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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SEVENTH NOON ***

[Frontispiece: "Spring," she answered. "Just spring" (missing from book)]

THE SEVENTH NOON

BY

FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT

*Author of "The Web of the Golden Spider",
"Joan of the Alley," etc.*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
EDMUND FREDERICK

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To
K. P. B. and K. J. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- I [THE BLACK DOG](#)
- II [KING OF TO-DAY](#)
- III [THE BEGINNING OF THE END](#)
- IV [KISMET](#)
- V [THE INNER WOODS](#)
- VI [THE SHADOW ON THE PORTRAITS](#)
- VII [THE ARSDALES](#)
- VIII [THE MAN WHO KNEW](#)
- IX [DAWN](#)
- X [OUTSIDE THE HEDGE](#)
- XI [A PARTING AND A MEETING](#)
- XII [DISTRICT MESSENGER 3457](#)
- XIII [THE SLEEPERS](#)
- XIV [CONSEQUENCES](#)
- XV [THE DERELICT](#)
- XVI [THE FOURTH DAY](#)
- XVII [AN INTERLUDE](#)
- XVIII [THE MAKING OF A MAN](#)
- XIX [A MIRACLE](#)
- XX [A LONG NIGHT](#)
- XXI [FACING THE SUN](#)
- XXII [CLOUDS](#)
- XXIII [WHEN THE DEAD AWAKE](#)
- XXIV [THE GREATER MASTER](#)
- XXV [THE SHADOW ON THE FLOOR](#)
- XXVI [ON THE BRINK](#)
- XXVII [THE END OF THE BEGINNING](#)
- XXVIII [THE SEVENTH NOON](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS

["Spring," she answered. "Just spring" ... Frontispiece](#)

["What, you, Miss Arsdale?"](#)

[As he studied her it seemed certain that she was by no means enjoying herself](#)

in her present company

Facing her he faced the pendulum which ticked out to him the cost of each new picture he had of her

He lowered the rails, and Miss Arsdale led the way

"The kid," he announced laconically. "What yuh think of him?"

At noon! At the seventh noon, the whistle was to blow!

The Seventh Noon

CHAPTER I

The Black Dog

"The right to die?"

Professor Barstow, with a perplexed scowl ruffling the barrette of gray hairs above his keen eyes, shook his head and turning from the young man whose long legs extended over the end of the lean sofa upon which he sprawled in one corner of the laboratory, held the test-tube, which he had been studying abstractedly, up to the light. The flickering gas was not good for delicate work, and it was only lately that Barstow, spurred on by a glimpse of the end to a long series of experiments, had attempted anything after dark. He squinted thoughtfully at the yellow fluid in the tube and then, resuming his discussion, declared emphatically,

"We have no such right, Peter! You 're wrong. I don't know where, because you put it too cleverly for me. But I know you 're dead wrong—even if your confounded old theories are right, even if your deductions are sound. You 're wrong where you bring up."

"Man dear," answered the other gently, "you are too good a scientist to reason so. That is purely feminine logic."

"I am too good a scientist to believe that anything so complex as human life was meant to be wasted in a scheme where not so much as an atom is lost. Bah, your liver is asleep! Too much work—too much work! The black dog has pounced upon your shoulders!"

"I never had an attack of the blues or anything similar in my life, Barstow," Donaldson denied quietly. "You 'll propose smelling salts next."

"Then what the devil does ail you?"

"Nothing ails me. Can't a man have a few theories without the aid of liver complaint?"

"Not that kind. They don't go with a sound constitution. When a man begins to talk of finding no use for life, he 's either a coward or sick. And—I know you 're not a coward, Peter."

The man on the couch turned uneasily.

"Nor sick either. You are as stubborn and narrow as an old woman, Barstow," he complained.

"Living is n't a matter of courage, physical or moral. It suits you—it doesn't happen to suit me, but that doesn't mean that you are well and moral while I 'm sick and a coward. My difficulty is simple—clear; I haven't the material means to get out of life what I want. I 'll admit that I might get it by working longer, but I should have to work so many years in my own way that there would n't in the end be enough of me left to enjoy the reward. Now, if I don't like that proposition, who the devil is to criticize me for not accepting it?"

"It's quitting not to stay."

"It would be if we elected to come. We don't. Moreover, my case is simplified by circumstances—no one is dependent upon me either directly or indirectly. I have no relatives—few friends. These, like you, would call me names for a minute after I 'd gone and then forget."

"You 're talking beautiful nonsense," observed Barstow.

"Schopenhauer says—"

"Damn your barbaric pessimists and all their hungry tribe!"

Donaldson smiled a trifle condescendingly.

"What's the use of talking to you when you 'll not admit a sound deduction? And yet, if I said you don't know what results when you put together two known chemicals, you 'd—"

There was a look in Barstow's face that checked Donaldson,—a look of worried recollection.

"I 'd say nothing," he asserted earnestly, "because I *don't* always know."

For a moment his fingers fluttered over the medley of bottles upon the shelves before him. They paused over a small vial containing a brilliant scarlet liquid. He picked it out and held it to the light.

"See this?" he asked.

Donaldson nodded indifferently.

"It is a case in point. Theoretically I should have here the innocuous union of three harmless chemicals; as a matter of fact I had occasion to experiment with it and learned that I had innocently produced a vicious and unheard-of poison. The stuff is of no use. It is one of those things a man occasionally stumbles upon in this work,—better forgotten. How do I account for it? I don't. Even in science there is always the unknown element which comes in and plays the devil with results."

"But according to your no-waste theory, even this discovery ought to have some use," commented Donaldson with a smile.

"Well," drawled the chemist whimsically, "perhaps it has; it makes murder very simple for the laity."

"How?"

Barstow turned back to his test-tube, relieved that the conversation had taken another turn.

"Because of the slowness with which it works. It requires seven days for the system to assimilate it and yet the stomach stubbornly retains it all this while. It is impossible to eliminate it from the body once it is swallowed. It produces no symptoms and leaves no evidence. There is no antidote. In the end it paralyzes the heart—swiftly, silently, surely."

Donaldson sat up.

"Any pain?" he inquired.

"None."

Barstow ran his finger over a calendar on the wall. Then he glanced at his watch.

"Stay a little while longer and you can see for yourself how it works. I am making a final demonstration of its properties."

Barstow stepped into the next room. He was gone five minutes and returned with a scrawny bull terrier scrambling at his heels. The little brute, overjoyed at his release, frisked across the floor, clumsily tumbling over his own feet, and sniffed as an overture of friendship at Donaldson's low shoes. Then wagging his feeble tail he lifted his head and patiently blinked moist eyes awaiting a verdict. The young man stooped and scratched behind its ears, the dog holding his head sideways and pressing against his ankles. He looked like a dog of the streets, but in his eyes there was the dumb appreciation of human sympathy which neutralizes breeding and blood. As Barstow returned to his work, the pup followed after him in a series of awkward bounds.

"Poor little pup," murmured Donaldson, sympathetically leaning forward with his arms upon his knees. "What's his name?"

"Sandy. But he 's a lucky little pup according to you; within an hour by the clock he ought to be dead."

"Dead?"

"If my poison works. It was seven days ago to-night that I gave him a dose."

Donaldson's brows contracted. He was big-hearted. This seemed a cruel thing to do. He whistled to the pup and called him by name, "Sandy, Sandy." But the dog only wagged his tail in response and snuggled with brute confidence closer to his master. Donaldson snapped his fingers coaxingly, leaning far over towards him. Reluctantly, at a nod from Barstow, the dog crept belly to the ground across the room. Donaldson picked up the trembling terrier and settling him into his lap passed his hand thoughtfully over the warm smooth sides where he could feel the heart pounding sturdily.

From the dog, Donaldson lifted his eyes to Barstow's back. They were dark brown eyes, set deep

below a square forehead. His head, too, was square and drooped a bit between loose shoulders. He smiled to himself at some passing thought and the smile cast a pleasant softness over features which at rest appeared rather angular and decidedly intense. The mouth was large and the irregular teeth were white as a hound's. His black hair was cut short and at the temples was turning gray, although he had not yet reached thirty. It was an eager face, a strong face. It hardened to granite over life in the abstract and softened to the feminine before concrete examples of it.

"It is a bit of a paradox," he resumed, "that so harmless a creature as you, Barstow, should stumble upon so deadly an agent. What do you call it?"

"I have n't reported it yet. I don't know as I care to have my name coupled with it in these days of newspaper notoriety—even though it may be my one bid for fame."

Donaldson drew a package of Durham from his pocket and fumbled around until he found a loose paper. He deftly rolled a cigarette, his long fingers moving with the dexterity of a pianist. He smoked a moment in silence, exhaling the smoke thoughtfully with his eyes towards the ceiling. The dog, his neck outstretched on Donaldson's knee, blinked sleepily across the room at his master. The gas, blown about by drafts from the open window, threw grotesque dancing shadows upon the stained, worn boards of the floor. Finally Donaldson burst out, ever recurring to the one subject like a man anxious to defend himself,

"Barstow, I tell you that merely to cling to existence is not an act in itself either righteous or courageous. If we owe obligations to individuals we should pay them to the last cent. If we owe obligations to society, we should pay those, too,—just as we pay our poll tax. But life is a straight business proposition—pay in some form for what you get out of it. There are no individuals in my life, as I said. And what do I owe society? Society does not like what I offer—the best of me—and will not give me what I want—the best of *it*. Very well, to the devil with society. Our mutual obligations are cancelled."

Barstow, still busy with his work, shook his head.

"You come out wrong every time," he insisted. "You don't seem to get at the opportunities there are in just living."

The young man took a long breath.

"So?" he demanded between half closed teeth. "No?" he challenged with bitter intensity. "You are wrong; I know all that it is possible for life to mean! That's the trouble. Oh, I know clear to my parched soul! I was made to live, Barstow,—made to live life to its fullest! There isn't a bit of it I don't love,—love too well to be content much longer to play the galley slave in it. To live is to be free. I love the blue sky above until I ache to madness that I cannot live under it; I love the trees and grasses, the oceans, the forests and the denizens of the forests; I love men and women; I love the press of crowds, the clamor of men; I love silks and beautiful paintings and clean white linen and flowers; I love good food, good clothes, good wine, good music, good sermons, and good books. All—all it is within me to love and to desire mightily. How I want those things—not morbidly—but because I have five good senses and God knows how many more; because I was *made* to have those things!"

"Then why don't you keep after them?" demanded Barstow coldly.

"Because the price of them is so much of my soul and body that I 'd have nothing left with which to enjoy them afterwards. You can't get those things honestly in time to enjoy them, in one generation. You can't get them at all, unless you sell the best part of you as you did when you came to the Gordon Chemical Company. Oh Lord, Barstow, how came you to forget all the dreams we used to dream?"

Barstow turned quickly. There was the look upon his face as of a man who presses back a little. For a moment he appeared pained. But he answered steadily,

"I have other dreams now, saner dreams."

"Saner dreams? What are your saner dreams but less troublesome dreams,—lazier dreams? Dreams that fit into things as they are instead of demanding things as they should be? You sleep o' nights now; you sleep snugly, you tread safely about the cage they trapped you into."

"Then let me alone there. Don't—don't poke me up."

Donaldson snapped away his cigarette.

"No. Why should I? But I 'll have none of it. That damned Barnum, 'Society,' shall not catch me and trim my claws and file my teeth."

He laughed to himself, his lips drawn back a little, rubbing behind the pup's ears. The dog moved sleepily.

"Barstow," he continued more calmly, "this is n't a whine. I 'm not discouraged—it is n't that. I 'm not frightened, nor despondent, nor worried, understand. I know that things will come out all right by the time I 'm fifty, but I shall then be fifty. I 'd like a taste of the jungle now—a week or two of roaming free, of sprawling in the sunshine, of drinking at the living river, of rolling under the blue sky. I 'd like

to slash around uncurbed outside the pale a little. I 'd like to do it while I 'm young and strong,—I 'd like to do it now."

"In brief," suggested Barstow, "you desire money."

"Enough so that I might forget there was such a thing."

"Well, you 'll have to sell something of yourself to get it."

"Just so. I won't and there you are. You see I don't fit."

Donaldson paused a moment and then went on.

"You know something of my story, you alone of all this grinding city. You saw me in college and in the law school, where on a coolie diet I did a man's work. But even you don't know how close to hard pan I was during those seven years,—down to crackers and water for weeks at a time."

"You don't mean to say you went hungry?"

"Hungry?" laughed Donaldson. "Man dear, there were days when I was starving! I 've been to classes when I was so weak I could n't push my pencil. I was hungry, and cold, and lonesome, but at that time I had my good warm, well-fed dreams, so I did n't mind so much. And always I thought it would be better next year, but it was n't. None of the things that come to some men fell to me; it continued the same old pitiless grind until I began to expect it. Then I said to myself that it would be different when I got through. But it was n't. I finished, and you are the only pleasant recollection I have of all that past. You used to let me sit by your fire and now and then you brought out cake they had sent you from home."

"Good Lord," groaned Barstow, "why did n't you let a fellow know?"

"Why should I let you know? It was my fight. But I 've watched by the hour your every move about the room, so hungry that my pulse increased or decreased as you neared or retreated from the closet where you kept that cake. I 'll admit that this condition was a good deal my fault,—I had a cursed false pride that forbade my doing for grub what some of the fellows did. Then, too, I was an optimist; it was coming out all right in the end. But it did n't and it has n't."

Donaldson paused.

"Am I boring you, old man?"

"No! No! Go on. But if I had suspected—"

"You could not then have been the friend you were to me,—I 'd have cut you dead. And understand, I 'm not recalling this now for the purpose of exciting sympathy. I don't deserve sympathy; I went my own gait and cheerfully paid the cost, content with my dreams of the future. I would n't sell one whit of myself. I wouldn't sacrifice one extravagant belief. I would n't compromise. And I 'm glad I did n't."

"When I finished my course you lost sight of me, but it was the same old thing over again. I refused to accept a position in a law office, because I would n't be fettered. I had certain definite notions of how a law practice ought to be conducted,—of certain things a decent man ought not to do. This in turn barred me from a job offered by a street railway company and another by a promoting syndicate. I took a room and waited. It has been a long wait, Barstow, a bitter long wait. Four barren years have gone. I have been hungry again; I have gone on wearing second-hand clothes; I have slept in second-class surroundings; my life has resembled life about as much as the naked trees in the Fall resemble those in June. I have existed after a fashion and learned that if I skimp and drudge and save for twenty years I can then begin to do the things I wish to do. But not before,—not before without compromise. And I 've had enough of the will o' the wisp Future, enough of the shadowy to-morrows. I 've saved a few hundreds and had a few hundreds left me recently by the last relative I had on earth. I 'd like to take this and squander it—live a space."

"Why don't you?"

"It's the curse of coming back, and the mere fact that your heart continues to tick forces that upon you. There is only one way—one way to dodge the mortgage I would place upon my Future by spending these savings."

"And that?"

"Not to let the heart tick on; to bar the future."

Donaldson moved a bit uneasily. As he did so the pup lost his balance and fell to the floor. The little fellow struck upon his side but instantly regained his feet, blinking sleepily at the light. Barstow took out his watch and squatting nearer him studied him with interest.

Suddenly the dog's legs crumpled beneath him. He tried to stand, to make his way to his master, but instantly toppled over on his side. Donaldson reached for him. That which he lifted was like a limp glove. He drew back from it in horror, glancing up at Barstow.

"You see," exclaimed the chemist with evident satisfaction, "almost to the hour!"

"But he isn't—"

"Dead!"

"Poor Sandy! Poor Sandy!"

Donaldson gingerly passed his fingers over the dog's hair. He was curiously unconvinced. There was no responsive lift of the head, no contented wagging of the tail, but that was the only difference. A moment ago the dog had been asleep for an hour; now he was asleep for an eternity. That was the only difference.

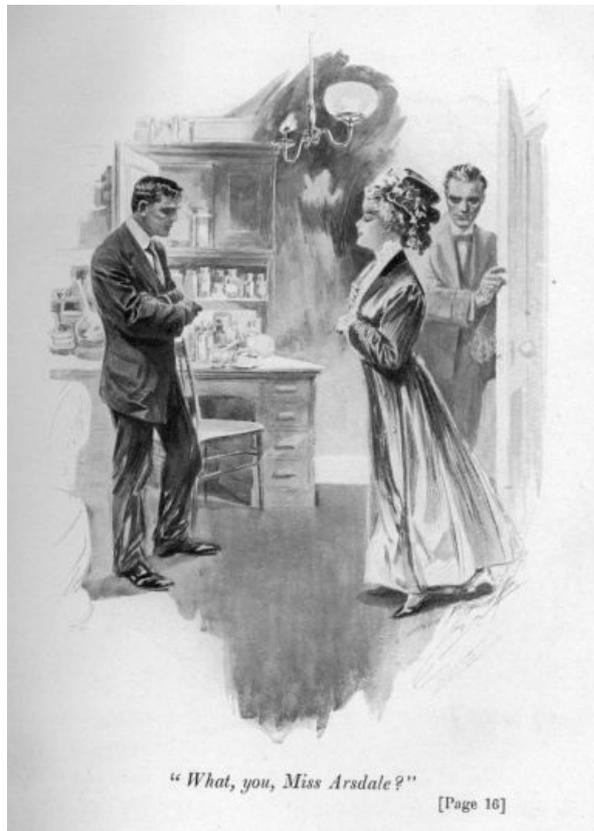
"Well," reflected Barstow, "Sandy had his week; beefsteak, bread and milk, all he could eat."

"Is n't that better than being still alive,—hungry in the gutters?"

"God knows," answered Barstow solemnly, as he picked up the body and carried it into the next room. "You see what is left."

As Barstow went out, Donaldson crossed to the chemist's desk. He fumbled nervously among the bottles until he found the little vial Barstow had pointed out. He had just time to thrust this into his pocket and reseal himself before Barstow returned. At the same moment there was a firm but decidedly feminine knock upon the outer door. The chemist seemed to recognize it, for instead of his usual impatient shout he went to the door and opened it. And yet, when the feeble light revealed his visitor he evinced surprise.

"What, you, Miss Arsdale?"



"What, you, Miss Arsdale?"

"Yes, Professor," she answered, slightly out of breath. "I thought that if I hurried I might possibly find you here. I am all out of my brother's medicine and I did not dare wait until to-morrow."

"I 'm glad you did n't," he responded heartily. "If you will sit down a moment I will prepare it."

Donaldson glanced up, irritated to think he had not left earlier and so escaped the inevitable introduction. He saw a young woman of perhaps twenty-two or three, and then—the young woman's eyes. They were dark, but not black, a sort of silver black like gun metal. They were, he noted instantly, apparently more mature than the rest of her features, as is sometimes true when the soul grows out of proportion to the years. Her hair was of a reddish brown; brown in the shadows, a golden red as she stood beneath the gas-jet. She was a little below medium height, rather slight, and was dressed in a dark blue pongee suit, the coat of which reached to her ankles. One might expect most anything of her, thought Donaldson, child or woman. It would no more surprise one to see her in tears over a trifle than standing firm in a crisis; bending over a wisp of embroidery, or driving a sixty horse-power automobile. Of one thing Donaldson thought he could be sure; that whatever she did she would do with all her

heart.

These and many other fugitive thoughts passed through Donaldson's brain during the few minutes he was left here alone with her. What was said he could not remember a minute afterwards; something of the night, something of the brilliant reflections of the gas-light in the varicolored bottles, something of the approaching summer. Her thoughts seemed to be as far removed from this small room as were his own.

"Your patient is better?" Barstow inquired, when he returned with the package.

Her face lightened instantly.

"Yes," she answered, "much better."

"Good." He added, "I should n't think it safe for you to be out alone at night. Have n't there been a good many highway robberies recently in your neighborhood?"

"You have heard?"

"It would be difficult to listen to the newsboys and not hear that. The last one, a week ago, made the fourth, didn't it?"

"I don't know. I seldom read the papers. They are too horrible."

"I will gladly escort you if—"

"I could n't think of troubling you," she protested, starting at once for the door. "I 'm in the machine, so I 'm quite safe. Good night."

With a nod and smile to both men she went out.

Donaldson himself prepared to go at once.

"Well, old man," he apologized nervously to the chemist, "pardon me for boring you so long. It is bad taste I know for a man to air such views as mine, but it has done me good."

"Take my advice and forget them yourself. Go into the country. Loaf a little in the sunshine. Stay a week. I 'm going off for a while myself."

"You leave—"

"Within a few days, possibly. I can't tell."

"Well, s' long and a pleasant trip to you."

Donaldson gripped the older man's hand. The latter gazed at him affectionately, apprehensively.

"See here, Peter," he broke out earnestly. "There is one thing even better for you than the country, a thing that includes the sunshine and everything else worth while in life. I have hesitated about mentioning it, but this girl who was here made me think of it again. You know I 'm not a sentimental man, Peter?"

"Unless you have changed. But your panacea?"

"Love."

"That's a generic term."

"Just plain human love, love for a woman like this one who was here. I wish you knew her. She 'd be good for you; she 'd give your present self-centred life a broader meaning."

Donaldson turned away.

"Barstow," he replied uneasily, "you 're good,—good clear through, but we move in different worlds. It is n't in me to love as you mean. I 'm too critical, which is to say too selfish."

"I think you are selfish, Peter," Barstow agreed frankly, "but I don't think it's your nature. You 've got into the Slough of Despond, and the only thing that will drag you out of that is love, love of something outside yourself. Try it."

Donaldson shook his head.

"You 're as good as gold," he declared, "but the things which content you and me are not the same. Good night."

"Good night. Be sure to drop in again when I get back."

Donaldson went out the door. He groped his way down the stairs into the street. Once he swung abruptly on his heel and stared at the pavement behind him. He thought he heard at his heels the

scratching padded tread of the pup.

CHAPTER II

King of To-day

Donaldson pressed his way along the lighted streets, clutching the vial in his pocket with the thrill of a man holding the key to fretting shackles. One week of life with the future eliminated; one week with no reckoning to be made at the end; one week with every human fetter struck off; one week in which to ignore every curbing law of futurity and abandon himself to the joy of the present! The future—even the narrow bounds of an earthly future—holds men prisoners. A few careless dogs, to be sure, live their day, blind to the years to come, but that is brute stupidity. A few brave souls swagger through their prime with some bravado, knowing the final cost, but willing to pay it by installments through the dribbling years which follow; but the usury of time makes that folly. The wise choke such gypsy impulses—admit the mortgage of the Present to the Future—and surrender the brisk liberty of youth to the limping freedom of old age. But Donaldson was too thoughtful a man to belong to either the first or second class and yet of too lusty stuff to join the third.

There were now just two doubtful points which checked him in his first impulse to swallow the deadly elixir at once,—two questions needing further thought before he would have a clear conscience about it; he must convince himself a trifle more clearly that he shifted nothing to the load of those he left behind, and he must make sure that no element of fear entered into his act. That phrase of Barstow's, "It's quitting not to stay," smarted a bit.

In spite of these vital problems, Donaldson was keenly conscious, even with his wild freedom still nothing but a conception, of sharpened senses which responded keenly to the lights and sounds about him. This bottle which he held made him feel like some old time king's messenger who carried a warrant making him exempt from local laws. He moved among people whose perplexed thoughts wandered restlessly down the everlasting vista of the days ahead, and he alone of them all knew the secret of being untroubled beyond the week. The world had not for ten years appeared so gay to him. He felt the exhilarating sting of life as he had when it first surged in upon him at twenty. The very fact that he held even a temporary solution to his barren days was enough. In the joy of his almost august scorn of circumstance he forgot the minor difficulties which still lay before him.

