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"THERE ARE A HUNDRED MEN BEATING THE MOUNTAIN TO FIND YOU"

The Wild Olive

A Novel

By the author of
The Inner Shrine

[Basil King]

Illustrated by
Lucius Hitchcock

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Part I

Ford

I

Finding himself in the level wood-road, whose open aisle drew a long, straight streak across the sky, still luminous with the late-lingering Adirondack twilight, the tall young fugitive, hatless, coatless, and barefooted, paused a minute for reflection. As he paused, he listened; but all distinctiveness of sound was lost in the play of the wind, up hill and down dale, through chasm and over crag, in those uncounted leagues of forest. It was only a summer wind, soft and from the south; but its murmur had the sweep of the eternal breath, while, when it waxed in power, it rose like the swell of some great cosmic organ. Through the pines and in the underbrush it whispered and crackled and crashed, with a variety of effect strangely bewildering to the young man's city-nurtured senses. There were minutes when he felt that not only the four country constables whom he had escaped were about to burst upon him, but that weird armies of gnomes were ready to trample him down.

Out of the confusion of wood-noises, in which his unpractised ear could distinguish nothing, he waited for a repetition of the shots which a few hours ago had been the protest of his guards; but, none coming, he sped on again. He weighed the danger of running in the open against the opportunities for speed, and decided in favor of the latter. Hitherto, in accordance with a woodcraft invented to meet the emergency, and entirely his own, he had avoided anything in the nature of a road or a pathway, in order to take advantage of the tracklessness which formed his obvious protection; but now he judged the moment come for putting actual space between his pursuers and himself. How near, or how far behind him, they might be he could not guess. If he had covered ground, they would have covered it too, since they were men born to the

mountains, while he had been bred in towns. His hope lay in the possibility that in this wilderness he might be lost to their ken, as a mote is lost in the air—though he built something on the chance that, in sympathy with the feeling in his favor pervading the simpler population of the region, they had given negative connivance to his escape. These thoughts, far from stimulating a false confidence, urged him to greater speed.

And yet, even as he fled, he had a consciousness of abandoning something—perhaps of deserting something—which brought a strain of regret into this minute of desperate excitement. Without having had time to count the cost or reckon the result, he felt he was giving up the fight. He, or his counsel for him, had contested the ground with all the resourceful ingenuity known to the American legal practitioner. He was told that, in spite of the seeming finality of what had happened that morning, there were still loopholes through which the defence might be carried on. In the space of a few hours Fate had offered him the choice between two courses, neither of them fertile in promises of success. The one was long and tedious, with a possibility of ultimate justification; the other short and speedy, with the accepted imputation of guilt. He had chosen the latter—instinctively and on the spur of the moment; and while he might have repeated at leisure the decision he had made in haste, he knew even now that he was leaving the ways and means of proving his innocence behind him. The perception came, not as the result of a process of thought, but as a regretful, scarcely detected sensation.

He had dashed at first into the broken country, hilly rather than mountainous, which from the shores of Lake Champlain gradually gathers strength, as it rolls inland, to toss up the crests of the Adirondacks. Here, burying himself in the woods, he skirted the unkempt farms, whose cottage lights, just beginning to burn, served him as signals to keep farther off. When forced to cross one of the sterile fields, he crawled low, blotting himself out among the bowlders. At times a patch of tall, tasselled Indian corn, interlaced with wandering pumpkin vines, gave him cover, till he regained the shelter of the vast Appalachian mother-forest which, after climbing Cumberlands, Alleghanies, Catskills, and Adirondacks, here clambers down, in long reaches of ash and maple, juniper and pine, toward the lowlands of the north.

As far as he had yet been able to formulate a plan of flight, it was to seek his safety among the hills. The necessity of the instant was driving him toward the open country and the lake, but he hoped to double soon upon his tracks, finding his way back to the lumber camps, whose friendly spiriting from bunk-house to bunk-house would baffle pursuit. Once he had gained even a few hours' security, he would be able to some extent to pick and choose his way.

He steered himself by the peak of Graytop, black against the last coral-tinted glow of the sunset, as a sailor steers by a star. There was further assurance that he was not losing himself or wandering in a circle, when from some chance outlook he ventured to glance backward and saw the pinnacle of Windy Mountain or the dome of the Pilot straight behind him. There lay the natural retreats of the lynx, the bear, and the outlaw like himself; and, as he fled farther from them, it was with the same frenzied instinct to return that the driven stag must feel toward the bed of fern from which he has been roused. But, for the minute, there was one imperative necessity—to go on—to go on anywhere, anyhow, so long as it took him far enough from the spot where masked men had loosed the handcuffs from his wrists and stray shots had come ringing after him. In his path there were lakelets, which he swam, and streams, which he forded. Over the low hills he scrambled through an undergrowth so dense that even the snake or the squirrel might have avoided it, to find some easier way. Now and then, as he dragged himself up the more barren ascents, the loose soil gave way beneath his steps in miniature avalanches of stone and sand, over which he crept, clinging to tufts of grass or lightly rooted saplings, to rise at last with hands scratched and feet bleeding. Then, on again!--frantically, as the hare runs and as the crow flies, without swerving—on, with the sole aim of gaining time and covering distance!

He was not a native of the mountains. Though in the two years spent among them he had come to acknowledge their charm, it was only as a man learns to love an alien mistress, whose alternating moods of savagery and softness hold him with a spell of which he is half afraid. More than any one suspected or he could have explained, his reckless life had been the rebellion of his man-trained, urban instinct against the domination of this supreme earth-force, to which he was of no more value than a falling leaf or a dissolving cloud. Even now, as he flung himself on the forest's protection, it was not with the solace of the son returning to the mother; it was rather as a man might take refuge from a lion in a mammoth cavern, where the darkness only conceals dangers.

After the struggle with crude nature the smooth, grass-carpeted wagon-track brought him more than a physical sense of comfort. It not only made his flight swift and easy, but it had been marked out by man, for man's purposes and to meet man's need. It was the result of a human intelligence; it led to a human goal. It was possible that it might lead even him into touch with human sympathies With the thought, he became conscious all at once that he was famished and fatigued. Up to the present he had been as little aware of a body as a spirit on its way between two worlds. It had ached and sweated and bled; but he had not noticed it. The electric fluid could not have seemed more tireless or iron more insensate. But now, when the hardship was somewhat relaxed, he was forced back on the perception that he was faint and hungry His speed slackened; his shoulders sagged; the long second wind, which had lasted so well, began to shorten. For the first time it occurred to him to wonder how long his strength would hold out.

It was then that he noticed a deflection of the wood-road toward the north, and down over the brow of the plateau on which for a mile or two its evenness had been sustained. It was a new sign that it was tending toward some habitation. Half an hour ago he would have taken this to mean that he must dash into the forest again; but half an hour ago he had not been hungry. He did not say to himself that he would venture to any man's door and ask for bread. So far as he knew, he would never venture to any man's door again; nevertheless, he kept on, down-hill, and down-hill nearer and nearer the lake, and farther and farther from

the mountain and the lairs of safety.

Suddenly, at a turning, when he was not expecting it, the wood-road emerged into a rough clearing. Once more he stopped to reflect and take his bearings. It had grown so dark that there was little danger in doing so; though, as he peered into the gloom, his nerves were still taut with the expectation of shot or capture from behind. Straining his eyes, he made out a few acres that had been cleared for their timber, after which Nature had been allowed to take her own way again, in unruly growths of saplings, tangles of wild vines, and clumps of magenta fireweed.

Without quite knowing why he did so, he crept down the slope, feeling his way among the stumps, and stooping low, lest his white shirt, wet and clinging limply to his body, might betray him to some keen-eyed marksman. Presently one of the old root-hedges, common to the countryside, barred his path—a queer, twisted line of long, gray tentacles that had once sucked sustenance from the soil, but now reached up idly into a barren element, where the wild grape was covering their grotesque nakedness with masses of kindly beauty. Below him he saw lights shining clearly like the planets, or faintly like the mere star-dust of the sky, while between the two degrees of brightness he knew there must lie the bosom of the lake. He had come to the little fringe of towns that clings to the borders of Champlain, here with the Adirondacks behind him, and there with the mountains of Vermont, but keeping close to the great, safe waterway, as though distrusting the ruggedness of both.

It was a moment at which to renew his alarm in this proximity to human dwellings. Like the tiger that has ventured beyond the edge of the jungle, he must slink back at the sight of fire. He turned himself slowly, looking up the heights from which he had come down, as they rolled behind him, mysterious and hostile, in the growing darkness. Even the sky, from which it seemed impossible for the daylight ever to depart, now had an angry red glare in it.

He took a step or two toward the forest, and paused again, still staring upward. Where was he going? Where *could* he go? The question presented itself with an odd pertinence that drew his set, beardless lips into a kind of smile. When he had first made his rush outward the one thing that seemed to him essential was to be free; but now he was forced to ask himself: For what purpose? Of what use was it to be as free as wind if he was to be as homeless? It was not merely that he was homeless for the moment; that was nothing; the overwhelming reflection was that he, Norrie Ford, could never have a home at all—that there was scarcely a spot within the borders of civilized mankind where the law would not hunt him out.

This view of his situation was so apparent and yet so new that it held him stock-still, gazing into space. He was free—but free only to crawl back into the jungle and lie down in it, like a wild beast.

"But I'm not a wild beast," he protested, inwardly. "I'm a man—with human rights. By God, I'll never let them go!"

He wheeled round again, toward the lower lands and the lake. The lights glowed more brightly as the darkness deepened, each lamp shining from some little nest, where men and women were busied with the small tasks and interests that made life. This was liberty! This was what he had a claim upon! All his instincts were civilized, domestic. He would not go back to the forest, to herd with wild nature, when he had a right to lie down among his kind. He had slept in the open hundreds of times; but it had been from choice. There had been pleasure then, in waking to the smell of balsam and opening his eyes upon the stars. But to do the same thing from compulsion, because men had closed up their ranks and ejected him from their midst, was an outrage he would not accept. In the darkness his head went up, while his eyes burned with a fire more intense than that of any of the mild beacons from the towns below, as he strode back to the old root-hedge and leaped it.

He felt the imprudence, not to say the uselessness, of the movement, as he made it; and yet he kept on, finding himself in a field in which cows and horses were startled from their munching by his footstep. It was another degree nearer to the organized life in which he was entitled to a place. Shielded by a shrubbery of sleeping goldenrod, he stole down the slope, making his way to the lane along which the beasts went out to pasture and came home. Following the trail, he passed a meadow, a potato-field, and a patch of Indian corn, till the scent of flowers told him he was coming on a garden. A minute later, low, velvety domes of clipped yew rose in the foreground, and he knew himself to be in touch with the civilization that clung, like a hardy vine, to the coves and promontories of the lake, while its tendrils withered as soon as they were flung up toward the mountains. Only a few steps more, and, between the yews, he saw the light streaming from the open doors and windows of a house.

It was such a house as, during the two years he had spent up in the high timber-lands, he had caught sight of only on the rare occasions when he came within the precincts of a town—a house whose outward aspect, even at night, suggested something of taste, means, and social position for its occupants. Slipping nearer still, he saw curtains fluttering in the breeze of the August evening, and Virginia creeper dropping in heavily massed garlands from the roof of a columned veranda. A French window was open to the floor, and within, he could see vaguely, people were seated.

The scene was simple enough, but to the fugitive it had a kind of sacredness. It was like a glimpse into the heaven he has lost caught by a fallen angel. For the moment he forgot his hunger and weakness, in this feast for the heart and eyes. It was with something of the pleasure of recognizing long-absent faces that he traced the line of a sofa against the wall, and stated to himself that there was a row of prints hanging above it. There had been no such details as these to note in his cell, nor yet in the courtroom which for months had constituted his only change of outlook Insensibly to himself, he crept nearer, drawn by the sheer spell of gazing.

Finding a gate leading into the garden, he opened it softly, leaving it so, in order to secure his retreat. From the shelter of one of the rounded yew-trees he could make his observations more at ease. He perceived now that the house stood on a terrace, and turned the garden front, its more secluded aspect, in his direction. The high hedges, common in these lakeside villages, screened it from the road; while the open French window threw a shaft of brightness down the yew-tree walk, casting the rest of the garden into gloom.

To Norrie Ford, peeping furtively from behind one of the domes of clipped foliage, there was exasperation in the fact that his new position gave him no glimpse of the people in the room. His hunger to see them became for the minute more insistent than that for food. They represented that human society from which he had waked one morning to find himself cut off, as a rock is cut off by seismic convulsion from the mainland of which it has formed a part. It was in a sort of effort to span the gulf separating him from his own past that he peered now into this room, whose inmates were only passing the hours between the evening meal and bedtime. That people could sit tranquilly reading books or playing games filled him with a kind of wonder.

When he considered it safe he slipped along to what he hoped would prove a better point of view, but, finding it no more advantageous, he darted to still another. The light lured him as it might lure an insect of the night, till presently he stood on the very steps of the terrace. He knew the danger of his situation, but he could not bring himself to turn and steal away till he had fixed the picture of that cheerful interior firmly on his memory. The risk was great, but the glimpse of life was worth it.

With powers of observation quickened by his plight, he noted that the home was just such a one as that from which he had sprung—one where old engravings hung on the walls, while books filled the shelves, and papers and periodicals strewed the tables. The furnishings spoke of comfort and a modest dignity. Obliquely in his line of vision he could see two children, seated at a table and poring over a picture-book The boy, a manly urchin, might have been fourteen, the girl a year or two younger. Her curls fell over the hand and arm supporting her cheek, so that Ford could only guess at the blue eyes concealed behind them. Now and then the boy turned a page before she was ready, whereupon followed pretty cries of protestation. It was perhaps this mimic quarrel that called forth a remark from some one sitting within the shadow.

"Evie dear, it's time to go to bed. Billy, I don't believe they let you stay up as late as this at home."

"Oh yes, they do," came Billy's answer, given with sturdy assurance. "I often stay up till nine."

"Well, it's half past now; so you'd both better come and say good-night."

With one foot resting on the turf and the other raised to the first step of the terrace, as he stood with folded arms, Ford watched the little scene, in which the children closed their book, pushed back their chairs, and crossed the room to say good-night to the two who were seated in the shadow. The boy came first, with hands thrust into his trousers pockets in a kind of grave nonchalance. The little girl fluttered along behind, but broke her journey across the room by stepping into the opening of the long window and looking out into the night. Ford stood breathless and motionless, expecting her to see him and cry out. But she turned away and danced again into the shadow, after which he saw her no more. The silence that fell within the room told him that the elders were left alone.

Stealthily, like a thief, Ford crept up the steps and over the turf of the terrace. The rising of the wind at that minute drowned all sound of his movements, so that he was tempted right on to the veranda, where a coarse matting deadened his tread. He dared not hold himself upright on this dangerous ground, but, crouching low, he was blotted from sight, while he himself could see what passed within. He would only, he said, look once more into kindly human faces and steal away as he came.

He could perceive now that the lady who had spoken was an invalid reclining in a long chair, lightly covered with a rug. A fragile, dainty little creature, her laces, trinkets, and rings revealed her as one clinging to the elegancies of another phase of life, though Fate had sent her to live, and perhaps to die, here on the edge of the wilderness. He made the same observation with regard to the man who sat with his back to the window. He was in informal evening dress—a circumstance that, in this land of more or less primitive simplicity, spoke of a sense of exile. He was slight and middle-aged, and though his face was hidden, Ford received the impression of having seen him already, but from another point of view. His habit of using a magnifying-glass as, with some difficulty, he read a newspaper in the light of a green-shaded lamp, seemed to Ford especially familiar, though more pressing thoughts kept him from trying to remember where and when he had seen some one do the same thing within the recent past.

As he crouched by the window watching them, it came into his mind that they were just the sort of people of whom he had least need to be afraid. The sordid tragedy up in the mountains had probably interested them little, and in any case they could not as yet have heard of his escape. If he broke in on them and demanded food, they would give it to him as to some common desperado, and be glad to let him go. If there was any one to inspire terror, it was he, with his height, and youth, and wildness of aspect. He was thinking out the most natural method of playing some small comedy of violence, when suddenly the man threw down the paper with a sigh. On the instant the lady spoke, as though she had been awaiting her cue.

"I don't see why you should feel so about it," she said, making an effort to control a cough. "You must have foreseen something of this sort when you took up the law."

The answer reached Ford's ears only as a murmur, but he guessed its import from the response.

"True," she returned, when he had spoken, "to foresee possibilities is one thing, and to meet them is another; but the anticipation does something to nerve one for the necessity when it comes."

Again there was a murmur in which Ford could distinguish nothing, but again her reply told him what it meant.

"The right and the wrong, as I understand it," she went on, "is something with which you have nothing to do. Your part is to administer the law, not to judge of how it works."

Once more Ford was unable to catch what was said in reply, but once more the lady's speech enlightened him.

"That's the worst of it? Possibly; but it's also the best of it; for since it relieves you of responsibility it's foolish for you to feel remorse."

What was the motive of these remarks? Ford found himself possessed of a strange curiosity to know. He pressed as closely as he dared to the open door, but for the moment nothing more was said. In the silence that followed he began again to wonder how he could best make his demand for food, when a sound from behind startled him. It was the sound which, among all others, caused him the wildest alarm—that of a human footstep. His next movement came from the same blind impulse that sends a hunted fox to take refuge in a church—eager only for the instant's safety. He had sprung to his feet, cleared the threshold, and leaped into the room, before the reflection came to him that, if he was caught, he must at least be caught game. Wheeling round toward the window-door through which he had entered, he stood defiantly, awaiting his pursuers, and heedless of the astonished eyes fixed upon him. It was not till some seconds had gone by, and he realized that he was not followed, that he glanced about the room. When he did so it was to ignore the woman, in order to concentrate all his gaze on the little, iron-gray man who, still seated, stared at him, with lips parted. In his own turn, Norrie Ford was dumb and wide-eyed in amazement It was a long minute before either spoke.

"You?"

"You?"

The monosyllable came simultaneously from each. The little woman got to her feet in alarm. There was inquiry as well as terror in her face—inquiry to which her husband felt prompted to respond.

"This is the man," he said, in a voice of forced calmness, "whom—whom—we've been talking about."

"Not the man—you—?"

"Yes," he nodded, "the man I—I—sentenced to death—this morning."

II

"Evie!"

Mrs. Wayne went to the door, but on Ford's assurance that her child had nothing to fear from him, she paused with her hand on the knob to look in curiosity at this wild young man, whose doom lent him a kind of fascination. Again, for a minute, all three were silent in the excess of their surprise. Wayne himself sat rigid, gazing up at the new-comer with strained eyes blurred with partial blindness. Though slightly built and delicate, he was not physically timid; and as the seconds went by he was able to form an idea as to what had happened. He himself, in view of the tumultuous sympathy displayed by hunters and lumber-jacks with the man who passed for their boon companion, had advised Ford's removal from the pretty toy prison of the county-town to the stronger one at Plattsville. It was clear that the prisoner had been helped to escape, either before the change had been effected or while it was taking place. There was nothing surprising in that; the astonishing thing was that the fugitive should have found his way to this house above all others. Mrs. Wayne seemed to think so too, for it was she who spoke first, in a tone which she tried to make peremptory, in spite of its tremor of fear.

"What did you come here for?"

Ford looked at her for the first time—in a blankness not without a dull element of pleasure. It was at least two or three years since he had seen anything so dainty—not, in fact, since his own mother died. At all times his mind worked slowly, so that he found nothing to reply till she repeated her question with a show of increased severity.

"I came here for protection," he said then.

His hesitation and bewildered air imparted assurance to his still astonished hosts.

"Isn't it an odd place in which to look for that?" Wayne asked, in an excitement, he strove to subdue.

The question was the stimulus Ford needed in order to get his wits into play.

"No," he replied, slowly; "I've a right to protection from the man who sentenced me to death for a crime of

which he knows me innocent."

Wayne concealed a start by smoothing the newspaper over his crossed knees, but he was unable to keep a shade of thickness out of his voice as he answered:

"You had a fair trial. You were found guilty. You have had the benefit of all the resources allowed by the law. You have no right to say I know you to be innocent."

Wholly spent, Ford dropped into a chair from which one of the children had risen. With his arm hanging limply over the back he sat staring haggardly at the judge, as though finding nothing to say.

"I have a right to read any man's mind," he muttered, after a long pause, "when it's as transparent as yours. No one had any doubt as to your convictions—after your charge."

"That has nothing to do with it. If I charged in your favor, it was because I wanted you to have the benefit of every possible plea. When those pleas were found insufficient by a jury of your peers—"

Ford emitted a sound that might have been a laugh, had there been mirth in it.

"A jury of my peers! A lot of thick-headed country tradesmen, prejudiced against me from the start because I'd sometimes kicked up a row in their town! They weren't my peers any more than they were yours!"

"The law assumes all men to be equal—"

"Just as it assumes all men to be intelligent—only they're not. The law is a very fine theory. The chief thing to be, said against it is that five times out of ten it leaves human nature out of account. I'm condemned to death, not because I killed a man, but because you lawyers won't admit that your theory doesn't work."

He began to speak more easily, with the energy born of his desperate situation and his sense of wrong. He sat up straighter; the air of dejection with which he had sunk to the chair slipped from him; his gray eyes, of the kind called "honest," shot out glances of protest. The elder man found himself once more struggling against the wave of sympathy which at times in the court-room had been almost too strong for him. He was forced to intrench himself mentally within the system he served before bracing himself to reply.

"I can't keep you from having your opinion—"

"Nor can I save you from having yours. Look at me, judge!" He was bolt upright now, throwing his arms wide with a gesture in which there was more appeal than indignation "Look at me! I'm a strong, healthy-bodied, healthy-minded fellow of twenty-four; but I'm drenched to the skin, I'm half naked, I'm nearly dead with hunger, I'm an outlaw for life—and you're responsible for it all."

It was Wayne's turn for protest, and though he winced, he spoke sharply.

"I had my duty to perform—"

"Good God, man, don't sit there and call that thing your duty! You're something more than a wheel in a machine. You were a human being before you were a judge. With your convictions you should have come down from the bench and washed your hands of the whole affair. The very action would have given me a chance—"

"You mustn't speak like that to my husband," Mrs. Wayne broke in, indignantly, from the doorway. "If you only knew what he has suffered on your account—"

"Is it anything like what I've suffered on his?"

"I dare say it's worse. He has scarcely slept or eaten since he knew he would have to pass that dreadful sen —"

"Come! come!" Wayne exclaimed, in the impatient tone of a man who puts an end to a useless discussion. "We can't spend time on this subject any longer. I'm not on my defence—"

"You *are* on your defence," Ford declared, instantly. "Even your wife puts you there. We're not in a courtroom as we were this morning. Circumstantial evidence means nothing to us in this isolated house, where you're no longer the judge, as I'm no longer the prisoner. We're just two naked human beings, stripped of everything but their inborn rights—and I claim mine."

"Well—what are they?"

"They're simple enough. I claim the right to have something to eat, and to go my way without being molested—or betrayed. You'll admit I'm not asking much."

"You may have the food," Mrs. Wayne said, in a tone not without compassion. "I'll go and get it."

For a minute or two there was no sound but that of her cough, as she sped down a passage. Before speaking, Wayne passed his hand across his brow as though in an effort to clear his mental vision.

"No; you don't seem to be asking much. But, as a matter of fact, you're demanding my pledge to my country. I undertook to administer its laws—"

Ford sprang up.

"You've done it," he cried, "and I'm the result! You've administered the law right up to its hilt, and your duty as a judge is performed. Surely you're free now to think of yourself as a man and to treat me as one."

"I might do that, and still think you a man dangerous to leave at large."

"But do you?"

"That's my affair. Whatever your opinion of the courts that have judged your case, I must accept their verdict."

"In your official capacity—yes; but not here, as host to the poor dog who comes under your roof for shelter. My rights are sacred. Even the wild Arab—"

He paused abruptly. Over Wayne's shoulder, through the window still open to the terrace, he saw a figure cross the darkness. Could his pursuers be waiting outside for their chance to spring on him? A perceptible fraction of a second went by before he told himself he must have been mistaken.

"Even the wild Arab would think them so," he concluded, his glance shifting rapidly between the judge and the window open behind him.

"But I'm not a wild Arab," Wayne replied. "My first duty is toward my country and its organized society."

"I don't think so. Your first duty is toward the man you know you've sentenced wrongly. Fate has shown you an unusual mercy in giving you a chance to help him."

"I can be sorry for the sentence and yet feel that I could not have acted otherwise."

"Then what are you going to do now?"

"What would you expect me to do but hand you back to justice?"

"How?"

There was a suggestion of physical disdain in the tone of the laconic question, as well as in the look he fixed on the neat, middle-aged man doing his best to be cool and collected Wayne glanced over his shoulder toward the telephone on the wall. Norrie Ford understood and spoke quickly:

"Yes; you could ring up the police at Greenport, but I could strangle you before you crossed the floor."

"So you could; but would you? If you did, should you be any better off? Should you be as well off as you are now? As it is, there is a possibility of a miscarriage of justice, of which one day you may get the benefit. There would be no such possibility then. You would be tracked down within forty-eight hours."

"Oh, you needn't argue; I've no intention—" Once more he paused. The same shadow had flitted across the dark space outside, this time with a distinct flutter of a white dress. He could only think it was some one getting help together; and while he went on to finish his sentence in words, all his subconscious faculties were at work, seeking an escape from the trap in which he was taken.

"I've no intention of doing violence unless I'm driven to it—"

"But if you are driven to it—?"

"I've a right to defend myself. Organized society, as you call it, has put me where it has no further claim upon me. I must fight against it single-handed—and I'll do it. I shall spare neither man nor woman—nor *woman*"—he raised his voice so as to be heard outside—"who stands in my way."

He threw back his head and looked defiantly out into the night. As if in response to this challenge a tall, white figure suddenly emerged from the darkness and stood plainly before him.

It was a girl, whose movements were curiously quick and silent, as she beckoned to him, over the head of the judge, who sat with his back toward her.

"Then all the more reason why society should protect itself against you," Wayne began again; but Ford was no longer listening. His attention was wholly fixed on the girl, who continued to beckon noiselessly, fluttering for an instant close to the threshold of the room, then withdrawing suddenly to the very edge of the terrace, waving a white scarf in token that he should follow her. She had repeated her action again and again, beckoning with renewed insistence, before he understood and made up his mind.

"I don't say that I refuse to help you," Wayne was saying. "My sympathy with you is very sincere. If I can get your sentence commuted—In fact, a reprieve is almost certain—"

With a dash as lithe and sudden as that which had brought him in, Ford was out on the terrace, following the white dress and the waving scarf which were already disappearing down the yew-tree walk. The girl's flight over grass and gravel was like nothing so much as that of a bird skimming through the air. Ford's own steps crunched loudly on the stillness of the night, so that if any one lay in ambush he knew he could not escape. He was prepared to hear shots come ringing from any quarter, but he ran on with the indifference of a soldier grown used to battle, intent on keeping up with the shadow fleeing before him.

He followed her through the garden gate he himself had left open, and down the lane leading to the pasture. At the point where he had entered it from the right, she turned to the left, keeping away from the mountains and parallel with the lake. There was no moon, but the night was clear; and no sound but that of the shrill, sustained chorus of insect life.

Beyond the pasture the lane became nothing but a path, zigzagging up a hillside between patches of Indian corn. The girl sped over it so lightly that Ford would have found it hard to keep her in sight if from time to time she had not paused and waited. When he came near enough to see the outlines of her form she flew on again, less like a living woman than a mountain wraith.

From the top of the hill he could see the dull gleam of the lake with its girdle of lamp-lit towns. Here the woodland began again; not the main body of the forest, but one of its long arms, thrust down over hill and valley, twisting its way in among villages and farm lands. That which had been a path now become a trail, along which the girl flitted with the ease of habit and familiarity.

In the concentration of his effort to keep the moving white spot in view Ford lost count of time. Similarly he had little notion of the distance they were covering. He guessed that they had been ten or fifteen minutes on the way, and that they might have gone a mile, when, after waiting for him to come almost near enough to speak to her, she began moving in a direction at an acute angle to that by which they had come. At the same time he perceived that they were on the side of a low wooded mountain and that they were beating their way round it.

All at once they emerged on a tiny clearing—a grassy ledge on the slope. Through the starlight he could see the hillside break away steeply into a vaporous gorge, while above him the mountain raised a black dome amid the serried points of the sky-line. The dryad-like creature beckoned him forward with her scarf, until suddenly she stopped with the decisive pause of one who has reached her goal. Coming up with her, he saw her unlock the door of a small cabin, which had hitherto not detached itself from the surrounding darkness.

"Go in," she whispered. "Don't strike a light. There are biscuits somewhere, in a box. Grope for them. There's a couch in a corner."

Without allowing him to speak, she forced him gently over the threshold and closed the door upon him. Standing inside in the darkness, he heard the grating of her key in the lock, and the rustle of her skirts as she sped away.

III

From the heavy sleep of fatigue Ford woke with the twittering of birds that announces the dawn. His first thought before opening his eyes, that he was still in his cell, was dispelled by the silky touch of the Sorrento rugs on which he lay. He fingered them again and again in a kind of wonder, while his still half-slumbering senses struggled for the memory of what had happened, and the realization of where he was. When at last he was able to reconstruct the events of the preceding night, he raised himself on his elbow and peered about him in the dim morning twilight.

The object he discerned most readily was an easel, giving him the secret of his refuge. On the wooden walls of the cabin, which was fairly spacious, water-color sketches were pinned at intervals, while on the mantelpiece above a bricked fireplace one or two stood framed. Over the mantelpiece a pair of snow-shoes were crossed as decorations, between which hung a view of the city of Quebec. On a lay-figure in a corner was thrown carelessly the sort of blanket coat worn by Canadians during winter sports. Paints and palettes were arranged on a table by the wall, and on a desk in the middle of the room were writing materials and books. More books stood in a small suspended bookcase. Beside a comfortable reading-chair one or two magazines lay on the floor. His gaze travelled last to the large apron, or pinafore, on a peg fastened in a door immediately beside his couch. The door suggested an inner room, and he got up promptly to explore it. It proved to be cramped and dark, lighted only from the larger apartment, which in its turn had but the one high north window of the ordinary studio. The small room was little more than a shed or "lean-to", serving the purposes of kitchen and storeroom combined. The arrangements of the whole cabin showed that some one had built it with a view to passing in seclusion a few days at a time without forsaking the simpler amenities of civilized life; and it was clear that that "some one" was a woman. What interested Ford chiefly for the moment was the discovery of a sealed glass jar of water, from which he was able to slake his twenty hours' thirst.

Returning to the room in which he had slept, he drew back the green silk curtain covering the north light in order to take his bearings. As he had guessed on the previous night, the slope on which the cabin was perched broke steeply down into a wooded gorge, beyond which the lower hills rolled in decreasing magnitude to the shore of Champlain, visible from this point of view in glimpses, less as an inland sea than like a chain of lakelets. Sunrise over Vermont flooded the waters with tints of rose and saffron, but made of the Green Mountains a long, gigantic mass of purple-black twisting its jagged outline toward the north into the Hog's Back and the Camel's Hump with a kind of monstrous grace. To the east, in New York, the Adirondacks, with the sunlight full upon them, shot up jade-colored peaks into the electric blue—the scarred pyramid of Graytop standing forth dark, detached, and alone, like a battered veteran sentinel.

In an access of conscious hatred of this vast panoramic beauty which had become the background of his tragedy, Ford pulled the curtain into place again and turned once more to the interior of the room. It began to seem more strange to him the more it grew familiar. Why was he here? How long was he to stay? How was he to get away again? Had this girl caught him like a rat in a trap, or did she mean well by him? If, as he supposed, she was Wayne's daughter, she would probably not be slow in carrying out her father's plan of handing him back to justice—and yet his mind refused to connect the wraith of the night before with either police work or betrayal. Her appearance had been so dim and fleeting that he could have fancied her the dryad of a dream, had it not been for his surroundings.

He began to examine them once more, inspecting the water-colors on the wall one by one, in search of some clew to her personality. The first sketch was of a nun in a convent garden—the background vaguely French, and yet with a difference. The next was of a trapper, or voyageur, pushing a canoe into the waters of a wild northern lake. The next was a group of wigwams with squaws and children in the foreground. Then came more nuns; then more voyageurs with their canoes; then more Indians and wigwams It occurred to Ford that the nuns might have been painted from life, the voyageurs and Indians from imagination He turned to the two framed drawings on the chimney-piece Both represented winter scenes. In the one a sturdy voyageur was conveying his wife and small personal belongings across the frozen snow on a sled drawn by a team of dogs. In the other a woman, apparently the same woman as in the preceding sketch, had fallen in the midst of a blinding storm, while a tall man of European aspect—decidedly not the voyageur—was standing beside her with a baby in his arms. These were clearly fancy pictures, and, so it seemed to Ford, the work of one who was trying to recapture some almost forgotten memory. In any case he was too deeply engrossed by his own situation to dwell on them further.

He wheeled round again toward the centre of the room, impatiently casting about him for something to eat. The tin box, from which he had devoured all the biscuits, lay empty on the floor, but he picked it up and ate hungrily the few crumbs sticking in its corners. He ransacked the small dark room in the hope of finding more, but vainly. As far as he could see, the cabin had never been used for the purpose it was meant to serve, nor ever occupied for more than a few hours at a time. It had probably been built in a caprice that had passed with its completion. He guessed something from the fact that there was no visible attempt to sketch the scene before the door, though the site had evidently been chosen for its beauty.

He had nothing by which to measure time, but he knew that precious hours which he might have utilized for escape were passing. He began to chafe at the delay. With the impulse of youth to be active, he longed to be out, where he could at least use his feet. His clothes had dried upon him; in spite of his hunger he was refreshed by his night's sleep; he was convinced that, once in the open, he could elude capture. He pulled back the curtain again in order to reconnoitre. It was well to be as familiar as possible with the immediate lay of the land, so as to avail himself of any advantages it might offer.

The colors of sunrise had disappeared, and he judged that it must be seven or eight o'clock. Between the rifts of the lower hills the lake was flashing silver, while where Vermont had been nothing but a mass of shadow, blue-green mountains were emerging in a triple row, from which the last veils of vapor were being dragged up into the firmament On the left, the Adirondacks were receding into translucent dimness, in a lilac haze of heat.

With an effort to get back the woodcraft suddenly inspired by his first dash for freedom, he ran his eye over the landscape, noting the points with which he was familiar. To the west, in a niche between Graytop and the double peak of Windy Mountain, he could place the county-town; to the north, beyond the pretty headlands and the shining coves, the prison of Plattsville was waiting to receive him. Farther to the north was Canada; and to the south the great waterway led toward the populous mazes of New York.

With an impatience bordering on nervousness he realized that these general facts did not help him. He must avoid the prison and the county-town, of course; while both New York and Canada offered him ultimate chances. But his most pressing dangers lurked in the immediate foreground; and there he could see nothing but an unsuggestive slope of ash and pine. The rapidity of instinct by which last night he had known exactly what to do gave place this morning to his slower and more characteristic mental processes.

He was still gazing outward in perplexity, when, through the trees beyond the grassy ledge, he caught the flicker of something white. He pressed closer to the pane for a better view, and a few seconds later a girl, whom he recognized as the nymph of last night, came out of the forest, followed by a fawn-colored collie. She walked smoothly and swiftly, carrying a large basket with her right hand, while with her left she motioned him away from the window. He stepped back, leaping to the door as she unlocked it, in order to relieve her of her burden.

"You mustn't do that," she said, speaking quickly. "You mustn't look out of the window or come to the door. There are a hundred men beating the mountain to find you."

She closed the door and locked it on the inside. While Ford lifted her basket to the desk in the centre of the room she drew the green curtain hastily, covering the window. Her movements were so rapid that he could catch no glimpse of her face, though he had time to note again the curious silence that marked her acts. The dog emitted a low growl.

"You must go in here," she said, decisively, throwing open the door of the inner room. "You mustn't speak or look out unless I tell you. I'll bring you your breakfast presently. Lie down, Micmac."

The gesture by which she forced him across the threshold was compelling rather than commanding. Before he realized that he had obeyed her, he was standing alone in the darkness, with the sound of a low voice of

liquid quality echoing in his ears. Of her face he had got only the hint of dark eyes flashing with an eager, non-Caucasian brightness—eyes that drew their fire from a source alien to that of any Aryan race.

But he brushed that impression away as foolish. Her words had the unmistakable note of cultivation, while a glance at her person showed her to be a lady. He could see, too, that her dress, though simple, was according to the standard of means and fashion. She was no Pocahontas; and yet the thought of Pocahontas came to him. Certainly there was in her tones, as well as in her movements, something akin to this vast aboriginal nature around him, out of which she seemed to spring as the human element in its beauty.

He was still thinking of this when the door opened and she came in again, carrying a plate piled high with cold meat and bread-and-butter.

"I'm sorry it's only this," she smiled, as she placed it before him; "but I had to take what I could get—and what wouldn't be missed. I'll try to do better in future."

He noted the matter-of-fact tone in which she uttered the concluding words, as though they were to have plenty of time together; but for the moment he was too fiercely hungry to speak. For a few seconds she stood off, watching him eat, after which she withdrew, with the light swiftness that characterized all her motions.

He had nearly finished his meal when she returned again.

"I've brought you these," she said, not without a touch of shyness, against which she struggled by making her tone as commonplace as possible. "I shall bring you more things by degrees."

On a chair beside that on which he was sitting she laid a pair of slippers, a pair of socks, a shirt, a collar, and a tie.

He jumped up hastily, less in surprise than in confusion.

"I can't take anything of Judge Wayne's—" he began to stammer; but she interrupted him.

"I understand your feelings about that," she said, simply. "They're not Judge Wayne's; they were my father's. I have plenty more."

In his relief at finding she was not Wayne's daughter he spoke awkwardly.

"Your father? Is he—dead?"

"Yes; he's dead. You needn't be afraid to take the things. He would have liked to help a man—in your position."

"In my position? Then you know—who I am?"

"Yes; you're Norrie Ford. I saw that as soon as I chanced on the terrace last night."

"And you're not afraid of me?"

"I am—a little," she admitted; "but that doesn't matter."

"You needn't be—" he began to explain, but she checked him again.

"We mustn't talk now. I must shut the door and leave you in the dark all day. Men will be passing by, and they mustn't hear you. I shall be painting in the studio, so that they won't suspect anything, if you keep still."

Allowing him no opportunity to speak again, she closed the door, leaving him once more in darkness. Sitting in the constraint she imposed upon him, he could hear her moving in the outer room, where, owing to the lightness of the wooden partition, it was not difficult to guess what she was doing at any given moment. He knew when she opened the outer door and moved the easel toward the entrance. He knew when she took down the apron from its peg and pinned it on. He knew when she drew up a chair and pretended to set to work. In the hour or two of silence that ensued he was sure that, whatever she might be doing with her brush, she was keeping eye and ear alert in his defence.

Who was she? What interest had she in his fate? What power had raised her up to help him? Even yet he had scarcely seen her face; but he had received an impression of intelligence. He was sure she was no more than a girl—certainly not twenty—and yet she acted with the decision of maturity. At the same time there was about her that suggestion of a wild origin—that something not wholly tamed to the dictates of civilized life—which persisted in his imagination, even if he could not verify it in fact.

Twice in the course of the morning he heard voices. Men spoke to her through the open doorway, and she replied. Once he distinguished her words.

"Oh no," she called out to some one at a distance. "I'm not afraid. He won't do me any harm. I've got Micmac with me. I often stay here all day, but I shall go home early. Thanks," she added, in response to some further hint. "I'd rather not have any one here. I never can paint unless I'm quite alone."

Her tone was light, and Ford fancied that as she spoke she smiled at the passers-by who had thought it right

to warn her against himself; but when, a few minutes later, she pushed open the door softly, the gravity that seemed more natural to her had returned.

"Several parties of men have gone by," she whispered. "They have no suspicion. They won't have, if you keep still. They think you have slipped away from here, and have gone back toward the lumber camps. This is your lunch," she continued, hastily, placing more food before him. "It will have to be your dinner, too. It will be safer for me not to come into this room again to-day. You must not go out into the studio till you're sure it's dark. No noise. No light. I've put an extra rug on the couch in case you're chilly in the night."

She spoke breathlessly, in whispers, and, having finished, slipped away.

"You're awfully good," he whispered back. "Won't you tell me your name?"

"Hush!" she warned him, as she closed the door.

He stood still in the darkness, leaving his food untasted, listening to the soft rustle of her movements beyond the wall. Except that he heard no more voices, the afternoon passed like the morning. At the end of what seemed to him interminable hours he knew by acute attention that she hung her apron on its peg, put on her hat, and took up her basket, while Micmac rose and shook himself. Presently she closed the door of the cabin and locked it on the outside. He fancied he could almost hear her step as she sped over the grass and into the forest. Only then did the tension of his nerves relax, as, dropping to his chair in the darkness, he began to eat.

IV

The two or three days that followed were much like the first. Each morning she came early, bringing him food, and such articles of clothing as she thought he could wear. By degrees she provided him with a complete change of raiment, and though the fit was tolerable, they laughed together at the transformation produced in him. It was the first time he had seen her smile, and even in the obscurity of the inner room where she still kept him secluded he noted the vividness with which her habitually grave features lighted up. Micmac, too, became friendly, inferring with the instinct of his race that Ford was an object to be guarded.

"No one would know you now," the girl declared, surveying him with satisfaction.

"Were these things all your father's?" he asked, with a new attempt to penetrate the mystery of her personality.

"Yes," she returned, absently, continuing her inspection of him. "They were sent to me, and I kept them. I never knew why I did; but I suppose it was—for this."

"He must have been a tall man?" Ford hazarded, again.

"Yes, he must have been," she returned, unwarily. Then, feeling that the admission required some explanation, she added, with a touch of embarrassment, "I never saw him—not that I can remember."

"Then he died a long time ago?"

Her reply came reluctantly, after some delay:

"Not so very long—about four years ago now."

"And yet you hadn't seen him since you were a child?"

"There were reasons. We mustn't talk. Some one may pass and hear us."

He could see that her hurry in finishing the small tasks she had come in to perform for him arose not so much from precaution as from a desire to escape from this particular subject.

"I suppose you could tell me his name?" he persisted.

Her hands moved deftly, producing order among the things he had left in confusion, but she remained silent. It was a silence in which he recognized an element of protest though he ignored it.

"You could tell me his name?" he asked, again.

"His name," she said, at last, "wouldn't convey anything to you. It wouldn't do you any good to know it."

"It would gratify my curiosity. I should think you might do as much as that for me."

"I'm doing a great deal for you as it is. I don't think you should ask for more."

Her tone was one of reproach rather than of annoyance, and he was left with a sense of having committed an indiscretion. The consciousness brought with it the perception that in a measure he was growing used to

his position. He was beginning to take it for granted that this girl should come and minister to his wants. She herself did it so simply, so much as a matter of course, that the circumstance lost much of its strangeness. Now and then he could detect some confusion in her manner as she served him, but he could see too that she surmounted it, in view of the fact that for him the situation was one of life and death. She was clearly not indifferent to elementary social usages; she only saw that the case was one in which they did not obtain. In his long, unoccupied hours of darkness it distracted his thoughts from his own peril to speculate about her; and when she appeared his questions were the more blunt because of the small opportunity she allowed for asking them.

"Won't they miss you at home?" he inquired, on the next occasion when she entered his cell.

She paused with a look of surprise.

"At home? Where do you mean?"

"Why—where you live; where your mother lives."

"My mother died a few months after I was born."

"Oh! But even so, you live somewhere, don't you?"

"I do; but they don't miss me there, if that's what you want to know."

"I was only afraid," he said, apologetically, "that you were giving me too much of your time."

"I've nothing else to do with it. I shall be only too glad if I can help you to escape."

"Why? Why should you care about me?"

"I don't," she said, simply; "at least, I don't know that I do."

"Oh, then you're helping me just—on general principles?"

"Quite so."

"Well," he smiled, "mayn't I ask why, again?"

"Because I don't like the law."

"You mean that you don't like the law as a whole?—or—or this law in particular?"

"I don't like any law. I don't like anything about it. But," she added, resorting to her usual method of escape, "we mustn't talk any more now. Some men passed here this morning, and they may be coming back. They've given up looking for you; they are convinced you're up in the lumber camps, but all the same we must be careful still."

He had no further speech with her that day, and the next she remained at the cabin little more than an hour.

"It's just as well for me not to excite curiosity," she explained to him before leaving; "and you needn't be uneasy now. They've stopped the hunt altogether. They say there's not a spot within a radius of ten miles of Greenport that they haven't searched. It would never occur to any one that you could be here. Every one knows me; and so the thought that I could be helping you would be the last in their minds."

"And have you no remorse at betraying their confidence?"

She shook her head. "Most of them," she declared, "are very well pleased to think you've got away; and even if they weren't I should never feel remorse for helping any one to evade the law."

"You seem to have a great objection to the law."

"Well, haven't you?"

"Yes; but in my case it's comprehensible."

"So it is in mine—if you only knew."

"Perhaps," he said, looking at her steadily, "this is as good a time as any to assure you that the law has done me wrong."

He waited for her to say something; but as she stroked Micmac's head in silence, he continued.

"I never committed the crime of which they found me guilty."

He waited again for some intimation of her confidence.

"Their string of circumstantial evidence was plausible enough, I admit. The only weak point about it was that it wasn't true."

Even through the obscurity of his refuge he could feel the suspension of expression in her bearing, and could

imagine it bringing a kind of eclipse over her eyes.

"He was very cruel to you—your uncle?—wasn't he?" she asked, at last.

"He was very cantankerous; but that wouldn't be a reason for shooting him in his sleep—whatever I may have said when in a rage."

"I should think it might be."

He started. If it were not for the necessity of making no noise he would have laughed.

"Are you so bloodthirsty—?" he began.

"Oh no, I'm not; but I should think it is what a man would do. My father wouldn't have submitted to it. I know he killed one man; and he may have killed two or three."

Ford whistled under his breath.

"So that," he said, after a pause, "your objection to the law is—hereditary."

"My objection to the law is because it is unjust. The world is full of injustice," she added, indignantly, "and the laws men live by create it."

"And your aim is to defeat them?"

"I can't talk any more now," she said, reverting to an explanatory tone of voice. "I must go. I've arranged everything for you for the day. If you are very quiet you can sit in the studio and read; but you mustn't look out at the window, or even draw back the curtain. If you hear a step outside, you must creep in here and shut the door. And you needn't be impatient; because I'm going to spend the day working out a plan for your escape."

But when she appeared next morning she declined to give details of the plan she had in mind. She preferred to work it out alone, she said, and give him the outlines only when she had settled them. It chanced to be a day of drenching summer rain, and Ford, with a renewed effort to get some clew to her identity, expressed his surprise that she should have been allowed to venture out.

"Oh, no one worries about what I do," she said, indifferently "I go about as I choose."

"So much the better for me," he laughed. "That's how you came to be wandering on old Wayne's terrace, just in the nick of time. What stumps me is the promptness with which you thought of stowing me away."

"It wasn't promptness, exactly. As a matter of fact, I had worked the whole thing out beforehand."

His eyebrows went up incredulously. "For me?"

"No, not for you; for anybody. Ever since my guardian allowed me to build the studio—last year—I've imagined how easy it would be for some—some hunted person to stay hidden here, almost indefinitely. I've tried to fancy it, when I've had nothing better to do."

"You don't seem to have had anything better to do very often," he observed, glancing about the cabin.

"If you mean that I haven't painted much, that's quite true. I thought I couldn't do without a studio—till I got one. But when I've come here, I'm afraid it's generally been to—to indulge in day-dreams."

"Day-dreams of helping prisoners to escape. It wouldn't be every girl's fancy, but it's not for me to complain of that."

"My father would have wanted me to do it," she declared, as if in self-justification. "A woman once helped him to get out of prison."

"Good for her! Who was she?"

Having asked the question lightly, in a boyish impulse to talk, he was surprised to see her show signs of embarrassment.

"She was my mother," she said, after an interval in which she seemed to be making up her mind to give the information.

In the manifest difficulty she had in speaking, Ford sprang to her aid.

"That's like the old story of Gilbert à Becket—Thomas à Becket's father, you know."

The historical reference was received in silence, as she bent over the small task she had in hand.

"He married the woman who helped him out of prison," Ford went on, for her enlightenment.

She raised her head and faced him.

"It wasn't like the story of Gilbert à Becket," she said, quietly.

It took some seconds of Ford's slow thinking to puzzle out the meaning of this. Even then he might have pondered in vain had it not been for the flush that gradually over-spread her features, and brought what he called the wild glint into her eyes. When he understood, he reddened in his own turn, making matters worse.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I never thought—"

"You needn't beg my pardon," she interrupted, speaking with a catch in her breath. "I wanted you to know.... You've asked me so many questions that it seemed as if I was ashamed of my father and mother when I didn't answer.... I'm not ashamed of them.... I'd rather you knew.... Every one does—who knows me."

Half unconsciously he glanced up at the framed sketches on the chimney-piece. Her eyes followed him, and she spoke instantly:

"You're quite right. I meant that—for them."

They were standing in the studio, into which she had allowed him to come from the stifling darkness of the inner room, on the ground that the rain protected them against intrusion from outside. During their conversation she had been placing the easel and arranging the work which formed her pretext for being there, while Micmac, stretched on the floor, with his head between his paws, kept a half-sleepy eye on both of them.

"Your father was a Canadian, then?" he ventured to ask, as she seated herself with a palette in her hand.

"He was a Virginian. My mother was the wife of a French-Canadian voyageur. I believe she had a strain of Indian blood. The voyageurs and their families generally have."

Having recovered her self-possession, she made her statements in the matter-of-fact tone she used to hide embarrassment flicking a little color into the sketch before her as she spoke. Ford seated himself at a distance, gazing at her with a kind of fascination. Here, then, was the clew to that something untamed which persisted through all the effects of training and education, as a wild flavor will last in a carefully cultivated fruit. His curiosity about her was so intense that, notwithstanding the difficulty with which she stated her facts, it overcame his prompting to spare her.

"And yet," he said, after a long pause, in which he seemed to be assimilating the information she had given him—"and yet I don't see how that explains *you*."

"I suppose it doesn't—not any more than your situation explains you."

"My situation explains me perfectly, because I'm the victim of a wrong."

"Well, so am I—in another way. I'm made to suffer because I'm the daughter of my parents."

"That's a rotten shame," he exclaimed, in boyish sympathy "It isn't your fault."

"Of course it isn't," she smiled, wistfully. "And yet I'd rather suffer with the parents I have than be happy with any others."

"I suppose that's natural," he admitted, doubtfully.

"I wish I knew more about them," she went on, continuing to give light touches to the work before her, and now and then leaning back to get the effect. "I never understood why my father was in prison in Canada."

"Perhaps it was when he killed the man," Ford suggested.

"No; that was in Virginia—at least, the first one. His people didn't like it. That was the reason for his leaving home. He hated a settled life; and so he wandered away into the northwest of Canada. It was in the days when they first began to build the railways there—when there were almost no people except the trappers and the voyageurs. I was born on the very shores of Hudson Bay."

