting that he had nothing to do before dining with the

Hitchcocks except to see Webber, he went in with a file of other men.

White and Einstein's offices were much more resplendent than the little room in the basement, where they had started two years before. There were many glass partitions and much mahogany-stained furniture. In the large room, where the quotations were posted, little rows of chairs were ranged before the blackboards, so that the weary patrons could sit and watch the game. The Chicago stocks had a blackboard to themselves, and this was covered with the longest lines of figures. Iron, Steel, Tobacco, Radiators, Vinegar, Oil, Leather, Spices, Tin, Candles, Biscuit, Rag--the names of the "industrials" read like an inventory of a country store. "Rag" seemed the favorite of the hour; one boy was kept busy in posting the long line of quotations from the afternoon session of the Exchange. A group of spectators watched the jumps as quotation varied from quotation under the rapid chalk of the office boy.

The place was feverish with excitement, which Sommers could feel rather than read in the dull faces of the men. From time to time White or Einstein bobbed out of an inner office, or a telephone booth, and joined the watchers before the blackboards. Their detached air and genial smiles gave them the appearance of successful hosts. White recognized Sommers and nodded, with one eye on the board. "Rag's acting queer," he said casually in the doctor's ear. "Are you in the market? Rag is Carson's latest--ain't gone through yet, and there are signs the market's glugged. Look at that thing slide, waltz! Gee, there'll be sore heads to-morrow!"

Sommers leaned forward and touched Webber, who, with open mouth, was following the figures. Webber turned round, but his head went back to the board. The glance he had given was empty--the glance of the drunkard.

"Your young friend's got hit," White remarked apathetically. "He shouldn't try to play marbles with _this_ crowd. Carson is just chucking new stocks at the public. But he has a clique with him that can do anything."

In spite of this opinion "Rag" tottered and wavered. Rumors rapidly spread among the onlookers that Carson had failed to put "Rag" through; that the consolidated companies would fall asunder on the morrow, like badly glued veneer; that Porter "had gone back on Carson" and was selling the stock. The quotations fell: common stock 60, 59, 56, 50, 45, 48, 50, 52, 45, 40--so ran the dazzling line of figures across the blackboard, again and again.

"There'll be fun to-morrow," White remarked, moving away. "Better come in and see Vinegar and Oil and the rest of Carson's list get a black eye."

Sommers touched Webber, then shook him gently, asking,

"What is it this time? Iron and Distillery?"

"Rag," Webber snapped, recognizing the doctor. "And I'm done for this time sure thing--_every red copper_. I made two thousand last week on Tin, and this morning I chucked the whole pile into Rag."

"You'd better come with me," Sommers urged. "The Exchange is closing for to-day, anyway."

The clerk laughed, and replied: "Let's have a drink. I've just got enough to get drunk on."

"You're drunk already," the doctor answered gruffly.

"I'll be drunker before the morning," the clerk remarked, with a feeble laugh. "I wish I had Dresser here; I'd like to pound him once."

That desire was repeated in the looks of many men, who were still glowering at the afternoon's quotations. Carson, the idol of the new "promotions," seemed to be the man most in demand for pounding. Einstein was explaining to a savage customer why he had advised him to buy "Rag."

"I got it over the telephone this morning from a man very close to Carson that Rag was the thing, the peach of the whole lot. He said it was slated to cross Biscuit to-day."

The man growled and ground a cigar stub into the floor.

"Come, we'll have a drink," a white-faced young fellow called out to an old man, an acquaintance of the hour. "Somebody's got my money!" The two passed out arm in arm.

Webber had his drink, and then another. Then he leaned back in the embrasure of the bar-room window and looked at Sommers.

"I guess it's the lake this time. I can't go back to her and tell her it's all up."

Sommers watched the man closely, trying to determine how far the disease had gone. Webber's vain, rather weak face was disguised with a beard, which made him look older than he was, and the arm that rested on the table trembled nervously from the flaccid fingers to the shoulder-blades.

"They've put up some trick between them," Webber continued, in a grumbling tone. "Carson or Porter is making something by selling Rag. They'd ought to be in the penitentiary."

"What rot!" Sommers remarked deliberately. "They've beaten you at your game, and they will every time, because they have more nerve than you, and because they know more. There's no use in damning them. You'd do the same thing if you knew when to do it."

"They're nothing but sharps!" the clerk protested feebly, insistent like a child on his idea that some one had done him a personal injury.

Sommers shrugged his shoulders in despair. "I must be going," he said at last. "I don't suppose you'll take my advice, and perhaps the lake would be the best thing for you. But you'd better try it again--it's just as well that everything has gone this time. There won't be any chance of going back

to the game. Tell her, and if she'll take you, marry her at once, and start with the little people. Or stay here and have a few more drinks," he added, as he read the irresolute look upon Webber's face.

The clerk rose wearily and followed the doctor into the street, as if afraid of being alone.

"You needn't be so rough," he muttered. "There are lots of the big fellows who started the same way--in the market, wheat or stocks. And I had a little ambition to be something better than a clerk. I wanted her to have something different. She's as good as those girls Dresser is always talking to her about."