He turned aside from the direct course to his room into Broadway. It was the last of May and early evening. The month revealed itself in the warm night sky and the buoyant spirits of those below its velvet richness. Spring was in the air—a stimulation as of etherialized champagne. The spirit of adventure, the spirit of renaissance, the spirit of creation was abroad once more. Not a cranny in even this sprawling section of denaturalized earth but thrilled for the time being with budding hopes, sap-swollen courage, and bright, colorful dreams. Walking beneath the spitting glare of the arc-lights, through the golden mist flooding from the store windows, Donaldson hazily saw again the careless unburdened world of his early youth. He caught the spirit of Broadway and all Broadway means in the spring. It was a marionette world where marionettes dance their gayest. Yesterday this would have been to him nothing but a dead bioscope picture; now, though he still sat an onlooker in the pit, it was a living human drama at which he gazed.

Two dark-haired grisettes passed him, their cheeks aglow and their eyes dancing. They appeared so full of life, so very gay, that he turned to glance back at them. He found the eyes of the prettier one upon him; she had turned to look at him. It was long since even so trifling an intrigue as this had quickened his life.

As a matter of fact Donaldson always attracted more interest in feminine eyes than, in his self engrossment, he was ever aware. Even in his shiny blue serge suit, baggy at the knees and sagging at the shoulders, even in his shabby hat, he carried himself with an air. Two things about his person were always as fine and immaculate as though he were a gentleman of some fortune, his linen and his shoes. But in addition to such slight externals Donaldson, although not a large man, had good shoulders, a well-poised head, and walked with an Indian stride from the hips that made him noticeable among the flat-footed native New Yorkers. He might have been mistaken for an ambitious actor of the younger school; even for a forceful young cleric, save for the fact that he smoked his cigarette with evident satisfaction.

He followed an aimless course—but a course fairly prickling with new sensations—until he stood before one of the popular cafés, now effervescing with sprightly life. He paused here a moment to listen to the music. A group of well-groomed men and women laughingly clambered out of a big touring car and passed in before the obsequious attendants. He watched them with some envy. Music, good food, good wines, laughter, and bright eyes—the flimsiest vanities of life to be sure—and yet there was something in his hungry heart that craved them all. Well, ten years from now perhaps,—his hand fell upon the vial. No. Not ten years from now, but to-morrow, even tomorrow, he might claim these luxuries!

He jumped on a car and in thirty minutes stood in the lean, quiet street into which for three years he had stared from his third floor room. These quarters seemed now more than ever a parody on home. This row of genteel structures which had degenerated into boarding houses for the indigent and struggling younger generation, and the wrecks of the past, embodied, in even the blank stare of their exteriors, stupid mediocrity. He fumbled nervously in his pocket for his latch-key, and opening the door climbed the three stale flights to his room. He lighted both gas-jets, but even then the gloom remained. He craved more light—the dazzling light of arc-lamps, the glare reflected from polished mirrors. Better absolute darkness than this. He turned out the gas and throwing open his window leaned far out over the sill. Then he concentrated his thoughts upon the issue confronting him.

At the end of other colorless days, when he had come back here only to be tortured by the stretch of gray road before him, he had considered as a possibility that which now was almost a reality. He had always been checked by this desire to have first his taste of life and by the troublesome conviction that there was something unfair about seizing it in this way. Furthermore, though he could, without Barstow's discovery, have lived his week and closed it by any one of a dozen effective means, he realized that he could not trust even himself to fulfill at the end—no matter how binding the oath—so fearful a decree. A few deep draughts of joyous life might turn his head. It was as dangerous an experiment as taking the first smoke of opium, as tampering with the first injection of morphine, upon the promise of stopping there. No, before beginning he must set at work some power outside himself which should be operative even against his will; which should be as final as death itself. Until to-night this had seemed an impossibility. Now, with that chief obstruction removed, he had but to consider the ethics of the question.

In arguing with Barstow he had been sincere. He believed as he had said that a man had the right to end the contract so long as he cheated no one by so doing. All his life he had paid his way like a man, done his duty like a good citizen, given a fair return for everything he took. He did not feel himself indebted to his country, his state, his city, nor to any living man or woman. In one form and another, he had paid. Few men could claim this as sincerely as Donaldson. He had lived conscientiously, so very conscientiously in fact that it was as much rebellion against self-imposed fetters which now drove him on to an opposite extreme as any bitterness against that society which had spurned his idealism. He had refused to compromise and learned that the world uses only as martyrs those who so refuse. The limitations of his nature were defined by the fact that he withdrew from so self sacrificing an end as that. But now if he demanded nothing more—if he was tired of this give and take—why should he not balance accounts?

Chiefly because there would still be one week to account for—that last week in which he should demand most. Like an inspiration came the solution to this, the final difficulty; economically he was wasting a life; very well, but if he could find a way of not wasting it, of giving his life to another, then he would have paid even this last bill. In the excitement of this new idea, he paced his room. If he could give his life for another! But supposing this were impossible, supposing no opportunity should offer, it would be something if he held himself open, offered himself a free instrument of Fate. He could promise—and he knew he could keep so sacred a promise as this with death approaching in so inevitable a form,—he could promise to offer himself upon the slightest pretext, recklessly and without fear, instantly and without thought, to the first chance which might come to him to give his life for another. That was the bond he would give to Fate—the same Fate which had produced him—his life for the life of another. Let society use him so if such use could be found for him. He would stand ready, would live up to the spirit and the letter of the bond unhesitatingly. For one week he would live his life in the present upon that condition—one week with the eighth day a blank, one week with the whole world his plaything.

He stared with new eyes from his window to the jumble of houses below, to the jumble of stars above. The whole world expanded and vibrated before the intensity of his passion. He was to condense a possible thirty or forty years into seven days. To-day was the twenty-third of May. By to-morrow noon he could adjust all his affairs. With nothing to demand of them in the future it would be an easy matter to cut them off. On Friday, May twenty-fourth, then, he could begin. This would bring the end on the thirty-first.

He considered a moment; was it better to die at noon or at night? An odd thing for a man to decide, but such details as this might as well be fixed now as later. It took but a moment's deliberation; he elected to go out at high noon. There would be dark enough afterwards—possibly an eternity of dark. He would face the sun with his last gaze; he would have the mad riot of men and women at midday ringing last in his ears.

As he drew in deep breaths it was as if he inhaled the whole world. He felt as though, if he but stepped out sturdily enough, he could foot the darkness. His head was light; his brain teemed with wild fancies. Then pressing through this medley he saw for a moment the young woman who had come to Barstow's laboratory. The effect was to steady him. He remembered the sweet girlishness of her face, the freshness of it which was like the freshness of a garden in the early morning. He realized that she stood for one thing that he could never know. What was it that he saw now in those strange eyes that left him a bit wistful at thought of this? There was not a detail of her features, of her dress, of her speech, that he could not see now as vividly as though she were still standing before him. That was odd, too. He was not ordinarily so impressionable. It occurred to him that he would not like her to know what he was about to do. Bah, he was getting maudlin!

Late as it was, he left his room and went downtown to his office. He worked here until daylight, falling asleep in his chair from four to seven. He awoke fresh, and even more eager than the night

before to undertake his venture.

There remained still a few men to be seen. He transacted his business with a brilliant dispatch and swift decision that startled them. He disposed of all his office furniture, his books, destroyed all his letters, made a will leaving instructions for the disposal of his body, and concluded every other detail of his affairs before eleven o'clock. When he left his office to go back to his room, he had in his pocket every cent he possessed in the world in crisp new bank notes. It amounted to twenty-eight hundred and forty-seven dollars. Not much to scatter over a long life,—not much as capital. Invested it might yield some seventy dollars a year. But as ready cash, it really stood for a fortune. It was the annual income at four per cent on over seventy thousand dollars, the monthly income on eight hundred and forty thousand dollars, the weekly income on over three million. For seven days then he could squander the revenue of a princely estate.

As a matter of fact his position was even more remarkable; he was as wealthy—so far as his own capacity for pleasure went—as though the possessor of thirty million. This because of his limitations; he was barred from travel; barred from the purchase of future holdings; barred from everything by this time restriction save what he could absorb within seven days through his five senses. Being an intelligent man of decent morals and no bad habits, he was also restrained from license and the gross extravagance accompanying it. But within his own world, there was not a desire which need remain unsatisfied.

Back again in his room he summoned his landlady.

"I am going away," he informed her briefly. "I sha'n't leave any address and I 'm going to take with me only the few things I can pack into a dress-suit case. I 'll give you the rest."

The woman—she had become rather fond of the quiet, gentle third story front—looked up sympathetically.

"Have you had bad news?"

"Bad news? No," he smiled. "Very good news. I 'm going to take a sort of vacation."

"Then perhaps you 'll come back."

"So, I 'm quite sure I shall never come back."

She watched him at his packing, still puzzled by his behavior. She noticed that he took nothing but a few trinkets, a handful of linen, and a book or two. He glanced at his watch.

"Madame," he announced, offering her his hand, "it is now eleven thirty. My vacation begins in half an hour. I must hurry. The remainder of these things I bequeath to you."

In twenty minutes he was at the Waldorf. He asked for and was allotted one of the best rooms in the house, for which he paid the suspicious clerk in advance. When at length he was left alone in his luxurious apartments, it was still a few minutes before twelve. He drew the vial from his pocket without fear, without hesitation. He placed his watch upon the table before him. Then he sat down and wrote out the following oath:

"I, Peter Donaldson, swear by all that I hold most sacred that I will offer my life freely and without question for the protection of any human being needing it during these next seven days in which I shall live."

He signed this in a bold scrawling hand. It was as simply and earnestly expressed as he knew how to make it.

He uncorked the vial and poured the liquid into a glass without a quaver of his hand. He mixed a little water with it and raised it to his lips. There he paused, for once again he seemed to see the big, calm eyes of the girl now staring at him as though in surprise. But this time he smiled, and with a little lift of the glass towards her swallowed the liquid at a gulp.

CHAPTER III

The Beginning of the End

Before the bitter taste of the syrup faded from his tongue, Donaldson's thoughts shifted from the Ultimate to the Now. He was too good a sportsman to question his judgment by worry when once committed to an enterprise. The world now lay before him as he had wished it—an enchanted land in which he could move with as great freedom as a prince in the magical kingdoms of Arabia. The Present

became sharpened to poignancy. Even as he stood there musing over the marvel of the new world into which he had leaped—the old thin world of years condensed into one thick week—he realized that this very wondering had cost him five precious minutes. A dozen such periods made an hour, two dozen hours a day—one seventh of his living space. This thought so whetted his interest that he could have sat on here indefinitely, thrilled to the marrow by the mere pageant of life as it passed before his eyes on the street below. The slightest incident was now dramatic; the hurry of men and women on their way up-town and down-town, the swift movement of vehicles, the fluttering of birds in the sunshine, the unceasing, eager flux of life. It was through the eyes of youth he was looking—for is youth anything more than the ability to live the irresponsible days as they come? Youth is Omar without his philosophy. He grew dizzy. Life taken so was too powerful a stimulant. He must brace himself.

He settled into one of the big chairs, closing his eyes to the wonders about him, and tried to think more soberly. He felt as though he must dull his quickened senses in some way. His unsheathed nerves quivered back from so direct a contact with life.

"Quiet, old man, quiet," he cautioned himself. "There 's a lot of things you wish to do in these next few days. So you must sober down—you must get a grip on yourself."

He rose to his feet determinedly. He must work out of such moods as this. One of the first things for him to do was to buy a decent personal outfit. As soon as he gave his mind a definite object upon which to work, his thoughts instantly cleared. It was just some such matter-of-fact task as this which he needed.

He went down-stairs, and stepping into a taxicab, was whisked to one of the large retail stores. He had no time to squander upon a tailor, but he was successful in securing a good fit in ready-made clothing. He bought several street suits, evening clothes, overcoats and hats, much silk underwear—a luxury he had always promised himself in that ghost future—and an extravagant supply of cravats, gloves, socks, and odds and ends. He omitted nothing necessary to make him feel a well-dressed man so far as he could find it ready made. There was nothing conceited about Donaldson, nothing of the fop, but he enjoyed both the feeling and the appearance of rich garments. He hired a messenger boy who announced his name as Bobby and who followed along at his heels, collecting the bundles and carrying them out to the waiting cab.

He was a fresh cheeked youngster with a quick interest in things. He could n't make up his mind whether Donaldson was really an Indian prince or whether as a result of drinking he merely felt like one. As time passed and he saw that the man was neither an oriental nor drunk, his imagination then wavered between accepting him as an English duke or a member of the Vanderbilt family.

Donaldson perceived the keen interest the boy was taking in his purchases, saw the wonder in his eyes grow, based upon a faith that still accepted Aladdin as an ever-present possibility, and realized that Bobby was getting almost as much fun out of this game as he himself. He began to humor him further by consulting his taste in the matter of ties and waistcoats, though he found that the latter's sporting instincts led him to colors too pronounced to harmonize with his own ideas. Still he appreciated the fact that Bobby was indulging in almost as many thrills as though he were actually holding the purse. This became especially true when Donaldson allowed the boy to purchase for himself such articles as struck his fancy. As a matter of fact there was not so much difference in the present point of view of the man and the boy; it was to them both a fairy episode.

They lounged from one store to another, enjoying the lights, the colors, the beautiful cloths, choosing where they would with all the abandon of those with genii to serve them. Donaldson was indulging something more fundamental than his enjoyment of the things themselves; this was his first taste, as well as Bobby's, of gratifying desires without worry of the reckoning. His wishes were now stripped to bare wants. He was free of the skeleton hand of the Future which had so long held him prisoner—which had frightened him into depriving himself of all life's garnishings until his condition had been reduced to one of monastic simplicity without the monk's redeeming inspiration. He was no longer mocked by the thin cry of "Wait!"

He moved about this gay store world with a sense of kingly superiority. He listened indulgently to the idle chatter of the shop girls, the rattle of the cash boxes, and smiled at the seriousness with which this business of selling was pressed. What a tremendous ado they made of living, with year after year, month after month, day after day, looming endlessly before them! Not an act which they performed, even to the tying up of a bundle, ended in itself, but was one of an endless vista of acts. The burden of the Future was upon them. They drooped, poor bloodless things, beneath the weight of the relentless days before them. And so this faded present was all their future, too. They saw nothing of the joyous world which spun around him bright as a new coin. They were dead, because of the weary days to come, to the magical brilliancy of the big arc-lights, to the humor and action of the crowd, to the quick shifts of colors; they were stupefied by this great flux of life which swept them on day after day to another day. Often unexpressed, this, but felt dumbly below the chatter and dry laughter. They waited, waited, circling about in a gray maelstrom until the grave sucked them in. He himself had been in the clutch of it. But that was yesterday.

To-day he saw all that lay unseen before their dulled vision—all the show with its million actors. He saw for example the pathos in the patient eyes of the old lady yonder—still waiting at eighty; he caught the flash of scarlet ribbon beyond, the silent message of the black one (another long waiting); the muffled laugh and the muffled oath; the careless eyes that tossed the coin to the counter, the sharp eyes that followed it, the dead ones that picked it up and threw it into the nicked cash box which flew

with it to its golden nest; the tread, the tread, the tread of a thousand feet, the beat, beat, beat of a thousand hearts. All these things he saw and heard and felt.

When he had fully replenished his wardrobe he still had several hours left to him. He remembered a unique book store just off Fifth Avenue at West Thirty-ninth Street which he had frequently passed, often lingering in front of the windows to admire quaint English prints. On cloudy days especially he had often made it a point to walk up there and breathe in the spirit of sunshine that he found in the green grass of the old hunting scenes and in the scarlet coats of the hearty-cheeked men riding to hounds upon their lean horses.

"Come on," he called enthusiastically to Bobby. "We 've just begun."

"Gee!" gasped Bobby. "H'aint you spent it all? Have yer gut more left?"

"Lots. As much as I can spend until I die."

The boy's face grew eager.

"Say," he asked confidentially. "Where 'd yer git it?"

"Earned it,—the most of it. Sweat for it and starved for it and suffered for it! And I earned with it the right to spend it, the *right*, I tell you!"

Bobby shrank back a little before such fierceness. The boy felt a faint suspicion of what had not before occurred to him: that the man was crazy. But the next second the gentle smile returned to soften the tense mouth, and the boy's fear vanished. No one could fear Donaldson when he smiled.

In front of the modest shop with its quaint sign swinging above the door, they paused. Donaldson found it difficult to believe that he now had the right to enter. To him this store had never been anything else but a part of the scenery of life, a part of the setting of some foreign world at which he gazed like a boy from the upper galleries of a theatre. He had rebelled at this, looking with some hostility at the well groomed men and women who accepted it with such assurance that it was for them alone, but now he realized the pettiness of that position. With a few unmortgaged dollars in his pocket, he was instantly one of them. He could stride in and use the quiet luxury of the place as his own.

For half an hour then, he browsed about the sun-lit shop, selecting here and there bits with which to brighten his room during the week. He picked out an engraving or two, several English prints which seemed to welcome him like old friends, and a marine in water color because of the golden blue in it. His bill exceeded that of the department stores, and Bobby confidently delivered himself of the opinion that he had been soaked, "good and plenty."

From here Donaldson began an extravagant course down Fifth Avenue that left the boy, who watched him closely every time he paid his bill, convinced that he had on his hands nothing short of an Arabian Prince such as his sister had told him of when he had thought her fooling. They wandered from book store to art store, to Tiffany's, to an antique shop back to another book store and then to where in his lean days he had seen a bit of Dresden that brought comfort to him through its dainty beauty. He took for his own now all the old familiar friends who had done what they could through store windows to brighten those days. They should be a part of him; share his week with him. There was that old hammered copper tray which in the sun glowed like a cooling ember; there was that hand-illuminated volume of Keats which he had so long craved; there was that vase of Cloisonne, that quaint piece of ivory browned with age, that old pewter mug reflecting the burden of its years in its sober surface. All these things he had long ago known as his own, and now he came to claim them.

"Mine, all mine!" he exclaimed to the boy. "And was n't it decent of them to wait for me?"

"They was waitin' for you all right," agreed Bobby. "They seen you comin'. They waits fer the easy marks."

"Yes," returned Donaldson, ignoring the latter's sarcasm. "They saw me coming when yet I was a great way off. They knew me, so they waited. I told them all to wait and some day I would come to them."

"D' yuh mean that ivory monkey waited?"

"For nearly a year."

Bobby did not reply, but his respect for Donaldson fell several degrees.

"There is one thing more, boy," exclaimed Donaldson; "I need flowers."

He ordered sent to his room two dozen rich lipped roses, a half dozen potted plants, and a small conservatory of ferns. Then he started back to the hotel.

It took the boy several trips to carry the bundles upstairs even when they were piled to his eyes. When he finished, Donaldson held out his hand.

"I 've had a mighty pleasant afternoon with you," he said. "And I hope we 'll meet again. What's your number?"

"Thirty-four fifty-seven."

"Well, thirty-four fifty-seven, give us your hand in case we lose one another for good."

The boy gingerly extended his grimy paw. When he removed it, he found himself clutching a ten-dollar bill.

Donaldson remained in his room only long enough to arrange his treasures and slip into his evening clothes. There was too much outside to be enjoyed for him to appreciate yet the luxury of his indoor surroundings. He had a passion for people, for crowds of people. He had thought at first that he might attend the theatre, but he realized now that the stage puppets were but faint reflections of the stirring drama all about him—the playwright's plot less gripping than that in which he himself was the central figure. To pass through those doors would be more like stepping out of a theatre into the leaden reality of life as he had seen it before yesterday.

For an hour or more he rubbed shoulders with the press that was on its way to find relief from their own lives in the mimic lives of others behind the footlights. To him in the Now it was comedy enough to watch them as they filed in; it would have been an anticlimax to have gone further. He craved good music, but a search of the papers did not reveal any concert of note, so he sought one of the popular restaurants, and, choosing a table in a corner, devoted himself to the ordering of his dinner. He was hungry and took a childish delight in selecting without first studying the price list.

When he had concluded, he took a more careful survey of the room. His wandering gaze was checked by the profile of the woman whose eyes had haunted him ever since he had first seen them in Barstow's laboratory. It was Miss Arsdale, and opposite her sat a tall, thin-visaged young man. As the latter turned and presented a full face view, Donaldson was held by the peculiarity of his expression. His hot, beadlike eyes burned from a white sensitive face that was almost emaciated; his thin lips were set as though in grim resolution; while even his brown hair refused to lend repose to the face, but, sticking out in cowlicks, added to the whole effect of nervousness still further exaggerated by the restless white hands. Over all, like a black veil, was an expression as of one haunted by a great fear. The man both repelled and interested Donaldson. There was a shiftiness about the eyes that excited suspicion, and yet there was in them a silent plea that asked for sympathy. Save for the eyes, the face had a certain poetic beauty due to its fine modeling and its savage intensity. The longer Donaldson studied it, the more sympathy he had for it. He had the feeling that the fellow had gone through some such crisis as his own.

But it was difficult to define the girl's relationship to him. There was not the slightest trace of family resemblance between them, and yet the man was hardly of a type that she would choose for so intimate a friend as her presence here with him suggested. She did not talk much, but seemed rather to be on the alert to protect him as from some unseen danger which appeared to hang over him. She followed his eyes wherever they wandered, and clearly took but little pleasure in being here.

Donaldson found the oddly matched couple absorbing his interest not only in the other guests but also in his dinner. He finished in almost the undue haste with which ordinarily he devoured his daily lunch and with scarcely more appreciation of the superior quality of these richer dishes. With his black coffee he rolled a cigarette. The familiar old tobacco brought him back to himself again so that for a few minutes he was able to give himself up to the swirling strains of the Hungarian orchestra. But even through the delicious intoxication of the waltz, the personality of this girl asserted itself to him. He got the impression now that she herself was in some danger. He wished that he had asked Barstow more about her. She had not noticed him as yet. He had watched closely to see if she turned. As he studied her it seemed certain that she was by no means enjoying herself in her present company. If given half an opportunity he would go over and speak to her.



*As he studied her it seemed certain that she was by no means
enjoying herself in her present company*

[Page 42]

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herself in her present company***

He wished to see her eyes again. He remembered them distinctly. They were not black—not gray, but black with the faintest trace of silver, like starlight on a deep pool. The whites were very clear and blue tinted. Just then she raised her head and looked at him as though she had been called. At that moment the orchestra swept their strings in a minor and swirled off in a mystic dance like that of storm ghosts in the tree-tops. It caught him up with the girl and for a measure or so bore them along like leaves, in a new comradeship. To them the light laughter was hushed; to them the heavy smoke clouds vanished; to them the Babel of other personalities was no more. They two had been lifted out of this and carried hand in hand to some distant gypsy region. She was the first to shake herself free. She started, nodded pleasantly to him, and turned back to her companion, with a little shiver.

That was all, but it left Donaldson strangely moved. He paid his check at once and prepared to leave, hoping that in passing her table he might find his opportunity to stop a moment. But they too rose as he was getting into his coat and passed out ahead, the young man evidently trying to hurry her.