"But you didn't stay there?"

"No. I was only a very little child—not old enough to remember—when my father sent me down to Quebec, to the Ursuline nuns. He never saw me again. I lived with them till four years ago. I'm eighteen now."

"Why didn't he send you to his people? Hadn't he sisters?—or anything like that."

"He tried to, but they wouldn't have anything to do with me."

It was clearly a relief to her to talk about herself. He guessed that she rarely had an opportunity of opening her heart to any one. Not till this morning had he seen her in the full light of day; and, though but an immature judge, he fancied her features had settled themselves into lines of reserve and pride from which in happier circumstances they might have been free. Her way of twisting her dark hair—which waved over the brows from a central parting—into the simplest kind of knot gave her an air of sedateness beyond her years. But what he noticed in her particularly was her eyes—not so much because they were wild, dark eyes, with the peculiar fleeing expression of startled forest things, as because of the pleading, apologetic look that comes into the eyes of forest things when they stand at bay. It was when—for seconds only—the pupils shone with a jet-like blaze that he caught what he called the non-Aryan effect; but that glow died out quickly, leaving something of the fugitive appeal which Hawthorne saw in the eyes of Beatrice Cenci.

"He offered his sisters a great deal of money," she sighed, "but they wouldn't take me."

"Oh? So he had money?"

"He was one of the first Americans to make money in the Canadian northwest; but that was after my mother died. She died in the snow, on a journey—like that sketch above the fireplace. I've been told that it changed my father's life. He had been what they call wild before that—but he wasn't so any more. He grew very hard-working and serious. He was one of the pioneers of that country—one of the very first to see its possibilities. That was how he made his money; and when he died he left it to me. I believe it's a good deal."

"Didn't you hate being in the convent?" he asked, suddenly "I should."

"N-no; not exactly. I wasn't unhappy. The Sisters were kind to me. Some of them spoiled me. It wasn't until after my father died, and I began to realize—who I was, that I grew restless. I felt I should never be happy until I was among people of my own kind."

"And how did you get there?"

She smiled faintly to herself before answering.

"I never did. There are no people of my kind."

Embarrassed by the stress she seemed inclined to lay on this circumstance, he grasped at the first thought that might divert her from it.

"So you live with a guardian! How do you like that?"

"I should like it well enough if he did—that is, if his wife did. You see," she tried to explain, "she's very sweet and gentle, and all that, but she's devoted to the proprieties of life, and I seem to represent to her—its improprieties. I know it's a trial to her to keep me, and so, in a way, it's a trial to me to stay."

"Why do you stay, then?"

"For one reason, because I can't help myself. I have to do what the law tells me."

"I see. The law again!"

"Yes; the law again. But I've other reasons besides that."

"Such as—?"

"Well, I'm very fond of their little girl, for one thing. She's the greatest darling in the world, and the only creature, except my dog, that loves me."

"What's her name?"

The question drove her to painting with closer attention to her work. Ford followed something of the progress of her thought by watching the just perceptible contraction of her brows into a little frown, and the setting of her lips into a curve of determination. They were handsome lips, mobile and sensitive—lips that might easily have been disdainful had not the inner spirit softened them with a tremor—or it might have been a light—of gentleness.

"It isn't worth while to tell you that," she said, after long reflection. "It will be safer for you in the end not to know any of our names at all."

"Still—if I escape—I should like to know them."

"If you escape, you may be able to find out."

"Oh, well," he said, with assumed indifference, "since you don't want to tell me—"

Going on with her painting, she allowed the subject to drop; but to him the opportunity for conversation was too rare a thing to neglect. Not only was his youthful impulse toward social self-expression normally strong, but his pleasure in talking to a lady—a girl—was undeniable. Sometimes in his moments of solitary meditation he said to himself that she was "not his type of girl"; but the fact that he had been deprived of feminine society for nearly three years made him ready to fall in love with any one. If he did not precisely fall in love with this girl, it was only because the situation precluded sentiment; and yet it was pleasant to sit and watch her paint, and even torment her with his questions.

"So the little girl is one reason for your staying here. What's another?"

She betrayed her own taste for social communion by the readiness with which she answered him—

"I don't know that I ought to tell you that; and yet I might as well. It's just this: they're not very well off—so I can help. Naturally I like that."

"You can help by footing the bills. That's all very fine if you enjoy it, but everybody wouldn't."

"They would if they were in my position," she insisted. "When you can help in any way it gives you a sense

of being of use to some one. I'd rather that people needed me, even if they didn't want me, than that they shouldn't need me at all."

"They need your money," he declared, with a young man's outspokenness. "That's what."

"But that's something, isn't it? When you've no place in the world you're glad enough to get one, even if you have to buy it. My guardian and his wife mayn't care much to have me, but it's some satisfaction to know that they'd get along much worse if I weren't here."

"So should I," he laughed. "What I'm to do when I'm turned adrift without you, Heaven only knows. It's curious—the effect imprisonment has on you. It takes away your self-reliance. It gives you a helpless feeling, like a baby. You want to be free—and yet you're almost afraid of the open air."

He was so much at home with her now that, sitting carelessly astride of his chair, with his arms folded on the back, he felt a fraternal element in their mutual relation. She bent more closely over her work, and spoke without looking up.

"Oh, you'll get along all right. You're that sort."

"That's easy to say."

"You may find it easy to do." Her next words, uttered while she continued to flick color into her sketch, caused him to jump with astonishment. "I'd go to the Argentine."

"Why not say the moon?"

"For one reason, because the moon is inaccessible."

"So is the Argentine—for me."

"Oh no, it isn't. Other people have reached it."

"Yes: but they weren't in my fix."

"Some of them were probably in worse."

There was a pause, during which she seemed absorbed in her work, while Ford sat meditatively whistling under his breath.

"What put the Argentine into your head?" he asked, at last.

"Because I happen to know a good deal about it. Everybody says it's the country of new opportunities. I know people who've lived there. The little girl I was speaking of just now—whom I'm so fond of—was born there. Her father is dead since then, and her mother is married again."

He continued to meditate, emitting the same tuneless, abstracted sound, just above his breath.

"I know the name of an American firm out there," she went on. "It's Stephens and Jarrott. It's a very good firm to work for. I've often heard that. And Mr. Jarrott has helped ever so many—stranded people."

"I should be just his sort, then."

His laugh, as he sprang to his feet, seemed to dismiss an impossible subject; and yet as he lay on his couch that evening in the lampless darkness the name of Stephens and Jarrott obtruded itself into his visions of this girl, who stood between him and peril because she "disliked the law," He wondered how far it was dislike, and how far jealous pain. In her eagerness to buy the domestic place she had not inherited she reminded him of something he had read—or heard—of the wild olive being grafted into the olive of the orchard. Well, that would come in the natural course of events. Some fine fellow, worthy to be her mate, would see to it. He was not without a pleasant belief that in happier circumstances he himself might have had the qualifications for the task. He wondered again what her name was. He ran through the catalogue of the names he himself would have chosen for a heroine—Gladys, Ethel, Mildred Millicent!--none of them seemed to suit her. He tried again. Margaret, Beatrice, Lucy, Joan! Joan possibly—or he said to himself, in the last inconsequential thoughts as he fell asleep, it might be—the Wild Olive.

V

As the days passed, one much like another, and the retreat seemed more and more secure, it was natural that Ford's thoughts should dwell less on his own danger and more on the girl who filled his immediate horizon. The care with which she foresaw his wants, the ingenuity with which she met them, the dignity and simplicity with which she carried herself through incidents that to a less delicate tact must have been difficult, would have excited his admiration in any case, even if the namelessness which helped to make her an impersonal element in the episode had not stirred his imagination. He was obliged to remind himself often that she was "not his type of girl," in order to confine his heart within the limits which the situation

imposed.

It worried him, therefore, it even hurt him, that in spite of all the openings he had given her, she had never offered him a sign of her belief in his innocence. For this reason he took the first occasion when she was seated at her easel, with the dog lying at her feet, to lay his case before her.

He told her of his overindulged boyhood, as the only child of a wealthy New York merchant. He outlined his profitless years at the university, where a too free use of money had hindered work. He narrated the disasters that had left him at the age of two-and-twenty to begin life for himself—his father's bankruptcy, followed by the death of both his parents within the year. He had been eager to start in at the foot of the ladder and work his way upward, when the proposal was made which proved fatal.

Old Chris Ford, his great-uncle, known throughout the Adirondack region as "the lumber king," had offered to take him, train him to the lumber business, and make him his heir. An eccentric, childless widower, commonly believed to have broken his wife's heart by sheer bitterness of tongue, old Chris Ford was hated, feared, and flattered by the relatives and time-servers who hoped ultimately to profit by his favor. Norrie Ford neither flattered nor feared his powerful kinsman, but he hated him with the best. His own instincts were city born and bred. He was conscious, too, of that aptitude with which the typical New-Yorker is supposed to come into being—the capacity to make money. He would have preferred to make it on his own ground and in his own way; and had it not been for the counsels of those who wished him well, he would have replied to his great-uncle's offer with a courteous "No." Wiser heads than his pointed out the folly of such a course as that; and so, reluctantly, he entered on his apprenticeship.

In the two years that followed he could not see what purpose he served other than that of a mark for the old man's poisoned wit. He was taught nothing, and paid nothing, and given nothing to do. He slept under his great-uncle's roof and ate at his table, but the sharp tongue made the bed hard to lie on and the bread difficult to swallow down. Idleness reawakened the propensity to vicious habits which he thought he had outlived, while the rough society of the lumber camps, in which he sought to relieve the tedium of time, extended him the welcome which Falstaff and his comrades gave Prince Hal.

The revolt of his self-respect was on the eve of bringing this phase of his existence to an end when the low farce turned into tragedy. Old Chris Ford was found dead in his bed—shot in his sleep. On the premises there had been but three persons, one of whom must have committed the crime—Norrie Ford, and Jacob and Amalia Gramm. Jacob and Amalia Gramm had been the old man's servants for thirty years. Their faithfulness put them beyond suspicion. The possibility of their guilt, having been considered, was dismissed with few formalities. The conviction of Norrie Ford became easy after that—the more respectable people of the neighborhood being agreed that from the evidence presented no other deduction could be drawn. The very fact that the old man, by his provocation of the lad, so thoroughly deserved his fate made the manner in which he met with it the clearer. Even Norrie Ford's friends, the hunters and the lumbermen, admitted as much as that, though they were determined that he should never suffer for so meritorious an act as long as they could give him a fighting chance for freedom.

The girl listened to Ford's narrative with some degree of interest, though it contained nothing new to her. She could not have lived at Greenport during the period of his trial without being familiar with it all. But when he came to explanations in his own defence she followed listlessly. Though she leaned back in her chair, and courteously stopped painting, while he talked so earnestly, the light in her eyes faded to a lustreless gleam, like that of the black pearl. His perception that her thoughts were wandering gave him a queer sensation of speaking into a medium in which his voice could not carry, cutting short his arguments, and bringing him to his conclusion more hurriedly than he had intended.

"I wanted you to know I didn't do it," he finished, in a tone which begged for some expression of her belief, "because you've done so much to help me."

"Oh, but I should have helped you just the same, whether you had done it or not."

"But I suppose it makes some difference to you," he cried, impatiently, "to know that I didn't."

"I suppose it would," she admitted, slowly, "if I thought much about it."

"Well, won't you think?" he pleaded—-"just to oblige me."

"Perhaps I will, when you're gone; but at present I have to give my mind to getting you away. It was to talk about that that I came this morning."

Had she wanted to slip out of giving an opinion on the subject of his guilt, she could not have found a better exit. The means of his ultimate escape engrossed him even more than the theme of his innocence. When she spoke again all his faculties were concentrated into one keen point of attention.

"I think the time has come for you to—go."

If her voice trembled on the last word, he did not notice it. The pose of his body, the lines of his face, the glint of his gray eyes, were alive with interrogation.

"Go?" he asked, just audibly. "When?"

"To-morrow."

"How?"

"I'll tell you that then."

"Why can't you tell me now?"

"I could if I was sure you wouldn't raise objections, but I know you will."

"Then there are objections to be raised?"

"There are objections to everything. There's no plan of escape that won't expose you to a good many risks. I'd rather you didn't see them in advance."

"But isn't it well to be prepared beforehand?"

"You'll have plenty of time for preparation—after you've started. If that seems mysterious to you now, you'll know what I mean by it when I come to-morrow. I shall be here in the afternoon at six."

With this information Ford was obliged to be content, spending a sleepless night and an impatient day, waiting for the time appointed.

She came punctually. For the first time she was not followed by her dog. The only change in her appearance he could see was a short skirt of rough material instead of her usual linen or muslin.

"Are we going through the woods?" he asked.

"Not far. I shall take you by the trail that led to this spot before I built the cabin and made the path." As she spoke she surveyed him. "You'll do," she smiled at last. "In those flannels, and with your beard, no one would know you for the Norrie Ford of three weeks ago."

It was easy for him to ascribe the glow in her eyes and the quiver in her voice to the excitement of the moment; for he could see that she had the spirit of adventure. Perhaps it was to conceal some embarrassment under his regard that she spoke again, hurriedly.

"We've no time to lose. You needn't take anything from here. We'd better start."

He followed her over the threshold, and as she turned to lock the cabin he had time to throw a glance of farewell over the familiar hills, now transmuted into a haze of amethyst under the westering sun. A second later he heard her quick "Come on!" as she struck into the barely perceptible path that led upward, around the shoulder of the mountain.

It was a stiff bit of climbing, but she sped along with the dryad-like ease she had displayed on the night when she led him to the cabin. Beneath the primeval growth of ash and pine there was an underbrush so dense that no one but a creature gifted with the inherited instinct of the woods could have found the invisible, sinuous line alone possible to the feet. But it was there, and she traced it—never pausing never speaking, and only looking back from time to time to assure herself that he was in sight, until they reached the top of the dome-shaped hill.

They came out suddenly on a rocky terrace, beneath which, a mile below, Champlain was spread out in great part of its length, from the dim bluff of Crown Point to the far-away, cloud-like mountains of Canada.

"You can sit down a minute here," she said, as he came up.

They found seats among the low scattered bowlders, but neither spoke. It was a moment at which to understand the jewelled imagery of the Seer of the Apocalypse. Jasper, jacinth, chalcedony, emerald, chrysoprasus, were suggested by the still bosom of the lake, towered round by light-reflecting mountains. The triple tier of the Vermont shore was bottle-green at its base, indigo in the middle height, while its summit was a pale undulation of evanescent blue against the jade and topaz of the twilight.

"The steamer *Empress of Erin*," the girl said, with what seemed like abruptness, "will sail from Montreal on the twenty-eighth, and from Quebec on the twenty-ninth. From Rimouski, at the mouth of the river St. Lawrence, she will sail on the thirtieth, to touch nowhere else till she reaches Ireland. You will take her at Rimouski."

There was a silence, during which he tried to absorb this startling information.

"And from here to Rimouski?" he asked, at last.

"From here to Rimouski," she replied, with a gesture toward the lake, "your way is there."

There was another silence, while his eyes travelled the long, rainbow-colored lake, up to the faint line of mountains where it faded into a mist of bluish-green and gold.

"I see the way," he said then, "but I don't see the means of taking it."

"You'll find that in good time. In the mean while you'd better take this." From her jacket she drew a paper, which she passed to him. "That's your ticket. You'll see," she laughed, apologetically, "that I've taken for you what they call a suite, and I've done it for this reason. They're keeping a lookout for you on every tramp ship from New York, on every cattle-ship from Boston, and on every grain-ship from Montreal; but they're not

looking for you in the most expensive cabins of the most expensive liners. They know you've no money; and if you get out of the country at all, they expect it will be as a stoker or a stow-away They'll never think you're driving in cabs and staying at the best hotels."

"But I shan't be," he said, simply.

"Oh yes, you will. You'll need money, of course; and I've brought it. You'll need a good deal; so I've brought plenty."

She drew out a pocketbook and held it toward him. He looked at it, reddening, but made no attempt to take it.

"I can't—I can't—go as far as that," he stammered, hoarsely.

"You mean," she returned, quickly, "that you hesitate to take money from a woman. I thought you might. But it isn't from a woman; it's from a man. It's from my father. He would have liked to do it. He would have wanted me to do it. They keep putting it in the bank for me—just to spend—but I never need it. What can I do with money in a place like Greenport? Here, take it," she urged, thrusting it into his hands. "You know very well it isn't a matter of choice, but of life or death."

With her own fingers she clasped his upon it, drawing back and coloring at her boldness. For the first time in their weeks of intercourse she saw in him a touch of emotion The phlegmatism by which he had hitherto concealed his inward suffering seemed suddenly to desert him. He looked at her with lips quivering, while his eyes filled. His weakness only nerved her to be stronger, sending her for refuge back into the commonplace.

"They'll expect you at Rimouski, because your luggage will already have gone on board at Montreal. Yes," she continued, in reply to his astonishment, "I've forwarded all the trunks and boxes that came to me from my father. I told my guardian I was sending them to be stored—and I am, for you'll store them for me in London when you've done with them. Here are the keys."

He made no attempt to refuse them, and she hurried on.

"I sent the trunks for two reasons; first, because there might be things in them you could use till you get something better; and then I wanted to prevent suspicion arising from your sailing without luggage. Every little thing of that sort counts. The trunks have 'H.S.' painted in white letters on them; so that you'll have no difficulty in knowing them at sight. I've put a name with the same initials on the ticket. You'd better use it till you feel it safe to take your own again."

"What name?" he asked, with eager curiosity, beginning to take the ticket out of its envelope.

"Never mind now," she said, quickly. "It's just a name—any name. You can look at it afterward. We'd better go on."

She made as though she would move, but he detained her.

"Wait a minute. So your name begins with S!"

"Like a good many others," she smiled.

"Then tell me what it is. Don't let me go away without knowing it. You can't think what it means to me."

"I should think you'd see what it means to me."

"I don't. What harm can it do you?"

"If you don't see, I'm afraid I can't explain. To be nameless is—- how shall I say it?—a sort of protection to me. In helping you, and taking care of you, I've done what almost any really nice girl would have shrunk from. There are plenty of people who would say is was wrong. And in a way—a way I could never make you understand, unless you understand already—it's a relief to me that you don't know who I am. And even that isn't everything."

"Well—what else?"

"When this little episode is over"—her voice trembled, and it was not without some blinking of the eyes that she was able to begin again—"when this little episode is over, it will be better for us both—for you as well as for me—to know as little about it as possible. The danger isn't past by any means; but it's a kind of danger in which ignorance can be made to look a good deal like innocence. I shan't know anything about you after you've gone, and you know nothing whatever about me."

"That's what I complain of. Suppose I pull the thing off, and make a success of myself somewhere else, how should I communicate with you again?"

"Why should you communicate with me at all?"

"To pay you back your money, for one thing—"

"Oh, that doesn't matter."

"Perhaps it doesn't from your point of view; but it does from mine. But it wouldn't be my only reason in any case."

Something in his voice and in his eyes warned her to rise and interrupt him.

"I'm afraid we haven't time to talk about it now," she said, hurriedly. "We really must be going on."

"I'm not going to talk about it now," he declared, rising in his turn. "I said it would be a reason for my wanting to communicate with you again. I shall want to tell you something then; though perhaps by that time you won't want to hear it."

"Hadn't we better wait and see?"

"That's what I shall have to do; but how can I come back to you at all if I don't know who you are?"

"I shall have to leave that to your ingenuity," she laughed, with an attempt to treat the matter lightly. "In the mean time we must hurry on. It's absolutely necessary that you should set out by sunset."

She glided into the invisible trail running down the lakeside slope of the mountain, so that he was obliged to follow her. As they had climbed up, so they descended—the girl steadily and silently in advance. The region was dotted with farms; but she kept to the shelter of the woodland, and before he expected it they found themselves at the water's edge. A canoe drawn up in a cove gave him the first clear hint of her intentions.

It was a pretty little cove, enclosed by two tiny headlands, forming a miniature landlocked bay, hidden from view of the lake beyond. Trees leaned over it and into it, while the canoe rested on a yard-long beach of sand.

"I see," he remarked, after she had allowed him to take his own observations. "You want me to go over to Burlington and catch a train to Montreal."

She shook her head, smiling, as he thought, rather tremulously.

"I'm afraid I've planned a much longer journey for you. Come and see the preparations I've made." They stepped to the side of the canoe, so as to look down into it. "That," she pursued, pointing to a small suit-case forward of the middle thwart, "will enable you to look like an ordinary traveller after you've landed. And that," she added, indicating a package in the stern, "contains nothing more nor less than sandwiches. Those are bottles of mineral water. The small objects are a corkscrew, a glass, a railway timetable a cheap compass, and a cheaper watch. In addition you'll find a map of the lake, which you can consult tomorrow morning, after you've paddled all night through the part with which you're most familiar."

"Where am I going?" he asked, huskily, avoiding her eyes. The nonchalance of her tone had not deceived him, and he thought it well not to let their glances meet.

"You'll keep to the middle of the lake and go on steadily. You'll have all Champlain to yourself to-night, and in daylight there's no reason why you shouldn't pass for an ordinary sportsman. All the same, you had better rest by day, and go on again in the evening. You'll find lots of little secluded coves where you can pull up the canoe and be quite undisturbed. I'd do that, if I were you."

He nodded to show that he understood her.

"When you look at the map," she went on, "you'll find that I've traced a route for you, after you get above Plattsville. You'll see that it will take you past the little French-Canadian village of Deux Etoiles. You can't mistake it, because there's a lighthouse, with a revolving light, on a rock, just off the shore. You'll be in Canada then. You'd better time yourself to go by about nightfall."

He nodded his agreement with her again, and she continued.

"About a mile above the lighthouse, and close in by the eastern shore, just where the lake becomes very narrow, there are two little islands lying close together. You'll take them as a landmark, because immediately opposite them, on the mainland, there's a stretch of forest running for a good many miles. There you can land finally. You must drag the canoe right up into the wood, and hide it as well as you can. It's my own canoe, so that it can lie there till it drops to pieces. Is all that quite clear to you?"

Once more he nodded, not trusting himself to speak. Again the sight of his emotion braced her to make her tone more matter-of-fact than ever.

"Now, then," she went on, "if you consult the map you'll see that an old wood-road runs through the forest, and comes out at the station of Saint Jean du Clou Noir. There you can get a train to Quebec.... The road begins nearly opposite the two little islands I spoke of.... I don't think you'll have any difficulty in finding it.... It's about seven miles to the station.... You could walk that easily enough through the night.... I've marked a very good train on the time-table—a train that stops at Saint Jean du Clou Noir at seven thirty-five ..."

A choking sensation warned her to stop, but she retained the power to smile. The sun had set, and the slow northern night was beginning to close in. Across the lake the mountains of Vermont were receding into deep purple uniformity, while over the crimson of the west a veil of filmy black was falling, as though dropped in mid-flight by the angel of the dark. Here and there through the dead-turquoise green of the sky one could detect the pale glimmer of a star.

"You must go now," she whispered. He began to move the canoe into the water.

"I haven't thanked you," he began, unsteadily, holding the canoe by the bow, "because you wouldn't let me. As a matter of fact, I don't know how to do it—adequately. But if I live at all, my life will belong to you. That's all I can say. My life will be a thing for you to dispose of. If you ever have need of it—"

"I shan't have," she said, hastily, "but I'll remember what you say."

"Thanks; that's all I ask. For the present I can only hope for the chance of making my promise good."

She said nothing in reply, and after a minute's silence he entered the canoe. She steadied it herself to allow him to step in. It was not till he had done so and had knelt down with the paddle in his hand that, moved by a sudden impulse she leaned to him and kissed him. Then, releasing the light craft, she allowed it to glide out like a swan on the tiny bay. In three strokes of the paddle it had passed between the low, enclosing headlands and was out of sight. When she summoned up strength to creep to an eminence commanding the lake, it was already little more than a speck, moving rapidly northward, over the opal-tinted waters.

VI

On finding himself alone, and relatively free, Ford's first sensation was one of insecurity. Having lived for more than a year under orders and observation, he had lost for the moment some of his natural confidence in his own initiative. Though he struck resolutely up the lake he was aware of an inner bewilderment, bordering on physical discomfort, at being his own master. For the first half-hour he paddled mechanically, his consciousness benumbed by the overwhelming strangeness. As far as he was able to formulate his thought at all he felt himself to be in process of a new birth, into a new phase of existence. In the darkening of the sky above him and of the lake around there came upon him something of the mental obscurity that might mark the passage of a transmigrating soul. After the subdued excitement of the past weeks, and especially of the past hour, the very regularity of his movements now lulled him into a passivity only quickened by vague fears. The noiseless leaping forward of the canoe beneath him heightened his sense of breaking with the past and hastening onward into another life. In that life he would be a new creature, free to be a law unto himself.

A new creature! A law unto himself! The ideas were subconscious, and yet he found the words framing themselves on his lips. He repeated them mentally with some satisfaction as a cluster of lights on his left told him he was passing Greenport. Other lights, on a hill, above the town and away from it, were probably those of Judge Wayne's villa. He looked at them curiously, with an odd sense of detachment, of remoteness, as from things belonging to a time with which he had nothing more to do. That was over and done with.

It was not until a steamer crossed his bows, not more than a hundred yards in front of him, that he began to appreciate his safety. Under the protection of the dark, and in the wide loneliness of the waters, he was as lost to human sight as a bird in the upper air. The steamer—zigzagging down the lake, touching at little ports now on the west bank and now on the east—had shot out unexpectedly from behind a point, her double row of lights casting a halo in which his canoe must have been visible on the waves; and yet she had passed by and taken no note of him. For a second such good-fortune had seemed to his nervous imagination beyond the range of hope. He stopped paddling he almost stopped breathing, allowing the canoe to rock gently on the tide. The steamer puffed and pulsated, beating her way directly athwart his course. The throbbing of her engines seemed scarcely louder than that of his own heart. He could see people moving on the deck, who in their turn must have been able to see him. And yet the boat went on, ignoring him, in tacit acknowledgment of his right to the lake, of his right to the world.

His sigh of relief became almost a laugh as he began again to paddle forward. The incident was like a first victory, an assurance of victories to come. The sense of insecurity with whith he had started out gave place, minute by minute, to the confidence in himself which was part of his normal state of mind. Other small happenings confirmed his self-reliance. Once a pleasure party in a rowboat passed so near him that he could hear the splash of their oars and the sound of their voices. There was something almost miraculous to him in being so close to the commonplace of human fellowship. He had the feeling of pleasant inward recognition that comes from hearing one's mother-tongue in a foreign land. He stopped paddling again, just to catch meaningless fragments of their talk, until they floated away into silence and darkness. He would have been sorry to have them pass out of ear-shot, were it not for his satisfaction in being able to go his way unheeded.

On another occasion he found himself within speaking distance of one of the numerous small lakeside hotels. Lights flared from open doors and windows, while from the veranda, the garden, and the little pier came peals of laughter, or screams and shouts of young people at rough play. Now and then he could catch the tones of some youth's teasing, and the shrill, pretended irritation of a girl's retort. The noisy cheerfulness of it all reached his ears with the reminiscent tenderness of music heard in childhood. It represented the kind of life he himself had loved. Before the waking nightmare of his troubles began he had been of the unexacting type of American lad who counts it a "good time" to sit in summer evenings on "porches" or "stoops" or "piazzas," joking with "the boys," flirting with "the girls," and chattering on all subjects from the silly to the serious, from the local to the sublime. He was of the friendly, neighborly, noisy, demonstrative spirit characteristic of his age and class. He could have entered into this circle of strangers—

strangers for the most part, in all probability, to one another—and in ten minutes' time been one of them. Their screams, their twang, their slang, their gossip, their jolly banter, and their gay ineptitude would have been to him like a welcome home. But he was Norrie Ford, known by name and misfortune to every one of them. The boys and girls on the pier, the elderly women in the rocking-chairs, even the waitresses who, in high-heeled shoes and elaborate coiffures, ministered disdainfully to the guests in the bare-floored dining-room, had discussed his life, his trial, his sentence, his escape, and formed their opinions upon him. Were it possible for them to know now that he was lurking out there in the dark, watching their silhouettes and listening to their voices, there would be such a hue and cry as the lake had not heard since the Indians sighted Champlain on its banks.

It was this reflection that first of all stirred the current of his deep, slow resentment. During the fifteen months since his arrest he had been either too busy, or too anxious, or too sorely puzzled at finding himself in so odd a position, to have leisure for positive anger. At the worst of times he had never lost the belief that the world, or that portion of the world which concerned itself with him, would come to recognize the fact that it was making a mistake. He had taken his imprisonment and his trial more or less as exciting adventures. Even the words of his sentence lost most of their awfulness in his inner conviction that they were empty sounds. Of the confused happenings on the night of his escape his clearest memory was that he had been hungry, while he thought of the weeks spent in the cabin as a "picnic." Just as good spirits had seldom failed him, so patience had rarely deserted him. Such ups and downs of emotion as he had experienced resulted in the long run in an increase of optimism. In the back of his slow mind he kept the expectation, almost the intention, of giving his anger play—some time; but only when his rights should have been restored to him.

But he felt it coming on him now, before he was prepared for it. It was taking him unawares, and without due cause, roused by the chance perception that he was cut off from rightful, natural companionship. Nothing as yet had brought home to him the meaning of his situation like the talk and laughter of these lads and girls, who suddenly became to him what Lazarus in Abraham's bosom was to Dives in his torment.

A few dips of the paddle took him out of sight and sound of the hotel; but the dull, indignant passion remained in his heart, finding outward vent in the violence with which he sent the canoe bounding northward beneath the starlight. For the moment it was a blind, objectless passion, directed against nothing and no one in particular. He was not skilled in the analysis of feeling, or in tracing effect to cause. For an hour or two his wrath was the rage of the infuriated animal roaring out its pain, regardless of the hand that has inflicted it. Other rowing-parties came within hearing distance, but he paid them no attention; lake steamers hove in sight, but he had learned how to avoid them; little towns, dotted at intervals of a few miles apart, lit up the banks with the lights of homes, but their shining domesticity seemed to mock him. The birth of a new creature was a painful process; and yet, through all his confused sensations and obscure elemental suffering, he kept the conviction that a new creature was somehow claiming its right to live.

Peace of mind came to him gradually, as the little towns put out their lights, and the lake steamers laid up in tiny ports, and the rowing-parties went home to bed. In the smooth, dark level of the lake and in the stars there was a soothing quality to which he responded before he was aware of doing so. The spacious solitude of the summer night brought with it a large calmness of outlook, in which his spirit took a measure of comfort. There was a certain bodily pleasure, too, in the regular monotony of paddling, while his mental faculties were kept alert by the necessity of finding points by which to steer, and fixing his attention upon them. So, by degrees, his limited reasoning powers found themselves at work, fumbling, with the helplessness of a man whose strong points are physical activity and concentration of purpose, for some light on the wild course on which he was embarked.

Perhaps his first reflection that had the nature of a conclusion or a deduction was on the subject of "old Wayne." Up to the present he had regarded him with special ill will, owing to the fact that Wayne, while inclining to a belief of his innocence, had nevertheless lent himself to the full working of the law. It came to Ford now in the light of a discovery that, after all, it was not Wayne's fault. Wayne was in the grip of forces that deprived him to a large extent of the power of voluntary action. He could scarcely be blamed if he fulfilled the duties he was appointed to perform The real responsibility was elsewhere. With whom did it lie? For a primitive mind like Ford's the question was not an easy one to answer.

For a time he was inclined to call to account the lawyers who had pleaded for the State. Had it not been for their arguments he would have been acquitted. With an ingenuity he had never supposed to exist they had analyzed his career—especially the two years of it spent with Uncle Chris—and showed how it led up to the crime as to an inevitable consequence. They seemed familiar with everything he had ever done, while they were able to prove beyond cavil that certain of his acts were inspired by sinister motives which he himself knew to have sprung from dissipation at the worst. It was astonishing how plausible their story was; and he admitted that if anybody else had been accused, he himself would probably have been convinced by it. Certainly, then, the lawyers must have been to blame—that is, unless they were only carrying out what others had hired them to do.

That qualifying phrase started a new train of thought. Mechanically, dip by dip, swaying gently with each stroke as to a kind of rhythm, he drove the canoe onward, while he pondered it. It was easy to meditate out here, on the wide, empty lake, for no sound broke the midnight stillness but the soft swish of the paddle and the skimming of the broad keel along the water. It was not by any orderly system of analysis, or synthesis, or syllogism, that Ford, as the hours went by, came at last to his final conclusion; and yet he reached it with conviction. By a process of elimination he absolved judge, jury, legal profession, and local public from the greater condemnation. Each had contributed to the error that made him an outlaw, but no one contributor was the whole of the great force responsible. That force, which had set its component parts to work, and plied them till the worst they could do was done, was the body which they called Organized Society. To Ford, Organized Society was a new expression. He could not remember ever to have heard it till it was used in

court. There it had been on everybody's lips. Far more than old Chris Ford himself it was made to figure as the injured party. Though there was little sympathy for the victim in his own person, Organized Society seemed to have received in his death a blow that called for the utmost avenging. Organized Society was plaintiff in the case, as well as police, jury, judge, and public. The single human creature who could not apparently gain footing within its fold was Norrie Ford himself. Organized Society had cast him out.

He had been told that before, and yet the actual fact had never come home to him till now. In prison, in court, in the cabin in the woods, there had always been some human hand within reach of his own, some human tie, even though it was a chain. However ignoble, there had been a place for him. But out here on the great vacant lake there was an isolation that gave reality to his expulsion. The last man left on earth would not feel more utterly alone.

For the first time since the night of his escape there came back to him that vague feeling of deserting something he might have defended, that almost physical sensation of regret at not having stood his ground and fought till he fell. He began to understand now what it meant. Dip, splash, dip, splash, his paddle stirred the dimly shining water, breaking into tiny whirlpools the tremulous reflection of the stars. Not for an instant did he relax his stroke, though the regret took more definitive shape behind him. Convicted and sentenced, he was still part of the life of men, just as a man whom others are trying to hurl from a tower is *on* the tower till he has fallen. He himself had not fallen; he had jumped off, while there was still a chance of keeping his foothold.

It required an hour or two of outward rhythmic movement and confused inward feeling to get him ready for his next mental step. He had jumped off the tower; true; but he was alive and well, with no bones broken. What should he do now? Should he try to tear the tower down? The attempt would not be so very ludicrous, seeing he should only have to join those—socialists, anarchists, faddists—already at the work. But he admired the tower, and preferred to see is stand. If he did anything at all, it would be to try to creep back into it.

The reflection gave still another turn to his thoughts. He was passing Burlington by this time—the electric lamps throwing broad bands of light along the deserted, up-hill streets, between the sleeping houses. It was the first city he had seen since leaving New York to begin his useless career in the mountains. The sight moved him with an odd curiosity, not free from a homesick longing for normal, simple ways of life. He kept the canoe at a standstill, looking hungrily up the empty thoroughfares, as a poor ghost may gaze at familiar scenes while those it has loved are dreaming. By-and-by the city seemed to stir in its sleep. Along the waterside he could hear the clatter of some belated or too early wayfarer; a weird, intermittent creaking told him that the milk-cart of provincial towns was on its beat; from a distant freight-train came the long, melancholy wail that locomotives give at night; and then drowsily, but with the promptness of one conscientious in his duty, a cock crew. Ford knew that somewhere, unseen as yet by him, the dawn was coming, and—again like a wandering ghost—sped on.

But he had been looking on the tower which the children of men had builded, and had recognized his desire to clamber up into it again. He was not without the perception that a more fiery temperament than his own—perhaps a nobler one—would have cursed the race that had done him wrong, and sought to injure it or shun it. Misty recollections of proud-hearted men who had taken this stand came back to him.

"I suppose I ought to do the same," he muttered to himself humbly; "but what would be the use when I couldn't keep it up?"

Understanding himself thus well, his purpose became clearer. Like the ant or the beaver that has seen its fabric destroyed, he must set patiently to work to reconstruct it. He suspected a poor-spirited element in this sort of courage; but his instinct forced him within his limitations. By dint of keeping there and toiling there he felt sure of his ability to get back to the top of the tower in such a way that no one would think he lacked the right to be on it.

But he himself would know it. He shrank from that fact with the repugnance of an honest nature for what is not straightforward; but the matter was past helping. He should be obliged to play the impostor everywhere and with every one. He would mingle with men, shake their hands, share their friendships, eat their bread, and accept their favors—and deceive them under their very noses. Life would become one long trick, one daily feat of skill. Any possible success he could win would lack stability, would lack reality, because there would be neither truth nor fact behind it.

From the argument that he was innocent he got little comfort. He had forfeited his right to make use of that fact any longer. Had he stayed where he was he could have shouted it out till they gagged him in the death-chair. Now he must be dumb on the subject forevermore. In his disappearance there was an acceptation of guilt which he must remain powerless to explain away.

Many minutes of dull pain passed in dwelling on that point. He could work neither back from it nor forward. His mind could only dwell on it with an aching admission of its justice, while he searched the sky for the dawn.

In spite of the crowing of the cock he saw no sign of it—unless it was that the mountains on the New York shore detached themselves more distinctly from the sky of which they had seemed to form a part. On the Vermont side there was nothing but a heaped-up darkness, night piled on night, till the eye reached the upper heavens and the stars.

He paddled on, steadily, rhythmically, having no sense of hunger or fatigue, while he groped for the clew

that was to guide him when he stepped on land. He felt the need of a moral programme, of some pillar of cloud and fire that would show him a way he should be justified in taking. He expressed it to himself by a kind of aspiration which he kept repeating, sometimes half aloud:

"O Lord, O Holy One! I want to be a man!"

Suddenly he struck the water with so violent a dash that the canoe swerved and headed landward.

"By God!" he muttered, under his breath, "I've got it.... It isn't my fault.... It's theirs.... They've put me in this fix.... They've brought this dodging, and shifting, and squirming upon me.... The subterfuge isn't mine; it's theirs.... They've taken the responsibility from me.... When they strip me of rights they strip me of duties.... They've forced me where right and wrong don't exist for me any more.... They've pitched me out of their Organized Society, and I've had to go.... Now I'm free ... and I shall profit by my freedom."

In the excitement of these discoveries he smote the waters again. He remembered having said something of the sort on the night of his interview with Wayne; but he had not till now grasped its significance. It was the emancipation of his conscience. Whatever difficulties he might encounter from outside, he should be hampered by no scruples from within. He had been relieved of them; they had been taken from him. Since none had a duty toward him, he had no duty toward any. If it suited his purposes to juggle with men, the blame must rest upon themselves. He could but do his best with the maimed existence they had left to him. Self-respect would entail observance of the common laws of truth and honesty, but beyond this he need never allow consideration for another to come before consideration for himself. He was absolved from the necessity in advance. In the region in which he should pass his inner life there would be no occupant but himself. From the world where men and women had ties of love and pity and mutual regard they had cast him out, forcing him into a spiritual limbo where none of these things obtained. It was only lawful that he should make use of such advantages as his lot allowed him.

There was exaltation in the way in which he grasped this creed as his rule of life; and looking up suddenly, he saw the dawn. It had taken him unawares, stealing like a gray mist of light over the tops of the Vermont hills, lifting their ridges faintly out of night, like the ghosts of so many Titans. Among the Adirondacks one high peak caught the first glimmer of advancing day, while all the lower range remained a gigantic silhouette beneath the perceptibly paling stars. Over Canada the veil was still down, but he fancied he could detect a thinner texture to the darkness.

Then, as he passed a wooded headland, came a sleepy twitter, from some little pink and yellow bill barely withdrawn from its enfolding wing—to be followed by another, and another, and another, till both shores were aquiver with that plaintive chirrup, half threnody for the flying darkness, half welcome to the sun, like the praise of a choir of children roused to sing midnight matins, but still dreaming. Ford's dip was softer now, as though he feared to disturb that vibrant drowsiness; but when, later, capes and coves began to define themselves through the gray gloaming, and, later still, a shimmer of saffron appeared above the eastern summits, he knew it was time to think of a refuge from the daylight.

The saffron became fire; the fire lit up a heaven of chrysoprase and rose. Where the lake had been as a metal mirror for the stars, it rippled and dimpled and gleamed with the tints of mother-of-pearl. He knew the sun must be on the farther slope of the Green Mountains, because the face they turned toward him was dense in shadow, like the unilluminated portion of the moon. On the western shore the Adirondacks were rising out of the bath of night as dewy fresh as if they had been just created.

But the sun was actually in the sky when he perceived that he no longer had the lake to himself. From a village nestling in some hidden cove a rowboat pulled out into the open—a fisherman after the morning's catch. It was easy enough for Ford to keep at a prudent distance; but the companionship caused him an uneasiness that was not dispelled before the first morning steamer came pounding from the northward. He fixed his attention then on a tiny islet some two or three miles ahead. There were trees on it, and probably ferns and grass. Reaching it, he found himself in a portion of the lake forest-banked and little frequented. Pastures and fields of ripening grain on the most distant slopes of Vermont gave the nearest token of life. All about him there was solitude and stillness—with the glorious, bracing beauty of the newly risen day.

Landing with stiffened limbs, he drew up the canoe on a bit of sandy beach, over which sturdy old bushes, elder and birch, battered by the north winds, leaned in friendly, concealing protection. He himself would be able to lie down here, among the tall ferns and the stunted blueberry-scrub, as secluded and secure as ever he had been in prison.

Being hungry and thirsty, he ate and drank, consulting his map the while and fixing approximately his whereabouts. He looked at his little watch and wound it up, and fingered the pages of the railway guide he found beside it.

The acts brought up the image of the girl who had furnished him with these useful accessories to flight. For lack of another name he called her the Wild Olive—remembering her yearning, not wholly unlike his own, to be grafted back into the good olive-tree of Organized Society. With some shame he perceived that he had scarcely thought of her through the night. It was astounding to recollect that not twelve hours ago she had kissed him and sent him on his journey. To him the gulf between then and now was so wide and blank that it might have been twelve weeks, or twelve months, or twelve years. It had been the night of the birth of a new creature, of the transmigration of a soul; it had no measurement in time, and threw all that preceded it into the mists of prenatal ages.

These thoughts passed through his mind as he made a pillow for himself with his white flannel jacket, and

twisted the ferns above it into a shelter from the flies. Having done this, he stood still and pondered.

"Have I really become a new creature?" he asked himself.

There was much in the outward conditions to encourage the fancy, while his inner consciousness found it easy to be credulous. Nothing was left of Norrie Ford but the mere flesh and bones—the least stable part of personality. Norrie Ford was gone—not dead, but gone—blasted, annihilated stamped out of existence, by the act of Organized Society. In its place the night of transition had called up some one else.

"But who? ... Who am I? ... What am I?"

Above all, a name seemed required to give him entity. It was a repetition of his feeling about the Wild Olive—the girl in the cabin in the woods. Suddenly he remembered that, if he had found a name for her, she had also found one for him—and that it was written on the steamer ticket in his pocket. He drew it out, and read:

"Herbert Strange."

He repeated it at first in dull surprise, and then with disapproval. It was not the kind of name he would have chosen. It was odd, noticeable—a name people would remember He would have preferred something commonplace such as might be found for a column or two in any city directory. She had probably got it from a novel—or made it up. Girls did such things. It was a pity, but there was no help for it now. As Herbert Strange he must go on board the steamer, and so he should be called until—

But he was too tired to fix a date for the resumption of his own name or the taking of another. Flinging himself on his couch of moss and trailing ground-spruce, with the ferns closing over him, and the pines over them, he was soon asleep.

PART II

STRANGE

VII

Dressed in overalls that had once been white, he was superintending the stacking of wool in a long, brick-walled, iron-roofed shed in Buenos Aires when the thought came to him how easy it had all been. He paused for a minute in his work of inspection—standing by an open window, where a whiff of fresh air from off the mud-brown Rio de la Plata relieved the heavy, greasy smell of the piles of unwashed wool—just to review again the past eighteen months. Below him stretched the noisy docks, with their row of electric cranes, as regular as a line of street lamps, loading or unloading a mile of steamers lying broadside on, and flying all flags but the Stars and Stripes. Wines, silk, machinery, textiles were coming out; wheat, cattle, hides, and beef were pouring in. In the confusion of tongues that reached him he could, on occasions, catch the tones of Spaniard, Frenchman, Swede, and Italian, together with all the varieties of English speech from Highland Scotch to Cockney; but none of the intonations of his native land. The comparative rarity of anything American in his city of refuge, while it added to his sense of exile, heightened his feeling of security. It was still another of the happy circumstances that had helped him.

The strain under which he had lived during this year and a half had undoubtedly been great; but he could see now that it had been inward strain—the mental strain of unceasing apprehension, the spiritual strain of the new creature in casting off the old husk, and adapting itself not merely to new surroundings, but to a new life. This had been severe. He was not a rover, and still less an adventurer, in any of the senses attached to that word. His instincts were for the settled, the well-ordered, and the practical. He would have been content with any humdrum existence that permitted his peaceable, commercially gifted soul to develop in its natural environment. The process, therefore, by which Norrie Ford became Herbert Strange, even in his own thoughts, had been one of inner travail, though the outward conditions could not have been more favorable. Now that he had reached a point where his more obvious anxieties were passing away, and the hope of safety was becoming a reality, he could look back and see how relatively easy everything had been.

He had leisure for reflection because it was the hour for the men's midday meal and siesta. He could see them grouped together—some thirty-odd—at the far end of the shed—sturdy little Italians, black-eyed, smiling, thrifty, dirty, and contented to a degree that made them incomprehensible to the ambitious, upward-toiling American set over them. They sat, or lounged, on piles of wood, or on the floor, some chattering, most of them asleep. He had begun like them. He had stacked wool under orders till he had made himself capable of being in command. He had been beneath the ladder; and though his foot was only on the lowest rung of it even now, he was satisfied to have made this first step upward.

He could not be said to have taken it to his own surprise, since he had prepared himself for it, and for other such steps to follow it, knowing that they must become feasible in time. He had been given to understand that what the Argentine, in common with some other countries, needed most was neither men nor capital, but intelligence. Men were pouring in from every corner of the globe; capital was keen in looking for its opportunity; but for intelligence the demand was always greater than the supply.

The first intimation of such a need had come to him on the *Empress of Erin*, in mid-Atlantic, by a chance opportunity of the voyage. It was on one of the first days of liberty when he had ventured to mix freely with his fellow-passengers. Up to the present he had followed the rule of conduct adopted at the little Canadian station of Saint Jean du Clou Noir. He went into public when necessary, but no oftener. He did then what other people did, in the way to attract the least attention. The season favored him, for amid the throngs of early autumn travellers, moving from country back to town, or from seaside resorts to the mountains he passed unnoticed. At Quebec he was one of the crowd of tourists come to see the picturesque old town. At Rimouski he was lost among the trainful of people from the Canadian maritime provinces taking the Atlantic steamer at a convenient port. He lived through each minute in expectation of the law's tap on his shoulder; but he acquired the habit of nonchalance. On shipboard it was a relief to be able to shut himself up in his cabin—his suite!--feigning sickness, but really allowing his taut nerves to relax, as he watched first the outlines of the Laurentides, and then the shores of Anticosti, and lastly the iron-black coast of Labrador, follow each other below the horizon. Two or three appearances at table gave him confidence that he had nothing to fear. By degrees he allowed himself to walk up and down the deck, where it was a queer sensation to feel that the long row of eyes must of necessity be fixed upon him. The mere fact that he was wearing another man's clothes—clothes he had found in the cabin trunk that had come on board for him—produced a shyness scarcely mitigated by the knowledge that he was far from looking grotesque.

Little by little he plucked up courage to enter the smoking-room where the tacit, matter-of-course welcome of his own sex seemed to him like extraordinary affability. An occasional word from a neighbor, or an invitation to "take a hand at poker," or to "have a cocktail," was like an assurance to a man who fancies himself dead that he really is alive. He joined in no conversations and met no advances, but from the possibilities of doing so he would go back to his cabin smiling.

The nearest approach to pleasure he allowed himself was to sit in a corner and listen to the talk of his fellow-men. It was sometimes amusing, but oftener stupid; it turned largely on food, with irrelevant interludes on business. It never went beyond the range of topics possible to the American or Canadian merchants, professional men, politicians, and saloon-keepers, who form the rank and file of smoking-room society on any Atlantic liner; but the Delphic worshipper never listened to Apollo's oracle with a more rapt devotion than Ford to this intercommunion of souls.

It was in this way that he chanced one day to hear a man speaking of the Argentine. The remarks were casual, choppy, and without importance, but the speaker evidently knew the ground. Ford had already noticed him, because they occupied adjoining steamer-chairs—a tall, sallow Englishman of the ineffectual type, with sagging shoulders, a drooping mustache, and furtive eyes. Ford had scarcely thought of the Argentine since the girl in the cabin had mentioned it—- now ten or twelve days ago; but the necessity of having an objective point, and one sufficiently distant turned his mind again in that direction.

"Did I hear you speaking yesterday of Buenos Aires?" he ventured to ask, on the next occasion when he found himself seated beside his neighbor on deck.

The Englishman drew his brier-root pipe from his mouth, glanced sidewise from the magazine he was reading, and jerked his head in assent.

"What kind of place did it seem to you?"

"Jolly rotten."

Pondering this reply, Ford might have lost courage to speak again had he not caught the eye of the Englishman's wife as she leaned forward and peeped at him across her husband's brier-root. There was something in her starry glance—an invitation, or an incitement—that impelled him to continue.

"I've been told it's the land of new opportunities."

The Englishman grunted without looking up. "I didn't see many."

"May I ask if you saw any?"

"None fit for a white man."

"My husband means none fit for a—gentleman. I liked the place."

From the woman's steely smile and bitter-sweet tones Ford got hints of masculine inefficiency and feminine contempt which he had no wish to follow up. He knew from fragments of talk overheard in the smoking-room that they had tried Mexico, California, and Saskatchewan in addition to South America. From the impatience with which she shook the foot just visible beneath the steamer-rug, while all the rest of her bearing feigned repose, he guessed her humiliation at returning empty to the land she had left with an Anglo-Saxon's pioneering hope, beside a husband who could do nothing but curse luck. To get over the awkward minute he spoke hurriedly.

"I've heard of a very good house out there—Stephens and Jarrott. Do you happen to know anything about

them?"

"Wool," the Englishman grunted again. "Wool and wheat. Beastly brutes."

"They were horribly impertinent to my husband," the woman spoke up, with a kind of feverish eagerness to have her say. "They actually asked him if there was anything he could do. Fancy!"

"Oh, I know people of that sort put a lot of superfluous questions to you," Ford said. But the lady hurried on.

"As to questions, there are probably fewer asked you in Argentine than anywhere else in the world. It's one of the standing jokes of the place, both in Buenos Aires and out in the Camp. Of course, the old Spanish families are all right; but when it comes to foreigners a social catechism wouldn't do. That's one of the reasons the place didn't agree with us. We wanted people to know who we'd been before we got there; but that branch of knowledge isn't cultivated."