Sommers made no reply to his defence, but walked slowly, accommodating his pace to Webber's weary steps. When they reached Michigan Avenue, he stopped and said,

"I should put the lake off, this time, and make up my mind to be a little fellow."

Webber shook hands listlessly and started toward the railroad station with his drooping, irresolute gait. Sommers watched him until his figure merged with the hurrying crowd. Habit was taking the clerk to the suburban train, and habit would take him to the Keystone and Miss M'Gann instead of to the lake. Habit and Miss M'Gann would probably take him back to his desk. But the disease had gone pretty far, and if he recovered, Sommers judged, he would never regain his elasticity, his hope. He would be haunted by a memory of hot desires, of feeble defeat.

The wavering clerk had succumbed to the mood of the hour. And the mood of the hour in this corner of the universe was hopeful for weak and strong alike. Cheap optimism, Sommers would have called it once, but now it seemed to him the natural temper of the world. With this hope suffused over their lives, men struggled on--for what? No one knew. Not merely for plunder, nor for power, nor for enjoyment. Each one might believe these to be the gifts of the gods, while he kept his eyes solely on himself. But when he turned his gaze outward, he knew that these were not the spur of human energy. In striving restlessly to get plunder and power and joy, men wove the mysterious web of life for ends no human mind could know. Carson built his rickety companies and played his knavish tricks upon the gullible public, of whom Webber was one. Brome Porter rooted here and there in the industrial world, and fattened himself upon all spoils. These had to be; they were the tools of the hour. But indifferent alike to them and to Webber, the affairs of men ebbed and flowed in the resistless tide of fate.

CHAPTER XIII

The dinner at the Hitchcocks' was very simple. Parker had gone out "to enjoy his success in not getting to Cuba," as Colonel Hitchcock expressed

it grimly. The old merchant's manner toward the doctor was cordial, but constrained. At times during the dinner Sommers found Colonel Hitchcock's eyes resting upon him, as if he were trying to understand him. Sommers was conscious of the fact that Lindsay had probably done his best to paint his character in an unflattering light; and though he knew that the old colonel's shrewdness and kindness would not permit him to accept bitter gossip at its face value, yet there must have been enough in his career to lead to speculation. While they were smoking, Colonel Hitchcock remarked:

"So you're back in Chicago. Do you think you'll stay?"

Sommers described the offer Dr. Knowles had made.

"I used to see Knowles,--a West Side man,--not very able as a money-getter, I guess, but a good fellow," Colonel Hitchcock emitted meditatively.

"He has a very commonplace practice," Sommers replied. "An old-fashioned kind of practice."

"Do you think you'll like Chicago any better?" Colonel Hitchcock asked bluntly.

"I haven't thought much about that," the doctor admitted, uncomfortably. He felt that the kind old merchant had lost whatever interest he might have had in him. Any man who played ducks and drakes with his chances in life was not to be depended upon, according to Colonel Hitchcock's philosophy. And a man who could not be depended upon to do the rational thing was more or less dangerous. It was easier for him to understand Parker's defects than Sommers's wilfulness. They were both lamentable eccentricities.

"Chicago isn't what it was," the old man resumed reminiscently. "It's too big, and there is too much speculation. A man is rich to-day and poor to-morrow. That sort of thing used to be confined to the Board of Trade, but now it's everywhere, in legitimate business. People don't seem to be willing to work hard for success." He relapsed into silence, and shortly after went upstairs, saying as he excused himself,--"Hope we shall see you again, Dr. Sommers."

When Colonel Hitchcock had left the room, Miss Hitchcock said, as if to remove the sting of her father's indifference:

"Uncle Brome's transactions worry papa,--for a time papa was deeply involved in one of his schemes,--and he worries over Parker, too. He doesn't like to think of--what will happen when he is dead. Parker will have a good deal of money, more than he will know what to do with. It's sad, don't you think so? To be ending one's life with a feeling that you have failed to make permanent your ideals, to leave things stable in your family at least?"

Instead of replying Sommers left his chair and walked aimlessly about the room. At last he came back to the large table near which Miss Hitchcock was seated.

"You know why I came to-night," he began nervously.

Miss Hitchcock put down the book she held in her hands and turned her face to him.

"Will you help me--to live?" he said bluntly.

She rose from her seat, and, with a slight smile of irony, replied,

"Can I?"

"The past,--" Sommers stammered. "You know it all better than any one else."

"I would not have it different, not one thing changed," she protested with warmth. "What I cannot understand in it, I will believe was best for you and for me."

"And the lack of success, the failure?" Sommers questioned eagerly; a touch of fear in his voice. "I am asking much and giving very little."

"You understand so badly!" The smile this time was sad. "I shall never know that it is failure."