On the sidewalk Donaldson found them waiting at the curb for a big automobile which swooped out of the dark to meet them. Making a pretext of stopping to roll a cigarette, he paused. The girl stepped into the machine, but her companion instead of following at once gave an order to the chauffeur. The latter left his seat and the girl expostulated. The chauffeur apparently hesitated, but, the younger man insisting, he hurried past Donaldson into the café. Unconsciously Donaldson moved nearer. He felt a foreboding of danger and a curious sense of responsibility. He caught a glimpse of the white face of the girl leaning forward towards her companion—heard her cry as the fellow stepped into the chauffeur's seat—and, yielding to some impulse, jumped to the running-board just as the man threw on the power.

The machine leaped forward with a shock that nearly tossed him off. To save himself he sprang to the empty seat beside the girl. The man at the wheel had apparently not noticed him; he had plenty to occupy his mind to control the machine which was tearing along at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

The girl leaned forward and gripped Donaldson's arm.

"You must stop him," she said. "He has lost himself again! Do you understand? You must stop him!"

CHAPTER IV

Kismet

The machine swirled around a corner at a speed that swung the rear wheels clear of the ground. It righted itself as a frightened dog scrambles to his legs, and shot on up the avenue, which was for the moment fortunately clear of other vehicles. It took a crossing at a single leap, missed a dazed pedestrian by an inch, and shot on as mad a thing as the man who ran it. It was clearly only a matter of minutes that this could last. Bending low, the madman, with still enough cunning left to know how to manage the machine, held it to its highest speed. But his arm was weakening. He did not have the physical strength to hold steady the vibrating steering gear. The big car began to tack.

Donaldson saw the girl's eyes upon him. They were confident with an instinct that is woman's sixth sense. A man has not lived until he has seen that look in a woman's eyes. Nor has a man suffered until he realizes that he must disappoint that look. Donaldson had never been in an automobile in his life. He knew no more how to control one than he did an aëroplane. And the arc-lights were flashing by at the rate of one every four seconds—and a madman at the wheel—and a woman's eyes upon him.

Donaldson was naturally a man of some courage, but it is doubtful if under ordinary conditions this situation would not have brought the cold sweat to his brow. As it was, he was conscious of only two emotions; an appreciation of the grim humor which had called upon him so early in his week to fulfill his oath, and a grinding resentment at the Fate which had thrust him into a position where he should show so impotent before those eyes. As far as personal fear went, it was nil. He was as oblivious to possible pain, possible death, as though he were now merely recalling a dream. Such contingencies had been decided the moment he swallowed the scarlet syrup. Fear had been annihilated in him because the most he had to lose was this next six days. He was too good a gambler to resent, in a fair game, the turn of the cards against him.

He stepped past her and out upon the running board, feeling his way along to the empty seat. The machine swayed dizzily. The wind tore off his hat and tugged at his coat, nearly dragging him to the ground which flowed beneath him as smoothly as a fly belt. He could not have made that distance yesterday with the assurance of to-day. He swung himself into the empty seat.

He had but one thing in mind; he knew that these big machines, in spite of their tremendous power, were as nicely adjusted as watches. They had their vital spots, their hearts. If only he could find this vulnerable place! At his feet he saw a small wooden box fastened to the dash-board. He did not know what it was, but on a blind chance he kicked it again and again until it splintered beneath his heels. The machine swerved across the road and he fought with the crazed man for the possession of the wheel. He was strong and he had this much at heart, but the other had the super-human strength of the crazed. Even as they struggled the machine began to slow down and within a few hundred yards came to a standstill. In destroying the coil box he had reached the heart.

The driver turned upon him, but Donaldson managed to secure a good grip and dragged the fellow to the ground. The latter was up in a minute and faced him with that gleam of devilish hatred that marks the foiled maniac. The girl started to separate the two men, but it was unnecessary; she saw the murder fade from her companion's face before the calm untroubled gaze of the other. She saw his strained body relax, she saw his fists unclench, and she saw him shrink back to her side trembling in fright. The demon in him had been quelled by the unflinching eyes of the sane man.

There was, luckily, no gathering of a crowd, for no one had witnessed the struggle in the machine. A few steps beyond, the blue and red lights of a drugstore stained the sidewalk. The girl seized the man's arm and turned to Donaldson.

"He is my brother," she explained. "We must leave the machine and get him home at once. Can we order a cab from somewhere?"

"At the drugstore we can telephone for one and also reach your garage."

"Would you mind attending to it?" she asked anxiously. "We will wait here,—in the car."

He hesitated.

"I don't like to leave you here alone," he said.

"I shall be quite safe—really."

"But in the drugstore it is warmer, and—"

"No, no," she broke in hurriedly. "I—I would much rather not."

Without further parley he took the address of the garage where the machine had been hired, and walked on to the drugstore. He was back again in five minutes, relieved to find her safe and the brother still quiet. While waiting for the cab it occurred to him that he should also have telephoned for a physician to meet them when they reached the house. But Miss Arsdale objected at once to this.

"I think we had better not. But if you would—it's asking a great deal of you—if you yourself would ride back with us."

"I had intended to do that," he assured her.

The cab arrived within a few minutes, and she gave an address off Riverside Drive. It took half an hour to make the run. On the journey the three remained silent save for a few commonplaces, for conversation seemed to have a disquieting effect upon young Arsdale. The lighted houses flashed past the carriage windows in the soft spring dark, looking like specks of gold upon black velvet. A certain motherliness pervaded the night; there was a suggestion of birth everywhere. Donaldson responded to it with a growing feeling of anticipation. Sitting here confronting this girl he was swept back to a primal joy of things, to a sense of new worlds. He felt for a moment as though back again with her in that gypsy kingdom into which the music had borne them.

The cab swung from the boulevard and, after following for a few moments a somewhat tortuous course among side streets, stopped before an iron gate which stretched across the drive leading to the house. Either side of the gate a high hedge extended. The three stepped out and Donaldson paused a moment before dismissing the cabby. The girl saw his hesitancy and in her turn seemed rapidly to revolve some question in her own mind. A quick motion on the part of her brother determined her. In the shadow of the house he began to show ill-boding symptoms.

"I wonder if—if you would come in for a minute," she asked in an undertone.

Without answer he dismissed the driver and followed her through a small gate in the hedge, down a short walk, to a brown-stone house with its entrance on a level with the ground. The house was unlighted and the lower windows were covered with wooden shutters. In the midst of its brilliantly lighted neighbors it looked severe and inhospitable. The girl drew a key from her purse and, opening the door, stepped inside and switched on the lights. Donaldson found himself in a large, cheerful looking hall finished in Flemish oak. A broad Colonial staircase led from the end and swung upstairs in a graceful turn which formed a landing. The floor was covered with rugs which he recognized as of almost priceless value. Several oil portraits in heavy frames ornamented the walls. It took but a glance to see that they were of the same family and to recognize in all their thin faces an expression that he had caught in young Arsdale himself—a haunting fear as of some family tragedy. Through an uncurtained door to the right opened what appeared to be a library, while to the left—Donaldson turned his back for a moment upon Arsdale. And the man, freed from the eyes, threw himself upon Donaldson's shoulder. The woman shouted a warning, but it was too late. She clutched at her brother's clothes, pulling with all her strength, crying,

"Ben! Ben!"

Donaldson slipped upon the polished floor and Arsdale, throwing his arm about his victim's neck, secured a very effective strangle hold. It looked bad for Donaldson. On the smooth waxed floor he could secure no purchase by which to regain his feet and he could not reach the fellow with either fist. He was as helpless as though he had the Old Man of the Mountain upon his back. The world began to swim before his eyes; the cries of the girl to sound in the distance. Then he smelled the biting aroma of spirits of ammonia and felt the clutch upon his throat loosen. He broke free, got upon his feet and found Arsdale rubbing his smarting eyes while the girl stood over him, frightened at what she had done, with the empty bottle in her hand.

"I've blinded him!" she cried, drawing back in horror.

"Thanks. You 've also prevented him from killing me."

"Don't say that—not kill!"

"But the man is n't responsible."

"That is true, but—even when he is like this he would n't do any harm."

His throat was still sore from the press of the fellow's fingers, but he nodded politely.

Donaldson perceived that she was fighting off a fear. It made the danger seem even more imminent. He had noted with surprise that no servants had appeared. This gave a particularly uncanny atmosphere to the big house, making it look as deserted as though empty of furniture.

"We must get him upstairs and into bed," she said. "Will you help him?"

The man was choking and writhing upon the floor in his pain. Donaldson stooped and wiped off his eyes. Then he placed his arm about him and half dragged and half carried him up the stairs as she led the way. She preceded them up two flights, switching on the lights at each landing, and entered a small, simply furnished room in the middle of the house,—a room, Donaldson was quick to note, having only a skylight for a window. Here he dashed cold water into the man's face and placed him on the bed. As soon as the pain subsided, Miss Arsdale administered two spoonfuls of a darkish brown medicine which seemed to have instantly a quieting effect.

It was the sight of the bottle that again recalled to Donaldson the fact of his own peculiar position in life. Even at the risk of appearing rude, he was forced to look at his watch. It was a few minutes after eleven o'clock. Well, what of it? Had not these hours been full—had he not had more of real living than during the entire last decade? He had faced death twice, he had met a woman, and he now stood at the threshold of a mystery that seemed to demand him. There was no other interest in his life to occupy

him—nothing to prevent him from throwing himself heart and soul into the case, lending what aid was possible to this woman. Furthermore, he was clear of all selfish interests; he need bother himself with no queries of what this might be worth to him. But it was worth something, it was worth something to have a woman look at him as this girl had done—with unquestioning trust in a crisis.

She glanced up as he replaced his watch.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I must detain you no longer!"

"My time is absolutely yours," he reassured her. "I was merely curious to know how old I have grown."

She did not understand.

"I 'm eleven hours old."

Again she did not understand, but in turning to care for her brother she ceased to puzzle over the enigma. Shortly afterwards the patient closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. Immediately the girl led the way on tiptoe from the room. She locked the door behind her and preceded Donaldson downstairs.

Once below there seemed nothing for him to do but to leave, but, quite aside from the fact that he felt himself to be really needed here, he was as reluctant to depart as a man is to awake from a pleasant dream. She had picked up a white silk Japanese shawl and thrown it about her shoulders.

He turned to her with the question,

"Is there nothing more I can do for you? Is there no one I may summon to help you?"

"I can manage very well now, thank you."

"But you can't stay here alone with the boy in this condition."

"Why not?"

Her reply came like a rebuke of his impetuous presumption.

"It is hardly safe for you," he declared more quietly.

"It is perfectly safe," she answered evenly.

"I suppose there are servants in the house upon whom you can call," he hazarded.

She looked a bit embarrassed.

"If I should need any one there is my old housekeeper, Marie," she answered.

Marie was upstairs, sick in bed with rheumatism, too feeble to move without help. But to confess this fact to him would be almost to force him to stay. As welcome a relief as it would be to have him remain until she had administered the medicine once more, she shrank from placing him in a position where he would have no alternative.

She roused herself from the temptation and extended her hand.

"Thank you is a weak phrase for all you 've done," she said.

"It is enough."

He took the hand but he did not say good night. So she withdrew it, her cheeks a bit redder, her eyes, a trick they had when brilliant, growing silver.

He had been studying her keenly, and now removing his overcoat, he said decidedly,

"I shall stay a little longer."

She seemed to hesitate a moment, meeting his eyes quite frankly. Then, with a little sigh of relief she stepped into the library.

CHAPTER V

The Inner Woods

In the fireplace there were birch logs ready to be kindled. At her suggestion he put a match to

them for the cheeriness they gave while she lighted a green shaded lamp which radiated a soft glow over the heavy mahogany library table upon which it stood. The room slowly warmed out of the gloom and shadows as though the three walls closed in nearer to the fire. Just outside the radius of warmth the bookbindings shone gold in the dark. In a frame six inches deep the ghostly outlines of a portrait of Horace Arsdale flickered near and away as the flames rose and fell.

Miss Arsdale came to a chair a little to the left of Donaldson, brushing back from her eyes the soft hair which in the firelight shone like burnished copper. He smiled at the strange chance which led her to seat herself almost directly in front of the grandfather's clock, so that facing her he faced the pendulum which ticked out to him the cost of each new picture he had of her. It was now within a few minutes of midnight—one half of his first day gone before he had more than raised the glass to his lips. He felt for a moment the petulant annoyance of a man imposed upon—as though Time were playing him unfairly; until today the hours had dragged heavily enough; now they sped like arrows.



***Facing her he faced the pendulum
which ticked out to him the cost of
each new picture he had of her***

And yet he did not count the time as ill spent. Though he had anticipated nothing of this sort, he found himself enjoying the situation with as deep a satisfaction as anything which had so far occurred in the swift hours which had sped by since noon. Outside lay the quick-moving throngs which he so loved, in his room there waited for him the gentle marine, the bit of brown ivory, the luxury of deep blooming roses, and yet he was not conscious of missing them. Those things had been waiting for him all through the long tedious years, and this—well perhaps this, too, had been waiting for him. He wondered if this effect was produced by the surroundings which were much as he would have chosen them if he had possessed the means from the first. The sober good taste of the room, its quiet richness, its air of being a part of several generations of men of culture pleased him.

He turned to the girl again. She too was one with this past of the room. The straight nose with its shell-like nostrils as sensitive to her thoughts as her eyes, the sharp cut corners of her mouth, and the fine hair over her white forehead dated back to women whose features had long been refined through their souls. All that he wished to crowd into a week, they had possessed for a hundred years or more. It showed even in this girl who had not yet come into the fulness of her womanhood.

She sat uneasily far forward on her chair, leaning toward the flames as though fearful of what might happen next. The light played upon her hair and her white face, making her seem almost a thing of some lighter, spirit world.

"I don't feel that I ought to detain you," she said, breaking the silence which he for his part would have been willing to continue, "but"—she looked up at him with a half-shamed smile—"I have n't the courage to refuse your kindness."

"You have the right to accept it merely as a woman," he assured her.

"But I should n't need help," she answered with some spirit. "I don't know what has come over me. I 'm just afraid of being alone."

"It is n't good for any one to be alone."

"You know?"

He answered slowly,

"Yes, I know."

Did any one know better? The curse of it had driven him to secure at any cost the broader comradeship of men and women which, if it does not come through some more subtle means such as she now seemed to suggest to him, can be found in that cruder relationship always at the command of those with some fortune. The thought swept over him that if he had known her before yesterday, he could never have felt alone again. But what had he to do with yesterday any more than with to-morrow?

"It is n't that there is anything to be afraid of here," she protested, to ward off any suspicions that might be lurking in his mind. "It is n't that. I 'm perfectly safe."

He nodded, though he by no means agreed with her.

"It would be just the same," she insisted with almost too much emphasis, "if Ben were well. I think I must have become panic stricken with myself."

He frowned. Then he broke out fiercely,

"It's the feel of all the silent people in the city around you, perhaps. They are ghosts, these strangers,—human ghosts with fingers which clutch your throat if you are n't careful. You sense them in New York as nowhere else."

She glanced up quickly,

"That's an odd idea," she replied. "The loneliness comes then because you are n't really alone."

"Yes—here in New York."

"But that is n't true of the woods," she asserted.

"You have been much among the trees?" he asked quickly, his voice softening.

"Not very much. But enough to learn to love them. Especially the inner woods."

He knew what she meant—the forests where things still grow for the sky and the beasts and not for man; where man may come as guest but not as master.

"No," he answered, "one never feels alone there."

"In there," she faltered, trying to express vague thoughts which yet were most real to her, "everything seems to be normal."

He studied her with increasing interest and a growing sense of comradeship. Her eyes were wonderful as she sat chin in hands, gazing into the fire, lost in some pleasant picture of the past. When he looked into them, they caught him up again as they had done in the café. They swept him to the rhythm of some haunting music back to the days when his blood had run strong—back to the beauty of the hills at twenty when he had not felt big enough by himself to absorb their full marvel. In a dim mystical way he had realized even then that the keenest edge of their meaning was escaping him. The blue sky above the trees had seemed like the laughing eyes of a woman and the rustle of leaves like the whisper of her skirt. He had laughed back boldly then, feeling in the pride of his strength little need of them.

Now the eyes of this girl, and the soft modeling of every line of her, filled him with an infinite tenderness for those forgotten hours. It was as though she cleared away the intervening years and made him face the fragrant Spring again. Without diminishing one whit of his vigorous enjoyment of life, she added an element of refinement to it.

Half in fear of what this might mean, he shook himself free of the mood, and moving a chair to the other side of the fire sat down. Behind her the old clock still ticked as though in malicious appreciation of the situation.

She clung to the subject of the woods as though in it she found relief. She wished to hear more of it from him. It made him appear less a stranger. When he spoke of these things he went back into her own past—into the most beautiful, intimate part of it. He was the only man other than Mr. Arsdale that she could have endured to associate with those days. She felt at ease with him there, and this made her feel that he had more right to be here now. His eager face softened when he spoke of those things. There was in it then none of that fierceness which had for a moment startled her when he spoke of the

loneliness he had found here in New York. At that moment he had looked like a man at bay. He had challenged life bitterly. It was not in keeping with the kindly generous strength of his mouth and chin.

"Tell me," she asked him, "of some of your days in the woods."

Yesterday he could not have complied. Those days had seemed dead and buried. Now he was in the mood for it. He found it pleasant, sitting here, to go back.

Each hour stood out as bright with sunshine as a Sorolla. It was as though they had sprung to life at a call from her—had come to bring her ease. He talked at random of brooks that start nowhere and go nowhere, save over white stones and past watercress; of thin ribbed ferns and of scarlet bunchberries. He told her of a stream he knew, where, if you lie very quiet in the moss, you see speckled trout dart over white pebbles into the darker water beneath the lichened rocks. He told her of the shallows, and pools, and falls you find if you keep to its banks for the miles it sings by the grave trees. He told her of mountain tops where he had lain near the stars and watched the noon clouds sweep half a county with their big shadows. He told her of old wood roads he had followed through the young maples and birches and evergreens and pines—roads which lay silent all day long and all night long, month after month, ready for the feet which might tread it once in a year.

So she took him back again to the redolent shadows, back to the silences where dreams are born. Here he came upon other things—the old path gay flowered with illusions which led him toward that future—

A future? What had he to do with a future? Was he rushing headlong thus soon into another pit as bad as that from which he had just escaped? The Future was Now—not one minute, not one second beyond. He was here before an open fire, with this girl in the background, with beautiful rugs and pictures about him, with a great seething, struggling, future-chained horde outside, and the eternal stars overhead. In the midst of it he was free, and this was enough for him to know. Now! Now! The girl was now and her eyes were now and the flush of her velvet cheek was now!

CHAPTER VI

The Shadow on the Portraits

He was roused by the sound of her voice and the single stroke of the clock back of her. It was one, and he could have sworn that they had been sitting here less than fifteen minutes.

"I must go to Ben now," she said. "It is time to give him more medicine."

"I will go with you."

"No," she decided, "I think I had better go alone. A stranger might frighten him."

He hesitated with an uneasy sense of foreboding, but she moved past him determinedly and went up the stairs, leaving him alone with the haunting picture upon the wall. He moved nearer to study it more in detail. He caught a trace of resemblance to the boy but none to the girl. The features were more rugged than those of young Arsdale, and the forehead was broader and higher, but the mouth was the same—thin, tense, and yet with no strength of jaw behind it. The cheek bones were rather high and the eyes set deep but over-close together. It was a face, thought Donaldson, of which great things might be expected, but upon which nothing could be depended. The man would move erratically but brilliantly, like those aquatic fireworks which dart in burning angles along the face of the water—scarlet serpents shooting to the right, the left, in their gorgeous irresponsible course towards the dark.

As he stood there Donaldson thought he heard the soft tread of feet in the hall and the click of the outside door as it was opened. He listened intently, but he heard nothing further. He crossed the library and looked out. The door was ajar. He flung it open and peered down the driveway; there was nothing to be seen but the dark mass of hedge bounding the yard. He went to the foot of the stairs and listened; there was no sound above.

The wind may have blown open the door if it had been unlatched, and the imagined footsteps in the hall may have been nothing but the rustling of the hangings, but still he was not satisfied. He ventured up the first flight and paused to listen. He thought he heard a movement above, but was not quite sure. He neither wished to intrude nor to frighten her unnecessarily, but he called her name. At first he received no response, and then, with a sense of relief that made him realize how deep his fear had been, he saw her come to the head of the stairs. The light came only from the sick room, so that he could not see her very clearly. She took a step towards them, and then he noticed that she swayed and clutched the banister. He was at her side in three bounds.

"What is the trouble?" he demanded.

"If you will steady me a bit," she answered.

"Are you hurt?"

"Just dazed a little. Did you stop him?"

"Stop him? Then some one did go out?"

"As I opened the door Ben rushed by me and—I fell down. I hoped you might see him and hold him!"

"I was at the other end of the library. He must have stolen out on tiptoe. But you are faint."

"I am stronger now."

She started down the stairs with the help of the banister, holding herself together with remarkable self control. As they came into the light he saw that she was very pale, but she insisted that she needed nothing but a breath of cool air. He helped her to the door and here she sat down for a moment upon the step.

"I might take a look around the grounds," Donaldson suggested.

"It is quite useless. He is not here."

"Then you have an idea where he has gone!"

She hesitated a moment.

"Yes," she answered.

He waited, but she ventured nothing further.

"I want you to feel," he said quietly, "that you may call upon me for anything you wish done. My time is my own—quite my own. I place it at your service."

She turned to study his face a moment. It was clean and earnest. It bade her trust. Yet to ask him to do what lay before her was to bring him, a stranger, into the heart of her family affairs. It was to involve her in an intimacy from which instinctively she shrank. But pressing her close was the realization of the imminent danger threatening the boy. This was no time for quibbling—no time for nice shadings of propriety. Even if this meant a sacrifice of something of herself, she must cling to the one spar that promised a chance for her brother's safety. As Donaldson's eyes met hers, she felt ashamed that she had hesitated even long enough for these thoughts to flash through her brain.

"The boy uses opium," she said without equivocation.

The bare naming of the drug rolled up the curtain before the whole tragedy which had been suggested by the portrait in the library; it explained every detail of this wild night except her presence here practically alone with the crazed young man. It accounted for her objection to waiting in the drugstore; it solved the mystery of her fear of the city shadows. Had he suspected this, he would no more have allowed her to go up those stairs alone than he would have permitted her to go unescorted into the cell of a madman.

"I 'm sorry for him," he murmured. "Then he has gone straight to Mott Street?"

"I 'm afraid so. He has been there once before."

"The habit has been long upon him?"

"It is inherited. This is the third generation," she admitted, turning her head aside in shame.

"But he himself—"

"Only after his father's death. The father feared this and watched him every minute. He died thinking the danger was passed, but he left me a prescription which had been of help to him. It was given him by our old family physician who has since died. Mr. Barstow knew Dr. Emory and so has always prepared it for me."

"How long this last time did he go without the drug?"

"It is three months since the first attack. This medicine tided him over five days. He was nervous to-night and begged me to go out to dinner with him. I 'm afraid it was unwise—the lights and the music excited him."

"But you have n't been here alone with him?"

"There is Marie."

"Two women alone with a man in that condition—it is n't safe."

"You don't understand how good he has been. He has struggled hard. He has allowed me to lock him up—to do everything to help him. He has never been like this before."

"It is n't safe for you," he repeated. "Are there no relatives I may summon?"

"None," she answered. "I am his cousin—his sister by adoption. There are no other relatives."

"No friends?"