"More beastly Johnnies in the Argentine passin' under names not their own," said the man, moved to speak, at last, "than in all the rest of the world put together. Heard a story at the Jockey Club—lot of beastly native bounders in the Jockey Club—heard a story at the Jockey Club of a little Irish Johnny who'd been cheatin' at cards. Three other asses kicked him out. Beggar turned at the door and got in his lick of revenge. 'Say boys, d'yez know why they call me Mickey Flanagan out here? Because it's me na-ame.' Beggar 'd got 'em all there."

Ford nerved himself to laugh, but made an excuse for rising.

"Oh, there's lots of cleverness among them," the lady observed, before he had time to get away. "In fact, it's one of the troubles with the country—for people like us. There's too much competition in brains. My husband hit the right nail on the head when he said there was no chance for any beastly Johnny out there, unless he could use his bloomin' mind—and for us that was out of the question."

Ford never spoke to them again, but he meditated on their words, finding himself at the end of twenty-four hours in possession of a new light. "I've got to use my bloomin' mind." The words seemed to offer him the clew to life. It was the answer to the question, "What should I do *there*?" which positively asked itself, whenever he thought of seeking a refuge in this country or in that. It came as a discovery that within himself was the power that would enable him to make the best of any country, and the country to make the best of him.

He could hardly have explained how his decision to try Argentina had become fixed. Until he saw whether or not he should get successfully ashore at Liverpool there was a paralysis of all mental effort; but once on the train for London his plans appeared before him already formed. The country where few questions were asked and the past had no importance was clearly the place for him. Within a fortnight he was a second-class passenger on board the Royal Mail Steam Packet *Parana*, bound for Buenos Aires—thus fulfilling, almost unexpectedly to himself, the suggestion made by the girl in the Adirondack cabin, whose star, as he began to believe, must rule his fate.

He thought of her now and then, but always with the same curious sense of remoteness—or unreality, as of a figure seen in a dream. Were it not for the substantial tokens of her actuality he possessed she would have seemed to him like the heroine of a play. He would have reproached himself for disloyalty if the intensity of each minute as he had to meet it had not been an excuse for him. The time would come when the pressure of the instant would be less great, and he should be able to get back the emotion with which he left her. Perhaps if she had been "his type of girl," her image would not have faded so quickly.

There was but one thing for which he was not grateful to her. She had fixed the name of Herbert Strange upon him in such a way that he was unable to shake it off. His own first name was the unobjectionable monosyllable John—though he had always been known by his less familiar middle name, Norrie—and as John Ford he could have faced the world with a certain amount of bluff. He meant to begin the attempt immediately on reaching London, but the difficulty of appearing in a hotel under one name while everything he brought with him bore another was patent to him at once. Similarly, he could not receive the correspondence incidental to his outfit and his passage under the name of Ford in a house where he was known as Strange. Having applied for his passage as Strange, he knew it would create comment if he asked to be put down in the books as Ford. Do what he would he was obliged to appear on the printed list of second-cabin passengers as Herbert Strange, and he had made at least one acquaintance who would expect to call him so after they reached land.

This was a little, clean-shaven man, in the neighborhood of sixty, always dressed at sea as he probably dressed on shore. He wore nothing but black, with a white shirt and a ready-made black bow-tie. He might have been a butler, an elderly valet, or a member of some discreet religious order in street costume. Ford had heard a flippant young Frenchman speak of him as an "ancien curé, qui a fait quelque bêtise"; and indeed there was about him that stamp of the ecclesiastic which is sometimes ineffaceable.

"I call myself Durand," he said to Ford, using the conveniently ambiguous French idiom, "je m'appelle Durand."

"Et je m'appelle Strange, I call myself Strange," Ford had replied, claiming the name for the first time without hesitation, but feeling the irrevocable nature of the words as soon as he had uttered them.

Out of the crowd of second-rate Europeans of all races who made up the second cabin, the man who called himself Strange had selected the man who called himself Durand by some obscure instinct of affinity. "He

looks like an old chap who could give one information," was Strange's own way of putting it, not caring to confess that he was feeling after a bit of sympathy. But the give and take of information became the basis of their friendship, and imparted the first real stimulus to the young man's awkward efforts to use his mind.

Monsieur Durand had been thirty years in the Argentine, observing the place and the people, native and foreign, with the impartial shrewdness only possible to one who sought little for himself. It was a pleasure to share the fruits of his experience with one so eager to learn, for young men were not in the habit of showing him deference. He could tell Mr. Strange many things that would be to his advantage—what to do—what to avoid—what sort of place to live in—what he ought to pay—and what sort of company to keep.

Yes, he knew the firm of Stephens and Jarrott—an excellent house. There was no Mr. Stephens now, only a Mr. Jarrott. Mr. Stephens had belonged to the great days of American enterprise in the southern hemisphere, to the time of Wheelwright, and Halsey, and Hale. The Civil War had put an end to that. Mr. Jarrott had come later—a good man, not generally understood. He had suffered a great loss a few years ago in the death of his brother-in-law and partner, Mr. Colfax. Mrs. Colfax, a pretty little woman, who hadn't old age in her blood either—one could see that—had gone back to the United States with her child—but a child!--blond as an angel—altogether darling—*tout à fait mignonne*. Monsieur Durand thought he remembered hearing that Mrs. Colfax had married again, but he couldn't say for certain. What would you? One heard so many things. He knew less of the family since the last boy died—the boy to whom he gave lessons in Spanish and French. Death hadn't spared the household—taking the three sons one after another and leaving father and mother alone. It was a thousand pities Mrs. Colfax had taken the little girl away. They loved her as if she had been their own—especially after the boys died. An excellent house! Mr. Strange couldn't do better than seek an entry there—it is I who tell you so—*c'est moi qui vous le dis*.

All this was said in very good English, with occasional lapses into French, in a soft, benevolent voice, with slow benedictory movements of the hands, more and more suggestive of an ecclesiastic *en civile*—or under a cloud. Strange stole an occasional glance into the delicate, clear-cut face, where the thin lips were compressed into permanent lines of pain, and the sunken brown eyes looked out from under scholarly brows with the kind of hopeful anguish a penitent soul might feel in the midst of purifying flames. He remembered again that the flippant young Frenchman had said, "Un ancien curé, qui a fait quelque bêtise." Was it possible that some tragic sin lay under this gentle life? And was the four-funnelled, twin-screwed *Parana* but a ghostly ship bearing a cargo of haunted souls into their earthly purgatory?

"But listen, monsieur," the old man began next day. But listen! There would be difficulties. Stephens and Jarrott employed only picked men, men with some experience—except for the mere manual labor such as the Italians could perform. Wouldn't it be well for Mr. Strange to qualify himself a little before risking a refusal? Ah, but how? Monsieur Durand would explain. There was first the question of Spanish. No one could get along in the Argentine without a working knowledge of that tongue. Monsieur Durand himself gave lessons in it—and in French—but in the English and American colonies of Buenos Aires exclusively. There were reasons why he did not care to teach among Catholics, though he himself was a fervent one, and he hoped—repentant. He pronounced the last word with some emphasis, as though to call Strange's attention to it. If his young friend would give him the pleasure of taking a few lessons, they could begin even now. It would while away the time on the voyage. He had his own method of teaching, a method based on the Berlitz system, but not borrowed from it, and, he ventured to say, possessing its own good points. For example: *el tabaco—la pipa—los cigarillos. Que es esto? Esto es la pipa*. Very simple. In a few weeks' time the pupil is carrying on conversations.

It would be an incalculable advantage to Mr. Strange if he could enter on his Argentine life with some command of the vernacular. It might even be well to defer his search for permanent employment until he could have that accomplishment to his credit. If he possessed a little money—even a very little—Oh, he did? Then so much the better. He need not live on it entirely, but it would be something to fall back on while getting the rudiments of his education. In the mean time he could learn a little about wool if he picked up jobs—Oh, very humble ones!--they were always to be had by the young and able-bodied—at the Mercado Central, one of the great wool-markets of the world. He could earn a few pesetas, acquire practical experience, and fit himself out in Spanish, all at the same time.

And he could live with relative economy. Monsieur Durand could explain that too. In fact, he might get board and lodging in the same house as himself, with Mrs. Wilson who conducted a modest home for "gentlemen only." Mrs. Wilson was a Protestant—what they called a Methodist, he believed—but her house was clean, with a few flowers in the patio, very different from the frightful conventillos in which the poor were obliged to herd. If Mr. Strange thought it odd that he, Monsieur Durand, should be living beneath a Protestant roof—well, there were reasons which were difficult to explain.

Later on, perhaps, Mr. Strange might take a season on some great sheep estancia out in the Camp, where there were thousands of herds that were thousands strong. Monsieur Durand could help him in that too. He could introduce him to wealthy proprietors whose sons he had taught. It would be a hard life, but it need not be for long. He would live in a mud hut, dirty, isolated, with no companionship but that of the Italian laborers and their womenkind. But the outdoor existence would do him good; the air over the pampas was like wine; and the food would not be as bad as he might expect. There would be an abundance of excellent meat, chiefly mutton, it was true, which when cooked *à* la guacho—*carne concuero*, they called it in the Camp—roasted in the skin so as to keep all the juices in the meat—! A gesture of the hands, accompanied by a succulent inspiration between the teeth, gave Strange to understand that there was one mitigation at least to life on an Argentine estancia.

To come into actual contact with the sheep, to know Oxfords, Cheviots, Leicesters, and Black-faced Downs, to assist at the feedings and washings and doctorings and shearings, to follow the crossings and recrossings

and crossings again, that bred new varieties as if they were roses, to trace the processes by which the Argentine pampas supply novel resources to the European manufacturer, and the European manufacturer turns out the smart young man of London or New York, with his air of wearing "the very latest"—all this would not only give Strange a pleasing sense of being at the root of things, but form a sort of apprenticeship to his trade.

The men had not yet finished their hour of siesta, but Strange himself was at work. Ten minutes were sufficient for his own snack, and he never needed rest. Moreover, he was still too new to his position to do other than glory in the fact that he was a free being, doing a man's work, and earning a man's wage. Out in the Camp he had been too desolate to feel that, but here in Buenos Aires, at the very moment when the great city was waking to the knowledge of her queenship in the southern world—when the commercial hordes of the north were sweeping down in thousands of ships across the equator to outdo each other in her markets, it was an inspiring thing merely to be alive and busy. He was as proud of Stephens and Jarrott's long brick shed, where the sun beat pitilessly on the corrugated iron roof, and the smell of wool nearly sickened him, as if it had been a Rothschild's counting-house. His position there was just above the lowest; but his enthusiasm was independent of trivial things like that. How could he lounge about, taking siestas, when work was such a pleasure in itself? The shed of which he had the oversight was a model of its kind, not so much because his ambition designed to make it so, as because his ardor could make it nothing else.

The roar of dock traffic through the open windows drowned everything but the loudest sounds, so that busily working, he heard nothing, and paid no attention, when some one stopped behind him. He had turned accidentally, humming to himself in the sheer joy of his task, when the presence of the stranger caused him to blush furiously beneath his tan. He drew himself up, like a soldier to attention. He had never seen the head of the firm that employed him, but he had heard a young Englishman describe him as "looking like a wooden man just coming into life," so that he was enabled to recognize him now. He did look something like a wooden man, in that the long, lean face, of the tone of parchment, was marked by the few, deep, almost perpendicular folds that give all the expression there is to a Swiss or German medieval statue of a saint or warrior in painted oak. One could see it was a face that rarely smiled, though there was plenty of life in the deep-set, gray-blue eyes, together with a force of cautious, reserved, and possibly timid, sympathy. Of the middle height and slender, with hair just turning from iron-gray to gray, immaculate in white duck, and wearing a dignified Panama, he stood looking at Strange—who, tall and stalwart in his greasy overalls, held his head high in conscious pride in his position in the shed—as Capital might look at Labor. It seemed a long time before Mr Jarrott spoke—the natural harshness of his voice softened by his quiet manner.

"You're in charge of this gang?"

"Yes, sir."

There was an embarrassed pause. As though not knowing what to say next, Mr. Jarrott's gaze travelled down the length of the shed to where the Italians, rubbing their sleepy eyes, were preparing for work again.

"You're an American, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Not quite twenty-six."

"What's your name?"

"Herbert Strange!"

"Ah? One of the Stranges of Virginia?"

"No, sir."

There was another long pause, during which the older man's eyes wandered once more over the shed and the piles of wool, coming back again to Strange.

"You should pick up a little Spanish."

"I've been studying it. Hablo Español, pero no muy bien."

Mr. Jarrott looked at him for a minute in surprise.

"So much the better—tanto mejor," he said, after a brief pause, and passed on.

VIII

He was again thinking how easy it had been, as he stood, more than three years later, on the bluffs of

Rosario, watching the sacks of wheat glide down the long chute—full seventy feet—into the hold of the *Walmer Castle*. The sturdy little Italians who carried the bags from the warehouse in long single file might have been those he had superintended in the wool-shed in Buenos Aires in the early stages of his rise. But he was not superintending these. He superintended the superintendents of those who superintended them. Tired with his long day in the office, he had come out toward the end of the afternoon not only to get a breath of the fresh air off the Parana, but to muse, as he often did, over the odd spectacle of the neglected, half-forgotten Spanish settlement, that had slumbered for two hundred years, waking to the sense of its destiny as a factor of importance in the modern world. Wheat had created Chicago and Winnipeg Adam-like from the ground; but it was rejuvenating Rosario de Santa Fé Faust-like, with its golden elixir. It interested the man who called himself Herbert Strange—resident manager of Stephens and Jarrott's great wheat business in this outlet of the great wheat provinces—to watch the impulse by which Decrepitude rose and shook itself into Youth. As yet the process had scarcely advanced beyond the early stages of surprise. The dome of the seventeenth-century Renaissance cathedral accustomed for five or six generations to look down on low, one-storied Spanish dwellings surrounding patios almost Moorish in their privacy, seemed to lift itself in some astonishment over warehouses and flour-mills; while the mingling of its sweet old bells with the creaking of cranes and the shrieks of steam was like that chorus of the centuries in which there can be no blending of the tones.

Strange felt himself so much a part of the rejuvenescence that the incongruity gave him no mental nor æsthetic shock. If in his present position he took a less naïve pride than in that of three years ago, he was conscious none the less of a deep satisfaction in having his part, however humble, in the exercise of the world's energies. It gave him a sense of oneness with the great primal forces—with the river flowing beneath him, two hundred miles to the Atlantic, with the wheat fields stretching behind him to the confines of Brazil and the foothills of the Andes—to be a moving element in this galvanizing of new life into the dormant town, in this finding of new riches in the waiting earth. There was, too, a kind of companionship in the steamers moored to the red buoys in the river, waiting their turns to come up to the insufficient quays and be loaded. They bore such names as *Devonshire*, *Ben Nevis*, and *Princess of Wales*. They would go back to the countries where the speech was English, and the ideals something like his own. They would go back, above all, to the north, to the north that he yearned for with a yearning to which time brought no mitigation, to the north which was coming to mean for him what heaven means to a soul outside the scope of redemption.

It was only on occasions that this sentiment got possession of him strongly. He was generally able to keep it down. Hard work, assisted by his natural faculty for singleness of purpose and concentration of attention, kept him from lifting the eyes of his heart toward the unattainable. Moreover, he had developed an enthusiasm, genuine in its way, for the land of his adoption. The elemental hugeness of its characteristics—its rivers fifty to a hundred miles in width, its farms a hundred thousand acres in extent, its sheep herds and cattle herds thousands to the count—were of the kind to appeal to an ardent, strenuous nature. There was an exhilarating sense of discovery in coming thus early to one of the world's richest sources of supply at a minute when it was only beginning to be tapped. Out in the Camp there was an impression of fecundity, of earth and animal alike, that seem to relegate poverty and its kindred ills to a past that would never return; while down in the Port the growth of the city went on like the bursting of some magic, monstrous flower. It was impossible not to share in some degree the pride of the braggart Argentine.

It was difficult, too, not to love a country in which the way had been made so smooth for him. While he knew that he brought to his work those qualities most highly prized by men of business, he was astonished nevertheless at the rapidity with which he climbed. Men of long experience in the country had been more than once passed over, while he got the promotion for which they had waited ten and fifteen years. He admired the way in which for the most part they concealed their chagrin, but now and then some one would give it utterance.

"Hello, grafter!" a little man had said to him, on the day when his present appointment had become known among his colleagues.

The speaker was coming down the stairs of the head office in the Avenida de Mayo as Strange was going up. His name was Green, and though he had been twenty years in Argentine, he haled from Boston. Short and stout, with gray hair, a gray complexion, a gray mustache, and wearing gray flannels, with a gray felt hat, he produced a general impression of neutrality. Strange would have gone on his way unheeding had not the snarling tone arrested him. He had ignored this sort of insult more than once; but he thought the time had come for ending it. He turned on an upper step, looking down on the ashy-faced little man, to whom he had once been subordinate and who was now subordinate to him.

"Hello—what?" he asked, with an air of quiet curiosity.

"I said, Hello, grafter," Green repeated, with bravado.

"Why?"

"I guess you know that as well as I do."

"I don't. What is it? Out with it. Fire away."

His tranquil air of strength had its effect in overawing the little man, though the latter stood firm and began to explain.

"A grafter is a fellow with an underground pull for getting hold of what belongs to some one else. At least that's what I understand by it—"

"It's very much what I understand by it, too. But have I ever got hold of anything of yours?"

"Yes, confound you! You've taken my job—the job I've waited for ever since 1885."

"Did waiting for it make it yours? If so, you would have come by it more easily than I did. I worked for it."

"Worked for it? Haven't I worked for it, too? Haven't I been in this office for going on seventeen years? Haven't I done what they've paid me for—?"

"I dare say. But I've done twice what they've paid me for. That's the secret of my pull, and I don't mind giving it away. You mayn't like it—some fellows don't; but you'll admit it it's a pull you could have had, as well as I. Look here, Green," he continued, in the same quiet tone, "I'm sorry for you. If I were in your place, I dare say I should feel as you do. But if I *were* in your place, I'll be hanged if I shouldn't make myself fit to get out of it. You're not fit—and that's the only reason why you aren't going as resident manager to Rosario. You're labelled with the year '1885,' as if you were a bottle of champagne—and you've forgotten that champagne is a wine that gets out of date. You're a good chap—quite as good as your position—but you're not better than your position—and when you are you won't be left in it any longer."

In speaking in this way the man who had been Norrie Ford was consciously doing violence to himself. His natural tendency was to be on friendly terms with those around him, and he had no prompting stronger than the liking to be liked. In normal conditions he was always glad to do a kindness; and when he hurt any one's feelings he hurt his own still more. Even now, though he felt justified in giving little Green to understand his intoleration of impertinence, he was obliged to fortify himself by appealing to his creed that he owed no consideration to any one. Little Green was protected by a whole world organized in his defence; Norrie Ford had been ruined by that world, while Herbert Strange had been born outside it. With a temperament like that of a quiet mastiff, he was forced to turn himself into something like a wolf.

In spite of the fact that little Green's account of the brief meeting on the stairs presented it in the light of the castigation he had administered to "that confounded upstart from nobody knows where," Strange noticed that it made the clerks in the office, most of whom had been his superiors as Green had been, less inclined to bark at his heels. He got respect from them, even if he could not win popularity—and from popularity, in any case, he had been shut out from the first. No man can be popular who works harder than anybody else, shuns companionship, and takes his rare amusements alone. He had been obliged to do all three, knowing in advance that it would create for him a reputation of an "ugly brute" in quarters whence he would have been glad to get good-will.

Finding the lack of popularity a safeguard not only against prying curiosity, but against inadvertent self-betrayal, it was with some misgiving that he saw his hermit-like seclusion threatened, as he rose higher in the business and consequently in the social—scale. In the English-speaking colony of Buenos Aires the one advance is likely to bring about the other—especially in the case of a good-looking young man, evidently bound to make his mark, and apparently of respectable antecedents. The first menace of danger had come from Mr. Jarrott himself, who had unexpectedly invited his intelligent employee to lunch with him at a club, in order to talk over a commission with which Strange was to be intrusted. On this occasion he was able to stammer his way out of the invitation; but when later, Mr. Skinner, the second partner, made a like proposal, he was caught without an excuse, being obliged, with some confusion, to eat his meal in a fashionable restaurant in the Calle Florida. Oddly enough, both his refusal on the one occasion and his acceptance on the other obtained him credit with his elders and superiors, as a modest young fellow, too shy to seize an honor, and embarrassed when it was thrust upon him.

To Strange both occurrences were so alarming that he put himself into a daily attitude of defence, fearing similar attack from Mr. Martin, the third member of the firm. He, however, made no sign; and the bomb was thrown by his wife. It came in the shape of a card informing Mr. Strange that on a certain evening, a few weeks hence, Mrs. Martin would be at home, at her residence in Hurlingham. It was briefly indicated that there would be dancing, and he was requested to answer if he pleased. The general information being engraved, his particular name was written in a free bold hand, which he took to be that of one of the daughters of the family.

Though he did his best to keep his head, there was everything in that bit of pasteboard to throw him into a state of something like excitement. Not only were the doors of the world Norrie Ford had known being thrown open to Herbert Strange, but the one was being moved by the same thrill—the thrill of the feminine—that had been so powerful with the other. He was growing more susceptible to it in proportion as it seemed forbidden—just as a man in a desert island may dream of the delights of wine.

He had looked at the Misses Martin, but had never supposed they could fling a glance at him. He had seen them at the public gathering-places—in their box at the opera, in the grand stand at the Jockey Club, in their carriage at Palermo or in the Florida. They were handsome girls—blonde and dashing—whose New York air was in pleasant contrast to the graceful indolence or stolid repose of the dark-eyed ladies of the Argentine, too heavily bejewelled and too consciously dressed according to the Paris mode. Strange said of the Misses Martin, as he had said of Wild Olive, that they were "not his type of girl"—but they were girls—they were American girls—they were bright, lively girls, representing the very poetry and romance of the world that had turned him out.

It was a foregone conclusion that he should decline their invitation, and he did so; but the mere occasion for doing it gave his mind an impetus in the direction in which he had been able hitherto to check it. He began again to think of the feminine, to dream of it, to long for it. For the time being it was the feminine in the abstract—without features or personality. As far as it took form at all it was with the dainty, nestling

seductiveness that belonged to what he called his "type"—a charm that had nothing in common with the forest grace of the Wild Olive or the dash of the Misses Martin.

Now and then he caught glimpses of it, but it was generally out of reach. Soft eyes, of the velvety kind that smote him most deliciously, would lift their light upon him through the casement of some old Spanish residence, or from the daily procession of carriages moving slowly along the palm avenue at Palermo or in the Florida. When this happened he would have a day or two of acting foolishly, in the manner of the Bonarense bucks. He would stand for hours of his leisure time—if he could get away from the office at the minute of the fashionable promenade—on the pavement of the Florida, or under a palm-tree in the park, waiting for a particular carriage to drive round again and again and again, while he returned the sweet gaze which the manners of the country allow an unknown lady to bestow, as a rose is allowed to shed its beauty. This being done, he would go away, and realize that he had been making himself ridiculous.

Once the incarnation of his dreams came so near him that it was actually within his grasp. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil dangled its fruit right before his eyes in the person of Mademoiselle Hortense, who sang at the Café Florian, while the clients, of whom he was sometimes one, smoked and partook of refreshments. She was just the little round, soft, dimpling, downy bundle of youth and love he so often saw in his mind's eye, and so rarely in reality, and he was ready to fall in love with any one. The mutual acquaintance was formed, as a matter of course, over the piece of gold he threw into the tambourine, from which, as she passed from table to table, she was able to measure her hearer's appreciation of art. Those were the days in which he first began to be able to dress well, and to have a little money to throw away. For ten days or a fortnight he threw it away in considerable sums, being either in love or in a condition like it. He respected Mademoiselle Hortense, and had sympathy with her in her trials. She was desperately sick of her roving life as he was of Mrs. Wilson's boarding-house. She was as eager to marry and settle down as he to have a home. The subject was not exactly broached between them, but they certainly talked round it. The decisive moment came on the night when her troupe was to sail for Montevideo. In the most delicate way in the world she gave him to understand that she would remain even at the eleventh hour if he were to say the word. She might be on the deck, she might be in her berth, and it still would not be too late. He left her at nine, and she was to sail at eleven. During the two intervening hours he paced the town, a prey to hopes, fears, temptations, distresses. To do him justice, it was her broken heart he thought of, not his own. To him she was only one of many possibilities; to her, he was the chance of a lifetime. She might never, he said to himself, "fall into the clutches of so decent a chap again." It was a wild wrestle between common sense and folly—so wild that he was relieved to hear a clock strike eleven, and to know she must have sailed.

The incident sobered him by showing him how near and how easily he could come to a certain form of madness. After that he worked harder than ever, and in the course of time got his appointment at Rosario. It was a great "rise," not only in position and salary, but also in expectations. Mr. Martin had been resident manager at Rosario before he was taken into partnership—so who could tell what might happen next?

The first intimation of the change was conveyed by Mr. Jarrott in a manner characteristically casual. Strange, being about to leave the private office one day, after a consultation on some matter of secondary import, was already half-way to the door, while Mr. Jarrott himself was stooping to replace a book in the revolving bookcase that stood beside his chair.

"By-the-way," he said, without looking up, "Jenkins is going to represent the house in New York. We think you had better take his place at Rosario."

Strange drew himself up to attention. He knew the old man liked his subordinates to receive momentous orders as if they came in the routine of the day.

"Very well, sir," he said, quietly, betraying no sign of his excitement within. Raising himself, Mr. Jarrott looked about uneasily, as if trying to find something else to say, while Strange began again to move toward the door.

"And Mrs. Jarrott—"

Strange stopped so still that the senior partner paused with that air of gentlemanly awkwardness—something like an Englishman's—which he took on when he had firmly made up his mind.

"Mrs. Jarrott," he continued, "begs me to say she hopes you will—a—come and lunch with us on Sunday next."

There was a long pause, during which the young man searched wildly for some formula that would soften his point-blank refusal.

"Mrs. Jarrott is awfully kind," he began at last to stammer, "but if she would excuse me—"

"She will expect you on Sunday at half-past twelve."

The words were uttered with that barely perceptible emphasis which, as the whole house knew, implied that all had been said.

In the end the luncheon was no formidable affair. Except for his fear, lest it should be the thin edge of the wedge of that American social life which it would be perilous for him to enter, he would have enjoyed this peep into a comfortable home, after his long exile from anything of the sort. In building his house at Palermo, Mr. Jarrott had kept, in the outlines at least, to the old Spanish style of architecture, as being most

suited to the history and climate of the country, though the wealthy Argentines themselves preferred to have their residences look—like their dresses, jewels, and carriages—as if they had come from Paris. The interior patio was spacious, shaded with vines, and gay with flowers, while birds, caged or free, were singing everywhere. The rooms surrounding it were airy and cool, and adapted to American standards of comfort. In the dining-room mahogany, damask, crystal, and silver gave Strange an odd feeling of having been wafted back to the days and usages of the boyhood of Norrie Ford.

As the only guest he found himself seated on Mrs. Jarrott's right, and opposite Miss Queenie Jarrott, the sister of the head of the house. The host, as his manner was, spoke little. Miss Jarrott, too, only looked at Strange across the table, smiling at him with her large, thin, upward-curving smile, comic in spite of itself, and with a certain pathos, since she meant it to be charged with sentiment. Over the party at table, over the elderly men-servants who waited on them, over the room, over the patio, there was—except for the singing of the birds—the hush that belongs to a household that never hears the noise or the laughter of youth.

Mrs. Jarrott took the brunt of the conversation on herself She was a beautiful woman, faded now with the pallor that comes to northern people after a long residence in the sub-tropical south, and languid from the same cause. Her handsome hazel eyes looked as if they had been used to weeping, though they conserved a brightness that imparted animation to her face. A white frill round her throat gave the only relief to her plain black dress, but she wore many handsome rings, after the Argentine fashion as well as a brooch and earrings of black pearls.

She began by asking her guest if it was true, as Mr. Jarrott had informed her, that he was not one of the Stranges of Virginia. She thought he must be. It would be so odd if he wasn't. There *were* Stranges in Virginia, and had been for a great many generations. In fact, her own family, the Colfaxes, had almost intermarried with them. When she said almost, she meant that they had intermarried with the same families—the Yorkes, the Endsleighs and the Poles. If Mr. Strange did belong to the Virginia Stranges, she was sure they could find relatives in common. Oh, he didn't? Well, it seemed really as if he must. If Mr. Strange came from New York, he probably knew the Wrenns. Her own mother was a Wrenn. She had been Miss Wrenn before she was Mrs. Colfax. He thought he had heard of them? Oh, probably. They were well-known people—at least they had been in the old days—though New York was so very much changed. She rarely went back there now, the voyage was so long, but when she did she was quite bewildered. Her own family used to be so conservative, keeping to a little circle of relatives and friends that rarely went north of Boston or south of Philadelphia; but now when she made them a visit she found them surrounded by a lot of people who had never been heard of before. She thought it a pity that in a country where there were so few distinctions, those which existed shouldn't be observed.

It was a relief to Strange when the sweet, languorous monologue, punctuated from time to time by a response from himself, or an interjectory remark from one of the others, came to an end, and they proceeded to the patio for coffee.

It was served in a corner shaded by flowering vines, and presided over by a huge green and gray parrot in a cage. The host and hostess being denied this form of refreshment took advantage of the moment to stroll arm in arm around the court, leaving Miss Jarrott in tête-à-tête with Strange. He noticed that as this lady led the way her figure was as lithe as a young girl's and her walk singularly graceful. "No one is ever old with a carriage like yours," Miss Jarrott had been told, and she believed it. She dressed and talked according to her figure, and, had it not been for features too heavily accentuated in nose and chin, she might have produced an impression of eternal spring-tide. As it was, the comic papers would have found her cruelly easy to caricature, had she been a statesman. The parrot screamed at her approach, croaking out an air, slightly off the key:

> "Up and down the ba-by goes,
> Turning out its lit-tle ..."

Tempted to lapse into prose, it proceeded to cry:

"Wa-al, Polly, how are you to-day? Wa-al, pretty well for an old gal," after which there was a minute of inarticulate grumbling. When coffee was poured, and the young man's cigarette alight, Miss Jarrott seized the opportunity which her sister-in-law's soft murmur at the table had not allowed her.

"It's really funny you should be Mr. Strange, because I've known a young lady of the same name. That is, I haven't known her exactly, but I've known about her."

Not to show his irritation at the renewal of the subject, Strange presumed she was one of the Stranges of Virginia, with right and title to be so called.

"She is and she isn't," Miss Jarrot replied. "I know you'll think it funny to hear me speak so; but I can't explain I'm like that. I can't always explain. I say lots and lots of things that people just have to interpret for themselves It's funny I should be like that, isn't it? I wonder why? Can you tell me why? And this Miss Strange—I never knew her really—not really—but I feel as if I had. I always feel that way about friends of friends of mine. I feel as if they were my friends, too. I'd go through fire and water for them. Of course that's just an expression but you know what I mean, now don't you?"

Having been assured on that point, she continued:

"I'm afraid you'll find us a very quiet household, Mr. Strange, but we're in mourning. That is, Mrs. Jarrott is in mourning; and when those dear to me are in mourning I always feel that I'm in mourning, too. I'm like that. I never can tell why it is, but—I'm like that. My sister-in-law has just lost her sister-in-law. Of course that's no

relation to me, is it? And yet I feel as if it was. I've always called Mrs. Colfax my sister-in-law, and I've taught her little girl to call me Aunt Queenie. They lived here once. Mr. Colfax was Mrs. Jarrott's brother and Mr. Jarrott's partner. The little girl was born here. It was a great loss to my brother when Mr. Colfax died. Mrs. Colfax went back to New York and married again. That was a blow, too; so we haven't been on the same friendly terms of late years. But now I hope it will be different. I'm like that. I always hope. It's funny, isn't it? No matter what happens, I always think there's a silver lining to the cloud. Now, why should I be like that? Why shouldn't I despair, like other people?"

Strange ventured the suggestion that she had been born with a joyous temperament.

"Wa-al, pretty well for an old gal!" screamed the parrot ending in a croaking laugh.

"I'm sure I don't know," Miss Jarrott mused. "Everybody is different, don't you think? And yet it sometimes seems to me that no one can be so different as I am. I always hope and hope; and you see, in this case I've been justified. We're going to have our little girl again. She's coming to make us a long, long visit. Her name is Evelyn; and once we get her here we hope she'll stay. Who knows? There may be something to keep her here. You never can tell about that. She's an orphan, with no one in the world but a stepfather, and he's blind. So who has a better right to her? I always think that people who have a right to other people should have them, don't you? Besides, he's going to Wiesbaden, to a great oculist there, so that Evelyn will come to us as her natural protectors. She's nearly eighteen now, and she wasn't eight when she left us. Oh yes, of course we've seen her since then—when we've gone to New York—but that hasn't been often. She will have changed; she'll have her hair up, and be wearing her dresses long; but I shall know her. Oh, you couldn't deceive me. I never forget a face. I'm like that. No, nor names either. I should remember you, Mr. Strange, if I met you fifty years from now. I noticed you when you first began to work for Stephens and Jarrott. So did my sister-in-law, but I noticed you first. We've often spoken of you, especially after we knew your name was Strange. It seemed to us so strange. That's a pun, isn't it? I often make them. We both thought you were like what Henry—that's Mr. Jarrott's oldest son—might have grown to, if he had been spared to us. We've had a great deal of sorrow—Oh, a great deal! It's weaned my sister-in-law away from the world altogether. She's like that. My brother, too—he isn't the same man. So when Evelyn comes we hope we shall see you often, Mr. Strange. You must begin to look on this house as your second home. Indeed, you must. It'll please my brother. I've never heard him speak of any young man as he's spoken of you. I think he sees the likeness to Henry. That'll be next year when Evelyn comes. No, I'm sorry to say it isn't to be this year. She can't leave her stepfather till he goes to Wiesbaden. Then she'll be free. Some one else is going to Wiesbaden with him. And isn't it funny, it's the same Miss Strange—the lady we were speaking of just now."

It was already some months since those words had been spoken, so that he had ceased to dwell on them; but at first they haunted him like a snatch of an air that passes through the mental hearing, and yet eludes the attempt to bring it to the lips. Even if he had had the synthetic imagination that easily puts two and two together, he had not the leisure, in the excitement of his removal to Rosario and the undertaking of his duties there, to follow up a set of clews that were scarcely more palpable than odors. Nevertheless the words came back to him from time to time, and always with the same odd suggestion of a meaning special—perhaps fatal—to himself. They came back to him at this minute, as he stood watching the loading of the *Walmer Castle* and breathing the fresh air off the Parana. But if they threatened danger, it was a danger that disappeared the instant he turned and faced it—leaving nothing behind but the evanescent memory of a memory, such as will sometimes remain from a dream about a dream.

IX

Another year had passed before he learned what Miss Jarrott's words were to mean to him. Knowledge came then as a flash of revelation in which he saw himself and his limitations clearly defined. His success at Rosario had been such that he had begun to think himself master of Fate; but Fate in half an hour laughingly showed herself mistress of him.

He had been called to Buenos Aires on an errand of piety and affection—to bury Monsieur Durand. The poor old unfrocked priest had been gathered to his rest, taking his secret with him—penitent, reconciled to the Church, and fortified with the Last Sacraments. Strange slipped a crucifix between the wax-like fingers, and followed—the only mourner—to the Recoleta Cemetery.

Having ordered a cross to mark the grave, he remained in town a day or two longer to attend to a small matter which for some time past he had at heart and on his conscience. It was now three or four years since he had set aside the sum lent him by the girl for whom he had still no other name than that of the Wild Olive. He had invested it, and reinvested it, till it had become a fund of some importance. Putting it now into the safest American securities, he placed them in the hands of a firm of English solicitors in Buenos Aires, with directions not only to invest the interest from time to time, but—in the event of his death—to follow certain sealed instructions with which also he intrusted them. From the few hints he was able to give them in this way he had little doubt but that her identity could be discovered, and the loan returned.

In taking these steps he could not but see that what would be feasible in case of his death must be equally feasible now; but he had two reasons for not attempting it. The first was definite and prudential. He was unwilling to risk anything that could connect him ever so indirectly with the life of Norrie Ford. Secondly, he was conscious of a vague shrinking from the payment of this debt otherwise than face to face. Apart from

considerations of safety, he was unwilling to resort to the commonplace channels of business as long as there was a possibility of taking another way.

Not that he was eager to see her again. He had questioned himself on that point, and knew she had faded from his memory. Except for a vision of fugitive dark eyes—eyes of Beatrice Cenci—he could scarcely recall her features. Events during the last six years had pressed so fast on each other, life had been so full, so ardent, each minute had been so insistent that he should give it his whole soul's attention, that the antecedent past was gone like the passion no effort can recapture. As far as he could see her face at all, it looked at him out of an abyss of oblivion to which his mind found it as hard to travel back as a man's imagination to his infancy.

It was with some shame that he admitted this. She had saved him—in a sense, she had created him. By her sorcery she had raised up Herbert Strange out of the ruin of Norrie Ford, and endowed him with young vigor. He owed her everything. He had told her so. He had vowed his life to her. It was to be hers to dispose of, even at her caprice. It was what he had meant in uttering his parting words to her. But, now, that he had the power in some degree, he was doing nothing to fulfil his promise. He had even lost the desire to make the promise good.

It was not difficult to find excuses for himself. They were ready-made to his hand. There was nothing practical that he could do except what he had done about the money. Life was not over yet; and some day the chance might come to prove himself as high-souled as he should like to be. If he could only have been surer that he was inwardly sincere he would not have been uneasy over his inactivity.

Then, within a few minutes, the thing happened that placed him in a new attitude, not only toward the Wild Olive, but toward all life.

Business with the head office detained him in Buenos Aires longer than he had expected. It was business of a few hours at a time, leaving him leisure for the theatres and the opera, for strollings at Palermo, and for standing stock-still watching the procession of carriages in the Florida or the Avenida Sarmiento, in the good Bonarense fashion. He was always alone, for he had acquired the art—none too easy—of taking pleasure without sharing it.

So he found himself, one bright afternoon, watching the races from the lawn of the Hipodromo of the Jockey Club. He was fond of horses, and he liked a good race. When he went to the Hipodromo it was for the sporting, not the social, aspect of the affair. Nevertheless, as he strolled about, he watched for that occasional velvety glance that gave him pleasure, and amused himself with the types seated around him, or crossing his path—heavy, swarthy Argentines, looking like Italian laborers grown rich—their heavy, swarthy wives, come out to display all the jewels that could be conveniently worn at once—pretty, dark-eyed girls, already with a fatal tendency to embonpoint, wearing diamonds in their ears and round their necks as an added glory to costumes fresh from the rue de la Paix—grave little boys, in gloves and patent-leather boots, seated without budging by their mammas, sucking the tops of their canes in imitation of their elder brothers, who wandered about in pairs or groups, all of the latest cut, eying the ladies but rarely addressing them—tall Englishmen, who looked taller than they were in contrast to the pudgy race around them, as the Germans looked lighter and the French more blond—Italian opera singers, Parisian actresses Spanish dancers, music-hall soubrettes—diplomats of all nations—clerks out for a holiday—sailors on shore—tourists come to profit by a spectacle that has no equal in the southern world, and little of the kind that is more amusing in the north.

As Strange's glance roamed about in search of a response he not infrequently received it, for he was a handsome fellow by this time—tall, well dressed, and well set up, his trim, fair beard emphasizing the clear-cut regularity of his profile, without concealing the kindliness that played about the mouth. A little gray on the temples, as well as a few tiny wrinkles of concentration about the eyes, gave him an air of maturity beyond his age of thirty-two. The Anglo-Saxon influence in the Argentine is English—from which cause he had insensibly taken on an English air, as his speech had acquired something of the English intonation. He was often told that he might pass for an Englishman anywhere, and he was glad to think so. It was a reason the less for being identified as Norrie Ford. It sometimes seemed to him that he could, in case of necessity, go back to North America, to New York, to Greenport, or even to the little county town where he had been tried and sentenced to death, and run no risk of detection.

The staring of other men first directed his attention toward her. She was sitting slightly detached from the party of Americans to whom she clearly belonged, and in which the Misses Martin formed the merrily noisy centre. Though dressed in white, that fell softly about her feet, and trained on the grass sidewise from her chair, her black cuffs, collar and hat suggested the last days of mourning. Whether or not she was aware of the gaze of the passers-by it was difficult to guess, for her air of demure simplicity was proof against penetration. She was one of those dainty little creatures who seem to see best with the eyes downcast; but when she lifted her dark lashes, the darker from contrast with the golden hair, to sweep heaven and earth in a blue glance that belonged less to scrutiny than to prayer, the effort seemed to create a shyness causing the lids, dusky as some flowers are, to drop heavily into place again, like curtains over a masterpiece. It was so that they rose and fell before Strange, her eyes meeting his in a look that no Argentine beauty could ever have bestowed, in that it was free from coquetry or intention, and wholly accidental.

It was in fact this accidental element, with its lack of preparation, that gave the electric thrill to both. That is to say, in Strange the thrill was electric; as for her, she gave no sign further than that she opened her parasol and raised it to shade her face. Having done this she continued to sit in undisturbed composure, though she probably saw through her fringing lashes that the tall, good-looking young man still stood

spellbound, not twenty yards away.

Strange, on his part, was aware of the unconventionality of his behavior, though he was incapable of moving on. He felt the occasion to be one which justified him in transcending the established rules of courtesy. He was face to face with the being who met not only all the longings of his earthly love, but the higher, purer aspirations that accompanied it. It was not, so he said to himself, a chance meeting; it was one which the ages had prepared, and led him up to. She was "his type of girl" only in so far as she distilled the essence of his gross imaginings and gave them in their exquisite reality. So, too, she was the incarnation of his dreams only because he had yearned for something mundane of which she was the celestial, and the true, embodiment. He had that sense of the insufficiency of his own powers of preconception which comes to a blind man when he gets his sight and sees a rose.

He was so lost in the wonder of the vision that he had to be awakened as from a trance when Miss Jarrott, very young and graceful, crossed the lawn and held out her hand.

"Mr. Strange! I didn't know you were in town. My brother never mentioned it. He's like that. He never tells. If I didn't guess his thoughts, I shouldn't know anything. But I always guess people's thoughts. Why do you suppose it is? I don't know. Do you? When I see people, I can tell what they're thinking of as well as anything. I'm like that; but I can't tell how I do it. I saw you from over there, and I knew you were thinking about Evelyn. Now weren't you? Oh, you can't deceive me. You were thinking of her just as plain—! Well, now you must come and be introduced."

He felt that he stumbled blindly as he crossed the bit of greensward in Miss Jarrott's wake; and yet he kept his head sufficiently to know that he was breaking his rules, contradicting his past, and putting himself in peril. In being presented to the Misses Martin and their group, he was actually entering that Organized Society to which Herbert Strange had no attachments, and in which he could thrust down no roots. By sheer force of will he might keep a footing there, as a plant that cannot strike into the soil may cling to a bare rock. All the same the attempt would be dangerous, and might easily lead to his being swept away.

It was in full consciousness, therefore, of the revolution in his life that he bowed before the Misses Martin, who received him coldly. He had not come to their dance, nor "called," nor shown them any of the civilities they were accustomed to look for from young men. Turning their attention at once to the other gentlemen about them, they made no effort to detain him as Miss Jarrott led him to Miss Colfax.

Here the introduction would have been disappointing if the greatness of the event had not been independent of the details with which it happened. Strange was not in a condition to notice them, any more than a soul can heed the formalities with which it is admitted into heaven. Nearly all his impressions were subconscious—to be brought to the surface and dwelt on after he went away. It was thus he recorded the facts relating to the gold tint—the *teint doré*—of her complexion, the curl of her lashes that seemed to him deep chestnut rather than quite black, as well as the little tremor about her mouth, which was pensive in repose, and yet smiled with the unreserved sweetness of an infant. He could not be said to have taken in any of these points at a glance; but they came to him later, vividly, enchantingly, in the solitude of his room at the Phoenix Hotel.

What actually passed would have been commonplace in itself had it not been for what lay behind. Miss Colfax acknowledged the introduction with a fleeting smile and a quick lifting of the curtains of her eyes. He did not need that glimpse to know that they were blue, but he got a throb of bliss from it, as does one from the gleam of a sunlit sea. To her answers to the questions he asked as to when she had arrived, how she liked the Argentine, and what she thought of the Hipodromo, he listened less than to the silvery timbre of her voice. Mere words were as unimportant to those first minutes of subtle ecstasy as to an old Italian opera. The music was the thing, and for that he had become one enraptured auditory nerve.

There was no chair for him, so that he was obliged to carry on the conversation standing. He did not object to this, as it would give him an excuse for passing on. That he was eager to go, to be alone, to think, to feel, to suffer, to realize, to trace step by step the minutes of the day till they had led him to the supreme instant when his eyes had fallen on her, to take the succeeding seconds one by one and extract the significance from each, was proof of the power of the spell that had been cast upon him.

"And isn't it funny, Evie, dear," Miss Jarrott began, just as he was about to take his leave, "that Mr. Strange's name should be—"

"Yes, I've been thinking about that," Miss Colfax fluted, with that pretty way she had of speaking with little movement of the lips.

But he was gone. He was gone with those broken sentences ringing in his ears—casual and yet haunting—meaningless and yet more than pregnant—creeping through the magic music of the afternoon, as a death-motive breathes in a love-chant.

X

After a night of little sleep and much thinking he determined to listen to nothing but the love-chant. He

came to this decision, not in the recklessness of self-will, but after due consideration of his rights. It was true that, in biblical phrase, necessity was laid upon him. He could no more shut his ears against that entrancing song than he could shut his eyes against the daylight. This was not, however, the argument that he found most cogent, as it was not the impulse from which he meant to act. If he could make this girl his wife it would be something more than a case of getting his own way; it would be an instance—probably the highest instance—of the assertion of himself against a world organized to destroy him. He could not enter that world and form a part of it; but at least he could carry off a wife from it, as a lion may leap into a sheepfold and snatch a lamb.

It was in this light that he viewed the matter when he accepted Miss Jarrott's invitations—now to lunch, now to dinner, now to a seat in their box at the opera or in their carriage in the park—during the rest of the time he remained in town. It became clear to him that the family viewed with approval the attachment that had sprung up between Miss Colfax and himself, and were helping it to a happy ending. He even became aware that they were growing fond of him—making the discovery with a queer sensation of surprise. It was a thing so new in his experience that he would have treated the notion as ridiculous had it not been forced upon him. Women had shown him favors; one lonely old man, now lying in the Recoleta Cemetery, had yearned over him; but a household had never opened its heart to him before. And yet there could be no other reading of the present situation. He began to think that Mr. Jarrott was delaying his departure for Rosario purposely, to keep him near. It was certain that into the old man's bearing toward him there had crept something that might almost be called paternal, so that their business discussions were much like those between father and son. Mrs. Jarrott advanced as far out of the circle of her griefs to welcome him as it was possible for her languorous spirit to emerge. Miss Jarrott, friendly from the first, attached him to the wheels of her social chariot with an air of affectionate possession.

It required no great amount of perspicuity to see that the three elders would be glad if Miss Colfax and he were to "make a match of it," and why. It would be a means—and a means they could approve—of keeping their little girl among them. As matters stood, she was only a visitor, who spoke of her flight back to New York as a matter of course.

"I only came," she lisped to Strange, as they sat one day, under the parrot's chaperonage, in the shady corner of the patio—"I only came because when dear mamma died there was nothing else for me to do. Everything happened so unfortunately, do you see? Mamma died, and my stepfather went blind, and really I had no home. Of course that doesn't matter so much while I'm in mourning—I mean, not having a home—but I simply *must* go back to New York next autumn, in order to 'come out.'"

"Aren't you 'out' enough already?"

Illustration: "Who is Miriam?" was on his lips

"Do you see?" she began to explain, with the quaint air of practical wisdom he adored in her, "I'm not out at all—and I'm nearly nineteen. Dear mamma fretted over it as it was—and if she knew it hadn't been done yet—Well something must be managed, but I don't know what. It isn't as if Miriam could do anything about it, though she's a great deal older than I am, and has seen a lot of social life at Washington and in England. But she's out of the question. Dear mamma would never have allowed it. And she's no relation to me, besides."

The question, "Who is Miriam?" was on his lips, but he checked it in time. He checked all questions as to her relatives and friends whom he did not know already. He was purposely making ignorance his bliss as long as possible, in the hope that before enlightenment could be forced upon him it would be too late for any one to recede.

"Couldn't they do it for you here?" he asked, when he was sure of what he meant to say. "I know the Miss Martins—"

"Carrie and Ethel! Oh, well! That isn't quite the same thing. *I* couldn't come out in a place like Buenos Aires—or anywhere, except New York."

"But when you've been through it all, you'll come back here, won't you?"

His eyes sought hers, but he saw only the curtains of the lids—those lids with the curious dusk on them, which reminded him of the petals of certain pansies.

"That'll—depend," she said, after a minute's hesitation.

"It'll depend—on what?" he persisted, softly.

Before she could answer the parrot interrupted, screaming out a bit of doggerel in its hoarse staccato.

"Oh, that bird!" the girl cried, springing up. "I do wish some one would wring its neck."

He got no nearer to his point that day, and perhaps he was not eager to. The present situation, with its excitements and uncertainties, was too blissful to bring to a sudden end. Besides, he was obliged to go through some further rehearsing of the creed adopted in the dawn on Lake Champlain before his self-justification could be complete. It was not that he was questioning his right to act; it was only that he needed to strengthen the chain of arguments by which his action must be supported—against himself. Within his own heart there was something that pleaded against the breaking off of this tender sprig of the true olive to graft it on the wild, in addition to which the attitude of the Jarrott family disconcerted him. It was one thing to push his rights against a world ready to deny them, but it was quite another to take advantage of a trusting affection that came more than half-way to meet him. His mind refused to imagine what they would do if they could know that behind the origin of Herbert Strange there lay the history of

Norrie Ford. After all, he was not concerned with them, he asserted inwardly, but with himself. They were intrenched within a world able to take care of itself; while there was no power whatever to protect him, once he made a mistake.

So every night, as he sat in his cheerless hotel room, he reviewed his arguments, testing them one by one, strengthening the weak spots according to his lights, and weighing the for and against with all the nicety he could command. On the one side were love, happiness, position, a home, children probably, and whatever else the normal, healthy nature craves; on the other, loneliness, abnegation, crucifixion, slow torture, and slower death. Was it just to himself to choose the latter, simply because human law had made a mistake and put him outside the human race? The answer was obvious enough; but while his intelligence made it promptly, something else within him—some illogical emotion—seemed to lag behind with its corroboration.