CHAPTER XIV

Miss Hitchcock's wedding was extremely quiet. It was regarded by all but the two persons immediately concerned as an eccentric mistake. Even Colonel Hitchcock, to whom Louise was almost infallible, could not trust himself to discuss with her, her decision to marry Dr. Sommers. It was all a sign of the irrational drift of things that seemed to thwart his energetic, honorable life. Even Sommers's attitude in the frank talk the two men had about the marriage offended the old merchant. Sommers had met his distant references to money matters by saying bluntly that he and Louise had decided it would be best for them not to be the beneficiaries of Colonel Hitchcock's wealth to any large extent. He wished it distinctly understood that little was to be done for them now, or in the future by bequest. Louise had agreed with him that for many reasons their lives would be happier without the expectation of unearned wealth. He did not explain that one potent reason for their decision in this matter was the hope they had that Colonel Hitchcock would realize the futility of leaving any considerable sum of money to Parker, and would finally place his money where it could be useful to the community in which he had earned it. Colonel Hitchcock rather resented the doctor's independence, and, at the same time, disliked the direct reference to his fortune. Those matters arranged themselves discreetly in families, and if Louise had children, why....

It did not take Louise and Sommers long, however, to convince Colonel

Hitchcock that they were absolutely sincere in their decision, and to interest him in methods of returning his wealth, at his death, to the world. As the months wore on, and Sommers settled into the peaceful routine of Dr. Knowles's mediocre practice, Colonel Hitchcock revised, to a certain extent, his judgment of the marriage. It must always remain a mystery to him, however, that the able young surgeon neglected the brilliant opportunities he had on coming to Chicago, and had, apparently, thrown away four years of his life. Probably he attributed this mistake to the young doctor's ignorance of the world, due to the regrettable fact that Dr. Isaac Sommers had remained in Marion, Ohio, instead of courting cosmopolitan experiences in Chicago. When his grandchild came, he saw that Louise was entirely happy, and he was content. Neither Louise nor Sommers looked back into the past, or troubled themselves about the future. The practice which Dr. Knowles had left, if not lucrative, was sufficiently large and varied to satisfy Sommers.

Brome Porter had transferred all his interests to New York. He had recouped himself by selling "Rag" short before it was really launched and by some other clever strokes of stock manipulation, and had undertaken at length the much-needed trip to Carlsbad. The suspicion that Porter had won back the money he owed to Colonel Hitchcock by a trick upon the small fry of speculators, such as Webber, had its influence in the feeling which Sommers and his wife had about the Hitchcock money. The last move of the "operator" had made something of a scandal in Chicago, for many of Porter's friends and acquaintances lost heavily in "Rag," and felt sore because "they had been left on the outside." If Porter was not in good odor in Chicago, Carson's name was anathema, not only to a host of little speculators, who had followed this ingenious promoter's star, but to substantial men of wealth as well. After the first flush of optimism, people began to examine Carson's specialties, and found them very rotten. Carson, and those who were near him in these companies, it turned out, had got their holdings at low figures and made money when those not equally favored lost. When "Rag" went to pieces, it was rumored that Carson had been caught in his own leaky tub; but, later, it turned out that Carson and Porter had had an understanding in this affair. "Rag" was never meant to "go." So Carson betook himself to Europe, and the great Sargent was removed from public exhibition to a storage warehouse. In some future generation, on the disintegration of the Carson family, the portrait may come back to the world again, labelled "A Soldier of Fortune."

Sommers met Dr. Lindsay at rare intervals; the great specialist treated him with a nice discrimination of values, adjusting the contempt he felt for the successor of Dr. Knowles to the respect he felt for the son-in-law of Colonel Alexander Hitchcock. Report had it that Lindsay had been forced to return to office practice after virtually retiring from the profession. And, in the fickle world of Chicago, the offices on the top floor of the Athenian Building did not "take in" what they once had gathered. For this as well as other reasons Sommers was not surprised when his wife opened Miss Laura Lindsay's wedding cards one morning, and read out the name of the intended bridegroom, _Mr. Samuel Thompson Dresser_.

"Shall we go?" Louise asked, scrutinizing the cards with feminine keenness.

"I have reasons for not going," Sommers answered hesitatingly. "But you used to know Laura Lindsay, and--"

"I think she will not miss me," Louise answered quickly. "It was queer, though," she continued, idly waving the invitation to and fro, "that a girl like Laura should marry a man like Dresser."

"Did I ever hear you say that it was to be expected that Miss Blank should marry Mr. Blank?" her husband asked. "In this case I think it is beautifully appropriate."

"But he was not exactly in our set, and you once said he was given to theories, was turned out of a place on account of the ideas he held, didn't you?"

"He has seen the folly of those ideas," Sommers responded dryly. "He has become a bond broker, and has a neat little office in the building where White and Einstein had their trade."

"Well," Mrs. Sommers insisted, "Laura never was what you might call serious."

"She has taught him a good deal, though, I have no doubt."

Mrs. Sommers looked puzzled.

"As other excellent women have taught other men," the doctor added, with a laugh.

"What shall we send them?" his wife asked, disregarding the flippancy of the remark.

"A handsomely bound copy of the 'Report of the Commission to Examine into the Chicago Strike, June-July, 1894.'"

As Louise failed to see the point, he remarked:

"I think I hear your son talking about something more important. Shall we go upstairs to see him? I must be off in a few minutes."

They watched the little child without speaking, while he cautiously manipulated his arms and interested himself in the puzzle of his own anatomy.

"What tremendous faith!" Sommers exclaimed at last.

"In what?"

"In the good of it all--in life."

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