"I would rather fight it out alone," she answered firmly. "I don't wish my friends to know about this," she added hastily, as though to avoid further discussion along this line.

"It was careless of me to leave the door open as I went in."

"It was lucky for you. He might have—"

"Don't!" she shuddered.

He waited a moment.

"You are brave," he declared, "but this is too big a problem for you to manage. He should have been placed in the hands of a physician."

"No," she interrupted. "No one must know of this. I trust you to tell no one of this."

He thought a moment.

"Very well. But in order to locate him now, it will be necessary to call in the help of the police."

"The police!" she exclaimed in horror. "No! You must promise me you will not do that."

She rose to her feet all excitement.

"They would not arrest him," he assured her. "They would simply hold him until we came for him."

"I would rather not. I would rather wait until he comes back himself than do that."

He could not understand her fear, but he was bound to respect it.

"Very well," he answered quietly. "But I have a friend whom I can trust. You do not mind if I enlist his help?"

"He is of the police?" she asked suspiciously.

"He is a friend," he replied. "It is as a friend he will do this for me."

"Oh," she answered confused, "I don't know what to do! But I feel that I can trust you—I *will* trust you."

"Thank you. Then I must begin work at once. There is a telephone in the house?"

Her face brightened instantly. He seemed so decisive and sure. The fact that he was so immediately active, that he did not wait until daylight, when conditions would be best, but began the search in the face of apparent impossibility, brought her immediate confidence. She liked a man who would, without quoting the old saw, hunt for a needle in a haystack.

She directed him to the telephone, and he summoned a cab. He returned with the question,

"Do you know how much money he had?"

"Money? He had none."

"Then," said Donaldson, "won't he come back of himself? Opium is one thing for which there is no credit."

"I 'm afraid not. He has been away before without money, and—"

She stopped as abruptly as though a hand had been placed over her mouth. Her face clouded as though from some new and half forgotten fear. She glanced swiftly at Donaldson, as though to see if he had read the ellipsis.

When she spoke again it was slowly, each word with an effort.

"My pocket-book was upstairs. It is possible that he borrowed."

Donaldson knew the meaning of that. Kleptomania was a characteristic symptom. Victims of this habit had gone even further in their hot necessity for money.

"Perhaps," she suggested hesitatingly, "perhaps this search to-night may inconvenience you financially. I wish you to feel free to spend without limit whatever you may find helpful. We have more than ample funds. Unfortunately I have on hand only a little money, but as soon as I can get to my bank —"

"I have enough." He smiled as a new meaning to the phrase came to him. "More than enough."

He glanced at the clock. Over half of his first day already gone. He heard the crunching wheels of the taxicab on the graveled road outside. Hurrying into the hall he took one of Arsdale's hats—he had lost his own in the machine—and slipped into his overcoat. Still he paused, curiously reluctant to leave her. He did not feel that there was very much waiting for him outside, and here—he would have been content to live his week in this old library. He had glimpsed a dozen volumes that he would have enjoyed handling. He would like to spread them out upon his knee before the fire and read to her at random from them. Yes, she must be there to complete the library. He was getting loose again in his thoughts.

She was looking at him anxiously.

"I think we shall find him," he said confidently. "At any rate I shall come back in the morning and report."

"This seems such an imposition—" she faltered.

"Please don't look at it in that light," he pleaded earnestly. "I feel as though I were doing this for an old friend."

"You are kind to consider it so."

"You see we have been in the inner woods together."

She smiled courageously.

"Good night. I wish you were better guarded here," he added.

He held out his hand quite frankly. She put her own within it for a moment. He grew dizzy at the mere touch of it. It was as though his Lady of the Mountains had suddenly become a living, tangible reality. The light touch of her fingers was as wine to him. They made the task before him seem an easy one. They made it a privilege. She thought that he was making a sacrifice in doing this for her when she was granting him the boon of returning upon the morrow.

"Good night," he said again.

He turned abruptly and opening the door stepped out into the cab without daring to look back.

CHAPTER VII

The Arsdales

Miss Arsdale hurried upstairs to where in a rear room Marie, with a candle burning beside her, lay in bed done up like a mummy.

"Par Di', Mam'selle Elaine," exclaimed the old housekeeper, her eyes growing brighter at sight of her. "I had a dream about a black horse. Is anything wrong with you?"

"Nothing. And your poor lame knees, Marie—they are better?"

"N'importe," she grunted, "but I do not like the feel of the night. Was M'sieur Ben down there with you?"

"Yes."

"You should be in bed by now. You must go at once."

"I think I shall sleep in the little room off yours to-night."

"Bien. Then if you need anything in the night, you can call me."

Marie was scarcely able to turn herself in her bed, but, she still felt the responsibility of the house.

"Very well, Marie. Good night."

She kissed the old housekeeper upon the forehead and was going out when she heard the latter murmur as though to herself,

"The black horse may mean Jacques."

"Have you heard nothing from him in his new position?" she asked, turning at the door.

"Non," she answered sharply. "Go to bed."

So the girl went on into a darkness that she, too, found ridden by black horses.

For three generations the Arsdales had been a family of whom those who claim New York as their inheritance had known both much and little. It was impossible to ignore the silent part Horace Arsdale, the grandfather, had played in the New York business world or the quiet influence he had exerted in such musical and literary centres as existed in his day. Any one who knew anybody would answer an inquiry as to who they might be with a surprised lift of the eyebrows.

"The Arsdales? Why they are—the Arsdales."

"But what—"

"Oh, they are a queer lot. But they have brains and—money."

Horace Arsdale died in an asylum, and there were the usual ugly rumors as to what brought him there. He left a son Benjamin, and Benjamin built the present Arsdale house at a time when it was like building in the wilderness. Here he shut himself up with his bride, a French girl he had met on his travels. Ask any one who Benjamin Arsdale was and they would be apt to answer,

"Benjamin Arsdale? Oh, he is Benjamin Arsdale. They say he has a great deal of talent and—money."

The first statement seemed to be proven by some very delicate lyrical verse which appeared from time to time in the magazines. Though a member of the best half dozen New York clubs, not a dozen men out of the hundreds who knew his name had ever seen him.

His wife died within three years, some say from a broken heart, some say from homesickness, leaving a boy child six months old. At this point Benjamin Arsdale's name disappeared even from the magazines, and save to a very few people he was as though dead and buried beneath his odd house. An old Frenchman, his wife, and his son Jacques Moisson seemed content to live there and look after the household duties. Some ten years later a little girl of nine appeared, a niece of Arsdale's, it was said, and this completed the household, though old Père Moisson died in the course of time, leaving his wife and Jacques as a sort of legacy to his old master, for a body-guard. The only reports of the inmates to the outside world came through the other servants who were employed here from time to time, and the most they had to say was that Arsdale was "queer," and they did not think it was the place to bring up young children, though the master did adore the very ground they walked on. When the children were older, Arsdale was seen at concerts and the theatre with them, but seemed to resent any attempt on the part of well meaning acquaintances to renew social ties. People remarked upon how old for his age he had grown, and some spoke in a whisper of the spirituality of his features.

So much every one knew and that was nothing. What Elaine Arsdale, whom he had legally adopted, knew, was what caused the white light about the bowed head of the man. When she first learned she could not tell, but as a very young girl she remembered days when he came to her with his face very white and tense, and in his eyes the terror of one in great pain, and said to her,

"Little girl, will you sit with me a bit?"

So she would take a seat by the window in the library and he would face her very quietly with his long fingers twined around the chair arms. He would not speak and she knew that he did not wish her to speak. He wished for her only to sit there where he could see her. She was never afraid, but at times there came into his eyes a look that tempted her to cry. Sometimes an hour, sometimes two hours passed, and then he would rise to his feet and walk unsteadily towards her and say,

"Now I may kiss your forehead, Elaine."

He would kiss her, and shortly after fall into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

Between these periods, which she did not understand save that in some way he suffered a great deal, he was to her the gentlest and kindest guardian that ever a girl had. He personally superintended her studies and those of Ben, her only other playmate. The day was divided into regular hours for work and play. In the morning at nine he met them in the library and heard their lessons and gave them their tasks for the next day. He seemed to know everything and had a way of making one understand very difficult matters such as fractions and irregular French verbs. In the afternoon came the music lessons. He was anxious for them both to play well upon the violin, for he said that it had been to him one of the greatest joys of his life. Each night before bedtime he used to play for them himself and make her see finer pictures than even those she found in her fairy tales. But there were other times when he could make his violin terrible. He used to punish Ben in this way. When the latter had been over wilful, he made the boy stand before him. Then taking a position in front of him, he played things so wild, so fearful, that the boy would beg for mercy.

"Do you wish your soul to be like that?" he would demand sternly.

"No, father, no," Ben would whimper.

"Then you must control yourself. If ever you lose a grip upon yourself in temper or anything else, it

will be like that."

But the music even at such times never frightened her, though it sounded very savage, like the wind through the trees in a thunder storm.

The only time that he had ever seemed the slightest bit angry at her was once during that wonderful summer when he had taken them abroad. She was seventeen, and on the boat she met a man with whom she fell in love. He was very much older than she, and possessed a glorious mustache which turned up at the corners. He helped her up and down the deck one day when the wind was blowing, and that night she lay awake thinking about him. When she appeared in the morning with her eyes heavy and her thoughts far away, the father put his arm about her and escorted her to the stern of the boat. Then sitting down beside her, he said,

"Tell me what is on your mind, little girl."

She told him quite simply, and had been surprised to see his face grow white and terrible.

"He put those thoughts into your heart?"

He rose to his feet and started towards the saloon. She knew what he was about to do. She flung her arms around his knees and, sobbing, pleaded with him until he stayed. Then after she had calmed a little, he talked to her and she listened as though to a stranger.

"Little girl," he cried fiercely, "there is much that you do not understand, and much that I pray God you never will understand. One of these things is the nature of man. If it were not for all the other fair things there are in life I would place you in a convent, for the best man who ever lived, little girl, is not good enough to take into his keeping the worst woman. They break their hearts with their weaknesses—they break their hearts."

"But you, dear Dada—"

"I did it! God forgive me, I did it, too!"

At this point he gained control of himself and his wild speech, but the words remained forever an echo in her heart.

They passed the next summer in the Adirondacks, and here in the deep woods she spent the pleasantest period of her life. She was strangely atune with the big pines and the fragrant shadows which lay beneath them. Arsdale used to sit beside her in these solitudes and read aloud by the hour from the poets in his sweet musical voice. At such times she wondered more than ever what he had meant in that outburst on the steamer. Here, too, he told her more of her mother who had died at almost the same time that Ben's mother had died. But of the father all he ever told her was,

"My brother was an Arsdale—like the rest of us."

So she lived her peaceful life and was conscious of missing nothing, save at odd moments the man with the beautiful mustache. Marie, the old housekeeper, was as careful of her as Jacques was of her father. Ben was kind to her, though during the latter years he had grown a bit out of her life. This had worried the father—this and other things. One day he had called her into the library, and though he was greatly agitated she saw that it was not in the usual way.

"Little girl," he said, "if it should so happen that you are ever left alone here with Ben and he—he does not seem to act quite himself, I want you to promise me that you will go to this address which I shall leave for you."

She had promised, knowing well to what he referred.

Then his face had hardened.

"There is still another thing you must promise; if at the end of six months he is no better I wish you to promise that you will not live in this house with him or anywhere near him—that you will cut off your life utterly from his life."

"But, Dada—"

"Promise."

She promised again, little thinking that the crisis of which he seemed to have a foreboding was so near at hand. A dark day came within two months when her soul was rent with the knowledge that he lay stark and cold in that very library where so much of his life had been lived. Marie gathered her into her arms and held her tight. She stared aghast at a world which frightened her by its emptiness. At her side stood Ben, his lips twitching, and in his eyes that haunting fear which always foreran the father's struggles. A month later the boy did not come home one night, but came after three days, a feeble wreck of a man. She tore open the letter the father had left, and this took her to Barstow, with whom he had evidently left instructions. That was five months ago, and in the meanwhile she had grown from a very young girl into a woman.

This was the sombre background to her frightened thoughts as she lay in her bed next to Marie. In

the midst of all the figures which haunted her, there stood now one alone who offered her anything but fearful things—and he was a stranger. Out of the infinite multitude of the indifferent who surrounded her, he had leaped and within these few hours made her debtor to him for her life, and now for partial relief from a strain which was worse than sudden death might have been. In spite of other torments it was like a cool hand upon her brow to know that out in that chaos into which the boy had plunged, this other had followed. She had perfect confidence in him. After all, it is as easy in a crisis to pick a friend from among strangers as from among friends.

CHAPTER VIII

The Man Who Knew

There are several members of the New York police force who think they know their Chinatown; there are several slum workers who think they do; there are many ugly guides, real guides, who think they do, but Beefy Saul, ex-newspaper man, ex-United States Chinese immigration inspector, and finally of the Secret Service, really does. This is because Beefy Saul knows not only the bad, but the good Chinamen; because he knows not only the ins and outs of Chinatown, but the ins and outs of New York; because he knows not only the wiles and weaknesses of Chinamen, the wiles and weaknesses of ugly souled guides (and of slum workers), but best of all, because he knows the several members of the New York police department who think they know their Chinatown. But like men who know less, Beefy Saul enjoys his sleep and naturally objects to being roused at three o'clock in the morning, even though in the east the silver is showing through the black, as Donaldson pointed out, like the eyes of a certain lady when she smiles (as Donaldson did not point out). Beefy came down in answer to the insistent bell which connected with his modest flat—it ought to be called a suite, for the lower hall boasted only six speaking tubes—and he swore like a pirate as he came. Finally the broad shoulders, which gave him his name, filled the door frame.

"I don't give a tinker's dam who you are," he growled before he had made out the features before him, "it's a blasted outrage! Hello, Don, what in thunder brings you out at this time of night? You look white, man, what's the trouble?"

Saul hitched up his trousers, his round sleepy face that of a good-natured farmer.

"I want you to do me a favor if you will, Beefy. I know it 's a darned shame to get you out at this hour."

"Tut, tut, man. If a friend can't get up for another friend, he ain't much of a friend. Tell your troubles."

"I 'm looking for a man, Beefy, who 's down there somewhere among your Chinks."

"Hitting the pipe?"

"I 'm afraid so."

"Have n't any address I suppose—don't know his favorite joint?"

"I don't know a thing about him except that he has been down there before—that he lit out again a little over an hour ago, half mad—and that I must find him."

"An hour ago, eh? That helps, some. There 's only a few of 'em open to the public at that time. But say, is there any special hurry? He's had time to get his dope by now. I 've got some work there in the morning."

"There's a girl waiting for him, Beefy, a girl who is paying big for every hour he's gone."

"So? Well, m' boy, guess we 'll have to get him then. I 'll be down in ten minutes. Make yourself at home on the doorstep."

Donaldson waited in the taxicab. For the first time in his life he computed the value of one-sixth of an hour. So long as he had been with the girl—or so long as he had been active in her behalf—the minutes were filled with sufficient interest to make them pass unreckoned. But to sit here and wait, to sit here and watch the seconds wasted, to sit here and be conscious of each one of them as it bit, like a thieving wharf rat, into his dwindling Present and carried the morsel of time back to the greedy Past, was a different matter. When finally Saul appeared with a fat cigar in one corner of his chubby mouth, Donaldson was halfway across the sidewalk to meet him.

"Good Lord!" he laughed excitedly, almost pushing the big man toward the cab, "I thought you were lost up there."

Saul paused with one foot already on the step. Then turning back, he struck a match for his cigar.

The flare revealed Donaldson's eager eyes, his tense mouth. He carelessly snapped the burnt match to the lapel of Donaldson's coat and stooping to pick it off took occasion to whiff the latter's breath.

"The sooner we start—" suggested Donaldson, impatiently.

Saul stepped in, his two hundred pounds making the springs squeak, and sinking into a corner waited to see what he might learn from Donaldson's talk. The suspicion had crossed his mind that possibly the latter had got into some such way himself—it was over a year since he had seen him—and was taking this method to hunt up an all-night opium joint. His experience made him constantly suspicious, but unlike the regular police, a suspicion with him remained a suspicion until proven. It never gained strength merely by being in his thought. At the end of five minutes he had discarded this theory. Stopping the machine, he gave the cabby a real address in the place of the fictitious one he had first given in Donaldson's hearing. The latter's mind, supernormally alert, detected the ruse instantly. He placed a hand upon Saul's knee.

"Beefy, you didn't suspect me, did you?"

"What the devil is the matter with you then?" demanded Saul.

"Nothing. What makes you think there is?"

"The mouth, man, the mouth! You don't get those wrinkles in the corner and a tight chin by being left alone five minutes, if all that is troubling you is a lost friend."

"You 're too confounded suspicious. It's only that I 've so many things to do, Beefy."

"Business picked up?"

Donaldson smiled. Saul had known his Grub Street life. As the cab sped on he regained his self-control. Action, movement was all he needed. For the next ten minutes he surprised Saul with his enthusiasm and loquacity. The latter having known him as a quiet and rather reserved fellow, finally decided that it was a clear case of woman. The questions he asked about young Arsdale, in securing a minute description of the man, confirmed this impression.

The cab turned into the narrow cobbled streets of Chinatown, past the dark windows, Chinese stores and restaurants, a region that, deserted now, appeared in the early morning quiet ominous rather than peaceful. Dark alleys opened out frequently—alleys which coiled like snakes past cellar entrances, noisome rears of tottering tenements, to grease-fingered doors as impassive as the stolid faces of guards who drowsed behind them asleep to all save those who knew the deadly pass-word. Paradoxical doors which shut in, instead of out, danger! But Saul knew them and they knew Saul. He knew further the haunts of beginners, where opium is high and the surroundings are fairly clean, he knew the haunts of the confirmed, where opium is cheaper and where surroundings do not matter at all. Also he knew Wun Chung, who does not smoke, but who, being rich, controls the trade and so keeps in touch with all who buy.

On the way to Chung's Saul made one stop. With Donaldson at his heels, he darted down a side street, pushed open, without knocking, a dingy door, went up a flight of stairs, along a dark hallway and down another flight, where he was stopped by a shadow. The big man spoke his name, and the shadow turned instantly from a guard to an obsequious servant. He opened the door and Saul strode across a narrow yard, stooping to brush beneath the stout clothes-line hung with blankets, an innocent appearing wash, which however served as an effective barrier to any one who might approach at a run. They entered the rear of a second tenement which faced a parallel street, but which, oddly enough, had no entrance to its rear rooms from the front. Another shadow rose before them only to vanish as the round red face of Saul appeared. He pushed on into a long, low-ceilinged room lined with bunks, the air heavy with the acrid dead smoke of opium.

"Light," demanded Saul.

The sleepy proprietor brought a kerosene lamp, the chimney befouled with soot and grease. It was an old trick. These fellows protect their customers and through a sooted chimney the feeble light makes scarcely more than shadows in which it is very difficult to identify a man. Seizing the slant-eyed ghoul by the arm Saul held the lamp within an inch of the yellow face, so close that it burned.

"Don't try such fool things on me, Tong," he warned. "Bring me a light."

The Chinaman squirmed in terror, and when loosed was back again in a hurry with a lamp that lighted the whole room. Saul took it and examined the nearest bunk. Donaldson glanced at the first face. That was enough. He retreated to the door for fresh air. Down the line went Saul, looking like some devil in Hell making tally of lost souls. He reached in and turned them, one after the other, face to the light, while Donaldson stood outside, dreading the call that should force him to look again. He was no man of the world and the reek of the place appalled him. Nothing he had ever read conveyed anything of the plain sordidness of it,—the unrelieved pall of it which burdened like the weary dead stretch of an alkali desert. The scene did not even become romantic to him, until glancing up, he saw above the irregular roof-tops, the stars still bright in the virgin purple, saw the unfouled spaces of the planet fields between them. What had such clean things as the stars to do with this mired world below? This jeweled roof was not intended for so squalid a floor. But the stars above brought him back to the girl again, and she to her brother, and her brother to this. Strange cycle! Then the stars and the blue

gathered them all into one. Strange one!

"Not here," announced Saul, wiping the oil from his fingers. Donaldson breathed more freely. Without delay they hurried back to the cab.

"I had sort of a hunch that we 'd find him there," said Saul, "but we did n't. Now we 'll have a cup of tea with Chung and set him to work. It's a darned sight easier and a lot swifter way when you have n't any clue at all to work on."

"And pleasanter," returned Donaldson. "I 've seen enough of this."

"Not so bad when you get used to 'em," answered Saul, lighting a fresh cigar. "But I know how you feel; I 'm just that queer about morgues. Can't get used to 'em nohow. Get the creeps every time I step inside a morgue. But then I don't hanker after murder work of any sort like some of the boys. It would be just my chance to get a taste of it before I 'm done with the Riverside robberies."

"What are the Riverside robberies?" inquired Donaldson, with a faint remembrance of the name.

"You been out of town?"

"No, but I don't read the papers much."

"I should say not. Four hold-ups in three weeks, all within half a mile of one another on Riverside Drive."

"Riverside Drive?"

He remembered now. The Arsdale home was near Riverside Drive. Barstow had spoken of these crimes.

"You on the case?" he asked indifferently,

"Yes," answered Saul. "I 'm on the case and if another one breaks, the case and the Chief will be on me."

The cab had stopped before an unlighted store. The street light revealed a window filled with a medley of china, teas, silks, and joss-sticks. Above, in big gilt letters, was the sign "Wun Chung and Co."

It was surprising how quickly in response to Saul's knocking a door to the left of the main entrance, and leading upstairs, opened. After a few words with the moon-faced attendant, the light was switched on and the three ascended to a small room, brilliant with gaudy Oriental colors and heavy with ebony furnishings. A group of three or four Chinamen sat at a small table soberly drinking their tea with the exaggerated innocence of those who have a deck of cards up their sleeves. The proprietor himself, fat as a butter ball, toddled up to Saul with a grin upon his round, colorless face. He ordered tea for all and they sat down. In two minutes Saul had explained what he wished, and in five a couple of the silent group near had taken Chung's orders and stolen out like ghosts.

Saul swallowed his tea boiling hot and glanced at his watch. It was half-past four.

"Now," he said, "I 'm going back for a wink of sleep. You can sit on here or you can have Chung notify you at your hotel, eh, Chung?"

"Allee light," nodded the proprietor.

"How long do you think it will take?" asked Donaldson quickly.

"Might take till noon to search every place—and then we might not find him if he's an old hand at the game," answered Saul.

"Till noon!" exclaimed Donaldson irritably. "Good Lord, that's eight hours!"

Saul placed his hand affectionately upon Donaldson's shoulder.

"See here, Don," he replied earnestly. "Take my advice and get some sleep."

"Do you think I can waste time in sleep?"

"Better take a little now or you 'll be having a long one coming to you."

"That's just it," retorted Donaldson. "I 've got all eternity for sleep."

"So? Well, I 'll take mine here and now, thanks. I want to wake up!"

The older man's sober common-sense brought Donaldson to himself.

"Guess you 're right," he admitted.

He took out a card and scribbled two addresses, one of the Waldorf and the other of the Arsdale house.

"You will notify me at one of these places as soon as you learn anything?"

"Allee light."

"*At once*, you understand?"

Saul insisted upon landing Donaldson at his hotel before going on to his own home. The latter grasped the big hand of his friend.

"Beefy," he said, "if ever I can give *her* a chance to thank you, I 'll bet you 'll think your trouble worth while."