This hesitation of his entire being to respond to the bugle-call of his need gave to his wooing a certain irregularity—an advance and recession like that of the tide. At the very instant when the words of declaration were trembling on his lips this doubt about himself would check him. There were minutes—moonlit minutes, in the patio, when the birds were hushed, and the scent of flowers heavy, and the voices of the older ones stole from some lighted room like a soft, human obligato to the melody of the night—minutes when he felt that to his "I love you!" hers would come as surely as the echo to the sound; and yet he shrank from saying it. Their talk would drift near to it, dally with it, flash about it, play attack and defence across it, and drift away again, leaving the essential thing unspoken. The skill with which she fenced with this most fragile of all topics, never losing her guard, never missing her thrust or parry, and yet never inflicting anything like a wound, filled him with a sort of rapture. It united the innocence of a child to the cleverness of a woman of the world, giving an exquisite piquancy to both. In this young creature, who could have had no experience of anything of the kind, it was the very essence of the feminine.

By dint of vigil and meditation he drew the conclusion that his inner hesitancy sprang from the fact that he was not being honest with himself. He was shirking knowledge that he ought to face. Up to the present he had done his duty in that respect, and done it pluckily. He had not balked at the statement that his rôle in the world was that of an impostor—though an impostor of the world's own creation. It had been part of the task forced upon him "to deceive men under their very noses," as he had expressed it to himself that night on Lake Champlain. Whatever vengeance, therefore, discovery might call upon him, he could suffer nothing in the loss of self-respect. He would be always supported by his inner approval. Remorse would be as alien to him as to Prometheus on the rock.

In the present situation he was less sure of that, and there he put his finger on his weakness. Seeing shadows flitting in the background he dodged them, instead of calling them out into daylight. He was counting on happy chances in dealing with the unforeseen, when all his moves should be based on the precise information of a general.

Therefore, when, in the corner of the patio, the next opportunity arose for asking the question, "Who is Miriam?" he brought it out boldly.

"She's a darling." The unexpected reply was accompanied by a sudden lifting of the lashes for a rapturous look and one of the flashing smiles.

"That's high praise—from you."

"She deserves it—from any one!"

"Why? What for? What has she done to win your enthusiasm when other people find it so hard?"

"It isn't so hard—only some people go the wrong way to work about it, do you see?"

She leaned back in her wicker chair, fanning herself slowly, and smiling at him with that air of mingled innocence and provocation which he found the most captivating of her charms.

"Do I?" he was tempted to ask.

"Do you? Now, let me think. Really, I never noticed. You'd have to begin all over again—if you ever did begin—before I could venture an opinion."

This was pretty, but it was not keeping to the point.

"Evidently Miriam knows how to do it, and when I see her I shall ask her."

"I wish you *could* see her. You'd adore her. She'd be just your style."

"What makes you think that? Is she so beautiful? What is she like?"

"Oh, I couldn't tell you what she's like. You'd have to see her for yourself. No, I don't think I should call her beautiful, though some people do. She's awfully attractive anyhow."

"Attractive? In what way?"

"Oh, in a lot of ways. She isn't like anybody else. She's in a class by herself. In fact, she has to be, poor thing."

"Why should she be poor thing, with so much to her credit in the way of assets?"

"Do you see?—that's something I can't tell you. There's a sort of mystery about her. I'm not sure that I understand it very well myself. I only know that dear mamma didn't feel that she could take her out, in New York, except among our very most intimate friends, where it didn't matter. And yet when Lady Bonchurch took her to Washington she got a lot of offers—I know that for a fact—and in England, too."

"I seem to be getting deeper in," Strange smiled, with the necessary air of speaking carelessly. "Who is Lady Bonchurch?"

"Don't you know? Why, I thought you knew everything. She was the wife of the British Ambassador. They took a house at Greenport that year because they were afraid about Lord Bonchurch's lungs. It didn't do any good, though. He had to give up his post the next winter, and not long after that he died. I don't think air is much good for people's lungs, do you? I know it wasn't any help to dear mamma. We had all those tedious years at Greenport, and in the end—but that's how we came to know Lady Bonchurch, and she took a great fancy to Miriam. She said it was a shame a girl like that shouldn't have a chance, and so it was. Mamma thought she interfered and I suppose she did. Still, you can't blame her much, when she had no children of her own, can you?"

"I shouldn't want to blame her if she gave Miriam her chance."

"That's what I've always said. And if Miriam had only wanted to, she could have been—well, almost anybody. She had offers and offers in Washington, and in England there was a Sir Somebody-or-other who asked her two or three times over. He married an actress in the end—and dear mamma thought Miriam must be crazy not to have taken him while he was to be had. Dear mamma said it would have been such a good thing for me to have some one like Miriam—who was under obligations to us, do you see?—in a good social position abroad."

"But Miriam didn't see it in that way?"

"She didn't see it in any way. She's terribly exasperating in some respects, although she's such a dear. Poor mamma used to be very tried about her—and she so ill—and my stepfather going blind—and everything. If Miriam had only been in a good social position abroad it would have been a place for me to go—instead of having no home—like this."

There was something so touching in her manner that he found it difficult not to offer her a home there and then; but the shadows were marching out into daylight, and he must watch the procession to the end.

"It seems to have been very inconsiderate of Miriam," he said. "But why do you suppose she acted so?"

"Dear mamma thought she was in love with some one—some one we didn't know anything about—but I never believed that. In the first place, she didn't know any one we didn't know anything about—not before she went to Washington with Lady Bonchurch. And besides, she couldn't be in love with any one without my knowing it, now could she?"

"I suppose not; unless she made up her mind she wouldn't tell you."

"Oh, I shouldn't want her to tell me. I should see it for myself. She wouldn't tell me, in any case—not till things had gone so far that—but I never noticed the least sign of it, do you see? and I've a pretty sharp eye for that sort of thing at all times. There was just one thing. Dear mamma used to say that for a while she used to do a good deal of moping in a little studio she had, up in the hills near our house—but you couldn't tell anything from that. I've gone and moped there myself when I've felt I wanted a good cry—and I wasn't in love with any one."

There was a long silence, during which he sat grave, motionless, reflecting. Now and then he placed his extinguished cigarette to his lips, with the mechanical motion of a man forgetful of time and place and circumstance.

"Well, what are you thinking about?" she inquired, when the pause had lasted long enough. He seemed to wake with a start.

"Oh—I—I don't know. I rather fancy I was thinking about—about this Miss—after all, you haven't given me any name but Miriam."

"Strange, her name is. The same as yours."

"Oh? You've never told me that."

"Aunt Queenie has, though. But you always seem to shuffle so when it's mentioned that I've let it alone. I don't blame you, either; for if there's one thing more tedious than another, it's having people for ever fussing about your name. There was a girl at our school whose name was Fidgett—Jessie Fidgett—a nice, quiet girl, as placid as a church—but I do assure you, it got to be so tiresome—well, you know how it would be—and so I decided I wouldn't say anything about Miriam's name to you, nor about yours to her. Goodness knows, there must be lots of Stranges in the world—just as much as Jarrotts."

"So that—after all—her name was Miriam Strange."

"It was, and is, and always will be—if she goes on like this," Miss Colfax rejoined, not noticing that he had spoken half-musingly to himself. "She was a ward of my step-father's till she came of age," she added, in an explanatory tone. "She's a sort of Canadian—or half a Canadian—or something—I never could quite make

out what. Anyhow, she's a dear. She's gone now with my stepfather to Wiesbaden, about his eyes—and you can't think what a relief to me it is. If she hadn't, I might have had to go myself—and at my age—with all I've got to think about—and my coming out—Well, you can see how it would be."

She lifted such sweet blue eyes upon him that he would have seen anything she wanted him to see, if he had not been determined to push his inquiries until there was nothing left for him to learn.

"Were you fond of him?—your stepfather?"

"Of course—in a way. But everything was so unfortunate I know dear mamma thought she was acting for the best when she married him; and if he hadn't begun to go blind almost immediately—But he was very kind to mamma, when she had to go to the Adirondacks for her health. That was very soon after she returned to New York from here—when papa died. But she was so lonely in the Adirondacks—and he was a judge—a Mr. Wayne—with a good position—and naturally she never dreamed he had anything the matter with his eyes—it isn't the sort of thing you'd ever think of asking about beforehand—and so it all happened that way, do you see?"

He did see. He could have wished not to see so clearly. He saw with a light that dazzled him. Any step would be hazardous now, except one in retreat; though he was careful to explain to himself that night that it was retreat for reconnoitre, and not for running away. The mere fact that the Wild Olive had taken on personality, with a place of some sort in the world, brought her near to him again; while the knowledge that he bore her name—possibly her father's name—seemed to make him the creation of her magic to an even greater degree than he had felt hitherto. He could perceive, too, that by living out the suggestions she had made to him in the cabin—the Argentine—Stephens and Jarrott—"the very good firm to work for"—he had never got beyond her influence, no more than the oak-tree gets beyond the acorn that has been its seed. The perception of these things would have been enough to puzzle a mind not easily at home in the complex, even if the reintroduction of Judge Wayne had not confused him further.

It was not astonishing, therefore, that he was seized with a sudden longing to get away—a longing for space and solitude, for the pampas and the rivers, and, above all, for work. In the free air his spirit would throw off its oppression of discomfort, while in a daily routine of occupation he often found that difficulties solved themselves.

"If you think that this business of Kent's can get along without me now," he said to Mr. Jarrott, in the private office, next morning, "perhaps I had better be getting back to Rosario."

Not a muscle moved in the old man's long, wooden face, but the gray-blue eyes threw Strange a curious look.

"Do you want to go?" he asked, after a slight pause.

Strange smiled, with an embarrassment that did not escape observation.

"I've been away longer than I expected—a good deal longer. Things must want looking after, I suppose. Green can take my place for a while, but—"

"Green is doing very well—better than I thought he could. He seems to have taken a new start, that man."

"I'm not used to loafing, sir. If there's no particular reason for my staying on here—"

Mr. Jarrott fitted the tips of his fingers together, and answered slowly.

"There's no particular reason—just now. We've been speaking of—of—a—certain changes—But it's too soon—"

"Of course, sir, I don't want to urge my private wishes against—"

"Quite so; quite so; I understand that. A—a—private wishes, you say?"

"Yes, sir; entirely private."

The gray-blue eyes rested on him in a gaze meant to be uninquisitive and non-committal, but which, as a matter of fact, expressed something from which Strange turned his own glance away.

"Very well; I'd go," the old man said, quietly.

Strange left his cards that afternoon at the house just when he knew Mrs. Jarrott would be resting and Miss Jarrott driving with Miss Colfax. At seven he took the night boat up the Plata to the Parana.

XI

"Evie, what do you think made Mr. Strange rush away like that? Your uncle says he didn't have to—that he might just as well have stayed in town."

"I'm sure I don't know," was Evie's truthful response, as she flitted about the dining-room table arranging the flowers before luncheon.

"Your uncle thinks you do," Mrs. Jarrott said, leaning languidly back in an arm-chair. Her tone and manner implied that the matter had nothing to do with her, though she was willing to speak of it. This was as far as she could come to showing an interest in anything outside herself since the boys died. She would not have brought up the subject now if the girl's pallor during the last few days had not made them uneasy.

"I haven't the least idea," Miss Colfax declared. "I was just as much surprised as you were, Aunt Helen."

"Your uncle thinks you must have said something to him—"

"I didn't. I didn't say anything to him whatever. Why should I? He's nothing to me."

"Of course he's nothing to you, if you're engaged to Billy Merrow."

Miss Colfax leaned across the table, taking a longer time than necessary to give its value to a certain rose.

"I'm not engaged to him now," she said, as if after reflection—"not in my own mind, that is."

"But you are in his, I suppose."

"Well, I can't help that, can I?"

"Not unless you write and tell him it's all over."

Miss Colfax stood still, a large red flower raised in protestation.

"That would be the cruellest thing I ever heard of," she exclaimed, with conviction. "I don't see how you can bear to make the suggestion."

"Then what are you going to do about it?"

"I needn't do anything just yet. There's no hurry—till I get back to New York."

"Do you mean to let him go on thinking—?"

"He'd much rather. Whenever I tell him, it will be too soon for him. There's no reason why he should know earlier than he wants to."

"But is that honor, dear?"

"How can I tell?" At so unreasonable a question the blue eyes clouded with threatening tears. "I can't go into all those fine points, Aunt Helen, do you see? I've just got to do what's right."

Mrs. Jarrot rose with an air of helplessness. She loved her brother's daughter tenderly enough, but she admitted to herself that she did not understand young girls. Having borne only sons, she had never been called upon to struggle with the baffling.

"I hope you're not going to tell any one, Aunt Helen," Evie begged, as Mrs. Jarrott seemed about to leave the room. "I shouldn't want Uncle Jarrott to know, or Aunt Queenie, either."

"I shall certainly spare them," Mrs. Jarrott said, with what for her was asperity. "They would be surprised, to say the least, after the encouragement you gave Mr. Strange."

"I didn't give it—he took it. I couldn't stop him."

"Did you want to?"

"I thought of it—sometimes—till I gave up being engaged to Billy."

"And having passed that mental crisis, I suppose it didn't matter."

"Well, the mental crisis, as you call it, left me free. I sha'n't have to reproach myself—"

"No; Mr. Merrow will do that for you."

"Of course he will. I expect him to. It would be very queer if he didn't. I shall have a dreadful time making him see things my way. And with all that hanging over me, I should think I might look for a little sympathy from you, Aunt Helen. Lots of girls wouldn't have said anything about it. But I told you because I want you to see I'm perfectly straight and above-board."

Mrs. Jarrott said no more for the moment, but later in the day she confided to her husband that the girl puzzled her. "She mixes me up so that I don't know which of us is talking sense." She was not at all sure that Evie was fretting about Mr. Strange—though she might be. If she wasn't, then she couldn't be well. That was the only explanation of her depression and loss of appetite.

"You can bet your life he's thinking of her," Mr. Jarrott said, with the lapse from colloquial dignity he permitted himself when he got into his house-jacket. "He's praying to her image as if it was a wooden saint."

With the omission of the word wooden this was much what Strange was doing at Rosario. Not venturing—in view of all the circumstances—to write to her, he could only erect a shrine in his heart, and serve it with a devotion very few saints enjoy. He found, however, that absence from her did not enable him to form detached and impartial opinions on his situation, just as work brought no subconsciously reached solution to the problems he had to face. In these respects he was disappointed in the results of his unnecessary flight from town.

At the end of two months he was still mentally where he was when he left Buenos Aires. His intelligence assured him that he had the right of a man who has no rights to seize and carry off what he can; while that nameless something else within him refused to ratify the statement. What precise part of him raised this obstacle he was at a loss to guess. It could not be his conscience, since he had been free of conscience ever since the night on Lake Champlain. Still less could it be his heart, seeing that his heart was crying out for Evie Colfax more fiercely than a lion roars for food. The paralysis of his judgment had become such that he was fast approaching the determination to make Love the only arbiter, and let all the rest go hang!

He was encouraged in this impulse by the thought that between her and himself there was the mysterious bond of something "meant." He believed vaguely in a Power, which, with designs as to human destinies, manifests its intentions by fitful gleams, vouchsafed somewhat erratically. In this way Evie Colfax, as a beautiful, fairy-like child, had been revealed to him at the most critical instant of his life. His mind had never hitherto gone back willingly to recollections of that night; but now he made the excursion into the past with a certain amount of pleasure. He could see her still, looking at a picture-book, her face resting on the back of her hand, and golden ringlets falling over her bare arm. He could see the boy, too. He remembered that his name was Billy. Billy who? he wondered. He could hear the sweet, rather fretful voice calling from the shadows:

"Evie dear, it's time to go to bed. Billy, I don't believe they let you stay up as late as this at home."

How ridiculous it would have been to remember such trivial details all these years if something hadn't been "meant" by it. There was a hint in the back of his mind that by the same token something might have been "meant" about the Wild Olive, too, but he had not an equal temptation to dwell on it. The Wild Olive, he repeated, had never been "his type of girl"—not from the very first. It was obviously impossible for a superintending Power to "mean" things that were out of the question.

He had got no further than this when the news was conveyed to him by Mrs. Green, whom he met accidentally in the street, that Mr. Skinner, the second partner, had had a "stroke," and had been ordered to Carlsbad. Mrs. Skinner, so Mrs. Green's letters from the Port informed her, was to accompany her husband. Furthermore, Miss Colfax was seizing the opportunity to travel with them to Southampton, where she would be able to join friends who would take her to New York. There was even a rumor that Miss Jarrott was to accompany her niece, but Mrs. Green was unable to vouch for the truth of it. In any case, she said, there were signs of "a regular shaking up," such as comes periodically in any great mercantile establishment; and this time, she ventured to hope, Mr. Green would get his rights.

XII

The knowledge that it was a juncture at which to execute a daring movement acted as an opiate on what would otherwise have been, for Strange, a day of frenzy. While to the outward eye he was going quietly about his work, he was inwardly calling all his resources to his aid to devise some plan for outwitting circumstance. After forty-eight hours of tearing at his heart and hacking at his brain, he could think of nothing more original than to take the first train down to the Port, ask the girl to be his wife, and let life work out the consequence. At the end of two days, however, he was saved from a too deliberate defiance of the unaccounted-for inner voice, by an official communication from Mr. Jarrott.

It was in the brief, dry form of his business conversation, giving no hint that there were emotions behind the stilted phraseology, and an old man's yearnings. Mr. Skinner was far from well, and would "proceed immediately" to Carlsbad. Strange would hand over the business at Rosario to Mr. Green—who would become resident manager, *pro tem* at any rate—and present himself in Buenos Aires at the earliest convenient moment. Mr. Jarrott would be glad to see him as soon as possible after his arrival.

That was all; but as far as the young man was concerned, it saved the situation. On consulting the steamer-list he saw that the Royal Mail Steam Packet *Corrientes* would sail for Southampton in exactly six days' time. By dint of working all night with Mr. Green, who was happy to lend himself to anything that would show him the last of his rival, he was able to take a train to the Port next day. It was half-past six when he arrived in Buenos Aires. By half-past eight he had washed, changed to an evening suit, and dined. At nine his cab stopped at the door of the house at Palermo.

As he followed the elderly man-servant who admitted him, the patio was so dim that he made his way but slowly. He made his way but slowly, not only because the patio was dim, but because he was trying to get his crowding emotions under control before meeting his employer in an interview that might be fraught with serious results. For once in his life he was unnerved, tremulous, almost afraid. As he passed the open doors and windows of unlighted, or dimly lighted, rooms he knew she might be in any one of the shadowy recesses. It would have been a relief to hear her at the piano, or in conversation, and to know her attention

was diverted. None the less, he peered about for a glimpse of her, and strained his hearing for a sound of her voice. But all was still and silent, except for the muffled footfall of the servant leading him to the library at the far end of the court.

If she had not moved out unexpectedly from behind a pillar, a little fluttering figure in a white frock, he could have kept his self-control. If he had not come upon her in this sudden way, when she believed him in Rosario, she, too, would not have been caught at a disadvantage. As it was, he stood still, as if awe-struck. She gave a little cry, as if frightened. It is certain that his movement of the arms was an automatic process, not dictated by any order of the brain; and the same may be said for the impulse which threw her on his breast. If, after that, the rest was not silence, it was little more. What he uttered and she replied was scarcely audible to either, though it was understood by both. It was all over so quickly that the man-servant had barely thrown open the library door, and announced "Mr. Strange," when Strange himself was on the threshold.

It was a moment at which to summon all his wits together to attend to business; but he was astonished at the coolness and lightness of heart with which he did it. After those brief, sudden vows exchanged, it was as easy to dismiss Evie Colfax momentarily from his mind as it is to forget money troubles on inheriting a fortune. Nevertheless as he got himself ready to deal with practical, and probably quite commercial, topics, he was fully conscious of the rapture of her love, while he was scarcely less aware of a comfort closely akin to joy in feeling that the burden of decision had been lifted from him. Since Fate had taken the matter into her own hands, she could be charged with the full responsibility.

Mr. Jarrott, who was smoking a cigar and sipping his after-dinner coffee, was in evening dress, but wore his house-jacket—a circumstance of which Strange did not know the significance, though he felt its effect. The old man's welcome was not unlike that of a shy father trying to break the shackles of reserve with a home-coming son. He pushed Strange gently into the most comfortable arm-chair beside which he drew up a small table for the cigar-box, the ash-tray, and the matches. He rang for another cup, and brought the coffee with his own hands. Strange remembered how often, after a hard day's work, he had been made uncomfortable by just such awkward, affectionate attentions from poor old Monsieur Durand.

"I didn't expect you so soon," Mr. Jarrott began, when they were both seated, "but you've done well to come. I'm afraid we're in for a regular upset all round."

"I hope it isn't going to make things harder for you, sir," Strange ventured, in the tone of personal concern which his kindly treatment seemed to warrant him in taking.

"It won't if I can get the right men into the right places. That'll be the tough part of the business. The wool department will suffer by Mr. Skinner's absence—he's very ill, in my opinion—and there's only one man who can take his place." Strange felt his heart throbbing and the color rising to his face. He did not covet the position, for he disliked the wool department; but it was undeniably a "rise," and right along the line of highest promotion. "That's Jenkins," Mr. Jarrott finished, quietly.

Strange said nothing. After all, he was relieved. Mr. Jarrott did not go on at once, but when he did speak Strange fell back into the depths of his arm-chair, in an attitude suggestive of physical collapse.

"And if Jenkins came back here," the old man pursued, "you'd have to take his place in New York."

Strange concealed his agitation by puffing out successive rings of smoke. If he had not long ago considered what he would say should this proposal ever be made to him, he would have been even more overcome than he actually was. He had meant to oppose the offer with a point-blank refusal, but what had happened within the last quarter of an hour had so modified this judgment that he could only sit, turning things rapidly over in his mind, till more was said.

"There's no harm in—a—telling you," Mr. Jarrott went on again, with that hesitancy Strange had begun to associate with important announcements, "that—a—Jenkins will be—a—taken into partnership. You won't—a—be taken into partnership—a—yet. But you will have a good salary in New York. I can—a—promise you that much."

It was because he was unnerved that tears smarted in the young man's eyes at the implications in these sentences. He took his time before responding, the courtesies of the occasion being served as well by silence as by speech.

"I won't try to thank you for all your kindness, sir," he said, with a visible effort, "until I've told you something—something that, very likely, you won't approve of. I've asked Miss Colfax to marry me, and she's consented."

The old man's brows shot up incredulously.

"That's odd," he said, "because not half an hour ago she told my wife there was nothing whatever between you—that you hadn't even written to her since you went away. Mrs. Jarrott only left this room as you rang the door-bell."

"But it was after I rang the door-bell," Strange stammered "that I—I—asked her."

"Quick work," was the old man's only comment, but the muscles of his lips relaxed slowly, as if rusty from disuse, into one of his rare smiles.

With the assurance of this reception, Strange could afford to sit silent till Mr. Jarrott made some further sign.

"By the terms of her father's will," he explained some minutes later, "I'm her guardian and trustee. She can't marry without my consent till she comes of age. I don't say that in this instance I should—a—withhold my consent; but I should feel constrained to—a—give it with conditions."

"If it's anything I can fulfil, sir—"

"No; it wouldn't concern you so much as her. She's very young—and in heart she's younger than her age. She knows nothing about men—she can't know—and I dare say you're the first young fellow who ever said anything to her about—well, you understand what I mean. Mind you, we've no objections to you whatever. You are your own credentials; and we take them at their face value. You tell me you're an orphan, with no near relations, so that there couldn't be any complications on that score. Besides that, you're—a likely chap; and I don't mind saying that—a—my ladies—Mrs. Jarrott and my sister—have taken rather a fancy to you. It can't do you any—a—harm to know as much as that."

Strange murmurred his appreciation, and the old man went on.

"No; you're all right. But, as I said before, she's very young, and if we married her to you out of hand we feel that we shouldn't be giving her a fair show. We think she ought to have a little more chance to look round her, so to speak. In fact, she isn't what ladies call 'out.' She's scarcely ever seen a man, except through a window. Consequently, we think we must send her back to New York, for a winter at any rate, and trot the procession before her. My sister is to undertake it, and they're to sail next week. That won't make so much difference to you now, as it would if you weren't soon going to follow them."

Strange nodded. He felt himself being wafted to New York, whether he would or no.

"Now all I have to say is this: if, when she's regularly started, she sees some other young fellow she likes better than you, you're to give her up without making a fuss."

"Of course. Naturally, she would have to be free to do as she chose in the long run. I'm not afraid of losing her—"

"That'll be your own lookout. You'll be on the spot, and will have as good a chance as anybody else. You'll have a better chance; for you'll only have to keep what you've won, while any one else would have to start in at the beginning. But it's understood that there—a—can be no talk of a wedding just yet. She must have next winter to reconsider her promise to you, if she wants to."

Strange having admitted the justice of this, the old man rose, and held out his hand.

"We'll keep the matter between ourselves—in the family, I mean—for the time being," he said, with another slowly breaking smile; "but the ladies will want to wish you luck. You must come into the drawing-room and see them."

They were half-way to the door when Mr. Jarrott paused.

"And, of course, you'll go to New York? I didn't think it necessary to ask you if you cared to make the change."

With the question straight before him, Strange knew that an answer must be given. He understood now how it is that there are men and women who find it worth their while to thrust their heads into lions' mouths.

"Yes, sir, of course," he answered, quietly; and they went on to join the ladies.

Part III

Miriam

XIII

On a day when Evie Colfax was nearing Southampton, and Herbert Strange sailing northward from the Rio de la Plata, up the coast of Brazil, Miriam Strange, in New York, was standing in the embrasure of a large bay-window of a fifth-floor apartment, in that section of Fifty-ninth Street that skirts the southern limit of Central Park. Her conversation with the man beside her turned on subjects which both knew to be only preliminary to the business that had brought him in. He inquired about her voyage home from Germany, and expressed his sympathy with "poor Wayne" on the hopelessness and finality of the Wiesbaden oculist's report. Taking a lighter tone, he said, with a gesture toward the vast expanse of autumn color on which they

were looking down:

"You didn't see anything finer than that in Europe. Come now!"

"No, I didn't—not in its own way. As long as I can look at this I'm almost reconciled to living in a town."

As her eyes roamed over the sea of splendor that stretched from their very feet, a vision of October gorgeousness against the sky, he was able to steal a glance at her. His immediate observation was to the effect that the suggestion of wildness—or, more correctly, of a wild origin—was as noticeable in her now, a woman of twenty-seven, as it was when he first knew her, a girl of nineteen. That she should have brought it with her from a childhood passed amid lakes and rivers and hills was natural enough—just as it was natural that her voice should have that liquid cadence which belongs to people of the forest, though it is rarely caught by human speech elsewhere; but that she should have conserved these qualities through the training of a woman of the world was more remarkable. But there it was, that something woodland-born which London and New York had neither submerged nor swept away. It was difficult to say in what it consisted, since it eluded the effort to say, "It is this or that." It resisted analysis, as it defied description. Though it might have been in the look, or in the manner, it conveyed itself to the observer's apprehension, otherwise than by the eye or ear, as if it appealed to some extra sense. People who had not Charles Conquest's closeness of perception spoke of her as "odd," while those who had heard the little there was to learn about her, said to each other, "Well, what could you expect?" Young men, as a rule, fought shy of her, not so much from indifference as from a sense of an indefinable barrier between her and themselves so that it was the older men who sought her out. There was always some fear on Conquest's part lest the world should so assimilate her that her distinctiveness—which was more like an influence that radiated than a characteristic that could be seen—would desert her; and it was with conscious satisfaction that he noted now, after an absence of some months, that it was still there.

He noted, too, the sure lines of her profile—a profile becoming clearer cut as she grew older—features wrought with delicacy and yet imbued with strength, suggestive of carved ivory. Delicacy imbued with strength was betokened, too, by the tall slenderness of her figure, whose silence and suppleness of movement came—in Conquest's imagination at least—from her far-off forest ancestry.

"I couldn't live anywhere else but here—if it must be in New York," she said, turning from the window. "I couldn't do without the sense of woods, and space, and sky. I can stand at this window and imagine all sorts of things—that the park really does run into the Catskills, as it seems to do—that the Catskills run into the Adirondacks—and that the Adirondacks take me up to the Laurentides with which my earliest recollections begin."

"I think you're something like Shelley's Venice," he smiled, "a sort of 'daughter of the earth and ocean.' You never seem to me to belong in just the ordinary category—"

She had been afraid of something like this from the minute he was announced, and so hastened to cling to the impersonal.

"Then, the apartment is so convenient. Being all on one floor, it is so much easier for Mr. Wayne to get about it than if he had stairs to climb. I didn't tell you that I've had Mrs. Wayne's room done over for Evie. It's so much larger and lighter than her old one—"

He cleared his throat uneasily.

"I remember your saying something of the kind before you went away in the spring. It's one of the things I came in to talk about to-day?"

"Indeed?" His change of tone alarmed her. He had taken on the air of a man about to break unpleasant news. "Won't you sit down? I'll ring for tea. We're not in very good order yet, but the servants can give us that much."

She spoke for the purpose of hiding her uneasiness, just as she felt that she should be more sure of herself while handling the teacups than if she were sitting idle.

"I've had a letter from Mr. Jarrott," he said, making himself comfortable, while she moved the tea-table in front of her. "He wrote to me, partly as Stephens and Jarrott's legal adviser, and partly as a friend."

He allowed that information time to sink in before continuing.

"He tells me Miss Jarrott is on her way home, with Evie."

"Yes; Evie herself wrote me that. I got the letter at Cherbourg."

"Then she probably told you about the house."

"The house? What house?"

"The house they've asked me to take for the winter—for Miss Jarrott and her."

The tea-things came, giving her the relief of occupation. She said nothing for the moment, and her attention seemed concentrated on the rapid, silent movements of her own hands among the silver and porcelain. Once she looked up, but her glance fell as she saw his small, keen, gray-green eyes scanning her obliquely.

"So I'm not to have her?" she said, at last.

"It's only for this winter—"

"Oh, I know. But what's for this winter will be for every winter!"

"And she won't be far away. I've taken the Grant's house in Seventy-second Street. They asked for a house in which they could do some entertaining. You see, they want to give her a good time—"

"I quite understand all that. Evie has to 'come out.' I've not the least doubt that they're managing it in the best way possible. Yes, I see that. If I feel a little—well, I won't say hurt—but a little—sorry—it's because I've almost brought Evie up. And I suppose I'm the person she's most fond of—as far as she's fond of any one."

"I presume she's fond of my nephew, Billy Merrow."

"I hope so. Billy rather teased her into that engagement, you know. She's too young to be deeply in love—unless it was with one romantic. And Billy isn't that. I'm not sure that there isn't trouble ahead for him."

"Then I shall let him worry through it himself. I've got other things to think about."

When she had given him his tea and begun to sip her own, she looked up with that particular bright smile which in women means the bracing of the courage.

"It'll be all right," she said, with forced conviction. "I know it will. It's foolish in me to think I shall miss her, when she will be so near. It's only because she and Mr. Wayne are all I've got—"

"They needn't be," he interposed, draining his cup, and setting it down, like a man preparing for action.

She knew her own words had exposed her to this, and was vexed with herself for speaking in a dangerous situation without due foresight. For a minute she could think of nothing to say that would ward off his thrust. She sat looking at him rather helplessly, unconsciously appealing to him with her eyes to let the subject drop.

If he meant to go on with it, he took his time—flecking a few crumbs from his white waistcoat and from his fingertips. In the action he showed himself for what he was—a man so neat as just to escape being dapper. There was nothing large about him, in either mind or body; while, on the contrary, there was much that was keen and able. The incisiveness of the face would have been too sharp had it not been saved by the high-bred effect of a Roman nose and a handsome mouth and chin. The fair mustache, faded now rather than gray, softened the cynicism of the lips without concealing it. It was the face of a man accustomed to "see through" other men—to "see through" life—compelling its favors from the world rather than asking them. The detailed exactness and unobtrusive costliness of everything about him, from the pearl in his tie to the polish on his boots, were indicative of a will rigorously demanding "the best," and taking it. The refusal of it now in the person of the only woman whom he had ever wanted as a wife left him puzzled, slightly exasperated, as before a phenomenon not to be explained. It was this unusual resistance that caused the somewhat impatient tone he took with her.

"It's all nonsense—your living as you do—like a professional trained nurse."

"The life of a professional trained nurse isn't nonsense."

"It is for you."

"On the contrary; it's for me, more than for almost any one, to justify my right to being in the world."

"Oh, come now! Don't let us begin on that."

"I don't want to begin on it. I'd much rather not. But if you don't, you throw away the key that explains everything about me."

"All right," he rejoined, in an argumentative tone. "Let's talk about it, then. Let's have it out. You feel your position; granted. Mind you, I've always said you wouldn't have done so if it hadn't been for Gertrude Wayne. The world to-day has too much common sense to lay stress on a circumstance of that kind. Believe me, nobody thinks about it but yourself. Did Lady Bonchurch? Did any of her friends? You've got it a little bit—just a little bit—on the brain; and the fault isn't yours; it belongs to the woman whose soul is gone, I hope, where it's freed from the rules of a book of etiquette."

"She meant well—"

"Oh, every failure, and bungler, and mischief-maker means well. That's their charter. I'm not concerned with that. I'm speaking of what she did. She fixed it in your mind that you were like a sapling sprung from a seed blown outside the orchard. You think you can minimize that accident by bringing forth as good as any to be found within the pale. Consequently you've taken a poor, helpless, blind man off the hands of the people whose duty it is to look after him—and who are well able to do it—"

"That isn't the reason," she declared, flushing. "If Mr. Wayne and I live together it's because we're used to each other—and in a way he has taken the place of my father."

"Oh, come now! That's all very fine. But haven't you got in the back of your mind the thought that the wild

tree that's known by its good fruit is the one that's best worth grafting?"

"If I had—" she began, with color deepening.

"If you had, you'd simply be taking a long way round, when there's a short cut home. I'm the orchard, Miriam. All you've got to do is to walk into it—with me."

A warmer tone came into his voice as he uttered the concluding words, adding to her discomfort. She moved the tea-things about, putting them into an unnecessary state of order, before she could reply.

"There's a reason why I couldn't do that," she said, meeting his sharp eyes with one of her fugitive glances. "I would have given it to you when—when you brought up this subject last spring, only you didn't ask me."

"Well, what is it?"

"I couldn't love you."

She forced herself to bring out the words distinctly. He leaned back in his chair, threw one leg across the other, and stroked the thin, colorless line of his mustache.

"No, I suppose you couldn't," he said, quietly, after considering her words.

"So that my answer has to be final."

"I don't see that. Love is only one of the many motives for marriage—and not, as I understand it, the highest one. The divorce courts are strewn with the wrecks of marriages made for love. Those that stand the test of life and time are generally those that have been contracted from some of the more solid—and worthier—motives."

"Then I don't know what they are."

"I could explain them to you if you'd let me. As for love—if it's needed at all—I could bring enough into hotch-potch as the phrase goes, to do for two. I'm over fifty years of age. It never occurred to me that you could—care about me—as you might have cared for some one else. But as far as I can see, there's no one else. If there was, perhaps I shouldn't persist."

She looked up with sudden determination.

"If there was any one else, you—would consider that as settling the question?"

"I might. I shouldn't bind myself. It would depend."

"Then I'll tell you; there *is* some one else." The words caused her to flush so painfully that she hastened to qualify them. "That is, there might have been."

"What do you mean by—might have been?"

"I mean that, though I don't say I've ever—loved—any man, there was a man I might have loved, if it had been possible."

"And why wasn't it possible?"

"I'd rather not tell you. It was a long time ago. He went away. He never came back again."

"Did he say he'd come back again?"

She shook her head. She tried to meet his gaze steadily, but it was like facing a search-light.

"Were you what you would call—engaged?"

"Oh no." Her confusion deepened. "There was never anything. It was a long time ago. I only want you to understand that if I could care for any one it would be for him. And if I married you—and he came back—"

"Are you expecting him back?"

She was a long time answering the question. She would not have answered it at all had it not been in the hope of getting rid of him.

"Yes."

He took the declaration coolly, and went on.

"Why? What makes you think he'll come?"

"I have no reason. I think he will—that's all."

"Where is he now?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Hasn't he ever written to you?"

"Never."

"And you don't know what's become of him?"

"Not in the least."

"And yet you expect him back?"

She nodded assent.

"You're waiting for him?"

Once more she braced herself to look him in the eyes and answer boldly.

"I am."

He leaned back in his chair and laughed, not loudly, but in good-humored derision.

"If that's all that stands between us—"

To her relief he said no more; though she was disappointed that the subject should be dropped in a way that made it possible to bring it up again. As he was taking his leave she renewed the attempt to end the matter once for all.

"I know you think me foolish—" she began.

"No, not foolish; only romantic."

"Then, romantic. Romance is as bad as folly when one is twenty-seven. I confess it," she went on, trying to smile, "only that you may understand that it's a permanent condition which I sha'n't get over."

"Oh yes, you will."

"Things happened—long ago—such as don't generally happen; and so—I'm waiting for him. If he never comes—then I'd rather go on—waiting—uselessly."

It was hard to say, but it was said. He laughed again—not quite so derisively as before—and went away.

When he had gone, she resumed her seat behind the tea-table. She sat looking absently at the floor and musing on the words she had just spoken. Not in all the seven or eight years since Norrie Ford went away had she acknowledged to her own heart what, within the last few minutes, she had declared aloud. The utmost she had ever owned to herself was that she "could have loved him." When she refused other men, she did not confess to waiting for him; she evaded the question with herself, and found pretexts. She would have continued doing so with Conquest, had not his persistency driven her to her last stand. But now that she had uttered the words for his benefit, she had to repeat them for her own. Notwithstanding her passionate love of woods, winds, and waters, she had always been so sane, so practical, in the things that pertained to daily life that she experienced something like surprise at detecting herself in this condition of avowed romance. She had actually been waiting for Norrie Ford to return, and say what he had told her he *would* say, should it ever become possible! She was waiting for him still! If he never came she would rather go on waiting for him—uselessly! The language almost shocked her; but now that the thing was spoken she admitted it was true. It was a light thrown on herself—if not precisely a new light, at least one from which all shades and colored wrappings that delude the eye and obscure the judgment had been struck away.

She smiled to herself to think how little Conquest understood her when he ascribed to her the ambition to graft her ungarnered branch on the stock of a duly cultivated civilization. She might have had that desire once, but it was long past. It was a kind of glory to her now to be outside the law—with Norrie Ford. There they were exiles together, in a wild paradise with joys of its own, not less sweet than those of any Eden. She had faced more than once the question of being "taken into the orchard," as Conquest put it. The men who had asked her at various times to marry them had been like himself, men of middle age, or approaching it—men of assured position either by birth or by attainment. As the wife of any one of them her place would have been unquestioned. She had not rejected their offers lightly, or from any foregone conclusion. She had taken it as a duty to weigh each one seriously as it came; and, leaving the detail of love apart, she had asked herself whether it was not right for her to seize the occasion of becoming "some one" in the world. Once or twice the position offered her was so much in accordance with her tastes that her refusal brought with it a certain vague regret. "But I couldn't do it," were the words with which she woke from every dream of seeing herself mistress in a quiet English park, or a big house in New York. Her habits might be those of civilized mankind; but her heart was listening for a call from beyond the limits in which men have the recognized right to live. She could put no shackles on her freedom to respond to it—if it ever came.

She discovered that Norrie Ford had come back, and that some of her expectations were fulfilled by finding him actually seated beside her one evening at dinner.

Miss Jarrott's taste in table light was in the direction of candles tempered by deep-red shades. As no garish electricity was allowed to intrude itself into this soft glow, the result was that only old acquaintances among her guests got a satisfactory notion of each other's features. It was with a certain sense of discovery that, by peering through the rose-colored twilight, Miriam discerned now a Jarrott or a Colfax, now an Endsleigh or a Pole—faces more or less well known to her which she had not had time to recognize during the few hurried minutes in the drawing-room.

It was the dinner of which Evie had said, in explaining her plan of campaign to Miriam, "We must kill off the family first of all." It was plain that she regarded the duty as a bore; but she was too worldly wise not to see that her bread cast upon the waters would return to her. Most of the Jarrotts were important; some were wealthy; and one—Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott—was a power in such matters as assemblies and cotillons. The ladies Colfax were little less influential; and while the sphere of the Poles and Endsleighs was in the world of art, letters, and scholarship, rather than in that of fashion and finance, they had the uncontested status of good birth. To Evie they represented just so much in the way of her social assets, and she was quick in appraising them at their correct relative values. Some would be good for a dinner given in her honor, others for a dance. The humblest could be counted on for a theatre-party or a "tea." She was skilful, too, in presenting her orphan state with a touching vividness that enlisted their sympathies on behalf of "poor Jack's," or "poor Gertrude's," pretty little girl, according to the side of the house on which they recognized the relationship.

With the confusion incidental to the arrival from South America, the settling into a new house, and the ordering of new clothes, Miriam had had little of the old intimate intercourse with Evie during the six weeks since the latter's return. There was no change in their mutual relation; it was only that Evie was caught up into the glory of the coming winter, and had no time for the apartment in Fifty-ninth Street. It was with double pleasure, therefore, that Miriam responded one day to Evie's invitation to "come and look at my things," which meant an inspection of the frocks and hats that had just come home. They lay about now, in clouds like a soft summer sunset, or in gay spots of feathers and flowers, on the bed and the sofa in Evie's room, and filled all the chairs except the one on which Miriam had retreated into the farthest corner of the bay-window. Seated there, not quite in profile, against the light, her head turned and slightly inclined, in order to get a better view of Evie's finery, her slender figure possessed a sort of Vandyke grace, heightened rather than diminished by the long plumes and rich draperies of the month's fashion. Evie flitted between closets, wardrobes, and drawers, prattling while she worked off that first event of her season, in which the family were to be "killed off." She recited the names of those who would "simply *have* to be asked" and of those who could conveniently be omitted.

"And, of course, Popsey Wayne must come," she observed in her practical little way. "I dare say he won't want to, poor dear, but it wouldn't do if he didn't. Only you, you dear thing, will have to go in with him—to pilot him and look after him when the dishes are passed. But I'm going to have some one nice on your other side, do you see?—some one awfully nice. We shall have to ask a few people outside the family, just to give it relief, and save it from looking like Christmas."

"You'll have Billy, I suppose."

Evie took the time to deposit a lace blouse in a drawer, as softly as a mother lays a sleeping babe to rest.

"No, I sha'n't ask Billy," she said, while she was still stooping.

"Won't he think that queer?"

"I hope so." She turned from the drawer, and lifted a blue gossamer creation from the bed. Miriam smiled indulgently.

"Why? What's the matter? Have you anything to punish him for?"

"I've nothing to punish him for; I've only got something I want to—bring home to him." She paused in the middle of the room, with her blue burden held in her outstretched arms, somewhat like a baby at a christening. "I might as well tell you, Miriam, first as last. You've got to know it some time, though I don't want it talked about just yet. I've broken my engagement to Billy."

"Broken your engagement! Why, I saw Billy myself this morning. I met him as I was coming over. He said he was here last night, and seemed particularly cheerful."

"He doesn't know it yet. I'm doing it—by degrees."

"You're doing it by—what?" Miriam rose and came toward her, stopping midway to lean on the foot-rail of the bed. "Evie darling, what do you mean?"

Evie's eyes brimmed suddenly, and her lip trembled.

"If you're going to be cross about it—"

"I'm not going to be cross about it, but I want you to tell me exactly what you're doing."

"Well, I'm telling you. I've broken my engagement, and I want to let Billy know it in the kindest way. I don't

want to hurt his feelings. You wouldn't like me to do that yourself. I'm trying to bring him where he'll see things just as I do."

"And may I ask if you're—getting him there?"

"I shall get him there in time. I'm doing lots of things to show him."

"Such as what?"

"Such as not asking him to the dinner, for one thing. He'll know from that there's something wrong. He'll make a fuss, and I shall be disagreeable. Little by little he'll get to dislike me—and then—"

"And how long do you think it will take for that good work to be accomplished?"

"I don't see that that matters. I suppose I may take all the time I need. We're both young—"

"And have all your lives to give to it. Is that what you mean?"

"I don't want to give all my life to it, because—I may as well tell you that, too, while I'm about it—because I'm engaged to some one else."

"Oh, Evie!"

Miriam went back, like a person defeated, to the chair from which she had just risen, while Evie buried herself in the depths of a closet, where she remained long enough, as she hoped, to let Miriam's first astonishment subside. On coming out she assumed a virtuous tone.

"You see now why I simply *had* to break with Billy. I couldn't possibly keep the two things going together—as some girls would. I'm one of those who do right, whatever happens. It's very hard for me—but if people would only be a little more sympathetic—"

It was some minutes before Miriam knew just what to say. Even when she began to speak she doubted her capacity for making herself understood.

"Evie darling," she said, trying to speak as for a child's comprehension, "this is a very serious matter. I don't think you realize how serious it is. If you find you don't love Billy well enough, of course you must ask him to release you. I should be sorry for that, but I shouldn't blame you. But until you've done it you can't give your word to any one."

"Well, I must say I never heard anything like that," Evie declared, indignantly. "You do have the strangest ideas, Miriam. Dear mamma used to say so, too. I try to defend you, but you make it difficult for me, I must say. I never knew any one like you for making things more complicated than they need be. You talk of my asking Billy to release me when I released myself long ago—in my own mind. That's where I have to look. I must do things according to my conscience—and when that's clear—"

"It isn't only a case of conscience, dear; it's one of common sense. Conscience has a way of sometimes mistaking the issue, whereas common sense can generally be trusted to be right."

"Of course, if you're going to talk that way, Miriam, I don't see what's left for me to answer; but it doesn't sound very reverent, I must say. I'm trying to look at things in the highest light, and it doesn't strike me as the highest light to be unkind to Billy when I needn't be. If you think I ought to treat him cruelly you must keep your opinion, but I know you'll excuse me if I keep mine."

She carried her head loftily as she bore another gown into the adjoining darkness, and Miriam waited patiently till she emerged again.

"Does your other—I hardly know what to call him—does your other fiancé know about Billy?"

"Why on earth should he? What good would that do? It will be all over—I mean about Billy—before I announce my second engagement, and as the one to Billy will never be announced at all there's no use in saying anything about it."

"But suppose Billy himself finds out?"

"Billy won't find out anything whatever until I get ready to let him."

The finality of this retort reduced Miriam to silence. She allowed some minutes to pass before saying, with some hesitation:

"I suppose you don't mind my knowing—who it is?"

Evie was prepared for this question and answered it promptly.

"I shan't mind your knowing—by-and-by. I want you to meet him first. When you've once seen him, I know you'll be more just to me. Till then I'm willing to go on being—misunderstood."

During the three more weeks that intervened before the family dinner Miriam got no further light on Evie's love-affairs. She purposely asked no questions through fear of seeming to force the girl's confidence, but she

obtained some relief from thinking that the rival suitor could be no other than a certain young Graham, of whom she had heard much from Evie during the previous year. His chances then had stood higher than Billy Merrow's; and nothing was more possible than a discovery on Evie's part that she liked him the better of the two. It was a situation that called for sympathy for Billy, but not otherwise for grave anxiety, so that Miriam could wait quietly for further out-pourings of Evie's heart, and give her mind to the mysteries incidental to the girl's social presentation to the world.

Of the ceremonies attendant on this event the "killing off" of the family was the one Miriam dreaded most. It was when she came within the periphery of this powerful, meritorious, well-to-do circle, representing whatever was most honorable in New York, that she chiefly felt herself an alien. She could scarcely have explained herself in this respect, since many of the clan had been kind to her, and none had ever shown her incivility. It was when she confronted them in the mass, when she saw their solidarity, their mutual esteem, their sum total of wealth, talents, and good works, that she grew conscious of the difference of essence between herself and them. Not one of them but had the right to the place he sat in!--a right maintained by himself, but acquired by his fathers before him—not one of them but was living in the strength of some respectable tradition of which he could be proud! Endsleigh Jarrott's father, for example, had been a banker, Reginald Pole's the president of a university, Rupert Colfax's a judge; and it was something like that with them all. In the midst of so much that was classified, certified, and regular she was as obviously a foreign element as a fly in amber. She came in as the ward of Philip Wayne, who himself was a new-comer and an intruder, since he entered merely as "poor Gertrude's second husband," by a marriage which they all considered a mistake.

With the desire to be as unobtrusive as possible, she dressed herself in black, without ornament of any kind, unaware of the fact that with her height of figure, her grace of movement, her ivory tint, and that expression of hers which disconcerted people because it was first appealing and then proud, she would be more than ever conspicuous against the background of brilliant toilets, fine jewels, and assured manners which the family would produce for the occasion. As a matter of fact, there was a perceptible hush in the hum of talk as she made her entry into the drawing-room, ostensibly led by Philip Wayne, but really leading him. As she paused near the door, half timid, half bewildered, looking for her hostess, it did not help her to feel at ease to see Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott—a Rubens *Maria de Medici* in white satin and pearls—raise her lorgnette and call on a tall young man who stood beside her to take a look. There was no time to distinguish anything further before Miss Jarrott glided up, with mincing graciousness, to shake hands.

"How do you do! How do you do! So glad you've come. I think you must know nearly every one here, so I needn't introduce any one. I hardly ever introduce. It's funny, isn't it? They say it's an English custom not to introduce, but I don't do it just by nature. I wonder why I shouldn't?—but I never do—or almost never. So if you don't happen to know your neighbors at table just speak. It was Evie who arranged where every one was to sit. *I* don't know. They say that's English, too—just to speak. I believe it's quite a recognized thing in London to say, 'Is this your bread or mine?' and then you know each other. Isn't it funny? Now I think we're all here. Will you take in Miriam, Mr. Wayne?"

A hasty embrace from Evie—an angelic vision in white—was followed by a few words of greeting from Charles Conquest after which Miriam saw Miss Jarrott take the arm of Bishop Endsleigh, and the procession began to move.

At table Miriam was glad of the dim, rose-colored light. It offered her a seclusion into which she could withdraw, tending her services to Wayne. She was glad, too, that the family, having so much to say to itself, paid her no special attention. She was sufficiently occupied in aiding the helpless blind man beside her, and repeating for his benefit the names of their fellow-guests. As the large party talked at the top of its lungs, Miriam's quiet voice, with its liquid, almost contralto, quality, reached her companion's ears unheard by others. She began with Bishop Endsleigh who was on Miss Jarrott's right. Then came Mrs. Stephen Colfax; after her Mr. Endsleigh Jarrott, who had on his right Mrs. Reginald Pole. Mrs. Pole's neighbor was Charles Conquest, whom she shared with Mrs. Rodney Wrenn. Now and then Wayne himself would give proof of that increased acuteness in his hearing of which he had spoken more than once since his blindness had become total. "Colfax Yorke is here," he observed at one time. "I hear his voice. He's sitting on our side of the table." "Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott is next but one to you," he said at another time. "She's airing her plans for the reconstruction of New York society."

So for a while they kept one another in small talk, affecting the same sort of vivacity that obtained around them. It was not till dinner was half over that he asked in an undertone:

"Who is your neighbor?"

"I don't know," she managed to whisper back. "He's so taken up with Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott that he hasn't looked this way. I don't think he's any member of the family."

"He must be," Wayne replied. "I know his voice. I have some association with it, but just what I can't remember."

Miriam herself listened to hear him speak, catching only an irrelevant word or two.