"Turn in and give her a chance to thank *you* in the morning. I reckon she 'll appreciate that more than an opportunity to thank me."

The cab bearing the big detective glided off. Donaldson watched it melt down the dwindling vista until finally, dissolved altogether, it became one with the dark.

CHAPTER IX

Dawn

Donaldson took a cold dip and then carefully dressed himself in fresh clothes. Sleep was out of the question. He had never in his life felt more alert in mind and body. He felt as though he could walk farther, hear farther, see farther than ever before. He was more keenly responsive to the perfume of the roses which were now drooping a bit languidly near the window; he was more alive to the delicate trceries of the ferns which banked one corner of the room; more appreciative of the little marine which he had hung near his dresser and—more alive to her into whose life Fate had picked him up and hurled him. He felt the warm pressure of her fingers as though they still rested within his; saw the marvelous quiet beauty of her eyes which had led him so far back into his past. Again out of this past they led him on—on to—he was checked as in his picture of her the ticking clock behind her intruded itself. There stood the sentinel to whom he must give heed. There stood the warning finger pointing to the seventh noon.

Good Lord, he must have more room. He must get out into the dawn—out where he could share these emotions which now surged in upon him with some virginal passion as big and fresh as the new-born day. He crossed to the window and looked out upon the dormant city. The morning light was just beginning to wash out the dark and to sketch in the outlines of buildings and the gray path of the road between them. He watched the new creation of a world. Around him lay a million souls ready to people it—ready to seize it and make it a part of themselves. In a few hours that dim street would be a bridge over which tens of thousands of people would pass to sorrow, to joy; to poverty, to riches; to hate, to love; to death, to life. That was a drama worth looking at. He must get out and rub shoulders with those who were playing their parts. He, too, must play his part in it.

He descended to the office and left instructions with the night clerk to insist upon a message from whoever might call him up. He would be back, he said, in an hour. He had not walked long before he found the city gently astir with life. Passing cars were soon well filled, traffic fretted the streets lately so quiet, while yawning pedestrians reminded him that there were still those who slept. At the end of thirty minutes more of brisk walking, the sky had melted through the entire gamut of colors, and finally settled into a blinding golden blue. A newsboy clicking out of space like a locust, shouted "Extra!" Donaldson gave little heed to the cry until he heard the word "Riverside," and caught the blatant headlines, "Another robbery." With an interest growing out of Saul's connection with the case, he skimmed through the story.

Then he tossed his paper away and took his course back to the hotel, glad to forget that sordid bit of drama, in the movement of the crowd now forcing its way to work. But something was lacking in the spectacle this morning. The play of light and color he still saw, the vibrancy of it he still felt, the dramatic quality of it he still appreciated, but still with the consciousness that it lacked something—that it had gone a bit flat. He no longer felt that princely sense of superiority to it—as though it were a gorgeous pageant upon which he was a mere onlooker. He felt now a harrying sense of responsibility towards it. It was as though they called him to join them. He quickened his pace. He must get back to the hotel and see if any message awaited him.

He caught his breath—he must get back to her. That was it. That was what the hurrying passers-by had called to him. Get back to her—what did the morning count until she became a part of it? It was because she had placed the red-blooded actuality of life before his eyes in contrast to the superficial picturesqueness of its expression as he had viewed it yesterday that the show had lost its vividness. She was making him see it again with eyes as they were at twenty. He recoiled. That way lay danger. He must put himself on guard. But from that moment he had but one object in mind—to get back to her as soon as possible.

A telephone message waiting him from Chung reported that no trace could be found of the boy.

He jumped into a cab and went at once to the Arsdale house. Miss Arsdale herself came to the door, her eyes heavy from lack of sleep but her face lighting instantly at sight of him.

"You have news?" she exclaimed.

"No," he answered directly.

She was a woman with whom one might be direct.

"No news may be good news," he added. "They have n't been able to locate him in Chinatown. I don't think there is a nook there in which he could hide from those people."

"Then," she exclaimed, "he has gone to Cranton."

"Then," he answered deliberately, "I will follow him there."

"No, I could n't allow you. It is two hours from town. You have already given generously of your time."

"Miss Arsdale," he said gently, "we of the inner woods must stand by each other. This week is a sort of vacation for me. I am quite free."

Yes, she was she he had seen through the tops of the whispering pines when he had thought it nothing but the blue sky; she was she who had brushed close to him when he had thought it only the rustling of dry leaves. Now that she stood beside him, his heart cried out, "Why did you not come before? Why did you not come a week ago?" If she could have stood for one brief second in that dingy office which had slowly closed in upon him until it squeezed the soul out of him, then he would have forced back the walls again. If only once she had walked by his side through the crowds, then he would have caught their cry in time. The world had narrowed down to a pin prick, but if only she had come a scant two days ago, she would have bent his eye to this tiny aperture as to the small end of a telescope as she did now and made him see big enough to grasp the meaning of life.

Well, the past was dead—even with her eyes magnifying the days to eternities; the past was dead, even with the delicate poise of her lips ready to utter prophecies. He must not forget that, and in remembering this he must choose this opportunity for exiling himself from her for the day. This mission would consume some six hours. It would take him out of the city where he would be able to think more clearly. This was well.

"Have you any idea how the trains run?" he inquired.

"I looked them up. There is one at 9.32."

"I can make it easily," he answered, glancing at the big clock. He had left his own watch at the hotel. He refused to carry so grim a reminder. "I suppose I'll have no trouble in finding the place."

"You would ask for the Arsdale bungalow," she answered. "Every one there knows it. But the chances are so slight—it is only that his father went out there once. After several days Jacques, Marie's boy and father's servant, found him hidden in the unused cottage. I thought that possibly Ben might remember this."

"I should say that it was more than probable that he would go there if his object is to keep in hiding."

"It is three miles from the station and quite secluded."

"That will make a good walk for me."

He rose to leave at once. But she, too, rose.

"If you think it best to go," she said firmly, "then I must go, too. I could not remain here passive another day. And, besides, if he is there, it is better that I should be with you. I know how to handle him. He is always gentle with me."

Donaldson caught his breath. This was an emergency that he had not foreseen. Manifestly, she could not go. She must not go. It would be to take her back to the blue sky beneath which she was born. It would be to give her a setting that would intensify every wild thought he was trying so hard to throttle.

"No," he exclaimed. "You had better permit me to go alone."

"I should not think of it," she answered decisively.

"But he may not be there. He might come back here while you were gone."

"He will be quite safe if he returns here."

"But—"

"I will see Marie and come down at once."

She hurried upstairs.

"Marie," she asked, "is it quite safe to leave you here alone until afternoon?"

"Safe? Why not?"

"I was going out to the bungalow."

The old servant looked up shrewdly.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing that you can help," the girl answered.

She had not yet told her of Ben's last disappearance. There was no use in worrying those who could give no help.

"Bien. Go on. It will do you both good."

"The telephone is at your bed—you can summon Dr. Abbot if you need anything."

"Bien."

"And perhaps while I am gone Jacques may come for a visit."

"Perhaps. Run along. The air will do you good."

The girl kissed the wrinkled forehead and hurried to her own room. There, before the mirror, she was forced to ask herself the question which she had tried to escape: "Why are you going?"

"Because if Ben were there and sick, he might need me!"

"Why are you going?"

The woman in the mirror was relentless.

"Because the house here is so full of shadows."

"Why are you going?"

"Because the sun will give me strength."

"Why are you going?"

"Because," she flushed guiltily,—"because it will be very much pleasanter than remaining here alone."

Whereupon the woman in the mirror ceased her questioning.

And, in the meanwhile, the relentless old clock was goading Donaldson. Its methodical, interminable ticking sounded like the approaching footsteps of a jailer towards the death cell.

"Don't you know better than to risk yourself out there one whole spring-time day with her?" it demanded.

"But with a full realization of the danger I can guard myself," he answered uneasily.

"Can you guard *her*?"

"That is unpardonable presumption," replied Donaldson heatedly.

"The mellow sun and the birthing flowers are ever presumptuous," answered the wise old clock.

"But a man may fight them off."

"I have ticked here many years and seen many things that man has prided himself upon having the power to do and yet has failed of doing."

"I cannot help myself. I should offend her unwarrantedly if I made further objection."

"Then you are not all-powerful."

"I have power over myself. And you are insulting her."

"Tick-tock. Tick-tock," answered the clock, jeeringly.

And Donaldson was saved from his impulse to kick the inanimate thing into splinters by the sound of her footsteps.

CHAPTER X

Outside the Hedge

She came down the stairs, a vision of young womanhood, dressed in white, with a wide turn-down collar fastened at the throat by a generous tie of black. Her hat was a girlish affair of black straw with a cluster of red roses gathered at the brim. She was drawing on her black gloves as she neared him—with the background of the broad Colonial staircase—a study for a master. She approached with the grace of a princess and the poise of a woman twice her years. He now could have no more bade her remain behind than he could have stopped the progress of time. There was something almost inevitable in her movements, as though it had been foreordained that they two should have this day in the country, no matter under what evil auspices. Without a word he held open the door for her to pass through and followed her into the cab.

Into the Drive they were whirled and so towards the station, the throbbing heart of the city. The ant-like throng was going and coming, and now he was one of them. It was as though the strand of his life, hanging loose, had been caught up, forced into the shuttle, and taken again into the pattern. At her side he made his way into the depot at the side of a hundred others; at her side he took his turn in line at the ticket window; at her side he made his way towards the gates, a score of others jostling him in criticism of his more moderate pace. An old client, one of his few, bowed to him. He returned the salute as though his position were the most matter-of-fact one in the world. Yet he was still confused. He had been thrust upon the stage but he was uncertain of his cue. What was the meaning of this figure by his side? In his old part, she had not been there.

When at last they were seated side by side in the car and the train began slowly to pull out, her presence there seemed even more unreal than ever. But soon he gave himself up comfortably to the illusion. She was within arm's length of him and they were steaming through the green country. That was enough for him to know at present. She looked very trim as compared to the other women who passed in and took their places in the dusty, red-cushioned seats. She looked more alive—less a type. She gave tone to the whole car.

Up to now, she had given her attention to scanning the faces of the multitude they had passed in the faint hope that by some chance her brother might be among them, but once the train started she surrendered herself fully to the new hope which lay ahead of her in the bungalow. This gave her an opportunity to study more closely this man who so suddenly had become her chief reliance in this intimate detail of her life. His kindly good nature furnished her a sharp contrast to the sober seriousness of the older man with whom so much of her youth had been lived. He had thrown open the doors and windows of the gloomy house in which she had so long been pent up. And yet as he rambled on in an evident attempt to lighten her burden, she caught a note that piqued her curiosity. It was as though below the surface he was fretted by some problem which lent a touch of sadness to his hearty courageous outlook. She felt it, when once on the journey he broke out,

"Don't ever look below the surface of anything I say. Don't ever try to look beyond the next step I take. I'm here to-day; gone to-morrow."

"Like the grass of the field?" she asked with a smile at his earnestness, which was so at odds with his light eager comments upon the bits of color which shot by them.

"Worse—because the grass is helpless."

"And we? We boast a little more, but are n't we at the mercy of chance?"

"Not if we are worthy of our souls."

She frowned.

"There is Ben, surely he is not altogether to blame," she objected.

"Less to blame than some others, perhaps."

"Then there is the chance that helps us willy nilly," she urged. "You, to me, are such a chance. Surely it was not within my power to bring about this good fortune any more than it is within the power of some others to ward off bad fortune."

"The mere episode does n't count. The handling of it is always within our power."

"And we can turn it to ill or good, as we wish?"

"Precisely."

"Providing we are wise enough," she returned.

"Yes, always providing that. That is the test of us."

"If we do poorly because of lack of wisdom?" she pressed him further.

"The cost is the same," he answered bitterly.

"That is a man's view. I don't like to feel so responsible."

"It would n't be necessary for women to be responsible for anything if men lived up to their best."

She laughed comfortably. He was one who would. She liked the uncompromising way in which his lips closed below his quick imaginative eyes.

It seemed but a matter of minutes before the train drew up at a toy station which looked like the suburban office of a real estate development company. Here they learned that the summer schedule was not yet in force, which meant that they would be unable to find a train back until four o'clock.

"I should have inquired at the other end. That oversight is either chance or stupidity," he exclaimed.

She met his eyes frankly, apparently not at all disconcerted.

"We can't decide which until we learn how it turns out, can we?" she laughed.

"No," he replied seriously, "it will depend upon that."

"Then," she said, "we need n't worry until the end. I have a feeling, grown strong now that we are here, that we shall need the extra time. I think we shall find him."

"That result alone will excuse my carelessness."

She appeared a bit worried over a new thought.

"I forgot. This will delay you further on your vacation."

"No. Nothing can do that," he interrupted her. "Every day, every hour I live is my vacation."

"That," she said, "is a fine way to take life."

He looked startled, but hastened to find a vehicle to carry them the three miles which lay between the station and the bungalow. He found an old white horse attached to the dusty skeleton of a depot wagon waiting for chance passengers. They clambered into this and were soon jogging at an easy pace over the fragrant bordered road which wandered with apparent aimlessness between the green fields. The driver turned half way in his seat with easy familiarity as they started up the first long hill. "Ben't ye afeered to go inter th' house?" he inquired.

"Afraid of what?" demanded Donaldson.

"Spooks."

"They don't come out in the daytime, do they?"

"I dunno. But they do say as how th' house is ha'nted these times."

"How did that story start?"

"Some allows they has seen queer lights there at night. An' there 's been shadders seen among the trees."

The girl leaned forward excitedly.

"Old wives' tales," Donaldson reassured her in an undertone.

"This has been lately?" he inquired of the driver.

"Off an' on in th' last few weeks."

Donaldson turned to the girl whose features had grown fixed again in that same old gloom of haunting fear.

"They circulate such yarns as those about every closed house," he said.

"Those lights and shadows are n't made by ghosts," she whispered.

"Then—that's so," he answered with sudden understanding. "It's the boy himself!"

At the barred lane which swept in a curve out of sight from the road he dismissed the driver. Even if they were successful in their quest, it would probably be necessary to straighten out Arsdale before allowing him to be seen. But as an afterthought he turned back and ordered the man to call here for them in time to make the afternoon train.

He lowered the rails, and Miss Arsdale led the way without hesitation along a grass-grown road and through an old orchard. The trees were scraggly and untrimmed, littered with dead branches, but Spring, the mother, had decked them with green leaves and buds until they looked as jaunty as old people going to a fair. The sun sifted through the tender sprigs to the sprouting soil beneath, making there the semblance of a choice rug of a green and gold pattern. The bungalow stood upon the top of a small hill, concealed from the road. It was of rather attractive appearance, though sadly in need of repair. All the windows were curtained and there was no sign of life. The broad piazza which ran around three sides of it was cluttered with dead leaves.



He lowered the rails, and Miss Arsdale led the way

She took the key to the front door from her purse and he inserted it in the lock.

"You wait out here," he commanded, "until I take a look around."

"I would rather go in with you. I know the house."

"I will open it up first," he said calmly, and stepping in before she had time to protest further, he closed the door behind him. He heard her clenched fists pounding excitedly on the panels.

"Mr. Donaldson," she pleaded, "it isn't safe. You don't know—"

"Don't do that," he shouted back. "I'll be out in a few moments."

"But you don't know him," she cried; "he might strike you!"

"I 'll be on guard," he answered.

The lower floor was one big room and showed no sign of having been occupied for years. It was scantily furnished and smelled damp and musty. At one side a big stone fireplace looked as dead as a tomb. He pushed through a door into the kitchen which led off this. The cast-iron stove was rusted and the covers cracked. He glanced into it. It was free of ashes and the wood-box was empty.

He came back and slowly mounted the stairs leading to the next floor. Stopping at the top, he listened. There was no sound. He entered the sleeping rooms one after another. The beds were stripped of blankets and the striped canvas of the mattresses was dusty and forbidding. There were six of these rooms but the farther one alone was habitable. Here a few blankets covered the bed and in the small fireplace there were ashes. They were cold, but he detected several bits of charred paper which were dry and crisp. Some old clothes were scattered about the floor and several minor articles which he scarcely noticed. He listened again. There was not a sound, and yet he had a feeling, born of what he did not know, that he was not alone here. The effect was to startle him. If he had been just a passing

stranger looking for a place to lodge for the night it would have been sufficient to drive him outdoors again.

He came out into the hall which divided the rooms, and there saw a ladder which led into an unlighted attic. He paused. He heard her calling to him, but he did not answer. He would soon be down again.

He mounted the ladder quickly, and peered into the dark of the unlighted recess. He could make out nothing, and so clambered over a beam to the unfinished floor to wait until his eyes had become more accustomed to the shadows. His feet had scarcely touched a firm foundation before he was conscious of a slight noise behind him. He turned, and at the same moment a form hurled itself upon him. In the frenzied movement of the hands for his throat, in the spasmodic clutch of the arms which clung animal-like about him he recognized the same mad, unreasoning passion with which young Arsdale had before attacked him. He could not see his face, and the man uttered no cry. The fellow's arms seemed stronger than before and even longer. But he himself was stronger also, and so while the madman from behind clasped his hands below Donaldson's throat, the latter managed to get his own arms behind him and secure a firm grip on his assailant's trousers. Then he threw himself sideways and back as much as possible. They both fell, and Donaldson in the scramble got to his side and shifted one arm higher up. The fall, too, loosened the man's strangle hold though he still remained on top. Donaldson then fought to throw him off, but the fellow clung so close to his body that he was unable to secure a purchase.

The fight now settled down to a trial of strength and endurance between them. He strained his free arm as though to crush in this demon's ribs. He kicked out with his feet and knees; he dug his head into the fellow's chest. The latter clung without cry or word like a living nightmare. His hand was creeping towards Donaldson's throat again. He felt it stealing up inch by inch and was powerless to check it. He rolled and tumbled and pushed. Then his head came down sharply on a beam and he lost consciousness.

In the meanwhile Miss Arsdale had waited at the front door, her ears to the panels. For a few moments she heard Donaldson's footsteps moving about the house, but soon the walls swallowed him up completely. She ran back a little and strained her eyes towards the upper windows. They were darkened with shades. She felt a keen sense of responsibility for not having told him, from the start, of what a demon Arsdale became when cornered in this condition. She had half concealed the fact because of shame and because—she shuddered back from the mere thought of another possibility so terrible that she could not yet even admit it to herself. She comforted herself with the memory that at the last moment she had feebly warned. But twice before she had refused to admit to him the worst.

She waited as long as she was able to endure the strain and then skirted the house to the rear. The kitchen door was wide open. She pushed forward into the middle of the house, calling his name. Receiving no response, she mounted the stairs to the second floor. She glanced into each room. In the farther one an article on the floor, which had escaped Donaldson's notice, riveted her eyes. It was an empty pocket-book. It was neither her own nor Arsdale's. Instead of finding relief in this, it drove her back trembling against the wall. Then with swift resolution she gathered herself together, picked up the wallet and hid it in her waist. As she did so, she turned as though fearful that some one might be observing her act.

She made her way out into the hall again and there found herself confronting Donaldson—dusty, bruised, and dishevelled.

He was leaning against the ladder.

CHAPTER XI

A Parting and a Meeting

He was still dazed, but at sight of her he recovered himself and stepped forward.

"Are you injured?" she cried.

"Not in the slightest," he assured her. "I think if I could have seen, I 'd have thrown him."

"It was dark—up there?"

"Pitch dark. Did you see him go out?"

"No," she answered, steadying herself under the influence of his steadiness.

"I 'm sorry he escaped," he apologized.

"Don't think of that now," she exclaimed.

She moved nearer him, as though still fearing that he was concealing some injury from her. He rearranged his disordered collar and tie while she insisted upon dusting off his coat. He felt the brush of her fingers in every vein, and stepped almost brusquely towards the stairway. As a matter of fact he was none the worse for his tussle save for a good-sized bump which was growing on the back of his head.

"He may be here in hiding or he may have left the house. I wish you would step outside until I search the place."

"I shall remain here with you," she replied stubbornly.

She was still weak from the excitement of the last few minutes, but she followed closely at his heels while he went into every room and closet in the house without success. Once outside, he further made a careful search of the grounds, but again without result. He felt chagrined that he had not been strong enough to hold the fellow. He had missed the opportunity to put an end to her pitiful worry.

"I don't think he will come back here," he said, as they stood again before the front door. "He may make for the station in an attempt to get back to town. Are you strong enough to walk it?"

"Yes," she said eagerly.

"I can push on ahead and send a carriage back for you."

"So. I need the walk. But you—" she began anxiously.

"I shall enjoy it," he declared.

They took the pleasant country road, side by side, and in five minutes he had forgotten the episode in a confusion of thoughts that were cheap at the cost of a brief struggle with a madman. The wine of her presence in this medley of blue sky, green grass, and springtime perfume was a heady drink for one in his condition. The full-throated birds sang to him, and the booming insects hummed to him and her eyes prophesied to him of a thousand days like this which lay like roses in bud. He watched with growing awe the supple movement of her body, the tender arch of her neck, and the clear surface of her features ever alive with the quick expression of her eager thoughts. She caught his gaze once and colored prettily but without lowering her eyes.

"You belong out here," he exclaimed. "This is where you should live."

"And you?"

"I was born in just such surroundings."

"Why did you leave them? Men are so free."

"Free?"

The word startled him.

"Men are not limited by either time or place," she avowed.

Time? Time was an ugly word. His face grew serious.

"I think," he said slowly, "that I am just beginning to learn what freedom is."

"And it is?"

"Like everything else when carried to an extreme—a paradox. Freedom is slavery—to something, to someone."

"Then you are a slave?" she laughed.

"As I thought freedom, I am the freest man on earth to-day."

"You speak that like a king."

"Or a slave."

She puzzled over this a moment as she tried to keep up with him. He had suddenly increased his pace.

"Even on your vacation, you could n't be absolutely free, could you? I feel responsible for that," she apologized.

"You need n't, for you have given me this bit of road. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

So he turned her away from the subject and breathed more easily. She had both loosed him and shackled him. What a procession of golden days she made him see, if only as a mirage. Freedom? If only he could return to that little office and drudge for her unceasingly—toil and hack and hew at

stubborn fortune merely in the consciousness that she was somewhere in the world, that would be freedom. He knew it now as she walked close beside him like a beautiful dream. There was no use longer in parrying or feinting. The brush of her sleeve made him dizzy; the sound of her voice set the whole world to music. How trivial seemed the barriers which had loomed so formidable before him a day ago. Given the opportunities he had thrown away and he would hew a path to her as straight as a prairie railroad bed. He would do this, remaining true to his old dreams and to better dreams. He would face New York and tear a road through the very centre of it. He would ram every steel-tipped ideal to its black heart. And all the inspiration he needed to give him this power was the knowledge that somewhere in one of its million crannies, this fragile half formed woman was there, seeing the sky with her silver gray eyes.

"I 'm afraid you are going too fast," she panted.

He stopped himself and found her with cheeks flushed in her effort to keep up with him.

"Pardon me," he exclaimed, "I did n't realize. I was going pretty fast. Let's sit down and rest a minute."

"It is n't necessary if you will only slow down a little."

"I will." He smiled. "My thoughts were going even faster than my legs. We 'll rest a little, anyhow."

They seated themselves beneath a roadside pine which had sprinkled the ground with redolent brown needles. He wiped his hot forehead. The undulating green fields throbbled before his excited eyes, as in midsummer when they glimmer from the heat rays. He burrowed his tightened fists to the cooler soil below the brown carpet.

"I guess you are glad to sit down a moment yourself," she suggested, noting his forced deep breathing. "Your efforts with Ben tired you more than you thought."

"I 'd like to have that chance over again—now."

His tense long body looked like Force incarnate. She caught her breath quickly.

"I 'm glad you have n't," she gasped.

She had the feeling that he could have picked up the boy and hurled him like a bit of wood into the road. She was not frightened. She liked to see him in such a mood. It gave her, somehow, a big sense of safety. It swept away all those haunting fears which had so long been always present in the background of her consciousness. It did this in as impersonal a way as the sun scatters shadows.

"The trouble is," he was saying, "that we don't often get a chance to try things—the big things—twice. The fairer way would seem to be to allow this, for we have to fail once in order to learn."

"You are generalizing?" she asked tentatively.

"I am sentimentalizing," he answered abruptly, suddenly coming to himself. He was more personal than he had any right to be. It did no good to become maudlin over what was irrevocably decided. The Present. He must cling to that one idea. Let him drink in the sunshine while it lasted; let him absorb as much of her as he could without taking one tittle from her.

His phrase had piqued her curiosity once more. She would like to know the inner meaning of his impatient eyes, the explanation of why his lips closed with such spasmodic firmness. There was something tantalizing in this reserve which he seemed to try so hard to maintain. She would like to deserve his confidences. He aroused her sympathy—a shy desire to be tender to him just because in his rugged strength there seemed to be nothing else but this for which he could need a woman. But as he glanced up she colored at the presumption of her thoughts.

"I think," he said, "that if you are rested we had better start again."

She rose at once and took her place by his side for the last stretch of free road that lay between her and the city.

At the station there was no sign of the fugitive. She objected instantly to Donaldson's suggestion that she go on while he wait over the night in the hope that Arsdale might turn up here for the first train in the morning.

"You have already sacrificed enough of your time to me and mine," she protested. "I will not listen to it."

And if she had been before her mirror doubtless the lady there would have pressed her to another explanation.

He submitted reluctantly, a new doubt springing to his eyes. But she was firm and so they boarded the train once more for home. She used the word "home," and Donaldson found himself responding to it with a thrill as though he himself were included. The word had lost its meaning to him since his freshman year at college.

They were back behind the hedge in so short a time that the day scarcely appeared real. She left him a moment in the hall while she ran upstairs to see Marie. The latter was still in bed, and at sight of her young mistress had a sharp question upon her lips.

"Chérie," she demanded, "why did not Ben go with you?"

"Ben?" faltered the girl.

"He was downstairs an hour after you left and would not come in to see me."

"Ben was here?"

"I shouted to him and he answered me. But his voice sounded bad. Is it well with him?"

"He may be here now. I will run down and see."

She flew down the stairs and into his room. It was empty. She rushed into her own room. It had been rifled. Every drawer was open, and it took but a glance to see that her few jewels were missing. She panted back to Marie.

"You are sure it was he who was here?"

"Do you think I do not know his voice after all these years?"

The old woman put out her hand and seized the girl's arm.

"Again?" she demanded.

"Yes! Yes! Oh, Marie, what does it all mean?"

"Ta, ta, chérie. Rest your head here."

She drew the young woman down beside her.

"You went out there all alone. You are brave, but you should not have done that. You should have taken me with you. See, now, I shall get well. I shall arise at once. I never knew the black horses to fail me."

Marie struggled to her elbow and threw off the clothes. But Elaine covered her up tight again, forcing her to lie still.

"Stay here quietly until I come back," she insisted. "I shall not be gone but a minute."

She hurried to her own room, trying to understand what the meaning of this impossible situation might be. Ben was here and Ben was in the bungalow and—there was the purse. There was the chance, of course, that Marie was mistaken, but Marie did not make such mistakes as this. Then one of the two men was not Ben. She took out again the pocket-book she had found and stared at it as though in hope that she might receive her answer through this. Then with a perplexed gasp, she threw it into one of the upset drawers, as though it burned her fingers.

She went downstairs to Donaldson. For reasons of her own she did not dare to tell him of this fresh complication, but she insisted that he should bother himself no more to-night with the matter.

"You should go straight back home and get some sleep," she told him.

Home? The word was flat again.

"And you?" he inquired.

"I shall try to sleep, too."

"You have a bolt on your door?"

"Yes."

"Will you promise to slide it before you retire?"

She nodded.

"If you only had a telephone in your room."

"There is one in the hall."

"Then you can call me in a moment if you should get frightened or need me?"

"You are good."

"You will not hesitate?"

"No."

"Then I shall feel that I am still near you. I will have a cab in waiting and on an emergency can reach here in twenty minutes. You could keep yourself barricaded until then?"

"Yes. But really there is no need. I—"

"You have n't wrestled with him. He is strong and—mad."

Still he hesitated. If it had been possible without compromise to her he would have remained downstairs. He could roll up in a rug and find all the sleep that he needed.

"See here," he exclaimed, as the sane solution to the whole difficulty, "why don't you let me take you and Marie to the Martha Washington?"

She placed her hand lightly upon his sleeve.

"I shall be all right here. You 'd best go at once and get some sleep. Your eyes look heavy."

Every minute that he stood near her he grew more reluctant to leave. It seemed like desertion. As he still stood irresolute, she decided for him.

"You must go now," she insisted.

"Will you call me if you are even so much as worried—even if it is only a blind making a noise?"

"Yes, and that will make me feel quite safe."

The booming of a distant clock—jailer of civilization—warned him that he must delay no longer. He took her hand a moment and then turned back into his free barren world.

He determined to dine somewhere down town and then spend the evening at a theatre. It was not what he wished, but he did not dare to go back to his room. He did not crave the movement of the crowds as he had last night, and yet he felt the need of something that would keep him from thinking. He jumped into the waiting cab and was driven to Park Row, where he got out. He had not eaten anything all day and felt faint.

Instead, however, of seeking one of the more pretentious dining rooms he dropped into a quiet restaurant and ate a simple meal. Then he came out and started to walk leisurely towards the Belasco.

He had not proceeded a hundred yards before his plan was very materially changed. He heard a cry, turned quickly, and saw a messenger boy sprawling in the street. The boy, in darting across, had tripped over a rope attached to an automobile having a second large machine in tow. The latter, the driver unable to turn because of vehicles which had crowded in on both sides of it, was bearing down upon the boy, who was either stunned or too frightened to move. This Donaldson took in at a glance as he dived under the belly of a horse, seized the boy and, having time for nothing else, held him above his head, dropping him upon the radiator of the approaching machine as it bore him to the ground. The chauffeur had shoved on his brakes, but they were weak. The momentum threw Donaldson hard enough to stun him for a moment and was undoubtedly sufficient to have killed the boy.

When Donaldson rose to his feet he found himself uninjured but something of a hero. Several newspaper photographers who happened to be passing (as newspaper photographers have a way of doing) snapped him. A reporter friend of Saul's recognized him and asked for a statement.

"A statement be hanged," snorted Donaldson. "Where's the kid?"

"Well," returned the newspaper man, "I 'm darned if I don't make a statement to you then; that was the quickest and nerviest stunt I 've ever seen pulled off in New York city."

"Thanks. Where 's the kid?"

The kid, with a grin from ear to ear, had kindly assumed a pose upon the radiator of the machine which had so nearly killed him for the benefit of the insatiate photographers. It was 3457.

"You!" exclaimed Donaldson, as he found himself looking into the familiar face. He lifted the boy to the ground.

"Let's get out of the crowd, kid," he whispered. "I want to see you."

He pushed his way through to the sidewalk, followed by the admiring throng, and hurried along to the nearest cab. He shoved the boy quickly into this and followed after as the photographers gave one last despairing snap.

"Drive anywhere," he ordered the driver. "Only get out of this."

He turned to the boy.

"Are you hurt?"

"No. Are youse?"

"Not a mite. Where were you bound?"

"Home."

"Where is that?"

The boy gave an address and Donaldson repeated it to the driver.

"I 'll go along with you and see that you don't block any more traffic."

"Gee. I never saw the rope."

"That's because you were in a hurry. It does n't pay to hurry life at all. Not a second."

"But the comp'ny can fire yer in a hurry if you don't hurry."

"A company can hurry because it hasn't a soul. You have. Keep it."

Donaldson felt as though he had found an old friend. It seemed now a month ago since he had wandered through the stores with this boy. The latter recalled again something of the spirit of those hours.

"Say," asked Bobby, "h'ain't yuh spent all yer coin yet?"

"No. I have n't had time to spend more than a few dollars since I left you. I ought to have hung on to you as a mascot."

"It's a cinch. I c'u'd a-helped yuh if yer 'd follered me. Me ten spot's gone."

"How'd you do it?"

"Huh? Yuh talks as though a feller'd have to hunt round an' find a hole to drop it inter. Dere 's allers one that's handy, 'n' that's th' rent hole."

"That does n't come on you, does it? Where's your Daddy?"

"Dead," answered the boy laconically.

The word had a new meaning to Donaldson as it fell from the lips of the boy. Dead. It was a terrible word.

"Guess th' ol' gent must ha' thought I was comin' to join him a minute ago. Would ha' been sort of rough on Mumsey."

"And on you, too," returned Donaldson fiercely. "You have been cheated out of a lot of life. Don't let that happen. Cling to every minute you can get. Die hard, boy. Die hard."

Bobby yawned.

CHAPTER XII

District Messenger 3457

The home of District Messenger 3457, who was known in private life as Bobby Wentworth, was what is technically called a basement kitchen.

Take it between four and five in the afternoon, which was a couple of hours before Bobby was expected home, and in consequence, at least an hour and a half before anything was astir in the way of supper, things got sort of lonesome looking and dull to Sis, daughter of the house. Ten to one that the baby—the tow-headed youngest—was a bit fussy; ten to one the mother gave you a sharp answer if you spoke to her, though, considering everything, she was remarkably patient; ten to one that every torn and cracked thing in the room became so conspicuous that you felt like a poor lone orphan girl and wanted to cry. If you did n't live below the sidewalk this was apt to go on until it was time to get supper, but here, in order to see to do the mending, the lamp was lighted, even in May, an hour or so earlier than the fire.

Then what a change! Instantly it was as though every one was tucked in from the night as children get tucked into bed. Not being able to see out of the windows any longer it was possible to imagine out there what one wished,—a big field, for instance, sprinkled over with flowers. The dull grays on wall and ceiling became brightened as though mixed with gold fire paint. Everything snuggled in closer; the kitchen table covered with a red table-cloth, the mirror with putty in the centre of the crack to keep the pieces from falling out, the kitchen stove, the wooden chairs, the iron sink with the tin dishes hanging

over it, and the shelf on the wall with the wooden clock ticking cheerfully away, all closed in noiselessly nearer to the lamp. Ten to one that now mother glanced up with a smile; ten to one that the baby chuckled and fell to playing with his toes if he could n't find anything better within reach; ten to one there was nothing in the room that did n't look almost new. One thing was certain,—the light did n't reveal any dirt that would come off for there was n't any. Mrs. Wentworth's New England ancestry and training had survived even the blows of a hard luck which had n't fought her fair.

On this particular night Sis had just lost herself in her thumbworn volume of Grimm's Fairy Tales when—there came a kick on the outside door and the sound of two voices coming down the short hall. The next minute Bobby entered with his clothes all mud and behind him a strange gentleman.

It was evident that something had happened to the boy, but the mother did not scream. She was not that kind. Her lips tightened as she braced herself for whatever this new decree of Fate might be. In a jiffy Bobby, who recognized that look as the same he had seen when they had brought Daddy home, was at her side.

"Cheer up, Mumsy," he exclaimed. "Nothin' doin' in caskits this time."

She lifted her thin, angular face from the boy to Donaldson. The latter explained,

"He got tangled up a bit with an automobile, but I guess the machine got the worst of it. At any rate your boy is all right."

The mother passed her hand over the lad's head, expressing a world of tenderness in the act.

"It was kind of you to bring him home," she said.

The directness of the woman, her self control, her simplicity, enlisted Donaldson's interest at once. He had expected hysterics. He would have staked his last dollar that the woman came from Vermont. His observant eyes had in these few minutes covered everything in the room, including the long-handled dipper by the faucet used for dipping into pails sweating silver mist, the wooden clock upon the mantelpiece, and the Hicks Almanac hanging below it. He felt as though he were standing in a Berrington kitchen with acres of green outside the windows sweeping in a circle off to the little hills, the acres of forest green, and the big hills beyond.

The mother stepped forward and brushed the mud from Bobby's coat. The baby screwed up his face for a howl to call attention to his neglect in the midst of all this excitement.

"What's this?" exclaimed Bobby, picking him up with as substantial an air of paternity as though he were forty. "What's this? Goneter cry afore a stranger?"

He held the child up to Donaldson.

"The kid," he announced laconically. "What yuh think of him?"



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[Page 140]

"The kid," he announced laconically. "What yuh think of him?"

"Corker," answered Donaldson. "Let me hold him."

"Sure. Get a chair for the gent, Sis."

In another minute Donaldson found himself sitting by the kitchen stove with a chuckling youngster on his knee. No one paid any attention to him; just took him for granted as a friend until he felt as though he had been one of the family all his life. Besides, the centre of the stage rightly belonged to Bobby, who was occupying it with something of a swagger in his walk.

"Well, I hope this will teach you a lesson, Bobby Wentworth," scolded the mother, now that after various proddings she had determined to her satisfaction that none of the boy's bones were broken. "I wish to the Lord you was back where the hills are so steep there ain't no automobiles."

Donaldson broke in.

"You were brought up in the country, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Laws, yes, and lived there most of my life."

"In New England?"

"Berrington, Vermont."

"Berrington? Your husband was n't one of the Wentworth boys?"

"He was Jim Wentworth, the oldest"

"Well, well! Then *you* are Sally Burnham."

"And you," she hesitated, "I do b'lieve you 're Peter Donaldson."

"Yes," he said, "I 'm Peter Donaldson."

The name from her lips took on its boyhood meaning. He shifted the youngster to his arms and crossing the room held out his hand to her.

"We did n't know each other very well in those days, but from now on—from now on we 're old

friends, are n't we?"

The steel blue eyes grew moist.

"It's a long time," she said, "since I 've seen any one from there."

"Or I. You left—"

"When I was married. Jim came here because his cousin got him a job as motorman. He done well, —but he was killed by his car just after the baby was born."

"Killed? That's tough. And it left you all alone with the children?"

"Yes. The road paid us a little, but I was sick and the children were sick, so it did n't last long."

She was not complaining. It was a bare recital of facts. But it raised a series of keen incisive thoughts in Donaldson's brain.

Wentworth had been killed. Chance had deprived this woman of her man; Chance had grabbed at her boy; Chance had sent Donaldson to save the latter; Chance—Donaldson caught his breath at the possibility the sequence suggested—Chance may have sent him to offset as far as possible the husband's death. It was too late, although he felt the obligation in a new light, for him to give his life for the life of that other, but there was one other thing he could do. He could play the father with what he had left of himself. So that when he came to face Wentworth—he smiled gently at the approaching possibility—he could hold his head high as he went to meet him.

He had argued to Barstow that he was shirking no responsibilities,—but what of such unseen responsibilities as this? What of the thousand others that he should die too soon to realize? It was possible that countless other such opportunities as this must be wasted because he should not be there to play his part. But there was still time to do something; he need not see, as with the girl and with love, the fine possibilities go utterly to waste.

The mother had noticed a warm light steal over his face, not realizing how closely his thoughts concerned her own future; she had seen the sabre cut of pain which had followed his thought of the girl and what she might have meant, knowing nothing of that grim tragedy. Now she saw his eyes clear as with their inspired light they were lifted to her. Yet the talk went on uninterruptedly on the same commonplace level.

"How old was Jim?"

"He was within a week of thirty."

That was within a few days of his own age. At thirty, Jim Wentworth, clinging to life, had been wrenched from it; at thirty, he himself had thrown it away. Wentworth had shouldered his duties manfully; he had been blind to them. But it was not too late to do something. He was being led as by Marley's ghost to one new vision of life after another. He saw love—with death grinning over love's shoulder; he was to be given a taste of fatherhood,—the grave at his feet.

"Do you ever hear from the people back home?" he asked abruptly.

"Not very often," she answered. "After the old folks went I sorter got out of tech with the others."

"What became of the homestead?"

"It was sold little by little when father was sick. When he died there was n't much left. That went to pay the debts."

"Who lives there now?"

"Let me see—I don't think any one is there now. Last I heard, it was fer sale."

"Who holds it?"

"Deacon Staples. Leastways it was him who held the notes."

"That old pirate? No wonder there was n't anything left."

"He *was* a leetle hard," she admitted. "I wanted Jim to go back an' take it after father died, but he couldn't seem to make a deal with the deacon."

"I s'pose not. No one this side of the devil himself will ever make a square deal with him. He 's still as strong in the church as ever?"

She smiled.

"I see by the Berrington paper that he begun some revival meetin's in town."

"Which means he 's just put through some particularly thievish deal and wants to ease his conscience. Have you the paper? Perhaps the sale is advertised there."

She found the paper and ran a finger down the columns until she came to the item.

"Makes you feel sort of queer," she said, "to see the old place for sale. Almost like slaves must ha' felt to see their own in the market."

She read slowly,

"Nice farm for sale cheap; story and a half frame house, good barn, ten acres of land, and a twenty-acre pasture lot. \$1800. Apply to A. F. Staples, Berrington, Vermont."

"I 'm glad the old pasture is going with the house. Somehow the two seem to belong together. It was right in front across the road, an' all us children used to play there. There 's a clump of oak trees at th' end of it. Hope they have n't cut them down."

"Eighteen hundred dollars, was it?" asked Donaldson.

"Eighteen hundred dollars," she repeated slowly. "My, thet 's a lot of money!"

"That depends," he said, "on many things. Should you like to go back there?"

The answer came before her lips could utter the words, in the awakening of every dormant hope in her nature—in every suppressed dream. Some younger creature was freed in the hardening eyes. The strain of the lips was loosened. Even the passive worn hands became alert.

"I 'd sell my soul a'most to get back there—to get the children back there," she answered.

"It 's the place for them."

"Thet's the way *I* 've felt," she ran on. "Mine don't belong here. It's not 'cause they 're any better, but because they've got the country in their blood. They was meant to grow up in thet very pasture just like I did. I 've ben oneasy ever since the boys was born, and so was Jim. Both of us hankered after the old sights and sounds—the garden with its mixed up colors an' the smell of lilac an' the tinkle of the cow bells. Funny how you miss sech little things as those."

"Little things?" Donaldson returned. "Little things? They are the really big things; they are the things you remember, the things that hang by you and sweeten your life to the end!"

"Then it ain't just my own notions? But I have wanted the children to grow up in the garden instead of the gutters. If Jim had lived it would have be'n. We 'd planned to save a little every year until we had enough ahead to take a mortgage. But you can't do it with nothin'. There ain't no way, is there?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps," he said.

She leaned toward him, in her face the strength of a man.

"I 'd work," she said, "I 'd work my fingers to the bone if I had a chance to get back there. I 'm strong 'nuff to take care of a place. If I only had just a tiny strip of land—just 'nuff fer a garden. I could get some chickens an' pay off little by little. I 'm good for ten years yet an' by thet time Bobby would be old 'nough to take hold. If I only had a chance I could do it!"

Her cheeks had taken on color. She looked like one inspired. Donaldson sat dumb in admiration of her splendid courage.

"How long," he asked, "how long would it take you to get ready to leave here?"

She scarcely understood. She didn't dare to understand for fear it might be a mistake.

"I mean," he said, "if you had a chance to go back to the farm how long would it take you to pack up?"

"You don't mean if—if I *really* had the chance?"

He nodded.

"Lord, if I had the chance—if I *really* had the chance, I 'd leave afore to-morrer night."

"To-morrow is Sunday. But it seems as though you might get ready to take the noon train on Tuesday."

She thought he was merely carrying her dream a little farther than she had ever ventured to carry it herself. So she looked at him with a smile checked half-way by the beauty of the fantasy.

"It's too good a'most to dream about," she sighed.

"It is n't a dream," he answered, "unless it is a dream come true. Pack up such things as you wish to take with you and be ready to leave at noon Tuesday."

"Peter Donaldson!"

"I 'm in earnest," he assured her.

"Peter, Peter, it *can't* be true! I can't believe it!"

There were tears in her eyes.

"Hush," he pleaded. "Don't—don't do that. Sit down. Had n't you better sit down?"

She obeyed as meekly as a child, her hands clasped in her lap.

"Now," he said, "I 'll tell you what I want to do; I 'm going to buy the farm for you and I 'm going to get a couple of cows or so, a yard full of chickens, a horse and a porker, and start you fair."

"But why should *you* do this?" she demanded.

"I don't exactly know," he answered. "But I 'm going to do for you so far as I can what Jim would have done if he had lived."

"But you did n't know Jim!"

"I did n't, but I know him now. The kids introduced me."

"He was a good man—a very good man, Peter."

"Yes, he must have been that. I am glad that I can do something to finish a good man's work."

"You are rich? You can afford this?"

"Yes, I can afford it. But I don't feel that I 'm giving,—I 'm getting. It would not be possible for me to use my money with greater satisfaction to myself."

"Oh, you are generous!"

"No, not I. I can't claim that. I 've been selfish—intensely, cowardly selfish."

He meant to stand squarely before this woman. He would not soil his act by any hypocrisy. But she only smiled back at him unbelieving.

He glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock. He was ready now to return to the hotel. He wished to leave at once, for he shrank from the undeserved gratitude he saw welling up in her eyes.

"You must listen carefully to what I tell you," he said, "for I may not be able to see you again before you leave. Do you think you can get ready without any help?"

"Yes," she answered excitedly; "there is n't much here to pack up."

"If I were you I would n't pack up anything but what I could put in a trunk. Sell off these things for what you can get and start fresh. I'll send you enough to furnish the house."

"I ought to do that much myself," she objected feebly.

"No, I want to do this thing right up chuck. As soon as I reach the hotel I will telephone the Deacon. If I can't buy that house, I 'll get another, and in either case, I will drop you a note to-night. I 'll arrange to have the deed left with some one up there, and I 'll also deposit in the local bank enough for the other things. So all you 've to do is to get ready and start on Tuesday. Do you understand?"

"Yes! Yes!" she gasped. "But it doesn't sound true—it sounds like a dream."

"Are you going to have faith enough to act on it?"

"Oh, I did n't mean that I doubted! I trust you, Peter Donaldson."

He reached in his pocket and took out five ten-dollar bills.

"This is for your fare and to settle up any little accounts you may have."

She took the money with trembling fingers while Bobby and Sis crowded around to gape at it.

"There," exclaimed Donaldson in relief. "Now you 're all fixed up, and on Monday morning Bobby can throw up his job. He can fire the company."

"Gee!" he gasped.

And almost before any of them could catch their breath he had kissed the baby, gripped Mrs. Wentworth's hand a second, and with a "S'long" to the others disappeared as though, Sis declared, a magician had waved his wand over him.

It was after nine before he finally reached the Waldorf. No message was waiting for him from either the girl or Saul. He hunted up the telephone operator at once.

"Call up Berrington, Vermont, for me, please."

"With whom do you wish to talk?"

"With Deacon Staples."

He smiled as he saw the hands of the clock pointing to nine-thirty. It was long after the Deacon's bedtime.