"He sounds English," she said then.

"No, he isn't English. That's not my association. It's curious how the mind acts. Since I became—since my sight failed—my memory instinctively brings me voices instead of faces, when I want to recall anything. Aren't you going to speak to him? You've got the formula: Is this your bread or mine?"

"It's very convenient, but I don't think I shall use it."

"He'd like you to, I know. I heard him say to Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott as we came in—while Queenie Jarrott was talking—that you were he most strikingly beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. How's that for a compliment from a perfect stranger?"

"I certainly sha'n't speak to him now. A man who could say that to Mrs. Endsleigh, after having seen *her,* must be wofully wanting in tact."

Mary Pole on Wayne's right claimed his attention and Miriam was left her own mistress. Almost at once her attention was arrested by hearing Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott saying in that appealing voice which she counted as the secret of her success with men:

"Now do give me your frank opinion, Mr. Strange. You don't know how much I should like it. It's far from my idea that we should slavishly copy London. You know that, don't you? We've an entirely different stock of materials to work with. But I'm firmly convinced that by working on the London model we should make society far more general, far more representative, and far—oh, *far*—more interesting! Now, what do *you* think? Do give me your frank opinion."

Mr. Strange! Her own name was sufficiently uncommon to cause Miriam to glance sidewise, in her rapid, fugitive way, at the person who bore it. His face was turned from her as he bent toward Mrs. Jarrott, but again she heard his voice, and this time more distinctly.

"I'm afraid my opinion wouldn't be of much value. Nevertheless, I know you must be right."

"Now I'm disappointed in you," Mrs. Jarrott said, with pretty reproachfulness. "You're not taking me seriously. Oh, I see, I see. You're just an ordinary man, after all; when I thought for a minute you might be—well, a little different. Do take some of that asparagus," she added in another tone. "It's simply delicious."

It was while he was helping himself to this delicacy that Miriam got the first clear view of his face, half turned as it was toward her. He seemed aware that she was observing him, for during the space of some seconds he held the silver implements idle in his hands, while he lifted his eyes to meet hers. The look they exchanged was significant and long, and yet she was never quite sure that she recognized him then. For the minute she was only conscious of a sudden, inward shock, to which she was unable to ascribe a cause. Something had happened, though she knew not what. Having in the course of a few minutes regained her self-control, she could only suppose that it was a repetition of that unreasoning panic which had now and then brought her to the verge of fainting, when by chance, in London, Paris, or New York, she caught a glimpse of some tall figure that carried her imagination back to the cabin in the Adirondacks. She had always thought that he might appear in some crowd and take her by surprise. She had never expected to find him in a gathering that could be called social. Still less had she looked to meet him like this, with Philip Wayne who had sentenced him to death not three feet away. The mere idea was preposterous. And yet—

She glanced at him again. He was listening attentively while Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott's voice ran on:

"People say our society has no traditions. It *has* traditions. It has the traditions of the country village, and it has never outgrown them. We're nothing but the country village writ large. New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore—we're the country village over again, with its narrowness its sets, its timidity, all writ *so* large that they hide anything like a real society from us. Now isn't it so, Mr. Strange? Don't be afraid to give me your frank opinion because that's what I'm asking for."

Miriam herself made an effort to seem to be doing something that would enable her to sit unnoticed. She was glad that Wayne was engaged by Mary Pole so that he could no longer listen to the voice that wakened his recollections. She looked again at the tall, carefully dressed man beside her, so different in all his externals from anything she imagined Norrie Ford could ever become. Norrie Ford was an outlaw and this was a man of the world. She felt herself being reassured—and yet disappointed. Her first feeling of faintness passed away, enabling her to face the situation with greater calm. Under cover of the energetic animation characteristic of every American dinner-party at which the guests are intimate, she had leisure to think over the one or two hints that were significant. Now and then a remark was addressed to her across the table to which she managed to return a reply sufficiently apt to give her the appearance of being in touch with what was going on around her; but in reality she was taking in the fact, with the spirit rather than the mind, that Norrie Ford had returned.

She never understood just how and when that assurance came to her. It was certainly not by actual recognition of his features, as it was not by putting together the few data that came under her observation. Thinking it over in after years, she could only say that she "just found herself *knowing it*." He was there—beside her. Of that she had no longer a doubt.

Her amazement did not develop all at once. Indeed, the position had an odd naturalness, like something in a dream. The element of impossibility in what had happened was so great that for the time being her mind refused to meet it. She was only aware of that vague sense of satisfaction, of inward peace, that comes when long-desired ends have been fulfilled.

The main fact being accepted, her outer faculties could respond to the call that a dinner-party makes on its least important member. When the conversation at her end of the table became general she took her part, and later engaged in a three-cornered discussion with Wayne and Mary Pole on the subject of an endowed theatre; but all the while her subconscious mind was struggling for a theory to account for Norrie Ford's presence in that particular room and in that unexpected company. The need of some immediate, plausible

reason for so astounding an occurrence deadened her attention to the comparative quietness with which she accepted his coming—now that she had regained her self-control, although she was conscious of stirrings of wild joy in this evidence that he had been true to her. Had she recalled what she had said to him eight years ago as to the Argentine, and the "very good firm to work for," she would have had an easy clew, but that had passed from her mind almost with the utterance—certainly with his departure He had gone out into the world, leaving no more trace behind him than the bird that has flown southward. Not once during the intervening years did the thought cross her mind that words which she had spoken nearly at haphazard could have acted as a guide to him, while still less did she dream that they could have led him into the very seat beside her which he was occupying now.

Nevertheless, he was there, and for the present she could dispense with the knowledge of the adventures that had brought him. He was there, and that was the reason of his coming in itself. He had hewn his way through all difficulties to reach her—as Siegfried came to Brunhild, over the mountains and through the fire. He had found the means—both the means and the daring—to enter and make himself accepted in her own world, her own circle, her own family—in so far as she had a family—and to sit right down at her side.

She was not surprised at it. She assured herself of that. At the very instant when she was saying to Mary Pole, across Philip Wayne's white waistcoat, that she had always thought of endowed institutions of creative art as belonging to the races of weaker individual initiative—at the very instant when she was saying that, she was repeating to herself that the directness, the high-handedness, and the success of this kind of exploit was exactly what she would have expected of Norrie Ford. It was what she *had* expected of him—in one form or another. It was with a sense of inward pride that she remembered that her faith in him had never wavered, even though it was not until Conquest forced her that she had confessed the fact. She glanced at Conquest across the table now and caught his eye. He smiled at her and raised his glass, as though to drink to her health. She smiled in return, daringly, triumphantly, as she would not have ventured to do an hour ago. She could see him flush with pleasure—a rare occurrence—at her unusual graciousness, while she was only rejoicing in her escape from him. Under the shadow of the tall man beside her, who had achieved the impossible in order to be loyal to her, she felt for the first time in her life that she had found a shelter. It mattered nothing that he was engrossed with Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott, and that, after the one glance, he had not turned toward her again; she was sure he knew that she understood him, and that he recognized her power to wait in patience to have the mystery explained.

In the drawing-room he was introduced to her. Miss Jarrott led him up and made the presentation.

"Miss Strange, I want you to know Mr. Strange. Now isn't that funny? You can't think how many times I've thought how interesting it would be to see you two meet. It's so unusual to have the same name, especially when it's such a strange name as yours. There's a pun. I simply can't help making them. My brother says I inherited all the sense of humor in the family. I don't know why I do it, but I always see a joke. Can you tell me why I do it?"

Neither Strange nor Miriam knew what replies they made, but a conversation of some sort went on for a minute or two, after which Miss Jarrott whisked him away to present him to some one else. When he had gone Miriam was left with a feeling of spiritual chill. While it was impossible to betray a previous acquaintance before Miss Jarrott, there had been nothing whatever in his bearing to respond to the recognition in hers. There was something that might have been conveyed from mind to mind without risk, and he had not used the opportunity. In as far as he addressed her at all it had been through Miss Jarrott, and he had looked around her and over her rather than directly into her eyes.

During the rest of the evening she caught glimpses of him only in the distance, talking now to one member of the family, now to another. It was clear that Miss Jarrott was, in a way, showing him off, and that he was received as some one of importance. She admired the coolness with which he carried himself, while her inherited instincts gave her a curious thrill of content that these law-making, law-keeping people should be duped.

She hoped he would find an occasion for passing again in her direction. If she could have only a word with him it might help to make the situation intelligible. But he did not return, and presently she noticed, in looking about the room, that he had disappeared. She, too, was eager to be gone. Only in solitude could she get control of the surging thoughts, the bewildering suggestions, the contradictory suppositions that crowded it on her. She saw how useless it was to try to build a theory without at least one positive fact to go on.

It was just as they were departing that her opportunity to ask a question came. They had said their good-nights to Miss Jarrott and were in the hall, waiting for the footman to call their carriage, when Evie, whom they had not wanted to disturb, came fluttering after them. She was flushed but radiant, and flung herself into Miriam's arms.

"You dear thing! I haven't had time to say a word to you or Popsey Wayne the entire evening. But you'll excuse me, won't you? I've had to be civil to them all—do you see?—and do them up well. I knew you wouldn't mind. I wanted you to have a good time, but I'm afraid you haven't."

"Oh yes," Miriam said, disengaging herself from the girl's embrace. "It's been wonderful—it really has. But, Evie dear," she whispered, drawing her away from the group of ladies who stood cloaked and hooded, also waiting for their carriages, "tell me—who is that Mr. Strange who sat next to me?"

Evie's eyes went heavenward, and she took on a look of rapture.

"I hope you liked him."

"I didn't have much chance to see. But why do you hope it?"

"Because—don't you see? Oh, surely you *must* see—because—he's the one."

XV

Enlightenment came to her in the carriage while she was driving homeward. During the five or ten minutes since Evie had spoken she, Miriam, had been sitting still and upright in the darkness, making no further attempt to see reason through this succession of bewilderments from sheer inability to contend against them. For the time being, at any rate, the struggle was too much for her. The issues raised by Evie's overwhelming announcement were so confusing that she must postpone their consideration. She must postpone everything but her own tumultuous passion, which had to be faced and mastered instantly. She was fighting with herself, with her own wild inward cries of protest, anger, jealousy, and self-pity, trying to distinguish each from the others and to silence it by appeal to her years of romantic folly, when suddenly Wayne spoke, in the cheery tone of a man who has unexpectedly passed a pleasant evening.

"I had a nice long chat with the Great Unknown, who was sitting beside you, when the ladies left the dining-room. Who do you think he is?"

After the shocks of the last two hours, she was prepared to hear Wayne tell her, in an offhand way, that it was Norrie Ford. Nevertheless, she summoned what was left of her stunned faculties and did her best to speak carefully.

"I heard them call him Mr. Strange—"

"Odd that was, wasn't it? But it isn't such a very uncommon name. I've met other Stranges—"

"Oh yes. So have I."

"Well, who do you think he is? Why, he's Stephens and Jarrott's new man in New York. He's taken Jenkins's place. You remember Jenkins, don't you? That little man with a lisp. I had a nice long chat with him—Strange, I mean. He tells me he's a New-Yorker by birth, but that he went out to the Argentine after his father failed in business. Well, *he* won't fail in business, *I* bet a penny. He's tremendously enthusiastic over the Argentine, too. Showed he had his head put on the right way when he went there. Wonderful country—the United States of South America some people call it. We're missing our opportunities out there. Great volume of trade flowing to Europe of which we had almost the monopoly at one time. I had a nice long chat with him."

Her tired emotions received a new surprise as Wayne's words directed her thoughts to the morning when she had made to Ford the first suggestion of the Argentine. She had not precisely forgotten it; she had only thought it of too little importance to dwell on. She remembered that she had considered the idea practical till she had expressed it, but that his opposition had seemed to turn it into the impossible. She had never supposed that he might have acted on it—not any more than she had expected him to retain her father's name once he had reached a place of safety. In spite of the suddenness with which her dreams regarding him had been dispelled, it gave her a thrill of satisfaction to think that the word which, in a sense, had created him had been hers. To her fierce jealousy, with which her pride was wrestling even now, there was a measure of comfort in the knowledge that he could never be quite free from her, that his existence was rooted in her own.

"Queenie Jarrott tells me," Wayne meandered on, "that her brother thinks very highly of this young man. It seems that his business abilities are quite remarkable, and they fancy he looks like Henry—the eldest of the boys who died. It's extraordinary how his voice reminds me of some one—don't know who. It might be—But then again—"

"His voice is like a thousand other voices," she thought it well to say, "just as he looks like a thousand other men. He's one of those rather tall, rather good-looking, rather well-dressed youngish men—not really young—of whom you'll pass twenty within a mile any day in Fifth Avenue, and who are as thick as soldiers on a battle-field at the lower end of Broadway."

With the data Wayne had given her she worked out the main lines of the story during the night; but it was not until she had done so that its full significance appeared to her. Having grasped that, she could scarcely wait for daylight in order to go to Evie, and yet when morning came she abandoned that course as impolitic. Reflection showed her that her struggle must be less with Evie than with Ford, while she judged that he himself would lose no time in putting the battle in array. He must see as plainly as she did that she stood like an army across his path, and that he must either retreat before her or show fight. She believed he would do the latter and do it soon. She thought it probable that he would appear that very day, and that her wisest plan was to await his opening attack. The necessity, so unexpectedly laid upon her, of defending the right deflected her mind from dwelling too bitterly on her own disillusioning.

The morning having passed without a sign from him, she made her arrangements for having the afternoon undisturbed sending Wayne to drive, and ordering the servants to admit no one but Mr. Strange, should he chance to call. Having intrenched herself behind the fortification of the tea-table, she waited. In spite of her preoccupation, or rather because of it, she purposely read a book, forcing herself to fix her attention on its pages in order to have her mind free from preconceived notions as to how she must act and what she must say. Her single concession to herself was to put on a new and becoming house dress, whose rich tones of brown and amber harmonized with her ivory coloring and emphasized the clear-cut distinction of her features. Before taking up her position she surveyed herself with the mournful approval which the warrior about to fall may give to the perfection of his equipment.

It was half-past four when the servant showed him in. His formal attire seemed to her, as he crossed the room, oddly civilized and correct after her recollections of him. Notwithstanding her dread of the opening minutes, the meeting passed off according to the fixed procedure of the drawing-room. It was a relief to both to find that the acts of shaking hands and sitting down had been accomplished with matter-of-course formality. With the familiar support of afternoon-call conventions difficult topics could be treated at greater ease.

"I'm very glad to find you at home," he began, feeling it to be a safe opening. "I was almost afraid—"

"I stayed in on purpose," she said, frankly. "I thought you might come."

"I wasn't sure whether or not you knew me last night—"

"I didn't at first. I really hadn't noticed you, though I remembered afterward that you were standing with Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott when Mr. Wayne and I came into the room. I wonder now if you recognized me?"

"Oh, rather! I knew you were going to be there. I've been in New York a month."

"Then you might have come to see me sooner."

"Well, you see—"

He paused and colored, trying to cover up his embarrassment with a smile. She allowed her eyes to express interrogation not knowing that her frank gaze disconcerted him. She herself went back so eagerly to the days when he was the fugitive, Norrie Ford, and she the nameless girl who was helping him, that she could not divine his humiliation at being obliged to drop his mask. Since becoming engaged to Evie Colfax and returning to New York, he perceived more clearly than ever before that his true part in the world was that of the respectable, successful man of business which he played so skilfully. It cost him an effort she could have no reason to suspect to be face to face with the one person in the world who knew him as something else.

"You see," he began again, "I had to consider a good many things—naturally. It wouldn't have done to give any one an idea that we had met before."

"No, of course not. But last night you might have—"

"Last night I had to follow the same tactics. I can't afford to run risks. It's rather painful, it's even a bit humiliating—"

"I can imagine that, especially here in New York. In out-of-the-way places it must be different. There it doesn't matter. But to be among the very people who—"

"You think that there it does matter. I had to consider that. I had to make it plain to myself that there was nothing dishonorable in imposing on people who had forced me into a false position. I don't say it's pleasant —"

"Oh, I know it can't be pleasant. I only wondered a little, as I saw you last night, why you let yourself be placed in a position that made it necessary."

"I should have wondered at that myself a year ago. I certainly never had any intention of doing it. It's almost as much a surprise to me to be here as it is to you to see me. I suppose you thought I would never turn up again."

"No, I didn't think that. On the contrary, I thought you *would* turn up—only not just here."

It struck him that she was emphasizing that point for a purpose—to bring him to another point still. He took a few seconds to reflect before deciding that he would follow her lead without further hanging back.

"I shouldn't have returned to New York if I hadn't become engaged to Miss Colfax. You know about that, don't you? I think she meant to tell you."

She inclined her head assentingly, without words. He noticed her dark eyes resting on him with a kind of pity. He had cherished a faint hope—the very faintest—that she might welcome what he had just said sympathetically. In the few minutes during which she remained silent that hope died.

"I suppose," she said, gently, "that you became engaged to Evie before knowing who she was?"

"I fell in love with her before knowing who she was. I'm afraid that when I actually asked her to marry me I had heard all there was to learn."

"Then why did you do it?"

He shrugged his shoulders with a movement acquired by long residence among Latins. His smile conveyed the impossibility of explaining himself in a sentence.

"I'll tell you all about it, if you'd like to hear."

"I should like it very much. Remember, I know nothing of what happened after—after—"

He noticed a shade of confusion in her manner, and hastened to begin his narrative.

Somewhat to her surprise, he sketched his facts in lightly, but dwelt strongly on the mental and moral necessities his situation forced on him. He related with some detail the formation of his creed of conduct in the dawn on Lake Champlain, and showed her that according to its tenets he was permitted a kind of action that in other men might be reprehensible. He came to the story of Evie last of all, and allowed her to see how dominating a part Fate, or Predestination had played in evolving it.

"So you see," he ended, "it was too late then to do anything—but to yield."

"Or withdraw," she added, softly.

He stared at her a moment, his body bent slightly forward his elbows resting on the arms of his chair. As a matter of fact, he was thinking less of her words than of her beauty—so much nobler in type than he remembered it.

"Yes," he returned, quietly, "I can see that it would strike you in that way. So it did me—at first. But I had to look at the subject all round—"

"I don't need to do that."

He stared at her again. There was a decision in her words which he found hard to reconcile with the pity in her eyes and the gentle softness of her smile.

"You mean that you don't want to take my—necessities—into consideration."

"I mean that when I see the one thing right to do, I don't have to look any further."

"The one thing right to do—for you?—or for me?"

"There's no reason why I should intervene at all. I look to you to save me from the necessity."

He hesitated a minute before deciding whether to hedge or to meet her squarely.

"By giving up Evie and—clearing out," he said, with a perceptible hint of defiance.

"I shouldn't lay stress on your—clearing out."

"But you would on my giving up Evie?"

"Don't you see," she began, in an explanatory tone, "I, in my own person, have nothing to do with it? It isn't for me to say this should be done or that. You can't imagine how hard it is for me to say anything at all; and if I speak, it isn't as myself—it's as the voice of a situation. You must understand as well as I do what that situation imposes."

"But I don't intend that a situation shall impose anything—on me. I mean to act as master—"

"But I'm neither so independent nor so strong—nor is Evie. You don't consider her."

"I don't have to consider any one. When I make Evie happy I do all that can be asked of me."

"No, you would be called on to *keep* her happy. And she couldn't remain happy if she were married to you. It isn't possible. She couldn't live with you any more than—than a humming-bird could live with a hawk."

They both smiled, rather nervously.

"But I'm not a hawk," he insisted. "I'm much more a humming-bird than you imagine. You think me some sort of creature of prey because you believe—that I did—what I was accused of—"

The circumstances seemed so far off from him now, so incongruous with what he had become, that he reverted to them with difficulty.

"I don't attach any importance to that," she said, with a tranquillity that startled him. "I suppose I ought to, but I never have. If you killed your uncle, it seems to me—very natural. He provoked you. He deserved it. My father would have done it certainly."

"But I didn't, you see. That puts another color on the case."

"It doesn't for me. And it doesn't, as it affects Evie. Whether you're innocent or guilty—and I don't say I think you to be guilty—I've never thought much about it—but whether you're guilty or not, your life is the kind of

tragedy Evie couldn't share. It would kill her."

"It wouldn't kill her, if she didn't know anything about it."

"But she would know. You can't keep that sort of thing from a wife. She wouldn't be married to you a year before she had discovered that you were—a—"

"An escaped convict. Why not say it?"

"I wasn't going to say it. But at least she would know that you were a man who was pretending to be—something that he wasn't."

"You mean an impostor. Well, I've already explained to you that I'm an impostor only because Society itself has made me one, I'm not to blame—"

"I quite see the force of that. But Evie wouldn't. Don't you understand? That's my point. She would only see the horror of it, and she would be overwhelmed. It wouldn't matter to her that you could bring forward arguments in your own defence. She wouldn't be capable of understanding them. You must see for yourself that mentally—and spiritually—just as bodily—she's as fragile as a butterfly. She couldn't withstand a storm. She'd be crushed by it."

"I don't think you do her justice. If she were to discover—I mean, if the worst were to come to the worst—well, you can see how it's been with yourself. You've known from the beginning all there is to know—and yet —"

"I'm different."

She meant the brief statement to divert his attention from himself, but she perceived that it aroused a flash of self-consciousness in both. While she could hear herself saying inwardly, "I'd rather go on waiting for him —uselessly," he was listening to a silvery voice, as it lisped the words, "Dear mamma used to think she was in love with some one; we didn't know anything about it." Each reverted to the memory of the lakeside scene in which he had said, "My life will belong to you ... a thing for you to dispose of ..." and each was afraid that the other was doing so.

All at once she saw herself as she fancied he must see her—a woman claiming the fulfilment of an old promise, the payment of a long-standing debt. He must think she was making Evie a pretext in her fight for her own hand. His vow—if it was a vow—had been the germ of so much romance in her mind that she ascribed it to a place in the foreground of his. In all she was saying he would understand a demand on her part that he should make it good. Very well, then; if he could do her such injustice, he must do it. She could not permit the fear of it to inspire her with moral cowardice or deter her from doing what was right.

Nevertheless, it helped her to control her agitation to rise and ring for tea. She felt the need of some commonplace action to assure herself and him that now, at last, she was outside the realm of the romantic. He rose as she did, to forestall her at the bell; and as the servant entered with the tray, they moved together into the embrasure of the wide bay-window. Down below the autumn colors were fading, while leaves, golden-yellow or blood-red, were being swirled along the ground.

"I had to do things out there"—his nod was meant to indicate the direction of South America—"in a somewhat high-handed manner, and I've acquired the habit of it. If I'd stuck at difficulties I shouldn't have got anywhere."

She looked at him inquiringly, as though to ask the purport of the observation.

"You must see that I'm obliged to put this thing through—on Evie's account as much as mine. After getting her to care for me, I can't desert her now, whatever happens."

"She wouldn't suffer—after a while. She'd get over it. You might not, but she—"

"She shall not get over it, if I can help it. How can you ask me to let her?"

"Only on the ground that you love her well enough."

"Would you call that love?"

"In view of all the circumstances, it would be my idea of it."

"Then it wouldn't be mine. The only love I understand is the love that fights for its object, in the face of all opposition."

She looked at him a minute with what she tried to make a smile, but which became no more than a quivering of the lip and lashes.

"I hope you won't fight," she said, in a tone of appeal, "because it would have to be with me. If anything could break my heart, that would."

She knew how near to self-betrayal she had gone, but in her eagerness she was reckless of the danger.

"How do you know it wouldn't break mine too?" he asked, with a scrutiny that searched her eyes. "But there

are times in life when men have just to fight—and let their hearts be broken. In becoming responsible for Evie's happiness I've given a pledge from which I can't withdraw—"

"But that's where you don't understand her—"

"Possibly; but it's where I understand myself."

"Tea is served, miss," the maid said, coming forward to where they talked in undertones. At the same minute there was a shuffling at the door and Wayne entered from his drive. Ford would have gone forward to help him, but she put out her hand and stopped him.

"He likes to find his way himself," she whispered.

"They tell me there's tea in here," Wayne said, cheerily, from the doorway.

"There's more than tea," Miriam replied in as bright a tone as she could assume. "There's Mr. Strange, whom you met last night."

"Ah, that's good." Wayne groped his way toward the voices. "How do you do! Glad to see you. It's windy out-of-doors. One feels the winter beginning to nip."

Ford took the extended hand, and, without seeming to do so, adroitly piloted the blind man to a seat as they moved, all three, to the tea-table.

For the next ten minutes their talk turned on the common topics of the day. As during her conversation with Conquest a few weeks before, Miriam found again that the routine of duties of acting as hostess steadied her nerves. With Ford aiding her in the little ways to which he had become accustomed since his engagement to Evie, hostility was absent from their mutual relation, even though opposition remained. That at least was a comfort to her; and now and then, as she handed him the bread and butter or a plate of cakes to pass to Wayne, their eyes could meet in a glance of comprehension.

Wayne was still enjoying his tea when Ford turned to him with an abrupt change of tone.

"I'm glad you came in, sir, while I was still here, because there's something I particularly want to tell you."

He did not look at Miriam, but he could feel the way in which she sat upright and aghast. Wayne turned his sightless eyes, hidden by large colored glasses, toward the speaker, and nodded.

"Yes?" he said, interrogatively.

"I would have told you before, only that Miss Jarrott and Miss Colfax thought I had better wait till every one got settled. In any case, Mr. Jarrott made it a condition before I left Buenos Aires that it shouldn't go outside the family till Miss Colfax had had her social winter in New York."

Wayne's face grew grave, but not unsympathetic.

"I suppose I know what's coming," he said, quietly.

"It's the sort of thing that was bound to come sooner or later with Miss Colfax," Ford smiled, speaking with an air of assurance. "What makes me uneasy is that I should be the man to come and tell the news. If it was any one you knew better—"

"You've probably heard that I'm not Evie's guardian," Wayne interposed. "I've no control at all over what she does."

"I understand that; but to me there's an authority above the legal one—or at least on a level with it—and I should be unhappy—we should both be unhappy—if we didn't have your consent."

Wayne looked pleased. He was so rarely consulted in the affairs of the family, especially since his affliction had forced him aside, that this deference was a clew to the young man's character. Nevertheless, he allowed some seconds to pass in silence, while Ford threw at Miriam a glance of defiance, in which there was also an expression of audacious friendliness. She sat rigid and pale, her hands clinching the arms of her chair.

"It's a serious matter—of course," Wayne said, after becoming hesitation; "but I've great confidence in Henry Jarrott. Next to Evie herself, he's the person most concerned—in a certain way. I'm told he thinks well of you —"

"He ought to know," Ford broke in, confidently. "I've nothing to show in the way of passports, except myself and my work. I've been with him ever since I went to South America, and he's been extremely kind to me. The only certificate of character I can offer is one from him."

"That's sufficient. We should be sorry to let Evie go, shouldn't we, Miriam? She's a sweet child, and very much like her dear mother. But, as you say, it was bound to happen one day or another; and we can only be glad that—I'm happy to congratulate you, Mr. Strange. Your name, at any rate, is a familiar one. It's that of an old boyhood's friend of mine, who showed me the honor of placing this young lady in my charge. We called him Harry. His full name was Herbert Harrington, but he dropped the first. You seem to have taken it up—it's odd, isn't it, Miriam?—and I take it as a happy omen."

"Thank you." Ford rose, and made the blind man understand that he was holding out his hand, "I shall be more satisfied now for having told you."

Miriam accompanied him into the hall, on pretext of ringing for the lift.

"Oh, why did you do that?" she protested. "Don't you see that it only makes things more complicated than they were already?"

"It's my first move," he laughed, with friendly bravado. "Now you can make yours."

She gazed at him in puzzled distress as the lift rose.

"I'm coming again," he said, with renewed confidence. "I've a lot more things to say."

"And I have only one," she answered, turning back toward the drawing-room.

"He's a nice young fellow," Wayne said, as he heard her enter. He had risen and felt his way into the bay-window, where he stood looking outward as if he could see. "I suppose it must be all right, since the Jarrotts are so enthusiastic Poor little Evie! I hope she'll be happy. It's extraordinary how his voice reminds me of—"

She stood still in the middle of the room, waiting for him to continue. Nothing he could add would have surprised her now. But he said no more.

XVI

Thinking that Ford might come again next afternoon, Miriam went out. On her return she found his card—*Mr. Herbert Strange.* The same thing occurred the next day, and the next, and so on through the week. She was not afraid of seeing him. Now that the worst was known to her, she was sure of her mastery of herself, and of her capacity to meet anything. What she feared most was her sympathy for him, and the possibility that in some unguarded moment of pity he might wring concessions from her which she had no right to make. She hoped, too, that time, even a few days' time, would help him to work out the honorable course for himself.

Her meetings with Evie were more inevitable, and required greater self-repression. She was so used to the part of elder sister, with whom all confidences are discussed, that she found it difficult not to speak her heart out frankly.

"I heard he had been to see you and Popsey Wayne, and told you," Evie said, with her pretty nose just peeping above the bedclothes, at midday, on a morning later in the week. It was the day after Evie's first large dance, and she had been sleeping late. Miriam sat on the edge of the bed, smoothing stray golden tendrils off the flushed, happy little face.

"He did come," Miriam admitted. "Mr. Wayne made no objections. I can't say he was glad. You wouldn't expect us to be that, dear, would you?"

"I expect you to like him. It isn't committing you to much to say that. But you seem so—so every which way about him."

"I'm not every which way about him. I can't say that I'm any way at all. Yes, I do like him—after a fashion. If I make reserves, it's because I'm not sure that I think him good enough for my little Evie."

"He's a great deal too good!" Evie exclaimed, rapturously. "Oh, Miriam, if you only knew how fond I am of him! I'd die for him—I truly believe I would—almost! Oh, it was so stupid last night without him! All these boys seem such pigeons beside him. I'm sorry now we're not going to announce the engagement at once. I certainly sha'n't change my mind—and it would be such fun to be able to say I was engaged before coming out."

"Twice before coming out."

"Oh, well, I only count it once, do you see? Billy's such a goose. You should have seen him last night when I forgot two of my dances with him—on purpose. He's really getting to dislike me; so that I shall soon be able to—to show him."

"I wouldn't be in a hurry about that, dear. There's lots of time. As you said the other day, it's no use hurting his feelings—"

Evie sat up suddenly in bed, and looked suspicious.

"So you're taking that stand. Now I know you don't like him. You've got something against him, though I can't for the life of me imagine what it can be, when you never laid eyes on him till a few days ago. Well, I'm not going to change, do you see? You may as well make up your mind to that at once. And it will be Billy or no Billy."

Nearer than that Miriam could not approach the subject through fear of doing more harm than good. At the end of a week Ford found her at home, chiefly because she felt it time he should. She secured again the afternoon-call atmosphere; but she noticed that he carried a small packet—a large, brownish-yellow envelope, strapped with rubber bands—which he kept in his hand. She was struck by the greater ease of his entry, and by the renewal of that sense of comradeship which had marked his bearing toward her in the old days in the cabin. The small comedy of introductory commonplace went off smoothly.

"Well?" he said then, with a little challenging laugh.

"Well—what?"

"I've been waiting for your move. You haven't made it."

She shook her head. "I've no move to make."

"Oh yes, you have—a great big move. You can easily say, Check. I doubt if you can make it, Checkmate."

"I'm afraid that's a game I don't know how to play."

He stared at her inquiringly—noting the disdain with which her chin tilted and her lip curled, though he could see it was a disdain suffused with sweetness.

"Do you mean that you wouldn't—wouldn't give me away?"

"I mean that you're either broaching a topic I don't understand or speaking a language I've never learned. If you don't mind, we won't discuss the subject, and we'll speak our mother-tongue—the mother-tongue of people like you and me."

He stared again. It took him some few seconds to understand her phraseology. In proportion as her meaning broke upon him, his face glowed. When he spoke it was with enthusiasm for her generosity in taking this stand rather than in gratitude for anything he was to gain by it.

"By Jove, you're a brick! You always were. I might have expected that this is exactly what you'd say."

"I hope so. I didn't expect that you'd talk of my giving you away, as you call it—to any one."

"But you're wrong," he said, with a return to the laughing bravado which concealed his inward repugnance to his position. "You're wrong. I'll give you that tip now. I'll fight fair. I sha'n't be grateful. I'll profit by your magnanimity. Remember it's my part in the world to be unscrupulous. It has to be. I've told you so. With me the end justifies the means—always; and when the end is to keep my word to Evie, it will make no difference to me that you were too high-minded to put the big obstacle in my way."

"You'll not expect me to be otherwise than sorry for that—for your sake."

"No, I dare say. But I can't stop to think of what any one feels for my sake when I know what I feel for my own."

"Which is only an additional reason for my being—sorry. You don't find fault with me for that?"

"I do. I don't want you to be sorry. I want to convince you. I want you to see things from my point of view—how I've been placed. Good Lord! it's hard enough, without the sense that you're sitting in judgment on me."

"I'm not sitting in judgment on you—except in so far as concerns Evie Colfax. If it was anybody else—"

"But it couldn't be anybody else It's Evie or no one. She's everything on earth to me. She's to me what electricity is to the wire—that which makes it a thing alive."

"To be a thing alive isn't necessarily the highest thing."

"Ah, but that doesn't apply to me. It's all very well for other men to say, 'All is lost to save honor.' They have compensations. I haven't. You might as well ask a man to think of the highest thing when he's drowning."

"But I should. There have been men who haven't—and they've saved their lives by it. But you know what we've called them."

"In my case there'd be only you to call me that—if you wanted to."

"Oh no; there'd be—you."

"I can stand that. I've stood it for eight years already. If you think I haven't had times when it's been hell, you're quite mistaken. I wonder if you can guess what it means to me—in here"—he tapped his breast—"to go round among all these good, kind, honorable people, passing myself off as Herbert Strange when all the time I'm Norrie Ford—and a convict? But I'm forced to. There's no way out of it."

"Because there's no way out of it isn't a reason for going further in."

"What does that matter? When you're in up to the eyes, what does it matter if you go over your head?"

"In this case it would matter to Evie. That's my point. I have to protect her—to save her. There's no one but

me to do it—and you."

"Don't count on me," he said, savagely. "I've the right, in this wild beast's life, to seize anything I can snatch."

He renewed his arguments, going over all the ground again. She listened to him as she had once listened to his plea in his defence—her pose pensive, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes pitiful. As far as she was aware of her own feelings it was merely to take note that a kind of yearning over him, an immense sorrow for him and with him, had extinguished the fires that a few days ago were burning for herself. It was hard to sit there heedless of his exposition and deaf to his persuasion. Seeing her inflexible, he became halting in his speech, till finally he stopped, still looking at her with an unresenting, dog-like gaze of entreaty.

She made no comment when he ceased, and for a time they sat in silence.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked, holding the packet toward her.

She shook her head wonderingly.

"It's what I owe you." She made a gesture of deprecation. "It's the money you lent me," he went on. "It's a tremendous satisfaction—that at least—to be able to bring it back to you."

"But I don't want it," she stammered, in some agitation.

"Perhaps not. But I want you to have it." He explained to her briefly what he had done in the matter.

"Couldn't you give it to something?" she begged, "to some church or institution?"

"You can, if you like. I mean to give it to you. You see, I'm not returning it with expressions of gratitude, because anything I could say would be so inadequate as to be absurd."

He left his chair and came to her, with the packet in his outstretched hand. She shrank from it, rising, and retreating into the space of the bay-window.

"But I don't want it," she insisted. "I never thought of your returning it. I scarcely thought of the incident at all. It had almost passed from my memory."

"That's natural enough; but it's equally natural that it shouldn't have passed from mine." He came close to her and offered it again. "Do take it."

"Put it on the table. Please."

"That isn't the same thing. I want you to take it. I want to put it into your own hand, as you put it into mine."

She remembered that she had put it into his hand by closing his fingers forcibly upon it, and hastened to prevent anything of that kind now. She took it unwillingly, holding it in both hands as if it were a casket.

"That's done," he said, with satisfaction. "You can't imagine what a relief it is to have it off my mind."

"I'm sorry you should have felt about it like that."

"You would have felt like that yourself, if you were a man owing money to a woman—and especially a woman who was your—enemy."

"Oh!" She cowered, as if he had threatened her.

"I repeat the word," he laughed, uneasily. "Any one is my enemy who comes between me and Evie. You'll forgive me if I seem brutal—"

"Yes, I'll forgive you. I'll even accept the word." She was pale and nervous, with the kind of nervousness that kept her smiling and still, but sent the queer, lambent flashes into her eyes. "Let us say it. I'm your enemy, and you pay me the money so as to feel free to strike me as hard as you can."

He kept to his laugh, but there was a forced ring in it.

"I don't call that a fair way of putting it, but—"

"I don't see that the way of putting it matters, so long as it's the fact."

"It's the fact twisted in a very ingenious fashion. I should say that—since I'm going to marry Evie—I want—naturally enough—to feel that—that"—he stammered and reddened, seeking a word that would not convey an insult—"to feel—that I—met other claims—as well as I could."

He looked her in the eyes with significant directness. His steady gaze, in which she saw—or thought she saw—glints of challenge toned down by gleams of regret, seemed to say, "Whatever I owe you other than money is out of my power to pay." She fully understood that he did not repudiate the debt; he was only telling her that since he had given all to Evie, his heart was bankrupt. What angered her and kept her silent, fearing she would say something she would afterward repent, was the implication that she was putting forth her claim for fulfilment.

He still confronted her, with an air of flying humiliation as a flag of defiance, while she stood holding the packet in both hands, when the door was pushed open, and Evie, radiant from her walk in the cold air and fine in autumn furs and plumage, fluttered in. Her blue eyes opened wide on the two in the bay-window, but she did not advance from the threshold.

"Dear me, dear me!" she twittered, in her dry little fashion, before they had time to realize the fact that she was there. "I hope I'm not interrupting you."

"Evie dear, come in." Miriam threw the packet on a table, and went forward. Ford followed, trying to regain the appearance of "just making a call."

"No, no," Evie cried, waving Miriam back. "I only came—for nothing. That is—But I'll go away and come back again. Do you think you'll be long? But I suppose if you have secrets—"

Her hand was on the knob again, but Miriam caught her.

"No, darling, you must stay. You're absurd. Mr. Strange and I were just—talking."

"Yes, so I saw. That's why I thought I might be *de trap*. How do you do!" She put out her left hand carelessly to Ford, her right hand still holding the knob, and twisted her little person impatiently. Ford held her hand, but she snatched it away. "There's not the least reason why I should stay, do you see?" she hurried on. "I only came with a message from Aunt Queenie."

"I'm sure it's confidential," Ford laughed, "so I'll make myself scarce."

"You can do just as you like," Evie returned, indifferently. "Cousin Colfax Yorke," she added, looking at Miriam, "has telephoned that he can't come to dine; and, as it's too late to get anybody else, Aunt Queenie thought you might come and make a fourth. It's only ourselves and—- him," she nodded toward Strange.

"Certainly, I'll come, dear—with pleasure."

"And I'll go," Ford said; "but I won't add with pleasure, because that would be rude."

When he had gone Evie sniffed about the room, looking at the pictures and curios as if she had never seen them before. It was evident that she had spied the packet, and was making her way, by a seemingly accidental route, toward it. Miriam drifted back to her place in the bay-window, where, while apparently watching the traffic in the street below, she kept an eye on Evie's manœuvres.

"What on earth can you two have to talk about?" Evie demanded, while she seemed intent on examining a cabinet of old porcelain.

"If you're very good, dear," Miriam replied, trying to take an amused, offhand tone, "I'll tell you. It was business."

"Business? Why, I thought you hardly knew him."

"You don't have to know people very well to transact business with them. He came on a question of—money."

"No, but you don't start up doing business with a person that's just dropped down from the clouds—like that." She snapped her fingers to indicate precipitous haste.

"Sometimes you do."

"Well, *you* don't. I know that for a fact." She was inspecting a vase on a pedestal in a corner now. It was nearer to the packet. She wheeled round suddenly, so that it should take her by surprise. "What's that?"

"You see. It's an envelope with papers in it."

"What sort of papers?"

"I haven't looked at them yet. They have to do with money, or investments, or something. I'm never very clear about those things."

"I thought you did all that through Cousin Endsleigh Jarrott and Mr. Conquest?"

"This was a little thing I couldn't trouble them with."

"And you went straight off to *him*, when you'd only known him—let me see!--how many days?—one, two, three, four—"

"I've gone to people I didn't know at all—sometimes. You have to. If you only knew more about investing money—"

"I don't know anything about investing money; but I know this is very queer. And you didn't like him—or you said you didn't."

"I said I did, dear—after a fashion—and so I do."

"In that case I should think a good deal would depend upon the fashion. Look here. It's addressed—*Miss Strange.* That's his writing. That's how he scribbles his name. And there's something written in tiny, tiny letters in the corner. What is it?" Without touching the envelope she bent down to see. "It's *The Wild Olive*. Now, what in this world can that mean? That's not business, anyhow. That means something."

"No, that's not business, but I haven't an idea what it means." Miriam was glad to be able to disclaim something. "It was probably on the envelope by accident. Some clerk wrote it, and Mr. Strange didn't notice it."

Evie let the explanation pass, while continuing to stare at the object of her suspicions.

"That's not papers," she said, at last, pointing as she spoke to something protruding between the rubber bands. "There's something in there. It looks like a"—she hesitated to find the right article—"it looks like a card-case."

"Perhaps it is," Miriam agreed. "But I'm sure I don't know why he should bring me a card-case."

"Why don't you look?"

"I wasn't in a hurry; but you can look yourself if you want to."

Evie took offence. "I'm sure I don't want to. That's the last thing."

"I wish you would. Then you'd see."

"I only do it under protest," she declared—"because you force me to." She took up the envelope, and began to unloose the rubber bands. "*The Wild Olive*" she quoted, half to herself. "Ridiculous! I should think clerks might have something better to do than write such things as that—on envelopes—on people's business." But her indignation turned to surprise when a small flat thing, not unlike a card-case, certainly, tumbled out. "What in the name of goodness—?"

Only strong self-control kept Miriam from darting forward to snatch it from the floor. She remembered it at once. It was a worn red leather pocket-book, which she had last seen when it was fresh and new—sitting in the sunset, on the heights above Champlain, and looking at the jewelled sea. A card fell from it, on which there was something written. Evie dropped on one knee to pick it up. Miriam was sorry to risk anything, but she felt constrained to say, as quietly as possible:

"You'd better not read that, dear. It might be private."

Evie slipped the card back into the pocket-book, which she threw on the table, where Miriam let it lie. "I won't look at anything else," Evie said, with dignity, turning away.

"I want you to," Miriam said, authoritatively. "I beg you to."

Thus commanded, Evie drew forth a flat document, on which she read, in ornamental letters, the inscription, *New York, Toronto, and Great Lakes Railroad Company*. She unfolded it slowly, looking puzzled.

"It's nothing but a lot of little square things," she said, with some disdain.

"The little square things are called coupons, if you know what they are."

"I know they're things people cut—when they have a lot of money. I don't know why they cut them; and still less do I know why he should be bringing them to you."

Miriam had a sudden inspiration that made her face beam with relief.

"I'll tell you why he brought them to me, dear—though I do it under protest, as you say yourself. Your curiosity forces my hand, and makes me show it ahead of time. He brought them to me because it's a wedding-present for you. When you get married—or begin to get married—you can have all that money for your trousseau."

"Aunt Helen is going to give me my trousseau. She said so."

"Then you can have it for anything you like—for house-furnishings or a pearl necklace. You know you wanted a pearl necklace—and there's plenty for a nice one. Each of those papers is worth a thousand dollars, or nearly. And there are—how many?"

"Three. You seem very keen on getting rid of them."

"So I am—to you, darling."

Evie prepared to depart, looking unconvinced.

"It's awfully nice of you—of course. But still—if that's what you had meant at first—from the beginning—you would have—Well, I'll tell Aunt Queenie you'll come."

Left alone, Miriam made haste to read the card in the pocket-book.

As deep calls to deep, so Spirit speaks to Spirit. It is the only true communion between mutually

comprehending souls. But it is unerring—pardoning all, because understanding all, and making the crooked straight.

She read it more than once. She was not sure that it was meant for her. She was not sure that it was in Ford's own handwriting. But in their situation it had a meaning; she took it as a message to herself; and as she read, and read again, she felt on her face the trickling of one or two slow, hard tears.

XVII

The result of the dinner that evening was that Evie grew more fretful. After the departure of her guests, she evolved a brief formula which she used frequently during the next few weeks: "There's something!" With her quick eyes and quicker intuitions, it was impossible for her not to see that Ford and Miriam possessed common memories of the kind that distinguish old acquaintances from new ones. When it did not transpire in chance words she caught it in their glances or divined it in the mental atmosphere. As autumn passed into early winter she became nervous, peevish, and exacting; she lost much from her pretty ways and something from her looks. In the family the change was ascribed to the fatigue incidental to the sudden round of lunches, dinners, dances, suppers, theatre-parties, opera-goings, and "teas" with which American boys and girls of a certain age are surfeited pitilessly with pleasure, as Strasburg geese are stuffed for paté de foie gras. Ford, however, suspected the true reason, and Miriam knew it. They met as seldom as might be; and yet, with the many things requiring explanation between them, frank conversation became imperative.

"You see how it is already," Miriam said to him. "It's making her unhappy from the start. You can't conceal the truth from her very long."

"She isn't fretting about the truth; she's fretting about what she imagines."

"She's fretting because she doesn't understand, and she'll go on fretting till she does. I'm not sorry. It must show you—"

"It shows me the necessity of our being married as soon as possible, so that I may take care of her, and put a stop to it."

"I agree with you that you'd put a stop to it. You'd put a stop to everything. She wouldn't live a year—or you wouldn't. Either she'd die—or she'd abhor you. And if she didn't die, you'd want to."

"I wish to the Lord I had died—eight years ago. The great mistake I made was when the lumber-jacks loosed my hand-cuffs and started me through the woods. They called it giving me a chance, and for a few minutes I thought it was one. A chance! Good God! I remember feeling, as I ran, that I was deserting something. I didn't know what it was just then, but I've understood it since. It would have been a pluckier thing to have been in my coffin as Norrie Ford—or even doing time—than to be here as Herbert Strange."

She said nothing for the moment, but as they walked along side by side he shot a glance at her, and saw her coloring. They had met in the park. He was going toward the house in Seventy-second Street when she was coming away from it. Seizing the opportunity of a few words in private, he had turned to stroll back with her.

"I didn't expect you to be here as Herbert Strange," she said, as though in self-excuse. "I had to give you a name that was like my own, when I was writing letters about your ticket, and sending checks. I had to do everything to avoid suspicion at a time when Greenport was watched. I thought you might be able to take your own name or something like it—"

He explained to her how that had never been possible.

"Evie fidgets about it," he continued. "She puts together the two facts that you and I seem to have known each other, and that my name is identical with your father's. She doesn't know what to make of it; she only thinks 'there's something.' She hasn't said more than that in words, but I see her little mind at work."

"Evie isn't the only one," she informed him. "There's Mr. Wayne. He has to be reckoned with. He recognized your voice from the first minute of hearing it, though he hasn't said yet that he knows whose it is. He may do so at any time. He's very surprising at that sort of thing. I can see him listening when you're there, not only to your words, but to your very movements, trying to recapture—"

"The upshot of everything," he said, abruptly, "is that I must marry her, take her back to the Argentine, where I found her, and where we shall both be out of harm's way."

"You wouldn't be out of harm's way. You can't turn your back on it like that. You alone might be able to slip through, but not if you have Evie."

"That will be my affair; I'll see to it. I take the full responsibility on myself."

"I couldn't let you. Remember that. You can't marry her. Let me say it plainly—"

"Oh, you've said it plainly enough."

"If I've said it too plainly, it's because you force me. You're so wilful."

"You mean, I'm so determined. What it amounts to is the clash of your will against mine; and you refuse to see that I can't give way."

"I see that you must give way. It's in the nature of things. It's inevitable. If I didn't know that, do you think I should interfere? Do you think I should dare to run the risk of wrecking your happiness if I could do anything else? If you knew how I hate doing anything at all—"

"But you needn't. You can just let things be."

"I can't let things be—with all I know; and yet it's impossible for me to appeal to any one, except yourself. You put me in a position in which I must either betray you or betray those who trust me. Because I can't do either—"

"I profit by your noble-mindedness. I told you I would. I'm sorry to have to do it—I'll even admit that I'm ashamed of it—and yet there's no other course for me. I'm not taking you at an unfair advantage, because I've concealed nothing from you from the first. You talk about the difficulty of your position, but you don't begin to imagine mine. As if everything else wasn't gall to me, I've got your disapproval to add wormwood."

"It isn't my disapproval; it's simply—the situation. My opinion counts for nothing—"

"It counts for everything with me—and yet I have to ignore it. But, after all," he flung out, bitterly, "it's the old story. I claim the right to squeeze out of life such drops of happiness—if you can call it happiness—as men have left to me, and you deny it. There it is in a nutshell. Because other people have inflicted a great wrong on me, you insist that I shall inflict a greater one on myself. And this time it wouldn't be only on myself; it would be on poor little Evie. There's where it cuts. No, no; I shall go on. I've the right to do it. You must stop me if you can. If you don't, or won't—why, then—"

"I can stop you ... if you drive me to extremes ... but it wouldn't be by doing ... any of the things you expect."

It was because of the catch in her voice that he stopped in his walk, and confronted her. In spite of the little tremor he could see in her no sign of yielding, and behind her veil he caught a gleam like that of anger. It was at that minute, perhaps, that he became distinctly conscious for the first time of a doubt as to the superiority of "his type of girl." Notwithstanding the awakening of certain faint perceptions, he had hitherto denied within himself that there was anything higher or more lovely. But in this girl's unflinching loyalty, and in her tenacious clinging to what she considered right, he was getting a new glimpse of womanhood, which, however, in no way weakened his determination to resist her.

"As far as I see," he said, after long hesitation, "you and I have two irreconcilable duties. My duty is to marry Evie; yours is to prevent me. In that case there's nothing for either of us but to forge ahead, and see who wins. If you win, I shall bear no malice; and I hope you'll be equally generous if I do."

"But I don't want to win independently of you. If I did, nothing could be easier."

"Then why not do it?"

He tossed up his hand with one of his fatalistic Latin gestures, drawing the attention of the passers-by to the man and woman talking so earnestly. For this reason, and because she was losing her self-command, she hastened to take leave of him.

Arrived at home, it gave her no comfort to find Charles Conquest—the most spick and span of middle-aged New-Yorkers—waiting in the drawing-room.

"I thought you might come in," he explained, "so I stayed. I have to get your signature to the papers about that property in Montreal. I've fixed the thing up and we'll sell."

"You said you'd send the papers—"

"That sounds as if you weren't glad to see me," he laughed, "but I'll ignore the discourtesy. Here," he added, unfolding the documents, "you put your name there—and there—near the L.S."

She carried the papers to her desk, and sat down to write. Conquest took the liberty of old friendship to stroll about the room, with his hands behind him, humming a little tune.

"Well," he said suddenly, "has he come back?"