CHAPTER XIII

The Sleepers

It was twenty minutes of ten before a sleepy and decidedly irritable voice responded in answer to Donaldson's cheery hello. There was little of Christian spirit to be detected in it.

"Is this Deacon Staples?"

"Yes. But I 'd like t' know what ye mean by gettin' a man outern bed at this time of night?"

"Why, you were n't in bed, Deacon!"

"In bed? See here, is this some confounded joke?"

"What kind of a joke, Deacon?"

"A—joke. Who are you, anyway?"

"I don't believe you remember me; I 'm Peter Donaldson."

"Don't recoleck your name. What d' ye want this time o' night?"

"Why, it's early yet, Deacon. You weren't really in bed!"

"I tell ye I was, an' that so is all decent folk. Once 'n fer all—what d'ye want?"

"I heard you had a house to sell."

"Wall, I ain't sellin' houses on th' Lord's day."

"Won't be Sunday for two hours and twenty minutes yet, Deacon. If you talk lively, you can do a day's work before then. What will you take for the old Burnham place?"

The deacon hesitated. He was a bit confused by this unusual way of doing business. It was too hurried an affair, and besides it did not give him an opportunity to size up his man. Nor did he know how familiar this possible purchaser was with the property.

"Where be you?" he demanded.

"In New York."

"In—see here, I rec'gnize your voice; you 're Billy Harkins down to the corner. Ye need n't think ye can play your jokes on me."

"We 've only two hours and a quarter left," warned Donaldson.

"Well, ye need n't think I 'm goin' to stand here in the cold fer thet long."

"It's warm 'nuff here," Donaldson answered genially.

"Maybe ye 've gut more on than I have."

"Hush, Deacon, there are ladies present."

"They ain't neither, down here. Our women are in bed, where they oughter be."

"Not at this hour! Why, the evening is young yet. But how much will you take?"

"Wal, th' place is wuth 'bout two thousand dollars."

Donaldson realized that it was the magic word "New York" which had so suddenly inflated the price. The deacon was taking a chance that this might be some wealthy New Yorker looking for a country home.

"Do you call that a fair price?" he asked.

"The house is in good condition, and thar 's over three acres of good grass land and ten acres of pasture with pooty trees in it."

"Just so. I 'm not able to look the place over, so I 'll have to depend upon your word for it. You consider that a fair price for the property?"

"Well, o' course, fer cash I might knock off fifty."

"I see. Then nineteen hundred and fifty is an honest value of the whole estate?"

"I 'low as much."

"Deacon."

"Yes" (eagerly).

"You 're a member of the church."

"Yes" (lamely).

"And you certainly would n't deal unfairly with a neighbor on Sunday?"

"What—"

"It's thirteen minutes of ten on a Saturday night. That's pretty near Sunday, is n't it?"

"What of it?" (suspiciously).

"Remember that advertisement you inserted in the Berrington Gazette?"

There was a silence of a minute.

"Wall," faltered the deacon rather feebly, "I thought mebbe ye wanted the farm fer a summer place. It's wuth more fer that."

"It is n't worth a cent more. You simply tried to steal two hundred dollars."

"Ye mean ter say—"

"Exactly that; I 've prevented you from going to bed within two hours of the Lord's day with the theft of two hundred dollars on your soul."

"If ye think I 'm gonter stand up here in th' cold and listen to sech talk as thet—"

"I 'll give you fifteen hundred dollars cash for the place," interrupted Donaldson. "And remember that I know you through and through. I even know how much you stole from old man Burnham."

This was a chance shot, but it evidently went home from the sound of uneasy coughing and spluttering that came to him over the telephone. Donaldson found considerable amusement in grilling this country Shylock.

"Why, the house 'n' barn is wuth more 'n thet," the deacon exploded.

"I 'll give you fifteen hundred dollars, and mail the money to you to-night."

"See here, I don't know who ye be, but ye 're darned sassy. I won't trade with ye afore Monday an'—"

"Then you won't trade at all."

"I 'll split th'—"

"You 'll take that price or leave it."

"I'll take it, but—"

"Good," broke in Donaldson sharply. "The operator here is a witness. I 'll send the money to-night, and have a tenant in the house Tuesday. Good night, Deacon."

"If yer—"

The rest of the sentence faded into the jangle of the line, but Donaldson broke in again.

"Say, Deacon, were you really in bed at this time of night?"

"Gol darn—"

"Careful! Careful!"

"Wall, ye need n't think cause ye 're in N' York ye can be so all-fired smart."

A sharp click told him that the deacon had hung up the receiver in something of a temper. Donaldson came out of the booth, hesitated, and then put in another call. He found relaxation in the vaudeville picture he had of the spindle-shanked hypocrite fretting in the cold so many miles distant. He was morally certain that the old fellow had robbed the dying Burnham of half his scant property. If he had had the time he would have started a lawyer upon an investigation. As he did n't, and he saw nothing more entertaining ahead of him until morning, he took satisfaction in pestering him as much as possible in this somewhat childish way.

"Keep at him until he answers," he ordered the girl.

It took ten minutes to rouse the deacon again.

"Is this Deacon Staples?" he inquired.

"Consarn ye—"

"I was n't sure you said good night. I should hate to think you went to sleep in a temper."

"It's none of your business how I go to sleep. If you ring me up again I 'll have the law on ye."

"So? I 'll return good for evil. I 'll give you a warning; look out for the ghost of old Burnham to-night."

"For what?"

There was fear in the voice. Donaldson smiled. This suggested a new cue.

"He's coming sure, because his daughter is a widow, and needs that money."

"I held his notes," the deacon explained, as though really anxious to offer an excuse. "I can prove it."

"Prove it to Burnham's ghost. He may go back."

"B—back where?"

"To his grave. He sleeps uneasy to-night."

"Be you crazy?"

"Look behind you—quick!"

The receiver dropped. Donaldson could hear it swinging against the wall. Without giving the deacon an opportunity to express his wrath and fears, Donaldson hung up his own receiver and cheerfully paid the cost of his twenty-minute talk.

In spite of the fact that on Thursday night he had slept only three hours, that on Friday night he had not even lain down, his mind was still alert. He did not have the slightest sense of weariness. It was rest enough for him to know that the girl was asleep, relaxation enough to recall the maiden joy that had freshened the eyes of Mrs. Wentworth.

It was too late to get a money-order, but he secured a check from the hotel manager for the amount, and finding in the Berrington paper the name of a local lawyer whom he remembered as a boy, he mailed it to him with a letter of explanation. The deed was to be made out to Mrs. Alice E. Wentworth, and was to be held until she called for it. In case of any difficulty—for it occurred to him that the deacon might at the last moment sacrifice a good trade out of spite—the lawyer was to telegraph him at once at the Waldorf.

Then he looked up the time the Berrington train left and wrote a note giving Mrs. Wentworth final detailed instructions.

Then still unwilling to trust himself alone with his thoughts, Donaldson remained about the lobby. He felt in touch here with all the wide world which lay spread out below the night sky. He studied with interest the weary travellers who were dropped here by steamers which had throbbled across so many turbulent watery miles, by locomotives hot from their steel-held course. The ever-changing figures absorbed him until, with her big shouldered husband, a woman entered who remotely resembled her he had been forced to leave to the protection of one old serving maid. Then in spite of himself, his thoughts ran wild again.

He hungered to get back to his old office, where, if he could find nothing else to do for her, he could at least bury himself in his law books. This unknown man strode across the lobby so confidently—every sturdy line of him suggesting blowsy strength. The unknown woman tripped along at his heels in absolute trust of it. And he, Donaldson, sat here, a helpless spectator, with a worthier woman trusting him as though he were such a man.

In rebellion he argued that it was absurd that such a passion as his towards a woman of whom he

had seen so little should be genuine. His condition had made him mawkishly sentimental. He had been fascinated like a callow youngster by her delicate, pretty features; by her deep gray eyes, her budding lips, her gentle voice. He would be writing verse next. He was free—free, and in one stroke he had placed the world at his feet. He was above it—beyond it, and every living human soul in it. He rose as though to challenge the hotel itself, which represented the crude active part of this world.

But with the memory of his afternoon, his declaration of independence lasted but a moment. He was back in the green fields with her—back in the blazing sunshine with her, and the knowledge that from there, not here, the road began along which lay everything his eager nature craved.

Well, even so, was he going to cower back into a corner? There still remained to him five days. To use them decently he must keep to the present. The big future—the true future was dead. Admit it. There still remained a little future. Let him see what he could do with that.

A porter came in with a mop and swabbed up the deserted floors. Donaldson watched every movement of his strong arms and felt sorry, when, his part played, he retired to the wings. Then he went to his room. He partly undressed and threw himself upon the bed. It was then ten minutes of four on Sunday morning, May twenty-sixth.

In spite of his apparent wakefulness he napped, for when he came to himself again it was broad daylight. An anxious looking hotel clerk stood at the foot of his bed, while a pop-eyed bell-boy pressed close behind him. Donaldson rose to his elbow.

"What the devil are you doing in here?" he demanded.

The clerk appeared relieved by the sound of his voice.

"Why, sir, we got a bit worried about you. We weren't able to raise you all day yesterday."

"Could n't what? I sat up until two o'clock this morning in the lobby. I was awake in my room here two hours after that!"

"You must be mistaken, sir. We rang your room telephone several times yesterday, and pounded at your door without getting an answer."

"I was away during the day, but I was here all last night. I asked you particularly if any call had been received for me."

The clerk smiled tentatively.

"The chamber-maid found you in bed at eleven o'clock in the morning, sir."

"The chamber-maid must have come into the wrong room," answered Donaldson, beginning to suspect that he had caught the two men in the act of thieving. "I was n't in bed at all yesterday, and left the city at nine o'clock."

The clerk hitched uneasily. It was evident to him that Donaldson had been drinking, and had the usual morning-after reluctance about admitting it. The night telephone operator had said that he had acted queer. However, as long as the man was n't dead this did n't concern him.

"Sorry the mistake was made, sir," he replied, anxious now to conciliate the guest. "I would n't have bothered you only the lady said the call was urgent."

"Good lord, man, what call?"

"It is to ring up Miss Arsdale's house at once, sir."

"When did you get that?" demanded Donaldson, as he sprang from his bed.

"This morning, sir, at one o'clock."

In three strides Donaldson was across the room. The hotel attendants crowded one another in their efforts to get out.

Donaldson gave the number and waited, every pulse beat of time throbbing hot through his temples. She had called and been unable to rouse him, while he lay there like a yokel and dreamed of her! He conjured up visions of all sorts of disaster. The boy might have returned and—he shuddered and drew back from the suggestion. He refused to imagine. He beat a tattoo with the inane hook which summons Central.

"Number does n't answer, sir," came the reply.

"They *must* answer! You must *make* them answer."

Again the interminable wait; again the dead reply. He hung up the receiver. The hallucinations which swarmed through his brain taken in connection with the meaningless talk of the hotel employees made him fear an instant for his sanity.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and devoted five minutes to the concentration of his mind upon

the fact that he must be cool, must be steady. Else he would be of no use to any one. He must be deliberate. Then he dressed himself with complete self-possession.

When he came down into the lobby he noticed with some astonishment the business-like appearance of the place for Sunday morning. The clerk glanced at him curiously as he approached. Donaldson spoke with exaggerated slowness and precision.

"I wish," he said, "that you would kindly make a careful note of any messages which may come to me to-day. Your error of this morning—"

He stopped as his eye caught the calendar, and its big black numeral. It read Monday, May 27. He looked from the calendar to the clerk.

"Have n't you made a mistake?" Donaldson asked.

"No, sir. Shall I send a boy with you to the Turkish baths, sir?"

Then the truth dawned upon him; he had lost in sleep one whole precious day!

And the girl—

CHAPTER XIV

Consequences

The driver threw on his high speed after a promise that his fine would be paid and ten dollars over should they be stopped. He made the house in fifteen minutes and was lucky enough not to pass a policeman. Donaldson jumping out bade him wait for further orders.

Donaldson received no response to his ring. He tried the latch and found the door locked. On a run he skirted the house to the rear. The back door was open. He pushed through into the cold kitchen, through this into the dining room, and so into the hall. There was no sign either of the servant or of the girl herself. He was now thoroughly alarmed.

As he ran up the stairs he was confronted by what he took to be an old witch in a purple wrapper. She barred his way in a decidedly militant manner, her sunken black eyes flashing anger. She seemed about to spring at him.

"Bien," she croaked, "qui diable are you?"

He paused.

"You are Marie?" he demanded.

"Bien, and you?"

A voice came from a room leading from the hall. "Marie, who is it? Is it Ben?"

"I know not who it is," Marie shouted back; "but if he comes up another step I will tear out his eyes."

"Miss Arsdale," called Donaldson, "is anything the trouble? It is I—Donaldson."

"You!"

Her voice, which had at first sounded weary, as the voice of one who has waited a long while, gathered strength.

"It is all right, Marie," she called. "This—this is my friend."

Marie relaxed and gripped the banister for support. She was weak.

"I have never seen him before," she challenged.

There was a movement at the door.

"No, you have never seen him. Come here a moment, Marie."

With difficulty the old woman hobbled back into the room to her mistress, and for a few moments Donaldson waited impatiently for the next development. It came when he heard her voice asking him to come in. He was in the room in three strides. She was sitting in her chair with her head bandaged, Marie sitting by her side as though liking but little his intrusion. At sight of the white strip across her

forehead, he caught his breath.

"What does this mean?" he demanded with quick assumption of authority.

"You must n't think it is anything serious," she hastened to explain, awed by the fierceness of his manner. "It is only that—that he came back."

"Arsdale?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"He went away again. Marie and I tried to hold him, but we weren't strong enough."

"It would be easier to hold the devil," interpolated Marie.

"But you," asked the girl,—"I was afraid you had met with an accident."

"I?" he cried. "I was asleep—asleep like a drunken lout."

"All yesterday—all last night?" she asked in astonishment.

"Yes," he admitted, as though it were an accusation.

"Ah, that is good," she replied. "You needed the rest."

"Needed rest, and you in this danger?" he exclaimed contemptuously. "It was unpardonable of me."

"No! No! Don't say that. You could have done nothing had you been here."

"If ever I get my hands on him again," he cried below his breath.

"Mon Dieu," broke in Marie. "If I, too—"

"Hush," interrupted the girl. "It is quite useless for any of us to attempt more until his money gives out. He came back and found a few dollars in my purse."

She had fought this madman, she and this rheumatic old woman, while he had slept! She had called to him and he had not answered! The blood went hot to his cheeks. It was enough to make a man feel craven.

The wounded girl rested her bandaged head on the back of the chair. At the light in Donaldson's eyes, Marie straightened herself aggressively.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked quietly.

"Only a bump," she laughed, remembering how he had stood by the ladder. "Marie insisted upon this," she added, lightly touching the cloth about her forehead.

"A bump?" snorted Marie. "It is a miracle that she was not altogether killed. She—"

But a hand upon the old servant's arm checked her indignation.

"You two women cannot remain here any longer alone," he said authoritatively. "Either you must allow me to take you to the shelter of some friend or—"

"There is no one," she interrupted quickly. "No one to whom I would go in this condition. They would not understand."

"Then," he said, "I must secure a nurse for you."

"Am I not able to care for the p'tite?" demanded Marie. "A nurse!"

"A nurse is needed to care for you both. I am going downstairs now to summon one."

She protested feebly, and Marie vigorously, but he was insistent.

"I ought to call your family physician—"

"No, Mr. Donaldson, you must not do that."

She was firm upon this point, so he went below to do what else he might.

At the telephone he found the explanation of his inability to get the house in the fact that the receiver was hanging loose. It was another accusation. Doubtless in her weakened condition she had dropped it from her hand and turned away, too dazed to replace it. The hot shame of it dried his tongue so that he could scarcely make himself understood. In spite of this he accomplished many things in a very few minutes. The operator gave him the number of a near-by reliable nurse, and finding her in, he sent off the cab for her. Then through an employment bureau he secured a cook who agreed to reach

the house within an hour. He then telephoned the nearest market and ordered everything he could think of from beefsteak to fruit, and to this added everything the marketman could think of. He had no sooner finished than the nurse arrived.

By the greatest good luck Miss Colson proved to be young, cheerful, and capable. She followed Donaldson upstairs and succeeded in winning the confidence of both the girl and Marie at once. Donaldson left them together. A little while later he was allowed to come up again.

"I feel like an unfaithful knight," he said, as he entered. "I deserve to be dismissed without a word."

"Because you slept? It was not your fault. I fear I have left you little time for rest."

"Why did n't you tell them to break down the doors—to *get* me!"

Her face clouded for a moment.

She saw how chagrined he still felt.

"Don't blame yourself," she pleaded. "It's all over anyway and you 've done everything possible. You 've been very thoughtful."

"I was a fool to leave you here. I should have stayed."

"That was impossible."

Donaldson marveled that she could pass off the whole episode so generously. He refrained from questioning her further as to what had happened. It was unnecessary, for he knew well enough.

"Let us choose a pleasanter subject," she said. "Tell me how you became a great hero."

"A sorry hero," he answered, not understanding what she meant.

"No. No. It was fine! It was fine!"

He was bewildered.

"You don't mean to say you have n't seen the papers—but then, of course, you have n't, if you were asleep all day Sunday. Please bring me that pile in the corner."

He handed them to her and she unfolded the first page of the uppermost paper. He found himself confronting a picture of himself as he had stood, the centre of an admiring crowd, in front of the big machine which had so nearly killed Bobby.

He shared the first page with the latest guesses concerning the Riverside robberies.

"Well," he stammered, "I 'd forgotten all about that!"

"Forgotten such an act! You don't half realize what a hero you are. Listen to the headlines, 'Heroic Rescue,' 'Young Lawyer Gives Remarkable Exhibition of Nerve,' 'The Name of Lawyer Donaldson Mentioned for Carnegie Medal,' 'Bravest Deed of the Year,' 'Faced Death Unflinchingly.'"

And the pitiful feature of it was that he must sit and listen to this undeserved praise from her lips. That, knowing deep in his heart his own unworthiness, he must face her and see her respond to those things as though he really had been worthy. He, who had done the act under oath, was receiving the reward of a man who would have done it with no false stimulus. He, who had been unconsciously braced to it by the fact that he had so little to lose, was receiving the praise due only a man who risks all the happiness of a long life. He had faced death after flinching from life. He was sick of his hypocrisy; he would be frank with himself. He would be frank with her; he had a right to it this once. He pressed down the paper she was reading.

"Don't repeat it," he commanded. "It is n't true! It's all wrong!"

"What do you mean?"

"That it's all a lie!"

"But here 's your picture. And *that* 's you."

"Oh, the naked facts are true. But the rest about,—" it was hard to do this with her eyes upon him, "the rest about being a hero—about nerve and bravery. It's rot! It is n't so!"

She threw back her head, resting it upon the top of her chair, and laughed gently. The color had come back into her cheeks and even the dark below her eyes seemed to fade.

"Of course," she returned, "you would n't be a truly hero if you knew you were one."

"But I know I 'm not."

"Of course and so you are!"

The impulse was strong within him to pour out to her the whole bitter story. Better to stand shorn and true before her than garbed in such false colors as these. But as before, he realized that her own welfare forbade even this relief.

The nurse approached with a cheery smile, but with an unmistakable air of authority.

"You will pardon me," she interrupted, "but we must keep Miss Arsdale as quiet as possible. I think she ought to try to sleep a little now."

Sorry as he was to go, Donaldson was relieved to know that he was leaving her in such good hands.

The ringing of the front door-bell startled her. She shrank back in her chair. The nurse was at her side instantly.

"You had better leave at once," she whispered to Donaldson.

"It's only the new cook," he answered.

He went downstairs and ushered her in, and led her to the kitchen.

"The place is yours," he said, waving his hands about the room, "and all you 've got to do is to cook quickly and properly whatever order is sent down to you. Get that?"

The woman nodded, but glanced suspiciously about the deserted quarters. The place looked as when first opened in the Fall, after the return from the summer vacation.

"The family," Donaldson went on to explain, "consists of three. If you succeed in satisfying this group I 'll give you an extra ten at the end of the week."

"I 'll do it, sor."

She looked as though she was able.

"Anything more you want to know?"

"The rist of the help, sor,—"

"You 're all of it," he answered briefly.

Before leaving the house he did one thing more to allay his fears. He called up a private detective bureau and ordered them to keep watch of the house night and day until further notice. They were to keep their eyes open for any slightly deranged person who might seek an entrance. In the event of capturing him, they were to take him into the house and put him to bed, remaining at his side until he, Donaldson, arrived.

Then he ordered his cab to the restaurant of Wun Chung.

CHAPTER XV

The Derelict

Chung had news for him; he had not yet found Arsdale, but his men reported that yesterday the boy had been concealed at Hop Tung's, where Saul had first suspected him to be. The evil-eyed proprietor had hidden him, half in terror of Arsdale himself and half through lust of his money. Finally, however, fearing for the young man's sanity he had thrown him out upon the street. It would go hard with the yellow rat, Chung declared, for such treachery as this to the Lieutenant.

"It may go hard with all of you," replied Donaldson significantly. "But you 've another chance yet; the boy is back here somewhere. Find him within twenty-four hours and I'll help you with Saul."

"He clome black?" exclaimed Chung.

"Sometime early this morning."

If the boy was in the neighborhood, Chung asserted eagerly, he would find him within an hour or hang the cursed-of-his-ancestors, Tung, by his pigtail from his own window.

"Which is better than being locked up in jail. Are you children," Donaldson exploded, "that you can be duped like that?"

Chung appeared worried. But his slant eyes contracted until scarcely more than the eye-lashes were revealed. However inactive he may have been up to now, Donaldson knew that an end had come

to his sluggishness. When Chung left the room there was determination in every wrinkle of his loose embroidered blouse.

So there were some nooks in Chinatown, mused Donaldson, that even Saul did not know. The longer he sat there, the more indignant he became at the treachery of this moon-faced traitor who was indirectly responsible for the nightmare through which the girl had passed. Yet, as he realized, no more responsible than he himself. He had been a thousand times more unfaithful to the girl than Tung had been to Saul.

Chung returned with a brew of his finest tea. He was loquacious. He tried one subject after another, interjecting protestations of his friendship for Saul. Donaldson heard nothing but the even voice and the sibilant dialect. He seemed chained to that one torturing picture. Even the prospect of finding the boy and so ending the suspense which had battered Miss Arsdale's nerves for so long brought little relief. He never could be needed again as he had been needed then. He might even have been able to detain Arsdale and so have avoided this present crisis. He felt all the pangs of an honest sentry who, asleep at his post, awakes to the fact that the enemy has slipped by him in the night.

It was well within the hour when Chung's lieutenant glided in with a message that brought a suave smile to the face of his master.

"Allee light," he announced, beaming upon Donaldson. "Gellelum ddownslairs."

"You've found him!"

"In callage," nodded Chung, with the genial air of a clergyman after completing a marriage ceremony.

Donaldson reached the carriage before Chung had descended the first half-dozen steps. He opened the door and saw a limp, unkempt form sprawled upon the seat. He recognized it instantly as Arsdale. But the man was in no condition to be carried home. He must take him somewhere and watch over him until he was in a more presentable shape. But one place suggested itself,—his own apartments.