He had not approached the subject, beyond alluding to it covertly, since the day she had confided to him the confused story of her hopes. She blotted her signature carefully thinking out her reply.

"I've given up expecting him," she said at last.

"Ho! ho! So that's out of the way."

She pretended to be scanning the documents before her so as to be able to sit with her back to him.

"It isn't, for the reason that there's—no *way*," she said, after some hesitation.

"Oh yes, there is," he laughed, "where there's a will."

"But I've no will."

"I have; I've enough for two."

"I'll tell you what you have got," she said, half turning and speaking to him over the back of her chair. He drew near her. "You've got a great deal of common sense, and I want to ask your advice."

"I can give that, as radium emits light—without ever diminishing the original store."

"Then tell me. Has one ever the right to interfere where a man and a woman—"

"No, never. You needn't give me any more details, because it's one of the questions an oracle finds easiest to answer. No one ever thanks you—"

"I shouldn't be doing it for thanks."

"And you get your own fingers burnt."

"That wouldn't matter. I'd let my fingers burn to the bone if it would do any good."

"It wouldn't. You may take my word for it. I know who you're talking about. It's Evie Colfax."

She started, looking guilty. "Why should you suppose that?"

"I've got eyes. I've watched her, and I know she's a little minx. Oh, you needn't protest. She's a taking little minx, and this time she's in the right."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

"What has Billy Merrow got to offer her, even if he is my nephew? Come now! He won't be in a position to marry for the next two or three years. Whereas that fellow Strange—"

"Have you heard anything about him?" she asked, breathlessly.

"It isn't what I've heard, it's what I see. He's a very good chap, and a first-rate man of business."

"Do you know him well—personally?"

"I meet him around—at the club and other places—and naturally I have something to do with him at the office. I like him. If Evie can snap him up she'll be doing well for herself. I'm sorry for Billy, of course; but he'll have time to break his heart more than once before he'll have money enough to do anything else with it. If I'd married at his age—"

This, however, was venturing on delicate ground, so that he broke off, wheeling round toward the centre of the drawing-room. She folded the documents and brought them to him.

"You know why I didn't send them?" he said, as he took them. "I thought if I came myself, you might have something to tell me."

"I haven't; not anything special, that is."

"You've told me something special already—that you're not looking for him back."

"I'd rather not talk about it now, if you don't mind."

"Then we'll talk about what goes with it—the other side of the subject."

"There is no other side of the subject."

"Oh, come now, Miriam! You haven't heard all I've got to tell you. You've never let me really present my case, as we lawyers say. If you could see things as I do—"

"But I can't, and you mustn't ask me to-day. I'm tired—"

"It would rest you."

"No, no; not to-day. Don't you see I'm not—I'm not myself? I've had a very trying morning."

"What's the matter? Tell me. I can keep a confidence even if I can't do some other things. Come now! I don't like to think you're worried when perhaps I could help you. That's what I should be good for, don't you see? I could assist you to bear a lot of things—"

His tone, which was so often charged with a slightly mocking banter, became tender, and he attempted to take her hand. For a minute it seemed as if it might be a relief to trust him, to tell him the whole story and follow his counsel; but a second's thought showed her that she could not shift the responsibility from herself, and that in the end she should have to act alone.

"Not to-day," she pleaded. "I'm not equal to it."

"Then I'll come another day."

"Yes, yes; if you like, only—"

"Some day soon?"

"When you like, only leave me now. Please go away. You won't think I'm rude, will you? But I'm not—not as I generally am—"

"Good-bye." He put out his, hand frankly, and smiled so humbly, and yet withal so confidently, that she felt as if in spite of herself she might yield to his persistence through sheer weariness.

To her surprise, the next few weeks passed without incident bringing no development in the situation. She saw little of Evie and almost nothing of Ford. One or two encounters with Charles Conquest had no result beyond the reiteration on his part of a set phrase, "You're coming to it, Miriam," which, while exasperating her nerves, had a kind of hypnotic effect upon her will. She felt as if she might be "coming to it." Without calculating the probabilities she saw clearly enough that if she married Conquest the very act would furnish proof to Ford that her intervention in his affairs had been without self-interest. It would even offer some proof to herself, the sort of proof that strengthens the resolution and supports what is tottering in the pride. Notwithstanding the valor with which she struggled her victory over herself was not so complete that she could contemplate the destruction of Ford's happiness with absolute confidence in the purity of her motives in bringing it to ruin. It was difficult to take the highest road when what was left of her own fiercest instincts accompanied her on it. That she had fierce instincts she was quite aware. It was not for nothing that she had been born almost beyond the confines of the civilized earth, of parents for whom law and order and other men's rights were as the dead letter. True, she was trying to train the inheritance received from them to its finer purposes, as the vine draws strange essences from a flinty soil and sublimates them into the grape—but it was still their inheritance. While she was proud of it, she was afraid of it; and the fact that it leaped with her to separate Norrie Ford from Evie Colfax was a reason for distrusting the very impulse she knew to be right. Marriage with Conquest presented itself, therefore as a refuge—from Ford's suspicion and her own.

For the time being, however, the necessity for doing anything was not pressing. Evie was caught into the social machine that had been set going on her account, and was not so much whirling in it as being whirled. Her energies were so taxed by the task of going round that she had only snatches of time and attention to give to her own future. In one of these she wrote to her uncle Jarrott, asking his consent to the immediate proclamation of her engagement, with his approval of her marriage at the end of the winter, though the reasons she gave him were not the same as those she advanced to Miriam. To him she dwelt on the maturity of her age—twenty by this time—the unchanging nature of her sentiments, and her desire to be settled down. To Miriam she was content to say, "There's something! and I sha'n't get to the bottom of it till we're married."

Of the opening thus unexpectedly offered her Miriam made full use, pointing out the folly or verifying suspicions after marriage rather than before.

"Well, I'm going to do it, do you see?" was Evie's only reply. "I know it will be all right in the end."

Still a few weeks were to pass, and it was early in the new year before Uncle Jarrott's cablegram arrived with the three words, "*If you like*." Miriam received the information at the opera, where she had been suddenly called on to take the place of Miss Jarrott, laid low with "one of her headaches." It was Ford who told her, during an entr'acte, when for a few minutes Evie had left the box with the young man who made the fourth in the party. Finding themselves alone, Ford and Miriam withdrew as far as possible from public observation, speaking in rapid undertones.

"But you'll not let her do it?" Miriam urged.

"I shall, if you will. You can stop it—or posptone it. If you don't, I have every right to forge ahead. It's no use going over the old arguments again—"

"You put me in an odious position. You want me either to betray you or betray the people who've been kind to me. It *would* be betrayal if I were to let you go on."

"Then stop me; it's in your power."

"Very well; I will."

He gave her a quick look, astonished rather than startled, but there was no time for further speech before Evie and her companion returned.

It was Miriam's intention to put her plan into immediate execution, but she let most of the next day go by without doing anything. Understanding his driving her to extremes to be due less to deliberate defiance than to a desperate braving of the worst, she was giving him a chance for repentance. Just at the closing in of the winter twilight, at the hour when he generally appeared, the door was flung open and Billy Merrow rushed in excitedly.

"What's all this about Evie?" he shouted, almost before crossing the threshold. "I've been there, and no one is at home. What's it about? Who has invented the confounded lie?"

She could only guess at his meaning, but she forced him to shake hands and calm himself. Turning on the electric light, she saw a young man with decidedly tousled reddish hair, and features as haggard as a perfectly healthy, honest, freckled face could be.

"Sit down, Billy, and tell me about it."

"I can't; I'm crazy."

"So I see; but tell me what you're crazy about."

"Haven't you heard it? Of course you have. They wouldn't be writing it to Uncle Charlie if you didn't know all about it. But I'm hanged if I'll let it go on."

Little by little she dragged the story from him. Miss Queenie Jarrott had written to Charles Conquest as one of the oldest friends of the family to inform him, "somewhat confidentially as yet," of her niece's engagement to Mr. Herbert Strange, of Buenos Aires and New York. Uncle Charlie, knowing what this would mean to him, had come to break the news and tell him to "buck up and take it standing."

"I'll bet you I sha'n't take it lying down," he assured Miriam. "Evie is engaged to *me*."

"Yes, Billy, but you see Miss Jarrott didn't know it. That's where the mistake has been. You know I've always been opposed to the secrecy of the affair, and I advised you and Evie to wait till you could both speak out."

"It isn't so very secret. You know it and so does Uncle Charlie."

"But Evie's own family have been kept in the dark, except that she told her aunt in South America. But that's where the mistake comes in, don't you see? Miss Jarrott, not having an idea about you, you see—"

"Spreads it round that Evie is engaged to some one else, when she isn't. I'll show her who's engaged, when I can find her in. I'm going to sit on her door-step till—"

"I wouldn't do anything rash, Billy. Suppose you were to leave it to me?"

"What good would that do? If that old witch is putting it round, the only thing for Evie and me to do is to contradict her."

"Has Evie ever given you an idea that anything was wrong?"

"Evie's been the devil. I don't mind saying it to you, because you understand the kind of devil she'd be. But Lord! I don't care. It's just her way. She's told me to go to the deuce half a dozen times, but she knows I won't till she comes with me. Oh, no. Evie's all right—"

"Yes, of course, Evie's all right. But you know, Billy dear, this thing requires a great deal of management and straightening out, and I do wish you'd let me take charge of it. I know every one concerned, you see, so that I could do it better than any one—any one but you, I mean—"

"I understand that all right. I'm not going to be rough on them, but all the same—"

She got him to sit down at last, made tea for him, and soothed him. At the end of an hour he had undertaken not to molest Miss Jarrott, or to fight that "confounded South-American," or to say a word of any kind to Evie till she was ready to say a word to him. He became impressed with the necessity for diplomatic action and, after some persuasion, promised to submit to guidance—at any rate, for a time.

"And now, Billy, I'm going to write a note. The first thing to be done is that you should find Mr. Strange and deliver it to him before nine o'clock this evening. You'll do it quietly, won't you? and not let him see that you are anything more than my messenger. No matter where he is, even in a private house, you must see that he gets the note, if at all possible."

When he had sworn to this she wrote a few lines hurriedly. He carried them away in the same tumultuous haste with which he had come. After his departure she felt herself unexpectedly strong and calm.

XVIII

The feeling of being equal to anything she might have to face continued with her. Now that the moment for action had arrived she had confidence in her ability to meet it, since it had to be done. At dinner she was able to talk to Wayne on indifferent topics, and later, when he had retired to his den to practise his Braile, she sat down in the drawing-room with a book. Noticing that she wore the severe black dress in which she had assisted at the "killing off" of Evie's family, she brightened it with a few unobtrusive jewels, so as to look less like the Tragic Muse. The night being cold, a cheerful fire burned on the hearth, beside which she sat down and waited.

When he was shown in, about half-past eight, it seemed to her best not to rise to receive him. Something in her repose, or in her dignity, gave him the impression of arriving before a tribunal, and he began his

explanations almost from the doorway.

"I got your note. Young Merrow caught me at dinner. I was dining alone, so that I could come at once."

"You're very kind. I'm glad you were able to do it. Won't you sit down?"

Without offering her hand, she indicated a high arm-chair suitable for a man, on the other side of the hearth. He seated himself with an air of expectation, while she gazed pensively at the fire, speaking at last without looking up.

"I hear Miss Jarrott has begun to announce your engagement to Evie."

"I understood she was going to, to a few intimate friends."

"And you allowed it?"

"As you see."

"Didn't you know that I should have to take that for a signal?"

"I've never given you to understand that a signal wouldn't come—if you required one."

"No; but I hoped—" She broke off, continuing to gaze at the fire. "Do you remember," she began again—"do you remember telling me—that evening on the shore of Lake Champlain—just before you went away—that if ever I needed your life, it would be at my disposal?—to do with as I chose?"

"I do."

"Then I'm going to claim it." She did not look up, but she heard him change his position in his chair. "I shouldn't do it if there was any other way. I'm sure you understand that. Don't you?" she insisted, glancing at him for an answer.

"I know you wouldn't do it, unless you were convinced there was a reason."

"I've tried to be just to you, and to see things from your point of view. I do; I assure you. If I were in your position I should feel as you do. But I'm not in your position. I'm in one of great responsibility, toward Evie and toward her friends."

"I don't see what you owe to them."

"I owe them the loyalty that every human being owes to every other."

Illustration: Again there was a long silence.

"To every other—except me."

"I'm loyal to you, at least, whoever else may not be. But it wouldn't be loyalty if I let you marry Evie. I'm going to ask you—not to do it—to go away—to leave her alone—to go—for good."

There was a long silence. When he spoke, it was hoarsely but otherwise without change of tone.

"Is that what you meant?—just now?"

"Yes. That's what I meant."

"Do you intend me to get out of New York, to go back to the South—?"

She lifted her hand in protestation.

"I'm not giving orders or making conditions. New York is large. There's room in it for you and Evie, too."

"I dare say. One doesn't require much space to break one's heart in."

"Evie wouldn't break her heart. I know her better than you do. She'd suffer for a while, but she'd get over it, and in the end, very soon probably—marry some one else."

"How cruel you can be," he said, with a twisted smile.

"I can be, when it's right. In this case I'm only as cruel as—the truth. I'm saying it because it must make things easier for you. Your own pain will be the less from the knowledge that, in time, Evie will get over hers."

"I suppose it ought to be, but—"

He did not finish his sentence, and again there was a long hush, during which, while she continued to gaze pensively at the fire, she could hear him shifting with nervous frequency in his chair. When at last she ventured to look at him he was bowed forward, his elbow supported on his knee, and his forehead resting on his hand.

"You'll keep your promise to me?" she persisted, softly, with a kind of pitiful relentlessness.

"I'll tell you in a minute."

He jerked out the words in the brusque way in which a man says all that, for the moment, he is physically able to utter. She allowed more time to elapse. The roar of traffic and the clanging of electric trams came up from the street below, but no sound seemed able to penetrate the stillness in which they sat. As far as Miriam was conscious of herself at all, it was simply to note the curious deadness of her emotions, as though she had become a mere machine for doing right, like a clock that strikes punctually. Nevertheless, it caused her some surprise when he raised himself and said, in a voice that would have been casual on a common occasion:

"I suppose you think me a cad?"

"No; why should I?"

"Because I am one."

"I don't know why you should say that, or what it has to do with—anything."

"It's about that—that—promise."

"Oh!"

"Do you mind if we speak quite frankly? I should like to. I've been bluffing that point ever since you and I met again. It's been torture to have to do it—damned, humiliating torture; but it's been difficult to do anything else. You see, I couldn't even speak of it without seeming to—to insult you—that is, unless you took me in just the right way."

His look, his attitude, the tones of his voice, the something woe-begone and yet boyish in his expression, recalled irresistibly the days in the cabin, when he often wore just this air. She had observed before that when they were alone together the years seemed to fall from his manner, while he became the immature, inexperienced young fugitive again. She had scarcely expected, however, that this lapse into youth would occur to-night. She herself felt ages old—as though all the ends of the world had come upon her.

"You may say anything you like. There's nothing you could possibly tell me that I shouldn't understand."

"Well, then, when I made that promise, I meant to keep it, and to keep it in a special way. I thought—of course we were both very young—but I thought that, after what had happened—"

"Wait a minute. I want to tell you something before you go on." She rallied her spirit's forces for a desperate step, gathering all her life's possible happiness into one extravagant handful, and flinging it away, in order to save her pride before this man, who was about to tell her that he had never been able to love her. "What I am going to say may strike you as irrelevant; but if it is, you can ignore it. I expect to be married—in a little while—it's practically a settled thing—to Charles Conquest, whom I think you know. Now, will you go on, please?"

He stared at her in utter blankness.

"Good God!"

He got up and took a few restless turns up and down the room, his head bent, his hands behind his back. He reseated himself when his confused impressions grew clearer.

"So that it doesn't matter what I thought about—that promise?"

"Not in the least." She had saved herself. "The one thing important to me is that you should have made it."

"And that you can hold me to it," he added, tersely.

"I presume I can do that?"

"You can, unless—unless I find myself in a position to take the promise back."

"I can hardly see how that position could come about," she said, with an air of wondering.

"I can. You see," he went on in an explanatory tone, "it was an unusual sort of promise—a promise made, so to speak, for value received—for unusual value received. It wasn't one that a common occasion would have called forth. It was offered because you had given me—life."

He rested his arm now on a table that stood between them and, leaning toward her, looked her steadily in the eyes.

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're going to say," she remarked, rather blankly.

"No, but you'll see. You gave me life. I hold that life in a certain sense at your pleasure. It is at your disposal. It must remain at your disposal—- until I give it back."

She sat upright in her chair, leaning in her turn on the table, and drawing nearer to him.

"I can't imagine what you mean," she said, under her breath and looking a little frightened.

"You'll see presently. But don't be alarmed. It's going to be all right. As long as I hold the life you gave me," he continued to explain, "I must do your bidding. I'm not a free man; I'm—don't be offended—I'm your creature. I don't say I was a free man before this came up. I haven't been a free man ever since I've been Herbert Strange. I've been the slave of a sort of make-believe. I've made believe, and I've felt I was justified. Perhaps I was. I'm not quite sure. But I haven't liked it; and now I begin to feel that I can't stand it any longer. You follow me, don't you?"

She nodded, still leaning toward him across the table, and not taking her eyes from his. He remembered afterward though he paid no heed to it at the time, how those eyes grew wide with awe and flashed with strange, lambent brightness.

"I told you a few days ago," he pursued, "that there were *times* when it was hell. That was putting it mildly—too mildly. There's been no time when it wasn't hell—in here." He tapped his forehead. "I've struggled, and fought, and pushed, and swaggered, and bluffed, and had ups and downs, and taken heart, and swaggered and bluffed again, and lied all through—and I've made Herbert Strange a respectable man of business on the high road to success. But when I come near you it all goes to pieces—like one of those curiously conserved dead bodies when they're brought to the air. There's nothing to them. There's nothing to me—so long as I'm Herbert Strange."

"But you *are* Herbert Strange. You can't help yourself—now."

"Herbert Strange goes back into the nothingness out of which he was born the minute I become Norrie Ford again."

"But you can't do that!"

She drew herself up hastily, with a gasp.

"It's exactly what I mean to do." He spoke very slowly "I'm going to be a free man, and my own master, even if it leads me where—where they meant to put me when you snatched me away. I'm going back to my fellow-men, to the body corporate—"

She rose in agitation, and drew back from him toward the chimney-piece. "So that if—if anything happens," she said, "I shall have driven you to it. That's how you get your revenge."

"Not at all. I'm not coming to this decision suddenly, or in a spirit of revenge, in any way." He followed her, standing near her, on the hearth-rug. "I can truthfully say," he went on in his slow, explanatory fashion, "that there's been no time, since the minute I made my first dash for liberty, when I haven't known, in the bottom of my heart, what a good thing it would have been if I hadn't done it. I've come to see—I've *had* to—- that the death-chair would have been better, with self-respect, than freedom to go and come, with the necessity to gag every one, every minute of the day, and every day in the year, and all the time, with lies. If that seems far-fetched to you—"

"No, it doesn't."

"Well, if it did you'd see it wasn't, if you were in my place for a month. I didn't mind it so much at first. I stood it by day and just suffered by night—till the Jarrotts began to be so kind to me, and I came to New York—and—and—and Evie!"

"I'm sorry I've spoken to you as I have," she said, hastily. "If I'd known you felt like that—"

"You were quite right. I always understood that. But I can't go on with it. If Evie marries me now, it shall be knowing who I am."

"You don't mean that you could possibly tell her?"

"I'm going to tell every one."

She stifled a little cry. "Then it will be my doing!"

"It will be your doing—up to a point. But it will be something for you to be proud of, not to regret. You've only brought my mistake so clearly before me that even I can't stand it—when I've stood so much. You ask me to turn my back on Evie and sneak away. You've got the right to command, and there's nothing for me but to obey you. But I can't help seeing the sort of life that would be left to me after I'd carried out your orders. It wouldn't only be the loss of Evie—I may lose her in any case—it would be the loss of everything within myself that's enabled me hitherto merely to hold up my head—and bluff."

"I might withdraw what I've just asked you to do. Perhaps we could find some other way."

He laughed with grim lightness.

"You're weakening. That's not like you. And it wouldn't do any good now. Even if we did patch up some other scheme, there would still remain what you talked about a minute ago—the loyalty that every human being owes to every other."

"But I thought you didn't recognize that?"

"I said I didn't. But in here"—he tapped his fingers over the heart—"I did, and I do. You've brought me to see

it."

"That's very noble, but you saw it for yourself—"

"Through a glass—darkly; now I can look at the thing in clear daylight, and see what I have to do."

She dropped into her chair again, looking up at him. He stood with his back to the fire, holding his head high, his bearing marked by a dogged, perhaps forced, serenity.

"But what *can* you do?" she asked, after considering his words. "You're so involved. All this business—and the people in South America—"

"Oh, there are ways and means. I haven't made plans, but I've thought, from time to time, of what I should do if I ever came to just this pass. The first thing would be to tell the few people who are most concerned, confidentially. Then I should go back to South America, and settle things give me your respect again—not even the little you've given me hitherto—and God knows that can't have been much. I could stand anything in the world—anything—rather than that you should come to that."

"But I shouldn't, when I myself had dissuaded you—"

"No, no; don't try. You'd be doing wrong. You've been to me so high and holy that I don't like to think you haven't the strength to go on to the end. I've got it, because you've given it me. Don't detract from your own gift by holding me back from using it. You found me a prisoner—or an escaped one—and I've been a prisoner all these years, the prisoner of something worse than chains. Now I'm going free. Look!" he cried, with sudden inspiration. "I'll show you how it's done. You'll see how easy it will be."

He moved to cross the room.

"What are you going to do?"

She sprang up as if to hold him back, but his finger was on the bell.

"You don't mind, I hope?" he asked; but he had rung before she could give an answer. The maid appeared in the doorway.

"Ask Mr. Wayne if he would be good enough to come in here a minute. Tell him Mr. Strange particularly wants to see him."

He went back to his place by the fireside, where he stood apparently calm, showing no sign of excitement except in heightened color and the stillness of nervous tension Miriam sank into her chair again.

"Don't do anything rash," she pleaded. "Wait till to-morrow There will always be time. For God's sake!"

If he heard her he paid no attention, and presently Wayne appeared. He hesitated a minute on the threshold, and during that instant Ford could see that he looked ashy and older, as if something had aged him suddenly. His hands trembled, too, as he felt his way in.

"Good-evening," he said, speaking into the air as blind men do. "I thought I heard your voice."

Having groped his way across the room and reached the table that stood between the arm-chairs Miriam and Ford had occupied, he stopped. He stood there, with fingers drumming soundlessly on the polished wood, waiting for some one to speak.

In spite of the confidence with which he had rung the bell, Ford found it difficult now to begin. It was only after one or two inarticulate attempts that he was able to say anything.

"I asked you to come in, sir," he began, haltingly, "to tell you something very special. Miss Strange knows it already.... If I've done wrong in not telling you before ... you'll see I'm prepared to take my punishment.... My name isn't Strange ... it isn't Herbert."

"I know it isn't."

The words slipped out in a sharp tone, not quite nervous, but thin and worn. Miriam's attitude grew tense. Ford took a step forward from the fireside. With his arm flung over the back of his chair, and his knee resting on the seat of it, he strained across the table, as if to annihilate the space between Wayne and himself.

"You *knew*?"

The blind man nodded. When he spoke it was again into the air.

"Yes; I knew. You're Norrie Ford. I ought to say I've only known it latterly—about a fortnight now."

"How?"

"Oh, it just came to me—by degrees, I think."

"Why didn't you say something about it?"

"I thought I wouldn't. It has worried me, but I thought I'd keep still."

"Do you mean that you were going to let everything—go on?"

"I weighed all the considerations. That's the decision I came to. You must understand," he went on to explain, in a voice that was now tremulous as well as thin, "that I'd had you a good deal on my mind, during these past eight years. I sentenced you to death when I almost knew you were innocent. It was my duty. I couldn't help it. The facts told dead against you. Every one admitted that. True, the evidence might have been twisted to tell against old Gramm and his wife, but they hadn't been dissipated, and they hadn't been indicted, and they hadn't gone round making threats against Chris Ford's life like you."

"I didn't mean them. It was nothing but a boy's rage—"

"Yes, but you made them; and when the old man was found—But I'll not go into that now. I only want to say that, while I couldn't acquit you with my intelligence, I felt constrained to do it in my heart, especially when everything was over, and it was too late. The incident has been the one thing in my professional career that I've most regretted. I don't quite blame myself. I had to do my duty. And yet it was a relief to me when you got away. I don't know that I could have acted differently, but—but I liked you. I've gone on liking you. I've often thought about you, and wondered what had become of you. And one day—not long ago—as I was going over the old ground once more, I saw I'd been thinking about—*you*. That's how it came to me."

"And you were going to remain silent, and let me marry Evie?"

The blind man reflected.

"I saw what was to be said against it. But I weighed all the evidence carefully. You were an injured man; you'd made a great fight and you'd won—as far as one man can win against the world. I came to the conclusion that I wasn't called on to strike you down a second time, after you'd scrambled up so pluckily. Evie is very dear to me; I don't say that I should see her married to you without some misgiving; but I decided that you deserved her. It was a great responsibility to take, but I took it and made up my mind to—let her go."

"Oh, you're a good man! I didn't think there was such mercy in the world."

Ford flung out the words in a cry that was half a groan and half a shout of triumph. Miriam choked back a sob. The neat little man shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"There's one thing I should like to ask," he pursued, "among the many that I don't know anything about, and that I don't care to inquire into. How did you come by the name of this lady's father, my old friend Herbert Strange?"

Ford and Miriam exchanged swift glances. She shook her head, and he took his cue.

"I happened to see it in a—a sort of—paper. I had no idea it was that of a real person. I fancied it had come out of a novel—- or something like that. I didn't mean to keep it, but it got fastened on me."

"Very odd," was his only comment. "Isn't it, Miriam?

"Now," he *added*, "I suppose you've had all you want of me, so I'll say good-night."

He held out his hand, which Ford grasped, clinched rather, in both his own.

"God bless you!" Wayne murmured, still tremulously. "God bless you—my boy, and bring everything out right. Miriam, I suppose you'll come in and see me before you go to bed."

They watched him shuffle his way out of the room, and watched the door long after he had closed it. When at last Miriam turned her eyes on Ford they were luminous with the relief of her own defeat.

"You see!" she cried, triumphantly. "You see the difference between him and me—between his spirit and mine! Now which of us was right?"

"You were."

XIX

The one thing clear to Miriam on the following day was that she had ruined everything with astonishing completeness—a curious result to come from what she was firmly convinced was "doing right." She had calculated that, by a moderate measure of suffering to Evie, and a large one to Ford, Evie's ultimate welfare at least would be secured. Now everything was being brought to grief together. Out of such a wreck nothing could be saved.

With Ford's desire to break the force which made him an impostor she had sympathy, but his willingness to risk his life in order to be in harmony with law and order again was not so easy for her to understand. While education, training and taste kept her, in her own person, within the restrictions of civilized life, yet the part of a free-lance in the world appealed to her strongly atavistic instincts far more directly than membership in

a disciplined regular army. The guerilla fighter must of necessity be put to shifts—even moral shifts—which the common soldier, trained and commanded by others, can be spared; but her heart was with the man roving in the hills on his own account. That Ford should deliberately seek chains in barracks, when by her surrender on the subject of Evie she had made it possible for him still to keep the liberty of the field, was to her at once incomprehensible and awful. She had not only the sense of watching a man rushing upon Fate, but the knowledge that she herself had given him the impetus; while she was fully alive to the fact that when he fell everything she cared for in the world would fall with him.

Her mind was too resourceful, her spirit too energetic, to permit of her sitting in helpless anguish over his new determination. She was already busy with plans for counteracting him, in one of which at least she saw elements of hope. Having conceived its possibilities, she was eager to go and test them; but she had decided not to leave the house until she knew that Ford was really putting his plans into execution. The minute Evie learned the fatal news she would have need of her, and she dared not put herself out of the child's reach. Her first duty must be toward the fragile little creature, who would be crushed like a trampled flower.

Shortly before noon she was summoned to the telephone, where Evie was asking if she should find her in. Miriam judged from the tones of the transmitted voice that the worst had been made known. She was not, however, prepared for the briskness with which, ten minutes later, Evie whisked into the room, her cheeks aglow with excitement and her heavenly eyes dancing with a purely earthly sparkle.

"Isn't this awful?" she cried, before Miriam could take her into her loving arms. "Isn't it appalling? But it's not a surprise to me—not in the least. I knew there was something. Haven't I said so? I almost knew that his name wasn't Strange. If I hadn't been so busy with my coming out—and everything—I should have been sure of it. I haven't had time to think of it—do you see? With a lunch somewhere every day at half-past one," she hurried on, breathlessly, "and a tea at half-past four, and a dinner at eight, and a dance at eleven, and very likely the theatre or the opera in between—well, you can see I haven't been able to give much attention to anything else; but I knew, from the very time when I was in Buenos Aires, that there was something queer about that name. I never saw a man so sensitive when any one spoke about his name, not in all my life before—and you know down there it's the commonest thing—why, they're so suspicious on that point that they'd almost doubt that mine was Evie Colfax."

She threw her muff in one direction, her boa in another, and her gloves in still another.

"But, Evie darling, you surely didn't think—"

"Of course I never thought of anything like this. I didn't really think of anything at all. If I'd begun to give my mind to it, I should probably have hit on something a great deal worse."

"What do you mean, dear? Worse—than what?"

"Worse than just being accused of shooting your uncle—and it was only his great-uncle, too. I might have thought of forgery or something dishonorable, though I should know he wasn't capable of it. Being accused isn't much. You can accuse *any one*—you could accuse *me*. That doesn't prove anything when he says he didn't do it. Of course he didn't do it. Can't any one *see*? My goodness! I wish they'd let me make the laws. I'd show them. Just think! To put a man like that in prison—- and say they'd do such awful things to him—and make him change his name—and everything. It's perfectly scandalous. It's an outrage. I shouldn't think such things would be allowed. They wouldn't be allowed in the Argentine. Why, there was a man out there who killed his father-in-law—actually *killed* him—and they didn't do anything to him at all. I've seen him lots of times. Aunt Queenie has pointed him out to me. He used to have the box next but two to ours at the opera. And to think they should take a man like Herbert, and worry him like that—it makes me so indignant I'd like to—"

Evie ground her teeth, threw her clinched fists outward, and twitched her skirts about the room in the prettiest possible passion of righteous anger.

"But, darling," Miriam asked, in a puzzled voice, "what are you going to do about it?"

Evie wheeled round haughtily.

"Do about it? What would you expect me to do about it? I'm going to tell every one he didn't do it—that's what I'm going to do about it. But of course we're not to speak of it just yet—outside ourselves, you know. He's going to Buenos Aires to tell Uncle Jarrott he didn't do it—and when he comes back we're going to make it generally known. Oh, there's to be law about it—and everything. He means to change his name again to what it was before—Ford, the name was—and I must say, Miriam, I like that a good deal better than Strange, if you don't mind my telling you. It seems odd to have so many Stranges—and I must say I never could get used to the idea of having exactly the same name as yours. It was almost like not being married outside the family—and I should hate to marry a relation. That part of it comes as a pleasant surprise, do you see? I'd made up my mind to Strange, and thought there was no way of getting rid of it, unless I—but I wasn't looking ahead to anything of *that* kind. I hope I shall never—"

"So, darling, you're going to be true to him?"

"True to him? Of course I'm going to be true to him. Why shouldn't I be? I'm going to be more true to him now than I was before. He's so noble about it, too. I wish you could have seen the way he broke it to me. Aunt Queenie said she never saw anything so affecting, not even on the stage. She was there, you know. Herbert felt he couldn't go over it all twice, and he thought I should need some one to support me through

the shock. I didn't—not a bit. But I wish you could have been there, just to see him."

"I can fancy it, dear."

"Of course I know now what you've been fidgeting about ever since he came to New York. He says you recognized him—that you'd seen him at Greenport. Oh, I knew there was something. But I must say, Miriam, I think you might have told me confidentially, and not let it come on me as such a blow as this. Not that I take it as a blow, though, of course, it upsets things terribly. We can't announce our engagement for ever so long, and Aunt Queenie is rushing round in the motor now to take back what she wrote to a few people yesterday. I can't imagine what she'll tell them, because I charged her on her sacred honor not to give them the idea it was broken off, although I'd rather they thought it was broken off than that I hadn't been engaged at all."

"Miss Jarrott takes it quietly, then?"

"Quietly! I wish you could see her. She thinks there never was anything so romantic. Why, she cried over him, and kissed him, and said she'd always be his friend if every one else in the world were to turn against him. As a matter of fact, the poor old dear is head over heels in love with him—do you see?—in that sort of old-maid way—you know the kind of thing I mean. She thinks there's nobody like him, and neither there is. I shall miss him frightfully while he's down there telling Uncle Jarrott. I shall skip half my invitations and go regularly into retreat till he comes back. There's lots more he's going to tell me then—all about what Popsey Wayne had to do with it—and everything. I'm glad he doesn't want to do it now, because my head is reeling as it is. I've so many things to think of—and so much responsibility coming on me all at once—and—"

"Are you going to do anything about Billy?"

"Well, I can postpone that, at any rate. Thank goodness, there's *one* silver lining to the cloud. I was going to give him a pretty strong hint to-night, seeing Aunt Queenie has begun writing notes around, but now I can let him simmer for a while longer. He won't be able to say I haven't let him down easy, poor old boy. And, Miriam dear," she continued, gathering up her various articles of apparel, preparatory to taking leave, "you'll keep just as quiet about it as you can, like a dear, won't you? We don't mean to say a word about it outside ourselves till Herbert comes back from seeing Uncle Jarrott. That's my advice—and it's all our advice—I mean, Aunt Queenie's, too. Then they're going to law—or something. I know you *won't* say anything about it, but I thought I'd just put you on your guard."

If Evie's way of taking it was a new revelation to Miriam, of her own miscalculation, it was also a new incentive to setting to work as promptly as possible to repair what she could of the mischief she had made. With Evie's limitations she might never know more of the seriousness of her situation than a bird of the nature of the battle raging near its nest; while if even Ford "went to law," as Evie put it, and he came off victorious, there might still be chances for their happiness. To anything else Miriam was indifferent, as a man in the excitement of saving his children from fire or storm is dead to his own sensations. It was with impetuous, almost frenzied, eagerness, therefore, that she went to the telephone to ring up Charles Conquest, asking to be allowed to see him privately at his office during the afternoon.

In what she had made up her mind to do the fact that she was planning for herself an unnecessary measure of sacrifice was no deterrent. She was in a mood in which self-immolation seemed the natural penalty of her mistakes. She was not without the knowledge that money could buy the help she purposed to obtain by direct intervention; but her inherited instincts, scornful of roundabout methods, urged her to pay the price in something more personal than coin. It replied in some degree to her self-accusation, it assuaged the bitterness of her self-condemnation, to know that she was to be the active agent in putting right that which her errors of judgment had put wrong. To her essentially primitive soul atonement by proxy was as much out of the question as to the devotee beneath the wheels of Juggernaut. Somewhere in the background of her thought there were faint prudential protests against throwing herself away; but she disdained them, as a Latin or a Teuton disdains the Anglo-Saxon's preference for a court of law to the pistol of the duellist. It was something outside the realm of reason. Reckless impulses subdued by convent restraint or civilized requirements awoke with a start all the more violent because of their long sleep, driving her to do that which she knew other women would have done otherwise or not at all.

She was aware, therefore, of limitations in the sacrifice she was making; she was even aware that, in the true sense, it was no sacrifice whatever. She was offering herself up because she chose to—in a kind of wilfulness—but a passionate wilfulness which claimed that for her at least there was no other way. Other women, wiser women, women behind whom there was a long, moderation-loving past, might obey the laws that prompt to the economy of one's self; she could only follow those blind urgings which drove her forefathers to fight when they might have remained at peace, or whipped them forth into the wild places of the earth when they could have stayed in quiet homes. The hard way in preference to the easy way was in her blood. She could no more have resisted taking it now than she could have held herself back eight years ago from befriending Norrie Ford against the law.

Nevertheless, it was a support to her to remember that Conquest's manner on the occasions when business brought her to his office was always a little different from that which he assumed when they met outside. He was much more the professional man with his client, a little the friend, but not at all the lover—if he was a lover anywhere. Having welcomed her now with just the right shade of cordiality, he made her sit at a little distance from his desk, while he himself returned to the revolving-chair at which he had been writing when she entered. After the preliminary greetings, he put on, unconsciously, the questioning air a business man takes at the beginning of an interview which he has been invited to accord.

"I came—about Evie."

Now that she was there it was less easy to begin than she had expected.

"Quite so. I knew there was a hitch. I've just had a mysterious note from Queenie Jarrott which I haven't been able to make out. Can't they hit it off?"

"It's a good deal more serious than that. Mr. Strange came to see Mr. Wayne and me last night. I may as well tell you as simply as I can. His name isn't Strange at all."

"Ho! ho! What's up?"

"Did you ever hear the name of—Norrie Ford?"

"Good Lord, yes! I can't quite remember—Let's see. Norrie Ford? I know the name as well as I know my own. Wasn't that the case—why, yes, it must have been—wasn't that the case Wayne was mixed up in six or eight years ago?"

"Yes, it was."

"The fellow gave 'em all the slip, didn't he?"

She nodded.

"Hadn't he been commuted to a life sentence—?"

"Mr. Wayne hoped it would be done, but it hadn't been done yet. He was still under sentence of—death."

"Yes, yes, yes. It comes back to me. We thought Wayne hadn't displayed much energy or ability of foresight—or something. I remember there was talk about it, and in the newspapers there was even a cock-and-bull story that Wayne had connived at his escape. Well, what has that got to do with Evie?"

"It has everything to do with her."

Conquest's little gray-green eyes blinked as if against the blaze of their own light, while his features sharpened to their utmost incisiveness.

"You don't mean to say—?"

"I do."

"Well, upon—my—!" The exclamation trailed off into a silent effort to take in this extraordinary piece of intelligence "Do you mean to say the scamp had the cheek—? Oh no, it isn't possible. Come now!"

"It was exactly as I'm going to tell you, but I don't think you should call him a scamp. You see, he's engaged to Evie—"

"He's not engaged to her now?"

"He is. She means to be true to him. So do we all."

Two little scarlet spots burned in her cheeks, but it was not more in the way of emotion than a warm partisanship on Evie's account demanded.

"Well, I'm blowed!" He swung one leg across the other, making his chair describe a semicircle.

"Perhaps you won't be so much—blowed, when you hear all I have to tell you."

"Go ahead; I'm more interested than if it was a dime novel."

As lucidly as she could she gave him the outline of Ford's romance, dwelling as he had done in relating it to her, less on its incidents than on its mental and moral effect upon himself. She suppressed the narrative of the weeks spent in the cabin and based her report entirely on information received from Ford. For testimony as to his life and character in the Argentine she had the evidence of Miss Jarrott, while on the subject of his business abilities—no small point with a New York business man, as she was astute enough to see—there could be no better authority than Conquest himself, who, as Stephens and Jarrott's American legal adviser, had had ample opportunity of judging. She was gratified to note that as her story progressed it called forth sympathetic looks, and an occasional appreciative exclamation, while now and then he slapped his thigh as a mark of the kind of amused astonishment that verges on approbation.

"So we couldn't desert him now, after she's been so brave, could we?" she pleaded, with some amount of confidence; "and especially when he's engaged to Evie."

"I suppose we can't desert him, if he's sane."

"Oh, he's sane."

"Then why the deuce, when he was so well out of harm's way, didn't he stay there?"

"Because of his love for Evie, don't you see?" She had to explain Ford's moral development and psychological state all over again, until he could see it with some measure of comprehension.

"It certainly is the queerest story I ever heard," he declared, in enjoyment of its dramatic elements, "and we're all in it, aren't we? It's like seeing yourself in a play."

"I thought you would look at it in that way. As soon as I began wondering what we could do—this morning—I saw that, after Evie, you were the person most concerned."

"Who? I? Why am I concerned? I've got nothing to do with it!"

"No, of course not, except as Stephens and Jarrott's lawyer. When their representative in New York—"

"Oh, but my dear girl, my duties don't involve me in anything of this kind. I'm the legal adviser to the firm, but I've nothing to do with the private affairs of their employees."

"Mr. Jarrott is very fond of Mr. Strange—"

"Perhaps this will cool his affection."

"I don't think it will as long as Evie insists on marrying him. I'm sure they mean to stand by him."

"They won't be able to stand by him long, if the law gives him—what it meant to give him before."

"Oh, but you don't think there's any danger of that?"

"I don't know about it," he said, shaking his head, ominously. "The fact that he comes back and gives himself up isn't an argument in favor of his innocence. There's generally remorse behind that dodge."

"Then isn't that all the more reason why we should help him?"

"Help him? How?"

"By trying to win his case for him."

He looked at her with eyes twinkling while his fingers concealed the smile behind his colorless mustache.

"And how would you propose to set about that?"

"I don't know, but I suppose you do. There must be ways. He's leaving as soon as he can for South America. He thinks it may be months before he gets back. I thought that—perhaps—in the mean time—while he won't be able to do anything for himself—you might see—"

"Yes, yes; go on," he said, as she hesitated.

"You might see if there is any evidence that could be found—that wasn't found before—isn't that the way they do it?—and have it ready—for him when he came back."

"For a wedding present."

"It *would* be a wedding present—to all of us. It would be for Evie's sake. You know how I love her. She's the dearest thing to me in the world. If I could only secure her happiness like that—"

"You mean, if I could secure it."

"You'd be doing it actively, but I should want to co-operate."

"In what way?"

She sat very still. She was sure he understood her by the sudden rigidity of his pose, while his eyes stopped twinkling, and his fingers ceased to travel along the line of his mustache. Her eyes fell before the scrutiny in his, but she lifted them again for one of her quick, wild glances.

"In any way you like."

She tried to make her utterance distinct, matter of fact, not too significant, but she failed. In spite of herself, her words conveyed all their meaning. The brief pause that followed was not less eloquent, nor did it break the spell when Conquest gave a short little laugh that might have been nervous and, changing his posture, leaned forward on his desk and scribbled on the blotting-pad. While he would never have admitted it, it was a relief to him, too, not to be obliged to face her.

He was not shocked, neither was he quite surprised. He was accustomed to the thought that a woman's love was a thing to purchase. One man bought it from her father for a couple of oxen, another from herself for an establishment and a diamond tiara. It was the same principle in both cases. He had never considered Miriam Strange as being without a price; his difficulty had been in knowing what it was. The establishment and the diamond tiara having proved as indifferent to her as the yoke of oxen, he was thrown back upon the alternative of heroic deeds. He had more than once suspected that these might win her if they had only been in his line. There being few opportunities for that kind of endeavor as the head of a large and lucrative legal practice, the suggestion only left him cynical. In the bottom of his heart he had long wished to dazzle,

by some act of prowess, the eyes that saw him only as a respectable man of middle age, but the desire had merely mocked him with the kind of derision which impotence gets from youth. It seemed now a stroke of luck which almost merited being termed an act of Providence that there should have come a call for exactly his variety of "derringdo" from the very quarter in which he could make it tell.

"We've never gone in for any criminal business here," he said, after long reflection, while he continued to scribble aimlessly, "but, of course, we're in touch with the people who take it up."

"I thought you might be."

"But it's only fair to tell you that if your motive is to save time for our friend in question—"

"That *is* my motive—the only one."

"Then you could get in touch with them, too."

"But I don't want to."

"Still I think you should consider it. The best legal advice in the world can be—bought—for money."

"I know that."

Lifting his eyes in a sharp look, he saw her head lilted back with her own special air of deliberate temerity.

"Oh, very well, then," he said, quietly, resuming his scribbling again. After this warning he felt justified in taking her at her word.

With that as a beginning she knew she had gained her first great point. In answer to his questions she told the story over again, displaying, as he remembered afterward—but long afterward—a surprising familiarity with its details. She made suggestions which he noted as marked by some acumen, and laid stress on the value of the aid they might expect privately from Philip Wayne. The beauty and eagerness in her face fired the almost atrophied enthusiasm in his own heart, while he could not but see that this entirely altruistic interest had brought them in half an hour nearer together than they had ever been before. It was what they had never had till now—a bond in common. In spite of the persistency of his efforts and his assertions, he had never hitherto got nearer her than a statue on a pedestal gets to its neighbor in a similar situation but now at last they were down on the same earth together. This was more than reason enough for his taking up the cause of Norrie Ford, consecrating to it all his resources, mental and material, and winning it.

In the course of an hour or two their understanding was complete, but he did not refer again to the conditions of their tacit compact. It was she who felt that sufficient had not been said—that the sincerity with which she subscribed to it had not been duly emphasized. She was at the door on the point of going away when she braced herself to look at him and say:

"You can't realize what all this means to me. If we succeed—that is, if you succeed—I hardly dare to tell you of the extent to which I shall be grateful."

He felt already some of the hero's magnanimity as to claiming his reward.

"You needn't think about that," he smiled. "I sha'n't. If by making Evie happy I can serve you, I shall not ask for gratitude."

She looked down at her muff and smoothed its fur, then glanced up swiftly. "No; but I shall want to give it."

With that she was gone—lighter of heart than a few hours ago it had seemed to her possible ever to be again. Her joy was the joy of the captain who feels that he has saved his ship, though his own wound is fatal.

PART IV

CONQUEST

XX

Among the three or four qualities Conquest most approved of in himself, not the least was a certain capacity for the patient acquisition of the world's more enviable properties. He had the gift of knowing what he wanted, recognizing it when he saw it, and waiting for it till it came within his reach. From his youth upward he had been a connoisseur of quality rather than a lover of abundance, while he owned to a talent for seeing the value of things which other people overlooked, and throwing them into relief when the objects became his. As far back as the time when the modest paternal heritage had been divided between his brothers and

sisters and himself, he had been astute enough to leave the bulk of it to them, contenting himself with one or two bits of ancestral furniture and a few old books, which were now known by all to have been the only things worth having. Throughout his life he had followed this principle of acquiring unobtrusively but getting exactly what he wanted. It was so that he bought his first horse, so that he bought his first motor, so that he purchased the land where he afterward built his house—in a distant, desolate stretch of Fifth Avenue which his acquaintances told him would be hopelessly out of reach, but where, not many years after, most of them were too late to join him.

In building his house, too, he took his time, allowing his friends to make their experiments around him, while he studied the great art of "how not to do it." One of his neighbors erected a Flemish château, another a Florentine palazzo, and a third a François Premier *hôtel*; but his plot of ground remained an unkempt tangle of mullein and blue succory. In the end he put up a sober, handsome development on a style which the humbler passers-by often called, with approval, "good, plain American," but whose point of departure was Georgian. He had the instinct for that which springs out of the soil. For this reason he did not shrink from an Early Victorian note—the first note of the modern, prosperous New York—in decoration; and the same taste impelled him toward the American in art. While Neighbor Smith displayed his Gainsboroughs, and Neighbor Jones his Rousseaus or Daubignys, Conquest quietly picked up a thing here and there—always under excellent advice—which no picture-dealer had been able to dispose of, because it came from some studio in Twenty-third Street. Hung on his walls, it produced that much-sought-for effect of "having been always there." He was not a Chauvinist, nor had he any sympathy with the intolerantly patriotic. He was merely a lover of the indigenous.

In much the same way he had sought for—and waited for—a wife. He had been rashly put down as "not a marrying man," when he was only taking his time. He had seen plainly of excellent possibilities—fine women, handsome women, clever women, good women—any of whom presumably he could have had for the asking; but none was, in his own phraseology, "just the right thing." He wanted something unusual, and yet not exotic—something obvious, which no one else had observed—something cultivated, and yet native—something as exquisite as any hothouse orchid, but with the keen, fresh scent of the American woods and waters on its bloom. It was not a thing to be picked up every day, and so he kept on the lookout for it, and waited. Even when he found it, he was not certain, on the spur of the moment, that it would prove exactly what he had in mind. So he waited longer. He watched the effect of time and experience upon it, until he was quite sure. He knew the risk he was running that some one else might snatch it up; but his principle had always been to let everything, no matter how coveted, go, rather than buy in haste.

Lest such an attitude toward Miriam Strange should seem cold-blooded, it should be said in his defence that he considered the aggregate of his sentiments to be—love. She was to be more than "something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse," more than the living, responsive soul among his chattels. There was that in her which appealed to his desire, and to something more deeply seated in him still. After satisfying ear, eye, and intelligence, there was in her nature a whole undiscovered region, undivined, undefined, wakening the imagination, and stirring the speculative faculties, like the subconscious elements in personality. In her wild, non-Aryan glances he saw the flame of eyes that flashed on him out of a past unknown to history; in the liquid cadences of her voice he heard the echo of the speech that had sounded in the land before Plymouth was a stockade or Manhattan was a farm; in her presence he found a claim that antedated everything sprung of Hudson, Cabot, or Columbus. The slender thread that attached her to the ages of nomadic mystery made her for him the indigenous spirit, reborn in a woman of the world.

Knowing himself too old to be dominated by a passion, and too experienced to be snared by wiles, he estimated his feelings as being those of love, as he understood the word. He conceded the fact that love, like every other desire, must work to win, and proceeded to set about his task according to his usual methods of persistent, unobtrusive siege. It was long before Miriam became aware of what he was doing, and her surprise as she drew back was not quite so great as his to see her do it. He was so accustomed to success—after taking the trouble to insure it—that he was astonished, and a little angry, to find his usual tactics fail. He did not believe that she was beyond his grasp; he perceived only that he had taken the wrong way to get her. That there was a right way there could be no question; and he knew that by patient, unremitting search he should find it.

He had, therefore, several sources of satisfaction in espousing the cause of Norrie Ford. The amplitude of his legal knowledge would be to him as gay feathers to the cock; while the contemplation of the prize added to his self-approval in never doubting that it could be won.

It was early March when Ford sailed away, leaving his affairs in Conquest's charge, at the latter's own request. He in his turn placed them in the hands of Kilcup and Warren, who made a specialty of that branch of the law. The reward was immediate, in that frequent talks with Miriam became a matter of course.

His trained mind was prompt to seize the fact that these interviews took place on a basis different from that of their meetings in the past. Where he had been seeking to gain an end he was now on probation. He had been told—or practically told—that what he had been asking would be granted, as soon as certain conditions were fulfilled. It became to him, therefore, a matter of honor, in some degree one of professional etiquette, to fulfil the conditions before referring to the reward. Instead of a suitor pressing his suit, he became the man of business recounting the points scored, or still to be scored, in a common enterprise. In keeping her informed of each new step that Kilcup and Warren were taking, he maintained an attitude of distant respect, of which she could have nothing to complain.

Expecting an equal reserve on her part, it was with some surprise that he saw her assume the initiative in cordiality. He called it cordiality, because he dared not make it a stronger word. Her manner went back to

the spontaneous friendliness that had marked their intercourse before she began to see what he was aiming at, while into it she threw an infusion of something that had not hitherto been there. When he came with the information that a fresh bit of evidence had been discovered, or a new light thrown on an old one, she listened with interest—just the right kind of interest—and made pretexts to detain him, sometimes with Wayne as a third, sometimes without, for the pleasure of his own company. Now and then, as spring came on, they would all three, at her suggestion, cross the street, and stroll in the park together. Leaving Wayne on some convenient seat, they would prolong their own walk, talking with the unguarded confidence of mutual trust. It was she who furnished the topics—books, music, politics, people, anything that chanced to be uppermost. When he decided to purchase an automobile a whole new world of consultation was opened up. They visited establishments together, and drove with Wayne into the country to test machines. Returning Conquest would dine informally, in morning dress, with them; or else, from time to time he would invite them to a restaurant. By-and-by he took to organizing little dinners at his own house, ostensibly to cheer up Wayne, but really to see Miriam at his table.

In all this there was nothing remarkable, as between old friends, except the contrast with her bearing toward him during the past year. He had expected that when Norrie Ford went finally free she would fulfil her contract, and fulfil it well; but he had not expected this instalment of graciousness in advance. It set him to pondering, to looking in the mirror, to refining on that careful dressing which he had already made an art. After all, a man in the fifties was young as long as he looked young, and according as one took the point of view.

Except when Ford's affairs came directly under discussion he occupied, seemingly, a secondary place in their thoughts. Miriam rarely spoke of him at all, and if Conquest brought up his name more frequently it was because his professional interest in the numerous "nice points" of the case was becoming keen. He talked them over with her, partly because of his pleasure in the intelligence with which she grasped them, and partly because their intimacy deepened in proportion as the hope strengthened that Ford's innocence would be proved.

It was June before Miriam heard from South America. Two or three letters to Evie had already come, guardedly written, telling little more than the incidents of Ford's voyage and arrival. It was to Miriam he wrote what he actually had at heart.

"The great moment has come and gone," she read to Conquest. "I have seen Mr. Jarrott, and made a clean breast of everything. It was harder than I expected, though I expected it would be pretty hard. I think I felt sorrier for him than for myself, which is saying a good deal. He not only takes it to heart, but feels it as a cut to his pride. I can see that that thought is uppermost. What he feels is not so much the fact that *I* deceived him as that I deceived *him*. I can understand it, too. In a country where there is such a lot of this sort of thing, he has never been touched by it before. It has been a kind of boast that his men were always the genuine article. If one of them is called Smith, it is because he *is* a Smith, and not a Vere de Vere in hiding. But that isn't all. He took me into his family—into his very heart. He showed that, when I told him. He tried not to, but he couldn't help it. I tell you it hurt—*me*. I won't try to write about it. I'll tell you everything face to face, when I get up to the mark, if I ever do. Apparently my letters hadn't prepared him for the thing at all. He thought it was to be something to do with Evie, though he might have known I wouldn't have chucked up everything for that. The worst of it is, he's no good at seeing things all round. He can't take my point of view a bit. It is impossible to explain the fix I was put in, because he can see nothing but the one fact that I pulled the wool over his eyes—*his* eyes, that had never suffered sacrilege before. I sympathize with him in that, and yet I think he might try to see that there's something to be said on my side. He doesn't, and he never will—which only hurts me the more.

"As for Evie, he wouldn't let me mention her name. I didn't insist, because it was too painful—I mean, too painful to see how he took it. He said, in about ten words, that Evie had not been any more engaged than if she had given her word to a man of air, and that there was no reason why she should be spoken of. We left it there. I couldn't deny that, and it was no use saying any more. The only reply to him must be given by Evie herself. He is writing to her, and so am I. I wish you would help her to see that she must consider herself quite free, and that she isn't to undertake what she may not have the strength to carry out. I realize more and more that I was asking her to do the impossible."

It was an hour or two after reading this, when Conquest had gone away, that Evie herself—as dainty as spring, in flowered muslin and a Leghorn hat crowned with a wreath of roses—came fluttering in.

"I've had the queerest letter from Uncle Jarrott," she began, breathlessly. "The poor old dear—well, something must be the matter with him. I can't for the life of me imagine what Herbert can have told him, but he doesn't understand a bit."

Miriam locked her own letter in her desk, saying as she did so:

"How does he show it?—that he doesn't understand."

"Why, he simply talks wild—that's how he shows it. He says I am not to consider myself engaged to Herbert—that I was never engaged to him at all. I wonder what he calls it, if it isn't engaged, when I have a ring—and everything."

"It is rather mystifying." Miriam tried to smile. "I suppose he means that having given your word to Herbert Strange, you're not to consider yourself bound to Norrie Ford, unless you want to."

"Pff! I don't care anything about that. I never liked the name of Herbert—or Strange, either. I told you that before. All the same, I wish Uncle Jarrott would have a little sense."

"Suppose—I mean, just suppose, dear—he felt it his duty to forbid your engagement altogether. What would you do then?"

"It wouldn't be very nice of him, I must say. He was as pleased as Punch over it when I was down there. If he's so capricious, I don't see how he can blame me."

"Blame you, for what, dear?"

"For staying engaged—if it's all right."

"But if he thought it wasn't all right?"

"You do, don't you?"

Evie, who had been prancing about the room, turned sharply on Miriam, who was still at her desk.

"That isn't the question—"

"No, but it's *a* question. I presume you don't mind my asking it?"

"You may ask me anything, darling—of course. But this is your uncle Jarrott's affair, and yours. It wouldn't do for me—"

"Oh, that's so like you Miriam. You'd exasperate a saint—the way you won't give your opinion when you've got one. I wish I could ask Billy. He'd know. But of course I couldn't, when he thinks I'm still engaged to *him*."

"What do you want to ask him, Evie, dear?"

"Well, he's a lawyer. He could tell me all about what it's all about. I'm sure *I* don't know. I didn't think it was anything—and yet here's Uncle Jarrott writing as if it was something awful. He's written to Aunt Queenie, too. Of course I must stand by Herbert, whatever happens—if it isn't very bad; but you can see yourself that I don't want to be mixed up in a—a—in a scandal."

"It would hardly be a scandal, dear; but there would be some—some publicity about it."

"I don't mind publicity. I'm used to that, with my name in the paper every other day. It was in this morning. Did you see it?—the Gresley's dance. Only I do wish they would call me Evelyn, and not Evie. It sounds so familiar."

"I'm afraid they'd put more in about you than just that."

"Would they? What?" Her eyes danced already, in anticipation.

"I can't tell you exactly what; but it would be things you wouldn't like."

Evie twitched about the room, making little clicking sounds with her lips, as signs of meditation.

"Well, I mean to be true to him—a while longer," she said, at last, as if coming to a conclusion. "I'm not going to let Uncle Jarrott think I'm just a puppet to be jerked on a string. The idea! When he was as pleased as Punch about it himself. And Aunt Helen said she'd give me my trousseau. I suppose I sha'n't get that now. But there's the money you offered me for the pearl necklace. Only I'd much rather have the pearl—Well, I'll be true to him, do you see? We're leaving for Newport the day after to-morrow. They say there hasn't been such a brilliant summer for a long time as they expect this year. Thank goodness, there's something to take my mind off all this care and worry and responsiblity, otherwise I think I should pass away. But I shall show Uncle Jarrott that he can't do just as he likes with me, anyhow."

Evie and Miss Jarrott went to Newport, and it was the beginning of July before Miriam heard from Ford again. Once more she read to Conquest such portions of the letter as she thought he would find of interest.

"It is all over now," Ford wrote, "between Stephens and Jarrott and me. I'm out of the concern for good. It was something of a wrench, and I'm glad it is past. I didn't see the old man again. I wanted to thank him and say good-bye, but he dodged me. Perhaps it is just as well. Even if I were to meet him now, I shouldn't make the attempt again. I confess to feeling a little hurt, but I thoroughly understand him. He is one of those men—you meet them now and again—survivals from the old school—with a sense of rectitude so exact that they can only see in a straight line. It is all right. Don't think that I complain. It is almost as much for his sake as for my own that I wish he could have taken what I call a more comprehensive view of me. I know he suffers—and I shall never be able to tell him how sorry I am till we get into the kingdom of heaven. In fact, I can't explain anything to any one, except you, which must be an excuse for my long letters. I try to keep you posted in what I'm going through, so that you may convey as much or as little of it as you think fit to Evie. I can't tell her much, and I see from the little notes she writes me that she doesn't yet understand.

"The cat seems to be quite out of the bag in the office, though I haven't said a word to any one, and I know Mr. Jarrott wouldn't. Pride and sore feeling will keep him from ever speaking of me again, except when he can't help it. I don't mean to say that the men know exactly what it is, but they know enough to set them

guessing. They are jolly nice about it, too, even the fellows who were hardly decent to me in the old days. Little Green—the chap from Boston who succeeded me at Rosario; I must have told you about him—and his wife can't do enough for me, and I know they mean it."

There was a silence of some weeks before he wrote again.

"I shall not get away from here as soon as I expected, as my private affairs are not easily settled up. This city grows so fast that I have had a good part of my savings in real estate. I am getting rid of it by degrees, but it takes time to sell to advantage. I may say that I am doing very well, for which I am not sorry, as I shall need the money for my trial. I hope you don't mind my referring to it, because I look forward to it with something you might almost call glee. To get back where I started will be like waking from a bad dream. I can't believe that Justice will make the same mistake twice—and even if she does I would rather she had the chance. I am much encouraged by the last reports from Kilcup and Warren. I've long felt that it was Jacob Gramm who did for my poor uncle, though I didn't like to accuse him of it when the proofs seemed all the other way. He certainly had more reason to do the trick than I had, for my uncle had been a brute to him for thirty years, while he had only worried me for two. He wasn't half a bad old chap, either—old Gramm—and it was one of the mysteries of the place to me that he could have stood it so long. The only explanation I could find was that he had a kind of affection for the old man, such as a dog will sometimes have for a master who beats him, or a woman for a drunken husband. I believe the moment came when he simply found himself at the end of his tether of endurance—and he just did for him. His grief, when it was all over, was real enough. Nobody could doubt that. In fact, it was so evidently genuine that the theory I am putting forward now only came to me of late years. I think there is something in it, and I believe the further they go the more they will find to support it. Now that the old chap is dead I should have less scruple in following it up—especially if the old lady is gone too. She was a bit of a vixen, but the husband was a good old sort. I liked him."

Some weeks later he wrote:

"I wander about this place a good deal like a ghost in its old haunts. Everything here is so temporary, so changing—much more so than in New York—that one's footprints are very quickly washed away. Outside the office almost no one remembers me. It is curious to think that I was once so happy here—and so hopeful. There was always a kind of hell in my heart, but I kept it banked down, as we do the earth's internal fires, beneath a tolerably solid crust. Yesterday, finding myself at the Hipodromo, I stood for a while on the spot where I first saw Evie. It used to seem to me a bit of enchanted ground, but I feel now as if I ought to erect a gravestone there. Poor little Evie! How right you were about it all. It was madness on my part to think she could ever climb up my Calvary. My excuse is that I didn't imagine it was going to be so steep. I even hoped she would never see that there was a Calvary at all. Her notes are still pitifully ignorant of the real state of things.

"And speaking of gravestones, I went out the other day to the Recoleta Cemetery, and looked at the grave of my poor old friend, Monsieur Durand. Everything neat, and in good order. It gives me a peculiar satisfaction to see that the decorum he loved reigns where he 'sleeps.' I never knew his secret—except that rumor put him down for an unfrocked priest.

"I doubt if I shall get away from here till the beginning of October; but when I do, everything will be in trim for what I sometimes think of as my resurrection."

These letters, and others like them, Miriam shared conscientiously with Conquest. It was part of the loyalty she had vowed to him in her heart that she should keep nothing from him, except what was sanctified and sealed forever, as her own private history. In the impulse to give her life as a ransom for Norrie Ford's she was eager to do it without reserves, or repinings, or backward looks—without even a wish that it had been possible to make any other use of it. If she was not entirely successful in the last feat, she was fairly equal to the rest, so that in allowing himself to be misled Conquest could scarcely be charged with fatuity. With his combined advantages, personal and otherwise, it was not astonishing that a woman should be in love with him; and if that woman proved to be Miriam Strange, one could only say that the unexpected had happened, as it often does. If, in view of all the circumstances, he dressed better than ever, and gave his little dinners more frequently, while happiness toned down the sharpness of his handsome profile to a softer line, he had little in common with Malvolio.

And what he had began to drop away from him. Insensibly he came to see that the display of his legal knowledge, of his carefully chosen ties, of his splendid equipment in house, horses, and automobiles, had something of the major-domo's strut in parti-colored hose. The day came when he understood that the effort to charm her by the parade of these things was like the appeal to divine grace by means of grinding on a prayer-mill. It was a long step to take, both in thought and emotion, leading him to see love, marriage, women's hearts, and all kindred subjects, from a different point of view. Love in particular began to appear to him as more than the sum total of approbation bestowed on an object to be acquired. Though he was not prepared to give it a new definition, it was clear that the old one was no longer sufficient for his needs. The mere fact that this woman, whom he had vainly tempted with gifts—whom he was still hoping to capture by prowess—could come to him of her own accord, had a transforming effect on himself. If he ever got her—by purchase, conquest, or any other form of acquisition—he had expected to be proud; he had never dreamed of this curious happiness, that almost made him humble.

It was a new conception of life to think that there were things in it that might be given, but which could not be bought; as it was a new revelation of himself to perceive that there were treasures in his dry heart which had never before been drawn on. This discovery was made almost accidentally. He stumbled on it, as men have stumbled on Koh-i-noors and Cullinanes lying in the sand.

"What I really came to tell you," he said to her, on one occasion, as they strolled side by side in the Park, "is that I am going away to-morrow—to the West—to Omaha."

"Isn't that rather sudden?"

"Rather. I've thought for the last few days I might do it. The fact is, they've found Amalia Gramm."

She stopped with a sudden start of interrogation, moving on again at once. It was a hot September evening, at the hour when twilight merges into night. They had left Wayne on a favorite seat, and having finished their own walk northward, were returning to pick him up and take him home. It was just dark enough for the thin crescent of the harvest moon to be pendulous above the city, while a rim of lighted windows in high façades framed the tree-tops The peace of the quiet path in which they rambled seemed the more sylvan because of the clang and rumble of the streets, as a room will appear more secluded and secure when there is a storm outside.

"They've found her living with some nieces out there," he went on to explain. "She appears to have been half over the world since old Gramm died—home to Germany—back to America—to Denver—to Chicago—to Milwaukee—to the Lord knows where—and now she has fetched up in Omaha. She strikes me in the light of an unquiet spirit. It seems she has nephews and nieces all over the lot—and as she has the ten thousand dollars old Chris Ford left them—"

"Are they going to bring her here?"

"They can't—bedridden—paralyzed, or something. They've got to take her testimony on the spot. I want to be there when they do it. There are certain questions which it is most important to have asked. In a way, it is not my business; but I'm going to make it mine. I've mulled over the thing so long that I think I see the psychology of the whole drama."

"I can never thank you enough for the interest you've shown," she said, after a brief silence.

He gave his short, nervous laugh.

"Nor I you for giving me the chance to show it. That's where the kindness comes in. It's made a different world for me, and me a different man in it. If anybody had told me last winter that I should spend the whole summer in town working on a criminal case—"

"You shouldn't have done that. I wanted you to go away as usual."

"And leave you here?"

"I shouldn't have minded—as long as Mr. Wayne preferred to stay. It's so hard for him to get about, anywhere but in the place he's accustomed to. New York in summer isn't as bad as people made me think."

"I too have found that true. To me it has been a very happy time. But perhaps my reasons were different from yours."

She reflected a minute before uttering her next words, but decided to say them.

"I fancy our reasons were the same."

The low voice, the simplicity of the sentence, the meanings in it and behind it, made him tremble. It was then, perhaps, that he began to see most clearly the true nature of love, both as given and received.

"I don't think they can be," he ventured, hoping to draw her on to say something more; but she did not respond.

After all, he reflected, as they continued their walk more or less in silence, too many words would only spoil the minute's bliss. There was, too, a pleasure in standing afar off to view the promised land almost equal to that of marching into it—especially when, as now, he was given to understand that its milk and honey were awaiting him.

XXI

It was the middle of October when Evie wrote from Lenox to say she would come to town to meet Ford on his arrival, begging Miriam to give her shelter for a night or two. The Grants remaining abroad, Miss Jarrott had taken the house in Seventy-second Street for another winter, but as Evie would run up to New York alone she preferred for the minute to be Miriam's guest.

"The fact is, I'm worried to death," she wrote, confidentially "and you must help me to see daylight through this tangled mass of everybody saying different things. Aunt Queenie has gone completely back on Herbert, just because Uncle Jarrott has. That doesn't strike me as very loyal, I must say. I shouldn't think it right to desert anybody, unless I wanted to. I wouldn't do it because some one else told me to—not if he was my brother ten times over. I mean to be just as true to Herbert as I can Not that he makes it very easy for me,

because he has broken altogether with Uncle Jarrott—and that seems to me the maddest thing. I certainly sha'n't get my trousseau from Aunt Helen now. I don't see what we're all coming to. Everybody is so queer, and they keep hinting things they won't say out, as if there was some mystery. I do wish I could talk to Billy about it. Of course I can't—the way matters stand. And speaking of Billy, that rich Mr. Bird—you remember I told you about him last winter—has asked me to marry him. Just think! I forget how much he has a year, but it's something awful. Of course I told him I couldn't give him a definite answer yet—but that if he insisted on it I should have to make it No. He said he didn't insist—that he'd rather wait till I had time to make up my mind, if I didn't keep him dangling. I told him I wouldn't keep him doing anything whatever, and that if he dangled at all it would be entirely of his own accord. I think he liked my spirit, so he said he'd wait. We left it there, which was the wisest way—though I must say I didn't like his presuming on his money to think I would make a difference between him and the others. Money doesn't mean anything to me, though dear mamma hoped she would live to see me well established. She didn't, poor darling, but that's no reason why I shouldn't try to carry out her wishes. All the same, I mean to be true to Herbert just as long as possible; and so you may expect me on the twenty-ninth."

If there was much in this letter that Miriam found disturbing, it was not the thought that Evie might be false to Ford, or that Ford might suffer, which alarmed her most. There was something in her that cried out in fear before the possibility that Norrie Ford might be free again. Her strength having sprung so largely from the hope of restoring the plans she had marred, the destruction of the motive left her weak; but worse than that was the knowledge that, though she had tried to empty her heart completely of its cravings, only its surface had been drained. It was to get assurance rather than to give information that she read fragments of Evie's letter to Conquest, on the evening of his return from Omaha. He had come to give her the news of his success. That it was good news was evident in his face when he entered the room; and, almost afraid to hear it, she had broached the subject of her anxiety about Evie first.

"She's going to give him the sack; that's what *she's* going to give him," Conquest said, conclusively, while Miriam folded the dashingly scribbled sheets. "You needn't be worried about her in the least. Miss Evie knows her way about as cleverly as a homing bee. She'll do well for herself whatever else she may not do. *Come now*!"

"I'm not thinking of that so much as that she should do her duty."

"Duty! Pooh! That sort of little creature has no duty—the word doesn't apply to it. Evie is the most skilful mixture of irresponsible impulse and shrewd calculation you'll find in New York. She'll use both her gifts with perfect heartlessness, and yet in such a way that even her guardian angel won't know just where to find fault with her."

"But she must marry Mr. Ford—now."

He was too busy with his own side of the subject to notice that her assertion had the intensity of a cry. He had a man's lack of interest in another man's love-affairs while he was blissfully absorbed in his own.

"You might as well tell a swallow that it must migrate—now," he laughed. "Poor Ford will feel it, I've no doubt; but we shall make up to him for a good deal of it. We're going to pull him through."

For the instant her anxiety was diverted into another channel. "Does that mean that Amalia Gramm has told you anything?"

"She's told us everything. I thought she would. I don't feel at liberty to give you the details before they come out at the proper time and place; but there's no harm in saying that my analysis of the old woman's psychological state was not so very far wrong. There's no question about it any longer. We'll pull him through. And, by George, he's worth it!"

The concluding exclamation, uttered with so much sincerity, took her by surprise, transmuting the pressure about her heart into a mist of sudden tears. Tears came to her rarely, hardly, and seldom with relief. She was especially unwilling that Conquest should notice them now; but the attempt to dash them away only caused them to fall faster. She could see him watching her in a kind of sympathetic curiosity, slightly surprised in his turn at the unexpected emotion, and trying to divine its cause. Unable to bear his gaze any longer, she got up brusquely from her chair, retreating into the bay-window, where—the curtains being undrawn—she stood looking down on the sea of lights, as beings above the firmament might look down on stars. He waited a minute, and came near her only when he judged that he might do so discreetly.

"You're unnerved," he said, with tender kindliness. "That's why you're upset. You've had too much on your mind. You're too willing to take all the care on your own shoulders, and not let other people hustle for themselves."

She was pressing her handkerchief against her lips, so she made no reply. The moment seemed to him one at which he might go forward a little more boldly. All the circumstances warranted an advance from his position of reserve.

"You need me," he ventured to say, with that quiet assurance which in a lover means much. "I understand you as no one else does in the world."

Her brimming eyes gave him a look which was only pathetic, but which he took to be one of assent.

"I've always told you I could help you," he went on, with tranquil earnestness, "and I could. You've too many

burdens to carry alone—burdens that don't belong to you, but which, I know, you'll never lay down. Well, I'll share them. There's Wayne, now. He's too much for you, by yourself—I don't mean from the material point of view, but—the whole thing. It wears on you. It's bound to. Wayne is my friend just as much as yours. He's my responsibility—so long as you take it in that light. I've been thinking of him a lot lately—and I see how, in my house—could put him up—ideally."

Still pressing her handkerchief against her lips with her right hand, she put out her left in a gesture of deprecation. He understood it as one of encouragement, and went on.

"You must come and look at my house. You've never really seen it, and I think you'd like it. I think you'd like—everything I've got everything to make you happy; and if you'll only let me do it, you'll make me happy, too."

She felt able to speak at last. Her eyes were still brimming as she turned toward him, but brimming only as pools are when the rain is over.

"I want you to be happy. You're so good ... and kind ... and you've done so much for me ... you deserve it."

She turned away from him again. With her arm on the woodwork of the window, she rested her forehead rather wearily on her hand. He understood so little of what was passing within her that she found it a relief to suspend for the minute her comedy of spontaneous happiness, letting her heart ache unrestrainedly. Her left hand hanging limp and free, she made no effort to withdraw it when she felt him clasp it in his own. Since she had subscribed to the treaty months ago, since she had insisted on doing it rightly or wrongly, it made little difference when and how she carried the conditions out. So they stood hand in hand together, tacitly, but, as each knew, quite effectually, plighted. In her silence, her resignation, her evident consent he read the proof of that love which, to his mind, no longer needed words.

Late that night, after he had gone away, she wrote to Evie, beseeching her to be true to Ford. The letter was so passionate, so little like herself, that she was afraid of destroying it if she waited till morning, so she posted it without delay. The answer came within forty-eight hours, in the shape of a telegram from Evie. She was coming to town at once, though it wanted still three or four days to Ford's arrival.

It was a white little Evie, with drawn face, who threw herself into Miriam's arms at the station, clutching at her with a convulsive sob.

"Miriam, I can't do it," she whispered, in a kind of terror. "They say he's going to be put in—*jail*!"

Her voice rose on the last word, so that one or two people paused in their rush past to glance at the pitifully tragic little face.

"Hush, darling," Miriam whispered back. "You'll tell me about it as we go home."

But in the motor Evie could only cry, clinging to Miriam as she used to do in troubled moments in childhood. Arrived at the apartment, Wayne had to be faced with some measure of self-control, and then came dinner. At table Evie, outwardly mistress of herself by this time, talked feverish nonsense about their common friends in Lenox, after which she made an excuse for retiring early. It was only in the bedroom, when they were secure from interruption that Miriam heard what Evie had to tell. She was tearless now, and rather indignant.

"I've had the strangest letter from Herbert," she declared excitedly, as soon as Miriam entered the room. "I couldn't have believed he wrote it in his senses if Aunt Queenie hadn't heard the Same thing from Uncle Jarrott. He says he's got to go to—*jail*."

There was the same rising inflexion on the last word, suggestive of a shriek of horror, that Miriam had noticed in the station. In her white peignoir, her golden hair streaming over her shoulders, and her hands flung wide apart with an appealing dramatic gesture, Evie was not unlike some vision of a youthful Christian martyr, in spite of the hair-brush in her hand. Miriam sat down sidewise on the edge of the couch, looking up at the child in pity. She felt that it was useless to let her remain in darkness any longer.

"Of course he has to," she said, trying to make her tone as matter of fact as might be. "Didn't you know it?"

"Know it! Did *you*?"

Evie stepped forward, bending over Miriam as if she meant to strike her.

"I knew it in a general way, darling. I suppose, when he gives himself to the police—"

"The police!" Evie screamed. "Am I to be engaged to a man who—gives himself up to the police?"

"It will only be for a little while, dear—"

"I don't care whether it's for a little while or foreverit can't *be*. What is he thinking of? What are *you* thinking of? Don't you *see*? How can I face the world—with all my invitations—when the man I'm engaged to is—in jail?"

Evie's hands flew up in a still more eloquent gesture, while the blue eyes, usually so soft and veiled, were wide with flaming interrogation.

"I knew that—in some ways—it might be hard for you—"

Evie laughed, a little silvery mirthless ripple of scorn.

"I must say, Miriam, you choose your words skilfully. But you're wrong, do you see? There's no way in which it can be hard for me, because there's no way in which it's possible."

"Oh yes, there is, dear—if you love him."

"That has nothing to do with it. Of course I love him. Haven't I said so? But that doesn't make any difference. Can't I love him without being engaged to—to—to a man who has to go to jail?"

"Certainly; but you can't love him if you don't feel that you must—that you simply *must*—stand by his side."

"There you go again, Miriam, with your queer ideas. It's exactly what any one would expect you to say."

"I hope so."

"Oh, you needn't hope so, because they would—any one who knew you. But I have to do what's right. I know what I feel in my conscience—and I have to follow it. And besides, I couldn't—I couldn't"—her voice began to rise again—"I couldn't face it—I couldn't bear it—not if I loved him a great deal better than I do."

"That's something you must think about very seriously, dear—"

"I don't have to!" she cried, with a stamp of her foot. "I know it already. It wouldn't make any difference if I thought about it a thousand years. I couldn't be engaged to a man who was in jail, not if I worshipped the ground he trod on."

"But when he's innocent, darling—"

"It's jail, just the same. I can't be engaged to people just because they're innocent. It isn't right to expect it of me. And, anyhow," she added, passionately, "I can't do it. It would kill me. I should never lift my head again. I can't—I can't. It's hateful of any one to say I ought to. I'm surprised at you, Miriam, when you know how dear mamma would have forbidden it. It's all very well for you to give advice, when you have no family—and no one to think about—and hardly any invitations— Well, I can't, and there's an end of it. If that's your idea of love, then, I must say, my conception is a little different. I've always had high ideals, and I feel obliged to hold to them, however you may condemn me."

She ended with a catch in her breath something like a sob.

"But I'm not condemning you, Evie dear. If you feel what you say, there's nothing for it but to see Mr. Ford and tell him so."

At this suggestion Evie sobered. She was a long time silent before she observed, in a voice that had become suddenly calm and significantly casual, "That's easy for you to say."

"If you speak to him as decidedly as to me, I should think it would be easy for you to do."

"And still easier for you."

Evie spoke in that tone of unintentional intention which is most pointed. It was not lost on Miriam, who recoiled from the mere thought. It seemed to her better to ignore the hint, but Evie, with feverish eagerness, refused to let it pass.

"Did you hear what I said?" she persisted, sharply.

"I heard it, dear; but it didn't seem to me to mean anything."

"That would depend on whether you heard it only with the ear or in the heart."

"You know that everything that has to do with you is in my heart."

"Well, then?"

"But if you mean by that that I should tell Mr. Ford you're not going to marry him—why, it's out of the question."

"Then who's to tell him? *I* can't. It's not to be expected."

"But, darling, you must. This is awful."

Miriam got up and went toward her, but Evie, who was nervously brushing her hair, edged away.

"Of course it's awful, but I don't see the use of making it worse than it need be. He'll feel it a great deal more if he sees me, and so shall I."

"And what shall I feel?" Miriam spoke unguardedly, but Evie was too preoccupied to notice the bitterness of the tone.

"I don't see why you should feel anything at all. It's nothing to you—or very little. It wouldn't be your fault; not any more than it's the postman's if he has to bring you a letter with bad news."

Miriam went back to her place on the edge of the couch, where with her forehead bowed for a minute on her hand she sat reflecting. An overwhelming desire for confidence, for sympathy perhaps, for the clearing up of mysteries in any case, was impelling her to tell Evie all that had ever happened between Ford and herself. It had been necessary to maintain so many reserves that possibly this new light would enable Evie to see her own duty more straightforwardly.

"Darling," she began, "I want to tell you something—"

But before she could proceed Evie flung the hair-brush on the floor and uttered a great swelling sob. With her hands hanging at her sidess and her golden head thrown back, she wept with the abandonment of a child, while suggesting the seraphic suffering of a grieving angel by some old master.

In an instant Miriam had her in her arms. It was the appeal she had never been able to resist.

"There, there, my pet," she said, soothingly, drawing her to the couch. "Come to Miriam, who loves you. There, there."

Evie clung to her piteously, with flower-like face tilted outward and upward for the greater convenience of weeping.

"Oh, I'm so lonely!" she sobbed. "I'm so lonely ... I I wish dear mamma ... hadn't died."

Miriam pressed her the more closely.

"I'm so lonely ... and everything's so strange ... and I don't know what to do ... and he's going to be put in jail ... and you're so unkind to me.... Oh, dear! ... I can't tell him ... I can't tell him ... I can't ... I can't ..."

She pillowed her head on Miriam's shoulder, like a child that would force a caress from the hand that has just been striking it. The action filled Miriam with that kind of self-reproach which the weak creature inspires so easily in the strong. In spite of her knowledge to the contrary, she had the feeling of having acted selfishly.

"No, darling," she said, at last, as Evie's sobs subdued into convulsive tremblings, "you needn't tell him. I'll see him. He'll understand how hard it's been for you. It's been hard for every one—and especially for you, darling. I'll do my best. You know I will. And I'm sure he'll understand. There, there," she comforted, as Evie's tears broke out afresh. "Have your cry out, dear. It will do you good. There, there."

So Evie went back next day to Lenox, while Miriam waited for Ford.

XXII

A few days later she read his name, in a morning paper, in the *Asiatic's* list of passengers the steamer having arrived at quarantine the night before: Mr. John Norrie Ford. Though flung carelessly into a paragraph printed in small type, it seemed to blaze in fire on the page! It was as if all America must rise at it. As she looked from the window it was with something like surprise that she saw the stream of traffic roaring onward, heedless of the fact that this dread name was being hawked in the streets and sold at the news-stands. She sent out for the evening papers that appear at midday, being relieved and astonished to find that as yet it had created no sensation.

She was not deceived by his ease of manner when he appeared at the apartment in the afternoon. Though he carried his head loftily, and smiled with his habitual air of confidence, she could see that the deep waters of the proud had gone over his soul. Their ebb had streaked his hair and beard with white, and deepened the wrinkles that meant concentrated will into the furrows that come of suffering. She was more or less prepared for that. It was the outward manifestation of what she had read between the lines of the letters he had written her. As he crossed the room, with hand outstretched, her one conscious thought was of the chance to be a woman and a helpmeet Evie had flung away. She had noticed how, on the very threshold, he had glanced twice about the room, expecting to find her there.

They did not speak of her at once. They talked of commonplace introductory things—the voyage, the arrival, the hotel at which he was staying—anything that would help her, and perhaps him, to control the preliminary nervousness. There was no sign of it, however, on his part, while she felt her own spirit rising, as it always did, to meet emergencies. Presently she mentioned her fears regarding his use of his true name.

"No; it isn't dangerous," he assured her, "because I'm out of danger now. Thank the Lord, that's all over. I don't have to live with a great hulking terror behind me any longer. I'm a man like any other. You can't imagine what it means to be yourself, and not to care who knows it. I'm afraid I parade my name just like a boy with a new watch, who wants to tell every one the time. So far no one has paid any particular attention; but I dare say that will come. Is Evie here?"

"She's not here—to-day."

"Why not?" he asked, sharply. "She said she would be. She said she'd come to town—"

"She did come to town, but she thought she'd better not—stay."

"Not stay? Why shouldn't she stay? Is anything up? You don't mean that Miss Jarrott—?"

"No; Miss Jarrott had nothing to do with it. I know her brother has written to her, in the way you must be prepared for. But she couldn't have kept Evie from waiting for you, if Evie herself—"

"Had wanted to," he finished, as she seemed to hesitate at the words.

Since she said nothing to modify this assertion, she hoped he would comprehend its gravity. Indeed, he seemed to be trying to attenuate that when he spoke next.

"I suppose she had engagements—or something."

"She did have engagements—but she could have put them off."

"Only she didn't care to. I see."

She allowed him time to accept this fact before going on.

"Her return to Lenox," she said then, "wasn't because of her engagements."

"Then it must have been because of me. Didn't she want to see me?"

"She didn't want to tell you what she felt she would have to say."

"Oh! So that was it."

He continued to sit looking at her with an expression of interrogation, though it was evident from his eyes that his questions had been answered. They sat in the same relative positions as on the night of their last long talk together, he in his big arm-chair, she in her low one. It struck her as strange—while he stared at her with that gaze of inquiry from which the inquiry was gone—that she, who meant so little to his inner life, should be called on again to live through with him minutes that must forever remain memorable in his existence.

"Poor little thing! So she funked telling me."

The comment was made musingly, to himself, but she took it as if addressed to her.

"She wasn't equal to it."

"But you are. You're equal to anything. Aren't you?" He smiled with that peculiar twisted smile which she had noticed at other times, when he was concealing pain.

"One is generally equal to what one has to do. All the same," she added, with an impulse she could not repress, "I'm sorry to be always associated in your mind with things that must be hard for you."

"You're associated in my mind with everything that's high and noble. That's the only memory I shall ever have of you. You've been with me through some of the dark spots of my life; but if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have found the way."

"Thank you. I'm glad you can say that. I should be even more sorry than I am to give you this news to-day, if it were not that perhaps I can explain things a little better than Evie could."

"I don't imagine that they require much explanation. I've seen from Evie's letters that—"

"That she was afraid of—the situation. She hasn't changed toward you."

"Do you mean by that that she still—cares anything about me?"

"She says she does."

"But you don't believe her."

"I'm not entitled to an opinion. It's something you and she must work out together. All I can do is to tell you what may give you a little hope."

She watched for the brightening effect of these words upon him, but he sat looking absently at the floor, as if he had not heard them.

"Evie is afraid," she continued, "but I think it's only fair to remember that the circumstances might well frighten any young girl of her sort."

He showed that he followed her by nodding assent, though he neither lifted his head nor spoke.

"She wanted me to tell you that while the—the trial—and other things—are going on, she couldn't be

engaged to you—I'm using her own expression, but she didn't say that, when it was all over and you were free, she wouldn't marry you. I noticed that."

He looked up quickly.

"I'm not sure that I catch your drift."

"I mean that when it's all over, and everything has ended as you hope it will, it may be quite possible for you to win her back."

He stared at her, with an incredulous lifting of the eyebrows

"Would you advise me to try?"

"It isn't a matter I could give advice about. I'm showing you what might be possible, but—"

"No, no. That sort of thing doesn't work. There was just a chance that Evie might have stuck to me spontaneously but since she didn't—"

"Since she didn't—what?"

"She was quite right not to. I admit that. It's in the order of things. She followed her instinct rather than her heart—I'm ready to believe that—but there are times in life when instinct is a pretty good guide."

"Am I to understand that you're not—hurt?—or disappointed? Because in that case—"

"I don't know whether I am or not. That's frank. I'm feeling so many things all at once that I can hardly distinguish one emotion from another, or tell which is strongest. I only know—it's become quite plain to me—that a little creature like Evie couldn't find a happy home in my life, any more than a humming-bird, as you once called her, could make its nest among crags."

"Do you mean by that," she asked, slowly, "that you're—definitely—letting her go?"

"I mean that, Evie being what she is, and I being what life has made me—Isn't it perfectly evident? Can you fancy us tied together—now?"

"I never could fancy it. I haven't concealed that from you at any time. But since you loved her, and she loved you—"

"That was true enough—in its way. In its way, it's still true. Evie still loves the man I was, perhaps, and the man I was loves her. The difference is that the man I was isn't sitting here in front of you."

"One changes with years, of course. I didn't suppose one could change in a few months, like that."

"One changes with experience—above all, with that kind of experience which people generally call—suffering. That's the great Alchemist; and he often transmutes our silver into gold. In my case, Evie was silver; but I've found there's something else that stands for—"

"So that," she interposed, quickly, "you're not sorry that Evie—?"

He got up, restlessly, and stood with his back to the empty fireplace.

"It isn't a case for sorrow," he replied, after a minute's thinking, "as it isn't one for joy. It's one purely for acceptance. When I first knew Evie I was still something of a kid. It was so all the more because the kid element in me had never had full play. I was arrogant, and cock-sure and certain of my ability to manipulate the world to suit myself. That was all Evie saw, and she liked it. In as far as she had it in her to fall in love with anything, she fell in love with it."

He took a turn or two across the room, coming back to his stand on the hearth-rug.

"I've travelled far since then," he continued; "I've *had* to travel far. Evie hasn't been able to come with me; and that's all there is to the story. It isn't her fault; because when I asked her, I had no intention of taking this particular way."

"It was I who drove you into that," she said, with a hint of remorse.

"Yes—you—and conscience—and whatever else I honor most. I give you the credit first of all, because, if it hadn't been for you, I shouldn't have had the moral energy to assert my true self against the false one. Isn't it curious that, after having made me Herbert Strange, it should be you who turned me into Norrie Ford again? It means that you exercise supreme power over me—a kind of creative power. You can make of me what you care to. It's no wonder that I've come to see——" He paused, in doubt as to how to express himself, while her eyes were fixed on him in troubled questioning. "It's no wonder," he went on again, "that I've come to see everything in a truer light—Evie as well as all the rest of it."

With a renewed impulse to move about, he strode toward the bay-window, where he stood for a few seconds, looking out and trying to co-ordinate his thoughts. Wheeling round again, he drew up a small chair close to hers, seating himself sidewise, with his arm resting on the back. He looked like a man anxious to explain himself.

"You're blaming me, I think, because I don't take Evie's defection more to heart. Isn't that so?"

"I'm not blaming you. I may be a little surprised at it."

"You wouldn't be surprised at it, if you knew all I've been through. It's difficult to explain to you—"

"There's no reason why you should try."

"But I want to try. I want you to know. You see," he pursued, speaking slowly, as if searching for the right words—"you see, it's largely a question of progress—of growth. Trouble has two stages. In the first, you think it hard luck that you should have to meet it. In the second, you see that, having met it, and gone through it, you come out into a region of big experience, where everything is larger and nobler than you thought it was before. Now, you'd probably think me blatant if I said that I feel myself emerging into—*that*."

"No, I shouldn't. As a matter of fact, I know you're doing it."

"Well, then, having got there—out into that new kind of world"—he sketched the vision with one of his Latin gestures—"I discover that—for one reason or another—poor little Evie has stayed on the far side of it. She couldn't pass the first gate with me, or the second, or the third, to say nothing of those I have still to go through. You know I'm not criticising, or finding fault with her, don't you?"

She assured him of that.

"And yet, I must go on, you see. There's no waiting or turning back for me, any more than for a dying man. No matter who goes or who stays, I must press forward. If Evie can't make the journey with me, I can only feel relieved that she's able to slip out of it—but I must still go on. I can't look back; I can't even be sorry—because I'm coming into the new, big land. You see what I mean?"

She signified again that she followed him.

"But the finding of a new land doesn't take anything from the old one. It only enlarges the world. Europe didn't become different because they discovered America. The only change was in their getting to know a country where the mountains were higher, and the rivers broader, and the sunshine brighter, and where there was a chance for the race to expand. Evie remains what she was. The only difference is that my eyes have been opened to—a new ideal."

It was impossible for her not to guess at what he meant. Independently of words, his earnest eyes told their tale, while he bent toward her like a man not quite able to restrain himself. In the ensuing seconds of silence she had time to be aware of three distinct phases of emotion within her consciousness, following each other so rapidly as to seem simultaneous. A throb of reckless joy in the perception that he loved her was succeeded by the knowledge that loyalty to Conquest must make rejoicing vain, while it flashed on her that, having duped herself once in regard to him, she must not risk the humiliating experience a second time. It was this last reflection that prevailed, keeping her still and unresponsive. After all, his new ideal might be something—or some one—quite different from what her fond imagining was so ready to believe.

"I suppose," she said, vaguely, for the sake of saying something, "that trial is the first essential to maturity. We need it for our ripening, as the flowers and fruit need wind and rain."

"And there are things in life," he returned, quickly, "that no immature creature can see. That's the point I want you to notice. It explains me. In a way, it's an excuse for me."

"I don't need excuses for you," she hastened to say, "any more than I require to have anything explained."

"No; of course not. You don't care anything about it. It's only I who do. But I care so much that I want you to understand why it was that—that—I didn't care before."

She felt the prompting to stop him, to silence him, but once more she held herself back. There was still a possibility that she was mistaking him, and her pride was on its guard.

"It was because I didn't know any better," he burst out, in naïve self-reproach. "It was because I couldn't recognize the high, the fine thing when I saw it. I've had that experience in other ways, and with just the same result. It was like that when I first began to hear good music. I couldn't make it out—it was nothing but a crash of sounds. I preferred the ditties and dances of a musical comedy; and it was only by degrees that I began to find them flat. Then my ear caught something of the wonderful things in the symphonies that used to bore me. You see, I'm slow—I'm stupid—"

"Not at all," she smiled. "It's quite a common experience."

"But I'm like that all through, with everything. I've been like that—with women. I used to be attracted by quite an ordinary sort. It's taken me years—all these years, till I'm thirty-three—to see that there's a perfect expression of the human type, just as there's a perfect expression of any kind of art. And I've found it."

He bent farther forward, nearer to her. There was a light in his face that seemed to her to denote enthusiasm quite as much as love. To her wider experience in emotions this discovery of himself, which was involved in his discovery of her, was rather youthful, provoking a faint smile.

"You're to be congratulated, then," she said, with an air of distant friendliness. "It isn't every one who's so fortunate."

"That's true. There's only one man in the world who's more fortunate than I. That's Conquest."

"Oh!"

In the brusqueness with which she started she pushed her chair slightly back from him. It was to conceal her agitation that she rose, steadying herself on the back of the chair in which she had been seated.

"Conquest saw what I didn't—till it was too late."

He was on his feet now, facing her, with the chair between them.

"I wish you wouldn't say any more," she begged, though without overemphasis of pleading. She was anxious, for her own sake as well as for his, to keep to the tone of the colloquial.

"I don't see why I shouldn't. I'm not going to say anything to shock you. I know you're going to marry Conquest. You told me so before I went away, and——"

"I should like to remind you that Mr. Conquest is the best friend you have. When you hear what he's done for you, you will see that you owe him more than you do any man in the world."

"I know that. I'm the last to forget it. But it can't do any harm to tell the woman—who's going to be his wife—that I owe her even more than I do him."

"It can't do any harm, perhaps; but when I ask you not to——"

"I can't obey you. I shouldn't be a man if I went through life without some expression of my—gratitude; and now's the only time to make it. There are things which I wasn't free to say before, because I was bound to Evie—and which it will soon be too late for you to listen to, because you'll be bound to him. You're not bound to him yet——"

"I *am* bound to him," she said, in a tone in which there were all the regrets he had no reason to divine. "I don't know what you think of saying; but whatever it is, I implore you not to say it."

"It's precisely because you don't know that I feel the necessity of telling you. It's something I owe you. It's like a debt. It isn't as if we were just any man and any woman. We're a man and a woman in a very special relation to each other. No matter what happens, nothing can change that. And it isn't as if we were going to live in the same world, in the same way. You will be Conquest's wife—a great lady in New York. I shall be—well, Heaven only knows what I shall be, but nothing that's likely to cross your path again. All the same, it won't hurt you, it wouldn't hurt any woman, however good, to hear what I'm going to tell you. It wouldn't hurt any man—not even Conquest—that it should be said to his wife—in the way that I shall say it. If it could, I wouldn't——"

"Wait a minute," she said, suddenly. "Let me ask you something." She took a step toward him, though her hand rested still on the back of the chair. "If I know it already," she continued, looking him in the eyes, "there would be no necessity for you to speak?"

He took the time to consider this in all its bearings.

"I'd rather tell you in my own words," he said, at last; "but if you assure me that you know, I shall be satisfied."

She took a step nearer to him still. Only the tips of her fingers now rested on the back of the chair, to which she held, as to a bulwark. Before she spoke she glanced round the room, as though afraid lest the doors and walls might mistake her words for a confession.

"Then I do know," she said, quietly.

XXIII

"The old lady was willing enough to talk," Conquest assured Ford, in his narrative of the taking of Amalia Gramm's testimony. "There's nothing more loquacious than remorse. I figured on that before going out to Omaha."

"But if she had no hand in the crime, I don't see where the remorse comes in."

"It comes in vicariously. She feels it for Jacob, since Jacob didn't live to feel it for himself. It involves a subtle element of wifely devotion which I guess you're too young, or too inexperienced, to understand. She was glad old Jacob was gone, so that she could make his confession with impunity. She was willing to make any atonement within *her* power, since it was too late to call *him* to account."

"Isn't that a bit far-fetched?"

"Possibly—except to a priest, or a lawyer, or a woman herself. It isn't often that a woman's heroism works in

a straight line, like a soldier's, or a fireman's. It generally pops at you round some queer corner, where it takes you by surprise. Before leaving Omaha I'd come to see that Amalia Gramm was by no means the least valiant of her sex."

Conquest's smoking-room, with its space and height, its deep leather arm-chairs, its shaded lamps, its cheerful fire, suggested a club rather than a private dwelling, and invited the most taciturn guest to confidence. Ford stretched himself before the blaze with an enjoyment rendered keener by the thought that it might be long before he had occasion to don a dinner-jacket again, or taste such a good Havana. Though it was only the evening of his arrival, he was eager to give himself up. Now that he had "squared himself," as he expressed it, with Miriam Strange, he felt he had put the last touch to his preparations. Kilcup and Warren were holding him back for a day or two, but his own promptings were for haste.

"I admit," Conquest continued to explain, as he fidgeted about the room, moving a chair here, or an ash-tray there, with the fussiness of an old bachelor of housekeeping tastes—"I admit that I thought the old woman was trying it on at first. But I came to the conclusion that she had told a true story from the start. When she gave her evidence at your trial she thought you were—the man."

"There's nothing surprising in that. They almost made me think so, too."

"It did look fishy, my friend. You won't mind my saying that much. Clearer heads than your jury of village store-keepers and Adirondack farmers might have given the same verdict. But old lady Gramm's responsibility hadn't begun then. It was a matter of two or three years before she came to see—as women do see things about the men they live with—that the hand which did the job was Jacob's. By that time you had disappeared into space, and she didn't feel bound to give the old chap away. She says she would have done it if it could have saved you; but since you had saved yourself, she confined her attentions to shielding Jacob. You may credit as much or as little of that as you please; but I believe the bulk of it. In any case, since it does the trick for us we have no reason to complain. Come now!"

"I'm not going to complain of anything. It's been a rum experience all through, but I can't say that, in certain aspects, I haven't enjoyed it. I *have* enjoyed it. If it weren't for the necessity of deceiving people who are decent to you, I'd go through it all again."

"That's game," Conquest said, approvingly, as he worked round to the hearth-rug, where he stood cutting the end of a cigar, with Ford's long figure stretched out obliquely before him.

"I would," Ford assured him. "I'd go through it all again, like a shot. It's been a lark from—I won't say from start to finish—but certainly from the minute—let me see just when!--certainly from the minute when Miss Strange beckoned to me, over old Wayne's shoulder."

An odd look came by degrees into Conquest's face—the look of pitying amusement with which one listens to queer things said by some one in delirium. He kept the cutter fixed in the end of the cigar, too much astonished to complete his task.

"Since Miss Strange did—*what*?"

Ford was too deeply absorbed in his own meditations to notice the tone.

"I mean, since she pulled me through."

Conquest's face broke into a broad smile.

"Are you dreaming, old chap? Or have you 'got 'em again'?"

"I'm going back in the story," Ford explained, with a hint of impatience. "I'm talking about the night when Miss Strange saved me."

"Miss Strange saved you? How?"

Ford raised himself slowly in his chair, his long legs stretched out straight before him, and his body bent stiffly forward, as he stared up at Conquest, in puzzled interrogation.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, incredulously, "that she hasn't told you—*that*?"

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me yourself. I'll be hanged if I know what you're talking about."

There was suppressed irritation in the way in which he tore off the end of the cigar and struck a match. Ford let himself sink back into the chair again.

"So she never told you! By George, that's like her! It's just what I might have expected."

"Look here," Conquest said, sharply, "did you know Miss Strange before you came up here from South America?" He stood with his cigar unlighted, for he had let the match burn down to his fingers before attempting to apply it. "Was your taking the name of Strange," he demanded with sudden inspiration, "merely an accident, as I've supposed it was—or had it anything to do with her?"

"It wasn't an accident, and it did have something to do with her."

"Just so! And you kept it dark!"

Something in Conquest's intonation caused Ford to look up. He saw a man with face suddenly growing gray, as though a light had gone out of it. He was disturbed only to the point of feeling that he had spoken tactlessly, and proceeded to repair the error.

"I kept it dark for obvious reasons. If Miss Strange didn't tell you about it, it's because she isn't the kind of person to talk of an incident in which her own part was so noble. I'll give you the whole story now."

"I should be obliged to you," Conquest said, dryly.

He sat down on the very edge of one of the big arm-chairs, leaning forward, and fingering his still unlighted cigar nervously, as he watched Ford puff out successive rings of smoke before beginning. He was less on his guard to screen the intenseness with which he listened, because Ford spoke at first in a dreamy way, without looking in his direction.

With more insight into the circumstances surrounding him Ford would have told his tale with greater reticence. As it was he spoke with enthusiasm, an enthusiasm born of an honest desire that Conquest should see the woman he was about to marry in the full beauty of her character. In regard to this he himself had made the discovery so slowly and so recently that he was animated by something like a convert's zeal. Beginning his narrative quietly, in a reminiscent vein, with intervals in which he lapsed altogether into meditation, he was presently fired with all the animation in a story-teller when he perceives he is holding his hearer spellbound. As a matter of fact, he was moved not so much by the desire of convincing Conquest of Miriam Strange's nobility, as by the impulse to do her justice, once in his life at least, in language of his own.

It was a naïve bit of eloquence, of which no detail was lost on the experienced man of the world, who sat twirling his cigar with nervous fingers, his eyes growing keener in proportion as his face became more gray. It was part of his professional acquirement to be able to draw his deductions from some snatch of human drama as he listened to its unfolding. His quickness and accuracy of judgment had, indeed, been a large element in his success; so that the habit of years enabled him to preserve a certain calmness of comprehension now. It lost nothing in being a studied calmness, since the forcing of his faculties within restraint concentrated their acumen.

Ford concluded with what for him was an almost lyric outburst.

"By George! Conquest, I didn't know there were such women in the world. She's been a revelation to me—as art and religion are revelations to other people. She came to me as the angel came to Peter in the prison; but, like Peter, I didn't know it was an angel. There's a sort of glory about her—a glory which it takes a higher sense than any I've got to see and understand. After all she's done for me—after all this time—I'm only now beginning to get glimpses of it; but it's merely as we get glimpses of an infinite beyond, because we see the stars. She's a mystery to me, in the same way that genius is a mystery, or holiness. I didn't appreciate her because I hadn't the soul, and yet it's in seeing that I hadn't the soul that I begin to get it. That's curious, isn't it? She's like some heavenly spirit that's passed by me, and touched me into newness of life."

His ardor was so sincere, his hymn of praise so spontaneous that he expected some sort of echo back. It seemed to him that even if Conquest did not join in this chant in honor of the woman who presumably loved him, whom more presumably still he loved, it would be but natural for him to applaud it. Ford knew that if any one else had sung of Miriam Strange as he had just been singing, he would have leaped to his feet and wrung the man's hand till it ached. It surprised him, therefore, it disappointed him, that Conquest should sit unmoved, unless the spark-like twinkle of his little eyes could be taken as emotion.

It was a relief to Conquest to get up, scratch another match, and light his cigar at last, turning his back so that it should not be seen that his fingers trembled. When he was sure of himself he faced about again, taking his seat.

"It's the most amazing story I ever heard," was his only comment, in response to Ford's look of expectation.

"I hoped it might strike you as something more than—amazing," Ford ventured, after a minute's waiting for a more appreciative word.

"Perhaps it will when I get my breath. You must give me time for that. Do you actually tell me that she kept you in her studio for weeks——?"

"Three weeks and four days, to be exact."

"And that she furnished you with food and clothing——?"

"And money—but I paid that back."

"And got you away in that ingenious fashion——?"

"Just as I've told you."

"Amazing! Simply amazing! And," he added, with some bitterness, "you came back here—and you and she together—took us all in."

Ford drew his cigar from his lips, and, turning in his chair, faced Conquest in an attitude and with a look which could not be misinterpreted.

"I came back here, and took you all in—if you like. Miss Strange had nothing to do with it. She didn't even expect me."

The last sentence gave Conquest the opening he was looking for, but now that he had it, he hesitated to make use of it. In his memory were the very words Miriam Strange had stammered out to him in the sort of confession no woman ever makes willingly: "Things happened ... such as don't generally happen ... and even if he never comes ... I'd rather go on waiting for him ... uselessly." It was all growing clear to him, and yet not so clear but that there was time even now to let the matter drop into the limbo of things it is best not to know too much about. It was against his better judgment, then—his better judgment as a barrister-at-law—that he found himself saying:

"She didn't expect you at that day and date, perhaps: but she probably looked for you some time."

"Possibly; but if so, I know little or nothing about it."

The reply, delivered with a certain dignified force of intention, recalled Conquest to a sense of his own interests. He had too often counselled his clients to let sleeping dogs lie, not to be aware of the advantage of doing it himself; and so, restraining his jealous curiosity, he turned the conversation back to the evidence of Amalia Gramm.

During the next half-hour he manifested that talent—partly native and partly born of practice—which he had often commended in himself, of talking about one thing and thinking of another. His exposition of the line to be adopted in Ford's defence was perfectly lucid, when all the while he was saying to himself that this was the man whom Miriam Strange had waited for through eight romantic years.

The fact leaped at him, but it was part of his profession not to be afraid of facts. If they possessed adverse qualities one recognized them boldly, in the practise of law, chiefly with a view of circumventing them. The matter presented itself first of all, not as one involving emotional or moral issues, but as an annoying arrangement of circumstances which might cheat him out of what he had honestly acquired. He had no intention of being cheated by any one whatever; and as he made a rapid summary of the points of the case he saw that the balance of probabilities was in his favor. It was to make that clear to Ford that he led the conversation back again to the subject of his adventures, tempting him to repeat at least a portion of his hymn of praise. By the time he had finished it Conquest was able to resume the friendly, confidential tone with which they had begun the evening.

"It's very satisfactory to me, old man," he said, between quiet puffs at his cigar, "to know that you think so highly of Miss Strange, because—I don't know whether you have heard it—she and I are to be married before long."

He looked to see Ford disconcerted by this announcement and was surprised to see him take it coolly.

"Yes; I knew that. I've meant to congratulate you when the time came. I should say it had come now."

There was a candor about him that Conquest could scarcely discredit, though he was unwilling to trust it too far.

"Thanks, old man. I scarcely expected you to be so well posted. May I ask how—?"

"Oh, I've known it a long time. Miss Strange told me before I went to South America last spring."

This evidence of a confidential relation between the two gave him a second shock, but he postponed its consideration, contenting himself for the moment with making it plain to Ford that "Hands off!" must be the first rule of the game. His next move was meant to carry the play into the opponent's quarters.

"As a matter of fact, I've never congratulated *you*," he said, with apparent tranquillity. "I've known about you and Evie for some time past, but—"

"Oh, that's all off. In the existing circumstances Evie didn't feel like—keeping the thing up."

"That's too bad. You've been pretty hard hit—what? When a fellow is as game as you a girl should stand by him, come now! But I know Evie. I've known her from her cradle. She'll back round, you'll see. When we've pulled you through, as we're going to, she'll take another view of things. I know for a fact that she's been head over heels in love with you ever since her trip to Buenos Aires."

As Ford made no remark, Conquest felt it well to drive the point home.

"We can all help in that, old boy; and you can count on us—both on Miss Strange and me. No one has such influence over Evie as Miriam, and I know she's very keen on seeing you and her—you and Evie, I mean—hit it off. I don't mind telling you that, as a matter of fact, it's been Miriam's anxiety on Evie's account that has mixed me up in your case at all. I don't say that I haven't got interested in you for your own sake; but it was she who stirred me up in the first place. It's going to mean a lot to her to see you get through—and marry Evie."

Ford smiled—his odd, twisted smile—but as he said nothing, Conquest decided to let the subject drop. He had, in fact, gone as far as his present judgment would carry him, and anything farther might lead to a false step. In a situation alive with claims and counter-claims, with yearnings of the heart and promptings of the higher law, he could preserve his rights only by a walk as wary as the treading of a tight-rope.

This became clearer to him later in the night, when Ford had gone away, and he was left free to review the circumstances with that clarity of co-ordination he had so often brought to bear on other men's affairs. Out of the mass of data he selected two conditions as being the only ones of importance.

If Miriam Strange was marrying him because she loved him, nothing else needed to be considered. This fact would subordinate everything to itself; and there were many arguments to support the assumption that she was doing so. One by one he marshalled them before him, from the first faint possibility up to the crowning proof that there was no earthly reason for her marrying him at all, unless she wanted to. He had pointed that out to her clearly, on the day when she came to him to make her terms. He had been guilty on that occasion of a foolish generosity, for that it went with a common-sense honesty to take advantage of another's ignorance, or impulsiveness, was part of his business creed. Nevertheless, having shown her this uncalled-for favor, he did not regret it now, since it put the spontaneous, voluntary nature of her act beyond dispute.

To a late hour of the night he wandered about the great silent rooms of the house which he had made the expression of himself. Stored with costly, patiently selected comforts, it lacked only the last requisite which was to impart the living touch. Having chosen this essential with so much care, and begun to feel for her something far more vital than the pride of possession which had been his governing emotion hitherto, it was an agony with many aspects to think he might have to let her go.

That there was this possibility was undeniable. It was the second of the two paramount considerations. Though Ford's enthusiasm tried to make itself enthusiasm and no more, there had been little difficulty in seeing what it was. All the same, it would be a passion to pity and ignore, if on Miriam's side there was nothing to respond to it. But it was here that, in spite of all his arguments, Conquest's doubts began. With much curious ignorance of women, there was a point of view from which he knew them well. It was out of many a poignant bit of domestic history, of which his profession had made him the confidant, that he had distilled the observation made to Ford earlier in the evening: "It isn't often that a woman's heroism works in a straight line, like a soldier's or a fireman's." Notwithstanding her directness, he could see Miriam Strange as just the type of woman to whom these words might be applicable. If by marrying a man whom she did not love she thought she could help another whom she did love, a culpable sacrifice was just the thing of which she would be capable. He called it culpable sacrifice with some emphasis for in his eyes all sacrifice was culpable. It was more than culpable, in that it verged on the absurd. There were few teachings of an illogical religion, few promptings of a misdirected energy, for which he had a greater scorn than the precept that the strong should suffer for the weak, or one man for another. Every man for himself and the survival of the fittest was the doctrine by which he lived; and his abhorrence of anything else was the more intense for the moment because he found himself in a situation where he might be expected to repudiate his faith.

But there it was, that something in public opinion which, in certain circumstances, might challenge him—might ask him for magnanimity, might appeal to him for mercy, might demand that he make two other human beings happy while he denied himself. It was preposterous, it was grotesque, but it was there. He could hear its voice already, explaining that since Miriam Strange had given him her word in an excess of self-devotion, it was his duty to let her off. He could see the line of argument; he could hear the applause following on his noble act. He had heard it before—especially in the theatre—and his soul had shaken with laughter. He had read of it in novels, only to toss such books aside. "The beauty of renunciation," he had often said, "appeals to the morbid, the sickly, and the sentimental. It has no function among the healthy and the sane." He had not only said that, but he had believed it. He believed it still, and lived by it. By doing so he had amassed his modest fortune and won a respected position in the world. He had not got on into middle life without meeting the occasion more than once when he could have saved others—a brother, or a sister, or a friend—and forborne to save himself. He had felt the temptation and resisted it, with the result that he was up in the world when he might have been down in it, and envied by those who would have despised him without hesitation when they had got out of him all he could give. He could look back now and see the folly it would have been had he yielded to impulses that every sentimentalist would have praised. He was fully conscious that the moment of danger might be on the point of returning again, and that he must be prepared for it.

He was able to strengthen himself with the greater conviction because of his belief in the sanctity of rights. The securing of rights, the defining of rights, the protection of rights, had been his trade ever since he was twenty-five. The invasion of rights was among the darkest crimes in his calendar. In the present case his own rights could not be called into question; they were inviolable. Miriam Strange had come to him deliberately, and for due consideration had signed herself away. He had spared nothing, in time, pains, or money, to fulfil his part of the compact. It would be monstrous, therefore, if he were to be cheated of his reward. That either Ford or Miriam would attempt this he did not believe, even if between them the worst, from his point of view, was at the worst; but that an absurd, elusive principle which called itself chivalry, but really was effeminacy of will, might try to disarm him by an appeal to scruples he contemned, was the possibility he feared. He feared it because he estimated at its worth the force of restraint a sentimental civilization and a naïve people can bring to bear, in silent pressure, upon the individual. While he knew himself to be strong in his power of resistance, he knew too that the mightiest swimmer can go down at last in a smiling, unrippled sea.

His exasperation was as much with his doubt about himself as with the impalpable forces threatening him, as he strode fiercely from room to room, turning out the flaring lights before going to bed. After all, his final resolutions were pitifully insufficient, in view of the tragic element—for he took it tragically—that had suddenly crept into his life. While his gleam of happiness was in danger of going out, the sole means he could find of keeping it aglow was in deciding on a prudent ignoring of whatever did not meet the eye, on a discreet assumption that what he had been dreaming for the past few months was true. As a matter of fact, there was nothing to show him that it wasn't true; and it was only common sense to let the first move toward clearing his vision come from the other side rather than from his.

And yet it was precisely this passive attitude which he found himself next day least able to maintain. If he needed anything further to teach him that love was love, it was this restless, prying jealousy, making it impossible to let well enough alone. After a trying day at the office, during which he irritated his partners and worried his clerks, he presented himself late in the afternoon at Miriam's apartment at the hour when he generally went to his club, and he knew she would not expect him. Thinking to surprise Ford with her—like the suspicious husband in a French play, he owned to himself, grimly—he experienced something akin to disappointment to find her drinking tea with two old ladies, whom he outstayed. During the ceremonies of their leave-taking he watched Miriam closely, seeking for some impossible proof that she either loved Ford or did not love him, and getting nothing but a renewed and maddening conviction of her grace and quiet charm.

"What about Evie's happiness?"

Miriam raised her eyebrows inquiringly at the question before stooping to put out the spirit-lamp.

"Well, what about it?" she asked, without looking up.

"Oh, nothing—except that we don't seem to be securing it."

She gazed at him now, with an expression frankly puzzled. He had refused tea, but she kept her accustomed place behind the tea-table, while he stretched himself comfortably in the low arm-chair by the hearth, which she often occupied herself.

"Don't you remember?" he went on. "Evie's happiness was the motive of our little—agreement."

He endeavored to make his tone playful, but there was a something sharp and aggressive in his manner, at which she colored slightly, no less than at his words.

"I suppose," she said, as if after meditation, "Evie's happiness isn't in our hands."

"True; but there's a good deal that *is* in our hands. There's, for example—our own."

"Up to a point—yes."

"And up to that point we should take care of it. Shouldn't we?"

"I dare say. But I don't know what you mean."

He gave the nervous little laugh which helped him over moments of embarrassment.

"Ford was with me last night. He said it was all off between him and Evie."

"I thought he might tell you that."

"So that," he went on, forcing a smile, with which his voice and manner were not in accord, "our undertaking having failed, the bottom's out of everything. Don't you see?"

She was so astonished that she walked into his trap, just as he expected.

"I don't see in the least. I thought our undertaking—as you call it—was going to be particularly successful."

"Successful—how?"

He dropped his smile and looked interrogative, his bit of acting still keeping her off her guard.

"Why, if Amalia Gramm's testimony is all you think it's going to be——"

"Oh, I see. That's the way you look at it."

"Isn't it the way you look at it, too?"

He smiled again, indulgently, but with significance.

"No; I confess it isn't—at least, it hasn't been. I thought—perhaps I was wrong—that our interest was in getting Ford off, so that he could marry Evie. Since he isn't going to marry her, why—naturally—we don't care so much—whether he gets off or not."

"Oh, but——"

She checked herself; she even grew a little pale. She began to see dimly whither he was leading her.

"Of course I don't say we should chuck him over," he went on; "but it isn't the same thing any longer, is it? I think it only fair to point that out to you, because it gives you reasonable ground for reconsidering your—decision."

"Oh, but I don't want to."

While she had said exactly what he hoped to hear, she had not said it as he hoped to hear it. There were shades of tone even to impetuosity, and this one lacked the note his ear was listening for. None the less, he told himself, a wise man would have stopped right there; and he was conscious of his folly in persisting, while he still persisted.

"That's for you to decide, of course. Only if we go on, it must be understood that we've somewhat shifted our ground."

"I haven't shifted mine."

"Not as you understand it yourself—as, possibly, you've understood it all along. But you have, as I see things. When you came to me—to my office——"

She put up her hand as though she would have screened her face, but controlled herself to listen quietly.

"Your object, then," Conquest continued, cruelly, "was to get Ford off, so that he might marry Evie. Now, I understand it to be simply—to get him off."

She looked at him with eyes full of distress or protest. It was a minute or two before she spoke.

"I don't see the necessity for such close definition."

"I do. I want you to know exactly what you're doing. I want you to see that you're paying a higher price than you need pay—for the services rendered."

He had got her now just where he had been trying to put her. He had snared her, or given her an opportunity, according as she chose to take it. She could have availed herself of the latter by a look or a simple intonation, for the craving of his heart was such that his perceptions were acute for the slightest hint. Had she known that, it would have been easy for her to respond to him, playing her part with the loyalty with which she had begun it. As it was, his cold manner and his slightly mocking tone betrayed her. Her answer was meant to give him the kind of assurance she thought he was looking for; and she couched it in the language she supposed he would most easily understand. In the things it said and did not say her very sincerity was what stabbed him.

"I hope it won't be necessary to bring this subject up again. I know what I undertook, and I'm anxious to fulfil it. I should be very much hurt if I wasn't allowed to, just because you had scruples about taking me at my word. You've been so—so splendid—in doing your part that I should feel humiliated if I didn't do mine."

There was earnestness in her regard and a suggestion of haughtiness in the tilt of her head. The Wise Man within him bade him be content, and this time he listened to the voice. He did her the justice to remember, too, that she was offering him all he had ever asked of her; and if he was dissatisfied, it was because he had increased his demands without telling her.

It was by a transition of topic that he saw he could nail her to her purpose.

"By-the-way," he said, when they had got on neutral ground again, and were speaking of Wayne, "I wish you would come and see what I think of doing for him. There are two rooms back of my library—too dark for my use—but that wouldn't matter to him, poor fellow—"

He saw that she was nerving herself not to flinch at this confrontation with the practical. He saw too that her courage and her self-command would have deceived any one but him. The very pluck with which she nodded her comprehension of his idea, and her sympathy with it, enraged him to a point at which, so it seemed to him, he could have struck her. Had she cried off from her bargain he could have borne it far more easily. That would at least have given him a sense of superiority, and helped him to be magnanimous; while this readiness to pay put him in the wrong, and drove him to exact the uttermost farthing of his rights. On a weak woman he might have taken pity; but this strong creature, who refused to sue to him by so much as the quiver of an eyelid, and rejected his concessions before he had time to put them forth, exasperated every nerve that had been wont to tingle to his sense of power. Since she had asked no quarter, why should he give it?—above all, when to give quarter was against his principles.

"And perhaps," he pursued, in an even voice, showing no sign of the tempest within, "that would be as good a time as any for you to look over the entire house. If there are any changes you would like to have made ——"

"I don't think there will be."

"All the same, I should like you to see. A man's house, however well arranged, isn't always right for a woman's occupancy; and so——"

"Very well; I'll come."

"When?"

"I'll come to-morrow."

"About four?"

"Yes; about four. That would suit me perfectly."

She spoke frankly, and even smiled faintly, with just such a shadow of a blush as the situation called for. The Wise Man within him begged him once more to be content. If, the Wise Man argued, this well-poised serenity was not love, it was something so like it that the distinction would require a splitting of hairs. Conquest strove to listen and obey; but even as he did so he was aware again of that rage of impotence which finds its easiest outlet in violence. As he rose to take his leave, with all the outward signs of friendly ceremoniousness, he had time to be appalled at the perception that he, the middle-aged, spick-and-span New-Yorker, should so fully understand how it is that a certain type of frenzied brute can kill the woman whom he passionately loves, but who is hopelessly out of reach.

XXIV

Except when his business instincts were on the alert, Ford's slowness of perception was perhaps most apparent in his judgment of character and his analysis of other people's motives. Taking men and women as he found them, he had little tendency to speculate as to the impulses within their lives, any more than as to the furnishings behind their house-fronts. A human being was all exterior to him, something like a street. Even in matters that touched him closely, the act alone was his concern; and he dealt with its consequences, without, as a rule, much inquisitive probing of its cause.

So when Miriam Strange elected to marry Conquest, he accepted the settled fact, for the time being, in the spirit in which he would have taken some disastrous manifestation of natural phenomena. Investigation of the motive of such a step was as little in his line as it would have been in the case of a destructive storm at sea. To his essentially simple way of viewing life it was something to be lamented, but to be borne as best one was able, while one said as little as one could about it.

And yet, somewhere in the wide, rarely explored regions of his nature there were wonderings, questionings, yearnings protests, cries, that forced themselves to the surface now and then, as the boiling waters within the earth gush out in geyser springs. It required urgent pressure to impel them forth, but when they came it was with violence. Such an occasion had been his night on Lake Champlain; such another was the evening when he announced to Miriam his intention of becoming Norrie Ford again. When these moments came they took him by surprise, even though afterward he was able to recognize the fact that they had been long preparing.

It was in this way, without warning, that his heart had sprung on him the question: Why should she marry him? At the minute when Conquest was leaving Miriam, he, Ford, was tramping the streets of New York, watching them grow alive with light, in glaring, imaginative ugliness—ugliness so dazzling in its audacity and so fanciful in its crude commercialism that it had the power to thrill. It was perhaps the electric stimulus of sheer light that quickened the pace of his slow mentality from the march of acceptance to the rush of protest, at an instant when he thought he had resigned himself to the facts.

Why should she marry Conquest? He was shouldering his way through the crowds when the question made itself heard, with a curious illuminating force that suggested its own answer. He was walking, partly to work off the tension of the strain under which these few days were passing, and partly because he had got the idea that he was being shadowed. He had no profound objection to that, though he would have preferred to give himself up of his own free will rather than to be arrested. Perhaps, after all, it was only an accident that had caused him to catch sight of the same two men at different moments through the day, and just now it amused him to put them to the test by leading them a dance. He had come to the conclusion that he had been mistaken, or that he had outwitted them, when this odd question, irrelevant to anything he had directly in his thoughts, presented itself as though it had been asked by some voice outside him: Why should she marry him?

Up to the present his unanalytical mind would have replied—as it would have replied to the same query concerning any one else—that she was marrying him "because she wanted to." That would have seemed to him to cover the whole ground of any one's affairs; but all at once it had become insufficient. It was as if the street had suddenly become insufficient as a highway, breaking into a chasm. He stopped abruptly, confronting, as it were, that bewildering void which a psychological situation invariably seemed to him. To get into a place where his few straightforward formulæ did not apply gave him that sense of distress which every creature feels out of its native element.

It was a proof of the dependence with which, in matters requiring mental or emotional experience, he had come to lean on Miriam Strange, as well as of the directness with which he appealed to her for help, that he should face about on the instant, and turn his steps toward her.

Only a few minutes earlier she had seen Conquest go, and in the interval since his departure she had had time to detect the windings of his strategy, and to be content with the skill with which she had met them. She understood him thoroughly, both in his fear of letting her go and his shame at holding her. Standing in her wide bay-window, her slight figure erect, her hands behind her back, she looked down, without seeing it, on the spangled city, as angels intent on their own high thoughts might pass over the Milky Way. She smiled faintly to herself, thinking how she should lead this kindly man, who for her sake had done so much for Norrie Ford, back to a sense of security and self-respect. When Norrie Ford went free she meant to live for nothing else but the happiness of the man who had cleared his name and given him back to the world. It

would be a kind of consecration to her, like that of the nun who forsakes the dearest ties for a life of good works and prayer. Conquest had told her that she was paying a bigger price than she needed to pay for the services rendered, but that depended somewhat on the value one set on the services. In this case she would not have been content in paying less. To do so would seem to indicate that she was not grateful. Since perceiving his compunction as to claiming his reward, she was aware of an elation, an exaltation, in forcing it upon him.

She was in the glow of this sentiment when Ford was ushered in. He was so vitally in her thoughts that, though she did not expect him, his presence gave her no surprise. It helped her, in fact, to sustain the romantic quality in her mood to treat his coming as a matter of course, and make it a natural incident to the moment.

"Come and look down on the stars," she said, in the tone she might have used to another member of her household who had appeared accidentally. "The view here, in the evening, makes one feel as if one had been wafted above the sky."

She half-turned toward him, but did not offer her hand as he took his place by her side. For a few seconds he said nothing, and when he spoke she accepted his words in the manner in which she had taken his coming.

"So you're going to marry Conquest!"

It was to show that the abrupt remark had not perturbed her that she nodded her head assentingly, still with the smile that had greeted his arrival.

"Why?"

In spite of her efforts she manifested some surprise.

"What makes you ask that question—now?"

"Because it never occurred to me before that there might be a special reason."

"Well, there is one."

"Has it anything to do with me?"

She backed away from him slightly, to the side curve of the window, where it joined the straight line of the wall. In this position she had him more directly in view.

"I said there was a reason," she answered, after some hesitation. "I didn't say I would tell you what it was."

"No, but you will, won't you?"

"I don't see why you should want to know."

"Is that quite true?" he queried, with a somewhat startling fixing of his eyes upon her. "Don't you see? Can't you imagine?"

"I don't see why—in such circumstances as these—any man should want to know what a woman doesn't tell him."

"Then I'll explain to you. I want to know, because ... I think ... you're marrying Conquest ... when you don't love him ..."

"He never asked me to love him. He said he could do without that."

"... while ... you do love ... some one else."

She reflected before speaking. Under his piercing look she took on once more the appealing expression of forest creatures at bay.

"Even if that were true," she said, at last, "there would be no harm in it as long as there was what you asked me for at first—a special reason."

"Is there ever a reason for a step like that? I don't believe it."

"But I do believe it, you see. That makes a difference."

"It would make a still greater difference if I begged you not to do it, wouldn't it?"

She shook her head. "It wouldn't—now."

"I let you see yesterday that I—I loved you."

"Since you force me to acknowledge it—yes."

"And you've shown me," he ventured, "within the last minute, that you—love me."

Her figure grew more erect against the background of exterior darkness. Even the hand that rested on the

woodwork of the window became tense. Lambent fire in her eyes—the light that he used to call non-Aryan—took the place of the fugitive glance of the woodland animal; but she kept her composure.

"Well, what then?"

"Then you'd be committing a sacrilege against yourself—if you married any one else but me."

If her heart bounded at the words, she did nothing to betray it.

"You say that, because it seems so to you. I take another view of it. Love to me does not necessarily mean marriage, any more than marriage necessarily implies love. There have been happy marriages without love, and there can be honorable love that doesn't ask marriage as its object. If I married you now, I should seem to myself to be deserting a high impulse for a lower one."

"There's only one sort of impulse to love."

"Not to my love. I know what you mean—but my love has more than one prompting, and the highest is—or I hope it is—to try to do what's right."

"But this would not be right."

"I'm the only judge of that."

"Not if we love each other. In that case I become a judge of it, too."

Once more she reflected. In speaking she lifted her head and looked at him frankly.

"Very well; I'll admit it. Perhaps it's true. In any case, I'd rather things were clear to you. It will help us both. I'll tell you what I'm doing, and why I'm doing it."

It was one of those occasions when a woman's emotion is so great that she seems to have none at all. As iron is said to come to a degree of heat so intense that it does not burn, so Miriam Strange seemed to herself to have reached a stage where the sheer truth, simple and without reserve, could bring no shame to her womanhood. Words that could not have passed her lips either before that evening or after it escaped her in the subsequent minutes as a matter of course.

"I entered into your life twice, and each time I did you harm. On the first occasion I turned you into Herbert Strange, and sent you out on a career of deception; on the second, I came between you and Evie, and brought you to the present pass, where you're facing death again, as you were eight or nine years ago. It's no use to tell you that I wanted to do my best, because good intentions are not much excuse for the trouble they often cause. But I'm ready to say this: that whenever you've suffered, I've suffered more. That's especially true of what's happened in the last six months. And when I saw how much I had put wrong, it was a comfort to think there was something at least that I could put right again."

"But you've put nothing wrong. That's what I should like to convince you of."

"I've put you in a position of danger. When I see that, I see enough to act upon."

"It's a very slight danger."

"It is now, because I've made it slight. It wasn't—before I went to Mr. Conquest."

"You went to him—what for?"

"He wanted me to marry him. He had wanted it for a long time. I told him I would do so, on condition that he found the evidence that would prove you innocent."

Ford laughed harshly, and rather loudly, stopping suddenly, as though he had ceased to see the joke.

"So that's it! That's why Conquest has been so devilishly kind. I wondered at his interest—or at least I should have wondered if I'd had the time. As a matter of fact, I took it for granted that he should help me, as a drowning man takes it for granted that the chance passer-by should pull him out. It wasn't till this evening—about half an hour ago—By Jove! I ran right up against it."

"You ran right up against—what?"

"Against the truth. It came in a flash—just like that." He snapped his fingers. "You're selling yourself—to get me off."

She seemed to grow straighter, taller. For the minute he saw nothing but the blaze of her eyes.

"Well? Why shouldn't I? My mother sold herself—to get a man off. He was my father. I'm proud of her. She did the best she could with her life. I'm doing the best I can with mine."

"But I shouldn't be doing the best I can with mine—if I let you continue."

"Isn't it too late for you to stop me? If I've sold myself as you put it, the price has been paid in. Mr. Conquest has secured the evidence that will acquit you. It will be used. That's all I care about—much."

She saw the hot color surge into his cheeks and brows. It seemed to her that his eyes grew red as the blood left his lips. She had never before been called on to confront a man angry with a passion beyond his control, but instinct told her what the signs were. Instinct told her, too, that, however confused his own sensations might be, his anger was not so much resentment against anything she might have done as it was despair at having lost her. She had guessed already that he would be seized with a blind impulse to strike, as soon as he came to a realizing sense of her action; though she had not expected the moment of his fury till after he went free. Till then, she had thought, he would be partially unconscious of his pain, just as a soldier fighting will run along for a while without feeling a bullet in his flesh. The anticipation of an awakening on his part some time enabled her to see beyond the madness of this instinct, even though the words he threw at her struck like stones. The very fact that she could see how he labored with himself to keep them back gave her strength to take them without flinching.

"You ... dared...? Without ... my ... permission...?"

"I'd done so many things without your permission that it seemed I could venture that far."

"You were wrong. It was—too far."

"It wasn't too far—when I loved you."

She uttered the words in a matter-of-fact voice, without a tremor. She foresaw their effect in bringing him to himself In his next words his tone had already softened slightly to one of protest.

"But I could have done it so much better—! so much more easily—! without——"

"I could have done that too. Mr. Conquest pointed it out to me. He took no advantage of my ignorance. As a matter of fact, I wasn't ignorant at all. I was extremely clear-sighted and wise. My love for you made me so. I knew—I felt it—that money might fail to do what I wanted. But I knew too that there was one thing that wouldn't fail. If you were innocent—and I wasn't wholly sure that you were—I knew there was one energy that would surely prove you so—and that was Charles Conquest's desire to have me as his wife. I took the course in which there was least risk of failure—and you see——"

A little gesture, triumphant in its suggestion, finished her sentence.

"What I see is this," Ford answered, thickly, "that I'm to hold my life at the cost of your degradation."

"Degradation? That's a hard word. But as applied to me—I don't know what it means."

"Isn't it degradation?—to enter into a marriage in which you put no love?"

There was a kind of superb indifference in her answer.

Illustration: "I'm to hold my life at the cost of your degradation"

"You may call it degradation if you choose. I shouldn't. As long as you go free, you can call my action anything you like. I dare say," she admitted, "you're quite right, from the highest moral—and modern—point of view; but that doesn't appeal to me. You see—you've got to make allowances for it—I'm not a child of your civilization. I'm not a child of any civilization at all. At best I'm like the wild creature that submits to being tamed because it doesn't know what else to do—but remains wild at heart. I used to think I could come into your system of law and order if any one would take me. But now I know I shall always be outside it. The very word you've just used of me shows me that. You say I'm to be degraded—it's your civilized point of view. I have no comprehension of that whatever. Because I love you I want to save you. I don't care anything about the means so long as I reach the end. To undo the harm I've done to you I'd freely give my body to be burned; so why shoudn't I—? No, no," she cried, as he made as though he would approach her, "keep away. Don't come near me! I can only talk to you like this—at a distance. I shall never say these things again—but I want to tell you—to explain to you—I should like you to understand."

She repeated herself haltingly because, as Ford held back from approaching her, a sudden spasm passed over his face, while he hung his head, and compressed his lips in a way that made him seem surprisingly boyish all at once, and touched that maternal tenderness in her that had always formed such a large part of her yearning over him. It was the kind of tenderness that steadied her own nerve, and kept her dry-eyed and strong, as she saw him reel to a chair, and flinging his arms on the table beside it, bow himself down on them, while his form shook convulsively. She had no shame for him. She understood perfectly that the pressure of years had been brought to bear on the complex emotions of the moment—to which reaction from his brief anger and his bitter words added an element of remorse—to cause this honest, manly nature that had never made any pretence of being stronger than it was, to give way to the instant's weakness. She was sure he would never have done it in the presence of any one but her, and she was thrilled with a curious joy at this proof of their spiritual intimacy. What was difficult was not the keeping of her own self-control, but the holding herself back from crossing the room and laying a hand on his shoulder, in token of their oneness at heart; but there, she felt, the forbidden line would be passed. She could only wait—it was not long—till he was calm again. Then he pulled himself together, got up heavily, and obviously refrained from looking her in the face. In the act and the attitude there was something so boylike, so natural, so entirely lacking in the dignity of grief, that if she had any impulse to let her own tears flow it was then.

But she knew it to be one of those minutes when a woman has to be strong for herself and for the man, too, even though she break down afterward. The necessity of coming to an understanding with him, once for all, impelled her to the economy of her forces, while the nervous snapping of his fortitude had given her an opportunity she could not afford to lose.

"So I want you to see," she went on, quietly, as though no interruption had occurred, "that having gained my point in helping to—to get you off, it's to some extent a matter of indifference what you think of me—what any one thinks of me—just as it was when I hid you in my studio, nearly nine years ago. You must put it down to my being of wild origin and not wholly amenable to civilized dictates. I can only do what the inward urging drives me on to do—just as my mother did—and my father. If it's degrading—"

Raising his head at last, he strode toward her. He put his hands rigidly behind his back, as if to show her that he pinioned them there in token that she had nothing to fear from him. His eyes were red, and there was still a painful tightening about his lips.

"You'll have to let me take that back," he muttered, unsteadily. "I didn't know what I was saying. It's come on me so suddenly that it's broken me all up. I haven't realized till this evening what—what everything meant. It seemed to me then that I couldn't stand it."

"But you can."

"Yes, I can," he replied, doggedly. "One can stand anything. If I reached my limit for a minute, it was in seeing that you have to suffer for my sake——"

"Wouldn't you suffer for mine?"

"I couldn't. Suffering for your sake would become such a joy——"

"That it wouldn't be suffering. That's just it. That's what I feel, exactly. It isn't hard for me to do what I'm doing because I know—I *know*—I'm helping to save your honor if not your life. I don't believe money would have done it. Mr. Conquest reminded me that the best legal services can be bought, but I never thought for an instant that you could secure zeal such as his for anything less than I offered him. And he's been so superb! He's given himself up to the thing absolutely. He's followed every trail with a scent—- with a certainty—your other men, your Kilcup and Warren, would never have been capable of. I've seen that; I'm sure of it. He has a wonderful mind, and in his way he has the kindest heart in the world. I'm very, very fond of him, and I'm deeply grateful. Next to seeing you free, I don't think I have any desire in life so strong as to make him happy. I dare say that isn't civilized either—but it's what I feel. And so we must think of this," she continued, eagerly explanative; "we must be loyal to him, you and I, as the first of all our duties. Don't you think so?"

He withdrew his eyes from hers before answering. His power of resistance was broken. The signs of struggle were visible, and yet the quixotic element in his own nature helped him to respond to that in hers.

"I'll try," he muttered, looking on the ground.

"You'll do more than try—you'll succeed. Only very small souls could grudge him what he's earned when he's worked so hard and given himself so unstintingly. The very fact that you and I know that we love each other will make it easier to be true to him."

"Conquest must know that we love each other, too," he declared, with some bitterness.

"Perhaps he does; but, you see, every one has a different way of looking at life, and I don't think that with him it's a thing that counts greatly. I'm not sure that I understand him in that respect. I only know that you and I, who owe him so much, can repay him by giving him what he asks for. Will you promise me to do it?"

He continued to look downward, as though finding it hard to give his word; but when he raised his eyes again, he flung back his head with his old air of resolution.

"I'll promise to do anything you ask me throughout our lives. I don't admit that Conquest should demand this thing or that he had any right to let you offer it. But since you want to give it—and I can show you no other token of my love—and shall never again be able to tell you that I adore you—that I *adore* you—I promise—to obey."

XXV

The inspection of the house was over, and they had come back to the drawing-room for tea. Conquest had lavished pains on the occasion, putting flowers in the rooms, and strewing handsome objects carelessly about, so as to impart to the great shell as much as possible the air of being lived in. To the tea-table he had given particular attention, ordering out the most ornamental silver and the costliest porcelain, and placing the table itself just where she would probably have it in days to come, so as to get the effect she produced in sitting there, as he liked to do with a new picture or piece of furniture.

On her part, Miriam had made the rounds of the rooms with conscientious care, observing, admiring, suggesting, with just that mingling of shyness and interest with which a woman in her situation would view her future home. Having got, by intuition, the idea that he was watching for some flaw in her manner, she was determined that he should find none. It was the beginning of that lifelong schooling to his service to which she had vowed herself, though the effort would have been easier had he not rendered her self-

conscious by scanning her so keenly out of his little gray-green eyes. Nevertheless, she was pleased with the manner in which she was acquitting herself, giving him his tea and taking her own with no sign of embarrassment. As on the preceding day, it was this perfection of acting, as he chose to call it, that exasperated his restless suspicion more than any display of weakness.

The thought that she was keeping her true self locked against him had, during the last twenty-four hours, become an obsession, making it impossible for him to eat or to sleep. In her serene, impeccable bearing he saw nothing but the bars up and the blinds drawn down. An instant of faltering or self-betrayal would have admitted him to at least a glimpse of what was passing within; but through this well-balanced graciousness it was as difficult to get at her soul as to read the mind of the Venus of Milo in the marble nobility of her face. He had led her from room to room, describing one, explaining another, and apologizing for a third, but all the while trying to break down her guard, only to find, as they returned to the point at which they started, that he had failed. It was with nerves all unstrung, and with a lack of self-command he would have been, in his saner senses, the first to condemn, that he strode up at last and rapped sharply at the door of her barricaded citadel.

"Why did you never tell me that you knew Norrie Ford—years ago?"

He was putting his empty cup on the table as he spoke, so that he could avoid looking at her. She was glad of this respite from his gaze, for she found the question startling. Before the scrutiny of his eyes was turned on her again she had herself in hand.

"I should probably have told you some time."

"Very likely. The odd thing is that you didn't tell me at once."

"It wasn't so odd—given all the circumstances."

"It wasn't so odd, given some of the circumstances; but given them all—*all*—I should say, I ought to have known."

She allowed a few seconds to pass.

"I suppose," she said, slowly, then, "that may fairly be considered a matter of opinion. I don't see, however, that it makes much difference—since you know now."

"My knowing or not knowing now isn't quite the point. The fact of importance is that you never told me."

"I'm sorry you should take it in that way; but since I didn't—and the matter is beyond remedy—I suppose we shouldn't gain anything by discussing it."

"I don't know about that. It seems to me a subject that ought to be—aired."

She tried to smile down his aggressiveness, succeeding partially, in that he subdued the quarrelsomeness of his voice and manner to that affectation of banter behind which he concealed habitually his real self, and by which he most easily deceived her.

"Very well," she laughed; "I'm quite ready to air it; only I don't know just how it's to be done."

"Suppose you were to tell me what happened, in your own language?"

"If Mr. Ford has told you already, as I imagine he has, I don't see that my language can be very different from his. All the same, I'll try, since you want me to."

"Just so."

During the few minutes she took to collect her thoughts he could see sweep over her features one of those swift, light changes—as delicate as the ripple of summer wind on water—which transformed her in an instant from the woman of the world to the forest maid, the spirit of the indigenous. The mystery of the nomadic ages was in her eyes again as she began her narrative, wistfully, and reminiscently.

"You see, I'd been thinking a good deal of my father and mother. I hadn't known about them very long, and I lived with their memory. The Mother Superior had told me a few things—all she knew, I suppose—before I left the convent at Quebec; and Mr. and Mrs. Wayne—especially Mrs. Wayne—had added the rest. That was the chief reason why I wanted the studio—so that I could get away from the house, which was so oppressive to me, and—so it seemed to me—live with them, with nothing but the woods and the hills and the sky about me. I could be very happy then—painting thinge I fancied they might have done, and pinning them up on the wall. I dare say it was foolish, but——"

"It was very natural. Go on."

"And then came up all this excitement about Norrie Ford. For months the whole region talked of nothing else. Nearly every one believed he had shot his uncle, but, except in the villages, the sympathy with him was tremendous. Some people—especially the hotel-keepers and those who depended on the tourist travel—were for law and order; but others said that old Chris Ford had got no more than he deserved. That was the way they used to talk. Mr. Wayne was on the side of law and order, too—naturally—till the trial came on; and then he began——"

"I know all about that. Go on."

"My own sympathy was with the man in prison. I used to dream about him. I remembered what Mrs. Wayne had told me my mother had done for my father. I was proud of that. Though I knew only vaguely what it was, I was sure it was what I should have done, too. So when there was talk of breaking into the jail and helping Norrie to escape, I used to think how easily I could keep any one hidden in my studio. I don't mean I thought of it as a practical thing; it was just a dream."

"But a dream that came true."

"Yes; it came true. It was wonderful. It was the day Mr. Wayne sentenced him. I knew what he was suffering—Mr. Wayne, I mean. We were all suffering; even Mrs. Wayne, who in her gentle way was generally so hard. Some people thought Mr. Wayne needn't have done it; and I suppose it was just his conscientiousness—because he had such a horror of the thing—that drove him on to it. He thought he mustn't shirk his duty. But that night at the house was awful. We dressed for dinner, and tried to act as if nothing frightful had happened—but it was as if the hangman was sitting with us at the table. At last I couldn't endure it. I went out into the garden—you remember it was one of those gardens with clipped yews. Out there, in the air, I stopped thinking of Mr. Wayne and his distress to think of Norrie Ford. It seemed to me as if, in some strange way, he belonged to me—that I ought to do something—as my mother had done for my father. And then—all of a sudden—I saw him creep in."

"How did you know it was he?"

"I thought it must be, though I was only sure of it when I was on the terrace and saw his face. He crept along and crept along—Oh, such a forlorn, hopeless, outcast figure! My heart ached at the sight of him. I didn't know what he meant to do, and at first I had no intention of attempting anything. It was by degrees that my own thought about the studio came back to me. By that time he was on the veranda of the house, and I was afraid he meant to kill Mr. Wayne. I went after him. I thought I would entice him away and hide him. But the minute he heard my footstep he leaped into the house. The next I saw, he was talking to Mr. and Mrs. Wayne—and something told me he wouldn't hurt them. After that I watched my chance till he looked outward, and then I beckoned to him. That's how it happened."

"And then?"

"After that everything was easy. He must have told you. I kept him in the studio for three weeks, and brought him food—and clothing of my father's. It seemed to me that my father was doing everything—not I. That's what made it so simple. I know my father would have wanted me to do it. I was only the agent in carrying out his will."

"That's one way of looking at it," Conquest said, grimly.

"It's the only way I've ever looked at it; the only way I ever shall."

"It was a romantic situation," he observed, when she had given him the outlines of the rest of the story. "I wonder you didn't fall in love with him."

He smoothed the colorless line of his mustache, as though concealing a smile. He had recaptured the teasing tone he liked to employ toward her, though its nervous sharpness would have betrayed him had she suspected his real thoughts. While she said nothing in response, the tilt of her head was that which he associated with her moods of indignation or pride.

"Perhaps you did," he persisted. Then, as she remained silent, "Did you?"

She resolved on a bold step—the audacity of that perfect candor she had always taken as a guide.

"I don't know that one could call it that," she said, quietly.

He drew a quick inward breath, clinching his teeth, but keeping his fixed smile.

"But you don't know that one couldn't."

"I can't define what I felt at all."

"It was just enough," he pursued, in his bantering tone, "to keep you—looking for him back—as you told me—that day."

She lifted her eyes in a swift glance of reproach.

"It was that—then."

"But it's more—now. Isn't it?"

She met him squarely.

"I don't think you've any right to ask."

He laughed aloud, somewhat shrilly.

"That's good!--considering we're to be man and wife."

"We're to be man and wife on a very distinct understanding to which I'm perfectly loyal. I mean to be loyal to it always—and to you. I shall give you everything you ever asked for. If there are some things—one thing in particular—out of my power to give you, I've said so from the first, and you've told me you could do without them. If what I can't give you I've given to some one else—because—because—I couldn't help it—that's my secret, and I claim the right to guard it."

They faced one another across the table piled with ornate silver. He had not lost his smile.

"You've the merit of being clear," was his only comment.

"You force me to be clear," she declared, with heightened color, "and a little angry. When you asked me to be your wife—long ago—I told you there were certain conditions I could never fulfil—and you waived them. On that ground I'm ready to meet all your wishes, and make you a good wife to the utmost of my power. I'm eager to do it—because I honor and respect you as women don't always honor and respect the very men they love. I've told Norrie Ford, and I repeat it to you, that after seeing him go free and restored to his place among men, the most ardent desire of my life is to make you happy. I'm perfectly true; I'm perfectly sincere. What more can you ask of me?"

He looked at her searchingly, while he thought hard and rapidly. He could not complain that the bars were up and the blinds drawn any longer. On the contrary, she had let him see into the recesses of her life with a clarity that startled him, as pure truth startles often. As he sat musing, his pretence at cynicism fell from him, together with something of his furbished air of youth. She saw him grow graver, grayer, older, under her very eyes, and was moved with compunction—with compassion. Her face still aglow and her hands clasped in her lap, she leaned to him across the table, speaking in the rich, low voice that always thrilled him.

"What I feel for you is ... something so much like ... love ... that you would never have known the difference ... if you hadn't wrung it from me."

Though he toyed aimlessly with some small silver object on the table and did not look up, her words sent a tremor through his frame. The Wise Man within him was very eloquent, repeating again and again the sentence she herself had used a minute or two ago: What more could he ask of her? What more *could* he ask of her, indeed, after this assurance right out of the earnestness and honesty of her pure heart? It was enough to satisfy men with far greater claims than he had ever put forth, and far more pretension than he had ever dreamed of cherishing. The Wise Man supplied him with two or three phrases of reply—neat little phrases, that would have bound her forever, and yet saved his self-esteem. He turned them over in his mind and on his tongue, trying to add a touch of glamour while he kept them terse. He could feel the Wise Man fidgeting impatiently, just as he could feel her flaming, expectant eyes upon him; and still he toyed with the small silver object aimlessly, conscious of a certain bitter joy in his soul's suspense. He had not yet looked up, nor polished the Wise Man's phrases to his taste, when a footman threw the door open, and Norrie Ford himself walked in.

The meeting was saved from awkwardness chiefly by Ford's own lack of embarrassment. As he crossed the room and shook hands, first with Miriam, then with Conquest, there was a subdued elation in his manner and glance that reduced small considerations to nothing.

"No; I won't sit down," he explained, hurriedly, and not without excitement, "because I only looked in for a minute. I've got a cab waiting for me outside. The fact is, I ran in to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" Miriam questioned.

"Not for long, I hope. I'm off—to give myself up."

"But why to-night?" Conquest asked. "What's the rush?"

"Only that I want to get my word in first. They've got their eye on me. I thought it yesterday, and I know it to-day. I want them to see that I'm not afraid of them, and so I'm asking their hospitality for to-night. I've got my bag in the cab, and everything ship-shape. I couldn't do it without coming round for a last word with you, old man; and I was going to see you afterward, Miss Strange. But since I've found you here——"

"You won't have to," she finished, brightly. "I'm glad to be able to save your time. I'm confident we're not losing you for long; and as I know you're eager, I can only wish you God-speed, and be glad to see you go"

She held out her hand, frankly, strongly, as one who has no fear.

"Now," she added, turning to Conquest, "I'll ask you to see me to my motor. I shall leave you and Mr Ford together, as I know you must have some last detail to arrange."

Ford protested, but she gathered up her gloves and furs, and both men accompanied her to the street.

It was an autumn evening, drizzling and dark. Up and down Fifth Avenue the wet pavements reflected the electric lamps like blurred mirrors. There were few passengers on foot, but an occasional motor whizzed weirdly out of the dark and into it. It was because there were no other people to be seen that two men standing in the rain attracted the attention of the three who descended Conquest's steps together.

"There they are," Ford said, jerkily. "By George! they've got ahead of me."

Instinctively Miriam clutched his arm, while one of the two strangers came forward apologetically.

"You're Mr. John Norrie Ford, ain't you?"

"I am."

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I've got a warrant for your arrest."

"That's all right," Ford said, cheerily. "I was on my way to you, anyhow. You'll find my bag in the cab, and everything ready. We'll drive, if it's all the same to you."

"Yes, sir. Sure thing, sir."

The man dropped back a few paces courteously, while Ford turned to his friends. His air was buoyant. Miriam, too, reflected the radiance of her vision of his triumph. Conquest alone, looking small and white and shrivelled in the rain, showed care and fear.

"I don't think there's anything special to say," Ford remarked, with the awkwardness of a simple nature at an emotional crisis. "I'm not very good at thanks. Miss Strange knows that already. But it's all in here"—he tapped his breast, with a characteristic gesture—"very sacred, very strong."

"We know that," Conquest said, unsteadily, with an embarrassment like Ford's own.

"Well, then—good-bye."

"Good-bye."

With a long pressure of the hand to each, he turned toward his cab. Of the two strangers, one took his place beside the driver on the box, while the other held the door open for Ford to enter. His foot was already on the step when Miriam cried, "Wait!"

He turned toward her as she glided across the wet pavement.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she whispered again; and drawing down his face to hers, she kissed him, as she had kissed him once before, beside the waters of Champlain.

As she drew back from him, Ford's countenance wore the uplifted look of a knight who has received the consecration to his quest. Even the two strangers bowed their heads, as though they had witnessed the bestowal of a sacrament. To Miriam herself it was the seal set on a past that could never be reopened. She felt the definiteness with which it was ended, as she heard, on her way back to Conquest's side, the door slammed, while the cab lumbered away. It seemed to her that Conquest shrank from her as she approached him.

"You'll come to-morrow? I shall be home about five."

Conquest had put her into her motor, drawn the rugs about her, and closed the door. As he did so, she noticed something slow and broken in his movements. Leaning from the open window, she held out her hand, but he barely touched it.

"No," he said, hoarsely, "I shall not come to-morrow."

"Then, the next day."

"No, nor the next day."

"Well, when you can. If you let me know, I shall stay in, whenever it may be."

"You needn't stay in. I'm not coming any more."

"Oh, don't say that. Don't say that," she pleaded. "You hurt me."

"I can't come, Miriam. Don't you see? Isn't it plain enough? I can't come. I thought I could. I tried to think I could hold you—in spite of everything. But I can't. I *can't*."

"You can hold me—if I stay. I want to stay. You mustn't let me go. I want you to be happy. You deserve it. You've done so much for me—and *him*."

It was the stress she laid on the last word—a suggestion of something triumphant and enraptured beyond restraint—that made him bound back to the centre of the pavement.

"Go on, Laporte," he said to the chauffeur, in a sharp voice. "Miss Strange is ready."

"No, no," Miriam cried, stretching both hands toward him. "I'm not ready. Keep me. I want to stay."

"Go on!" he cried, sternly, as the chauffeur hesitated. "Miss Strange is quite ready. She must go."

Standing by the curb, he watched the motor glide off into the misty, lamplit darkness. He was watching it still, as it overtook the carriage in which Norrie Ford had just driven away. As the two vehicles passed

abreast out of his range of vision, he knew they were bearing Ford and Miriam side by side into Life.

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