Donaldson paused. He must take this bedraggled, disheveled remnant of a man to the rooms which stood for rich cleanliness. He must soil the nice spotlessness of the retreat for which he had paid so dearly. In view of the little he had so far enjoyed of his costly privileges, this last imposition seemed like a grim joke.

"To the Waldorf," he ordered the driver with a smile.

He himself climbed up on the box where he could find fresh air. At the hotel he bribed a bellboy to help him with the man to his room by way of the servant's entrance. Then he telephoned for the hotel physician, Dr. Seton.

Before the doctor arrived Donaldson managed to strip the clothes from the senseless man and to roll him into bed. Then he sat down in a chair and stared at him.

"It's an opium jag," he explained, as soon as Dr. Seton came in, "but that is n't the worst feature of it. I 'm tied here to him until he comes to. I can't tell you how valuable my time is to me. I want you to take the most heroic measures to get him out of it as soon as possible."

"Very well, we 'll clear his system of the poison. But we can't be too violent. We must save his nerves."

"Damn his nerves," Donaldson exclaimed. "He doesn't deserve nerves."

The doctor glanced sharply from his patient to Donaldson himself. He noted the latter's pupils, his tense lips, his tightened fingers. He had jumped at the word poison, like a murderer at the word police.

"See here," he demanded, "you have n't any of this stuff in you, have you?"

"No," answered Donaldson, calmly.

"Anything else the matter with you?"

"Nothing but nervousness, I guess. I 've been under something of a strain recently."

Donaldson turned away. He was afraid of the keen eyes of this man. Barstow had not experimented very long with the stuff; perhaps, after all, it did produce symptoms. But he reassured himself the next minute, remembering that the drug was unknown. Barstow had not revealed his discovery to any one. If he showed a dozen symptoms they would be unrecognizable.

The doctor dropped his questioning and turned to his patient. He subjected the man to the stomach-pump and hot baths. Donaldson assisted and watched every detail of the vigorous treatment with increasing interest. At the end of two hours Arsdale was allowed to sleep.

Seton put on his coat and wrote out instructions for the further care of the man. But before leaving he again turned his shrewd eyes upon Donaldson himself.

"My boy," he said kindly, "you ought to pay some attention to your own health. I hate to see a man of your age go to pieces."

He squinted curiously at Donaldson's eyes. The latter withdrew a little.

"What makes you think there is anything wrong with me?" he asked.

"Your eyes for one thing," he answered.

"Nonsense. If I need anything, its only a good sweating, such as you gave Arsdale."

"There are some poisons not so easily sweated out."

Donaldson hesitated. While watching this man at work upon the boy, he had felt a temptation which was now burning hot within him. It was possible that it was not too late even now to clean his own system of the drug he had swallowed. This man, he knew, would bring to his aid all the wisdom of medical science. Barstow may have been mistaken, although he knew the careful chemist well enough to realize this was well nigh an impossibility. The next second he held out his hand. It was steady. He smiled as he saw Seton pause a moment to note if it trembled.

"Thanks for all you 've done, doctor," he said. "Do you think I can take him home tomorrow?"

"If you follow my instructions. The boy really has a sound physique. He ought to pull out quickly."

As the door closed upon the doctor, Donaldson drew a breath of relief. Thank God he had resisted his impulse. He would keep true to his compact. He must remain true to himself. That was all that was now left. There must be no shirking—no flinching. If he had played the fool, he must not play the coward. The subtle tempter had suggested the girl, but he realized that he had better not come to her at all than to come as one who had played unfairly with himself. To be unfaithful to the spirit of his undertaking would be as weak a thing as not to fulfill the letter of his oath. His shadowy duty to the girl would not justify himself in evading a crisis demanding his life for the life of another, nor would it vindicate the greater evasion. It was a matter of honor to remain true to that which at the start had justified the whole hazard to him. It was this which restrained him even from learning whether or not Barstow was in town.

The man on the bed was breathing heavily, his lips moving at every breath in a way to form a grimace. He made in this condition the whole room as tawdry as a tavern tap. And at the feet of this thing he was tossing his meager store of golden minutes.

Yet it was through this inert medium alone that Miss Arsdale could pay the debt to the father who had been so good to her; and it was only through this same unsightly shell that he, Donaldson, could in his turn repay his debt for the dreams she had quickened in him.

He stepped to the telephone to tell her what he could of that which he had found and done. The mere sound of her voice as it came over the wire brightened the room like a flood of light. The joy in it as she listened to what he had accomplished was payment enough for all he had sacrificed. He told her that the doctor had advised keeping the boy in for at least another day.

"Oh, but you are good!" she exclaimed. "And you will not leave him—you will guard him against running off again?"

"I shall stay here at his side until it is absolutely safe to go."

"If I could only come down!"

"But you must n't. You must stay where you are and do as you 're told."

"It will be only for to-day and to-night, won't it?"

"Probably that is all."

"That is n't very long."

"Not as time goes."

"But it will seem long."

"Will it—to you?"

He regretted the question the moment it had been uttered. But it came to his lips unbidden.

"Of course," she answered.

"It will seem very long to me," he returned slowly. "Almost a lifetime."

"Perhaps you will telephone now and then."

"Very often, if I may."

"The nurse says she 'll not allow me to answer the telephone after nine at night."

"Nine to-night is a long way off yet."

"It's only half a day."

"But that's twelve hours!"

"Do you think that long?"

"Yes. That seems a very long while to me."

"It is soon gone."

"Too soon."

"Then comes the night and then the morning and then you 'll bring him home."

"Then I 'll bring him home."

What a new meaning that word home had when it fell from her lips. What a new meaning everything had.

She turned aside to address some one in the room and then her voice came in complaint.

"The nurse is here with my medicine."

"Then close your eyes and swallow it quickly. I 'll telephone you later and inquire how it tasted."

"Thank you. Good bye."

"Good bye."

He hung up the receiver and settled down to the grim task of counting the passing minutes which were draining his life as though each minute were a drop of blood let from an artery. And all the company he had for it was this poor devil on the bed who grimaced as he breathed.

He folded his arms. If this, too, was a part of the cost he must pay it like a man.

CHAPTER XVI

The Fourth Day

The morning of Tuesday, May twenty-eighth, found Donaldson still sitting in the chair, facing the form upon the bed. He had not undressed, and had slept less than an hour. He was now waiting for eight o'clock, when he had received permission from the nurse to ring up Miss Arsdale again.

With some tossing Arsdale had slept on without awaking fully enough to be conscious of his surroundings. Now, however, Donaldson became aware that the fellow's brain was clearing. He watched the process with some interest. It was an hour later before the man began to realize that he was in a strange room, and that another was in the room with him. It was evident that he was trying hard, and yet with fear of whither the road might lead him, to trace himself back. He had singled out Donaldson for some time, observing him through half-closed eyes, before he ventured to speak.

"Where am I?" he finally faltered huskily.

"In my charge."

"Who are you?"

"One Donaldson."

"I never heard of you."

"That is not improbable."

Arsdale reflected upon this for some time before he gained courage to proceed further.

"I 'm going to get up," he announced, at the end of some five minutes.

"No, you 're not. You are going to stay right where you are."

"What right have you to keep me here?" he demanded.

"The right of being stronger than you."

Arsdale struggled feebly to his elbow, but Donaldson pushed him back with a pressure that would not have made a child waver. He stood beside him wondering just how much the dulled brain was able to grasp. The long night had left him with little sympathy. The more he had thought of that blow, the greater the aversion he felt towards Arsdale. If the boy had n't struck her he would feel some pity for him, but that blow given in the dark against a defenseless woman—the one woman who had been faithful and kind to him—that was too much. It had raised dark thoughts there in the night.

Arsdale, his pupils contracted to a pin-point, stared back at him. Yet his questions proved that he was now possessed of a certain amount of intelligence. If he was able to realize that he was in a strange place, he might be able to realize some other things that Donaldson was determined he *should*.

"You are n't very clear-headed yet, but can you understand what I am saying to you now?"

Arsdale nodded weakly.

"Do you remember anything of what you did yesterday?" he demanded, in a vibrant voice that engraved each word upon the sluggish brain.

"No," answered the man quailing.

"No? Then I'll tell you. You came back to the house and you struck your sister."

"No! No! Not that! I didn't do that."

Donaldson responded to a new hope. This seemed to prove that the conscience of the man was not dead. It came to him as a relief. He was relentless, not out of hate, but because so much depended upon establishing the fact that the fellow still had a soul.

"Yes. You did," he repeated, his fingers unconsciously closing into his palms. "You struck her down."

"Good God!"

"Think of that a while and then I 'll tell you more."

"Is she hurt, is she badly hurt?"

Without replying Donaldson returned to his chair on the opposite side of the bed and watched him as a physician might after injecting a medicine. Arsdale stared back at him in dumb terror. Donaldson could almost see the gruesome pictures which danced witch-like through his disordered brain. He did n't enjoy the torture, but he must know just how much he had upon which to work.

It was in the early hours of the morning that Donaldson had become conscious of the new and tremendous responsibility which rested upon him. To leave Arsdale behind him alive in such a condition as this would be to leave the curse upon the girl,—would be to desert her to handle this mad-man alone. He had seen red at the thought of it. It would be to brand his own act with unpardonable cowardice; it would be to go down into his grave with the helpless cries of this woman ringing in his ears; it would be to shirk the greatest and most sacred duty that can come to a man. The cold sweat had started upon his forehead at the thought of it.

The inexorable alternative was scarcely less ghastly. Yet in the face of this other the alternative had come as a relief. If it cost him his immortal soul, this other should not be left behind to mar a fair and unstained life. He would throttle him as he lay there upon the bed before he would leave him behind to this. He would go to his doom a murderer before he would leave Arsdale alive to do a fouler murder. That should be his final sacrifice,—his ultimate renunciation. In its first conception he had been appalled by the idea, but slowly its inevitability had paralyzed thought. It had made him feel almost impersonal. Considering the manner in which he had been thrust into it, it seemed, as it were, an ordinance of Fate.

Though this had now become fixed in his mind, there was still the scant hope that he had grasped from what he had observed in Arsdale's manner. Given the morsel of a man, and there was still hope. Therefore it was with considerable interest that he watched for some evidence of the higher nature, even if only expressed in the crude form of shame. At times Arsdale looked like a craven cornered to his death—at times like a man struggling with a great grief—at times like a man dazed and uncomprehending.

To himself he moaned continuously. Frequently he rose to his elbow with the cry, "Is she hurt?"

Still in silence Donaldson watched him. Once Arsdale fell forward on his chin, where he lay motionless, his eyes still upon Donaldson. The latter helped him back to the pillow, but Arsdale shrank from his touch.

"Your eyes!" he gasped, covering his own with his trembling hand. "They are the eyes of a devil. Take them off me—take them off!"

But Arsdale could not endure his blindness long. It made the ugly visions worse. So, he saw the girl

with red blood streaming down her cheeks.

The sight of this writhing soul raised many new speculations in Donaldson's mind especially in connection with its possible outcome. In the matter of religion he was negative, neither believing any professed creed nor denying any. He had received no early impetus, and had up to now been too preoccupied with his earthly interests, with no great grief or happiness to arouse him, to formulate any theory in his own mind. Even at the moment he had swallowed the poison the motive prompting him to it had been so intensely material that it had started but the most momentary questions. It was the thought of Mrs. Wentworth, the sight of the baby, the indefinable boundaries of his own love—it was love that pressed the question in upon him. Now the other extreme embodied in the sight of the man before him, capped by the acute query of what the sin of murder might mean, sharpened it to a real concern. If such love as the mother and the girl connoted forbade the conception that love expired with life, the torture of this other stunted soul seemed prophetic of what might be awaiting his own future, dwarfed by the shifty expedient he had adopted to check its development. If punishment counted for anything, he was, to be sure, receiving his full portion right here on earth. The realization of what he was leaving was an inquisition of the most exquisite order. But would this be the end? His consciousness, as he sat there, refused to allow the hope,—refused even to allow the hope to be desired.

So, face to face, each of these two struggled with the problem of his next step. To each of them life had a new and terrible significance. From a calm sea it had changed to wind-rent chaos. It was revealing its potentialities,—lamb-like when asleep, lion-like when roused. Tangle-haired Tragedy had stalked forth into the midst of men going about their business.

The man on the bed broke out again,

"Why did n't I die before that? Why did n't I die before?"

Then he turned upon Donaldson with a new horror in his eyes.

"I did n't kill her?" he gasped.

The answer to his cry came—though he could not interpret it—in the ringing of the telephone. Donaldson crossed to it, while Arsdale cowered back in bed as though fearing this were news of some fresh disaster. To him the broken conversation meant nothing; to Donaldson it brought a relief that saved him almost from madness.

"Is that you, Mr. Donaldson?" she asked.

"Yes. And you—you are well?"

There was a pause, and then came the query again,

"Is that you?"

"Yes, can't you hear my voice?"

"It does n't sound like your voice. Is anything the matter?"

"No, nothing. I don't understand what you mean."

She hesitated again and then answered,

"It—it made me almost afraid."

"It's your nerves. Did you sleep well?"

"Yea. And is Ben all right?"

"Yes."

"There it is again," she broke in. "Your voice sounds harsh."

"That must be your imagination."

"Perhaps," she faltered. "Are you going to bring him home to-day?"

"Probably not until this evening. But," he broke in, "I shall come sooner myself. I shall come this morning. Will you tell that gentleman waiting near the gate to come down here?"

"What gentleman?"

"You probably have n't seen him. I put him there on guard."

"You are thoughtful. Your voice is natural again. Is Ben awake now?"

"Yes."

"And does he know?"

"Some things."

"Mr. Donaldson," she said, and he caught the shuddering fear in her voice, "are you keeping anything from me?"

"I don't know what you mean, but I will come up so that you may see there has been no change."

"I still think you are concealing something."

"Nothing that is not better concealed; nothing that you could help."

"I should rather know. I do not like being guarded in that way."

"We all have to guard one another. You in your turn guard me."

"From what?"

"Many things. You are doing it now—this minute."

"From what?" she insisted.

"From myself."

"Oh, I don't know what you mean. I think you had better come up here at once—if it is safe to leave Ben."

"I shall make it safe. Don't forget to send down my man."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Arsdale. The latter must have noticed instantly the change in Donaldson's expression, for he rose to his elbow with eager face.

"You'll tell me before you go! You'll tell before—"

"You didn't kill," answered Donaldson.

"Thank God!"

"She is n't even wounded seriously."

"She knows that it was I?"

"Yes. She knows."

"How she must hate me, gentle Elaine."

"It is hard for her to hate any one."

"You think she—she might forgive?"

"I don't know. That remains to be seen."

The man buried his face in his arms and wept. This was not maudlin sentimentality; it struck deeper.

"Are you ready to do anything more than regret?" demanded Donaldson. "Are you ready to make a fight to quit that stuff?"

"So help me as long as I live—"

"Don't tell me that. I want you to think it over a while. I 'm going to have some one stay here with you until I get back this afternoon. Will you remain quiet?"

"Yes."

"And remember that even if by chance you did n't do much harm, still you struck. You struck a woman; you struck your sister."

Arsdale cringed. Each word was a harder blow than he, even in his madness, could strike.

"It's a—terrible thing to remember. But—but it will be always with me. It will never leave me."

As soon as the detective arrived Donaldson gave him his instructions, adding,

"Look out for tricks, and be ready to tell me all he says to you."

"I 've had 'em before," answered the man.

CHAPTER XVII

An Interlude

She was waiting for him in the library with an expression both eager and worried. She crossed the room to meet him, but paused half-way as though really fearful of some change. But she saw only the same kind, tense face, looking perhaps a bit heavy from weariness, the same dark eyes with their strange fires, the same slight droop of the shoulders. There was certainly nothing to fear in him as he stood before her with a tender, quizzical smile about his large mouth. He looked to her now more like a big boy than the cold, stern man she had half expected.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"No, not standing here where I can see you. But over the telephone with your strange voice and your half meanings—what *did* you mean?"

"Nothing you need worry about."

She became suddenly serious.

"I want to tell you now that there is no need of your trying to hide anything at all from me about Ben."

"I am hiding nothing. But," he asked with quick intuition, "are *you*?"

She hesitated, met his eyes, and dropped her voice.

"I can tell you nothing—not even you—unless you have learned it."

"I, in my turn, don't know what you mean," he answered. "I have learned nothing new about him. And it is too fair a morning," he concluded abruptly, "to bother over puzzles. Things have happened so rapidly that we are probably both muddled, and if we could spend the time in explanations we should doubtless find that neither of us means anything."

She was clearly relieved, but it raised a new question in Donaldson's mind. Of course she understood nothing of what had taken place last night unless by mental telepathy. But in these days of psychic revelations a man could n't feel secure even in his thoughts. There was apparently some inner secret—she had touched upon it before—relating to the Arsdale curse. Doubtless if one pried carefully enough many another skeleton could be found in the closets of the house of this family half-poisoned now through three generations.

It was early and it suddenly occurred to her that he had probably not yet breakfasted.

She struggled a moment with a conflicting sense of hospitality and propriety, but finally said resolutely, "I should be glad if you would breakfast with me. You ought to try your new cook."

The picture he had of her sitting opposite him at the coffee brought the warm blood to his cheeks.

"I—why—"

"Will you have your chop well done?" she broke in, without giving him time to frame an excuse.

"Yes," he answered.

She left him.

Within a very short time she announced the meal with pretty grace, which concealed all trace of nervousness, save for the heightened color of her cheeks, which, he noted, were as scarlet as though she herself had been bending over a hot stove. She led the way into an exquisite little dining room, which he at once took to be the expression of her own taste. It was in white and apple green, with a large trellised window opening upon the lawn. A small table had been placed in the sun near the window, and was covered with dazzling white linen, polished silver, and cut glass, which, catching the morning beams, reflected a prismatic riot of colors. The chops, lettuce, bread and butter, and coffee were already served. As he seated her, he felt as though he were living out a dream—one of the dreams that as a very young man he had sometimes dreamed when, lying flat upon his back in the sun, he had watched the big cotton clouds wafted, like thistledown, across the blue.

It might have been Italy for the blue of the sky and the caressing warmth of the sun. They threw open the big window and in flooded the perfume of lilacs and the twitter of sparrows, which is the nearest to a bird song one can expect in New York. But after all, this was n't New York; nor Spain; nor even the inner woods; it was just Here. And Here is where the eyes of a man and a woman meet with spring in their blood.

Griefs of loss, bitter, poignant; sorrows of mistakes, bruising, numbing; the ache of disappointments, ingratitude, betrayals,—Nature surging on to her fulfillment sweeps them away, like

fences before a flood, allowing no obstructions to Youth's kinship with Spring. So the young may not mourn long; so, if they do, they become no longer young.

The man and the woman might have been two care-free children for all they were able to resist the magic of this fair morning or the subtler magic of their own emotions.

To the man it suggested more than to the woman because he gave more thought to it, but the woman absorbed more the spirit of it because she more fully surrendered herself.

Donaldson found himself with a good appetite. There was nothing neurotic about him. He was fundamentally normal—fundamentally wholesome—with no trace of mawkishness in his nature. As he sipped the hot golden-brown coffee, he tried to get at just what it was that he felt when he now looked at her. It came to him suddenly and he spoke it aloud,

"I seem to have, this minute, a fresher vision of life than I have known since I was twenty."

It was something different from anything he had experienced up to now. It was saner, clearer.

"It is the morning," she hazarded. "I never saw the grass so green as it is this morning; I never felt the sun so warm."

"It is like the peace of the inner woods,—only brighter," he declared.

"You said such peace never came to any one unless alone."

"Did I?"

She nodded.

"But it *is* like that," he insisted. "Only more joyous. I think it is the extra joy in it that makes us not want it alone. Queer, too, it seems to be born altogether of this spot, of this moment. Understand what I mean? It does n't seem to go back of the moment we entered this room and—," he hesitated, "it does n't seem to go forward."

"It is as though coming in here we had stepped into a beautiful picture and were living inside the frame for a little," she suggested.

"Exactly. The frame is the hedge; the picture is the sky, the sun, and you."

She laughed, frankly pleased in a childish way, at his conceit.

"Then for me," she answered, "it must be the sun, the sky, and *you*."

"We are n't trying to compliment each other, are we?"

"No," she answered seriously. "I hope not."

She went on after a moment's reflection,

"I have been puzzling over the strange chance that brought you into my life at so opportune a time."

"I came because you believed in me and because you needed me. You believed in me because—," he paused, his blood seeming suddenly to run faster, "because I needed you."

"You needed me?"

"Yes," he answered, "I needed you. I needed you long ago."

"But how—why?"

"To show me the joy there is in the sunlight wherever it strikes; to take me with you into this picture."

Their eyes met.

"Have I done that?" she asked.

"Yes."

She shook her head.

"I 'm afraid not," she disclaimed, "because the joy has n't been in my own heart."

"Nor was it in mine—then."

Her eyes turned back to his. The silver in them came to the top like the moon reflection on dark waters through fading clouds. He was leaning a little towards her.

"It seems to be something that we can't get alone," he explained.

"Perhaps it is," she pondered, "perhaps."

She started back a little, as one who, lost in a sunset, leans too far over the balcony. Then she smiled. Donaldson's heart answered the smile.

"Your coffee is cooling," she said. "May I pour you some fresh?"

He passed his cup automatically. But the act was enough to bring him back. A moment gone the room had grown misty. Something had made his throat ache. He felt taut with a great unexpressed yearning. He became conscious of his breakfast again. He sipped his hot coffee.

"I suppose," he reflected, "you ought to know something about me."

"I am interested," she answered, "but I don't think it matters much."

Again he saw in her marvelous eyes that look of complete confidence that had thrilled him first on that mad ride. Again he realized that there is nothing finer in the world. For a moment the room swam before him at the memory of his doom. But her calm gaze steadied him at once. He must cling to the Now.

"I have n't much I can tell you," he resumed. "My parents died when I was young. They were New England farm-folk and poor. After I was left alone, I started in to get an education without a cent to my name. It took me fifteen years. I graduated from college and then from the law school. I came here to New York and opened an office. That is all."

He waved his hand deprecatingly as though ashamed that it was so slight and undramatic a tale. But she leaned towards him with sudden access of interest.

"Fifteen years, and you did it all alone! You must have had to fight."

"In a way," he answered.

"Will you tell me more about it?" she asked eagerly.

"It's not very interesting," he laughed. "It was mostly a grind—just a plain, unceasing grind. It was n't very exciting—just getting any old job I could and then studying what time was left."

"And growing stronger every day—feeling your increasing power!"

"And my hunger, too, sometimes."

He tried to make light of it because he didn't wish her to become so serious over it. He did n't like playing the part of hero.

"You did n't have enough to eat?" she asked in astonishment.

"You should have seen me watch Barstow's cake-box."

He told her the story, making it as humorous as he could. But when he had finished, she wasn't laughing. For a moment his impulse was to lay before her the whole story—the bitter climax, the ashen climax, which lately he had thought so beautiful. She had said that nothing in the past would matter—but this was of the future, too. Even if she ought to know, he had no right to force upon her the burden of what was to come. He found now that he had even cut himself off from the privilege of being utterly honest with her. To tell her the whole truth might be to destroy his usefulness to her. She might then scorn his help. He must not allow that. Nothing could justify that.

"You are looking very serious," she commented.

Her own face had in the meanwhile grown brighter.

"It is all from within," he answered, "all from within. And—now presto!—it is gone."

Truly the problem did seem to vanish as he allowed himself to become conscious of the picture she made there in the sunshine. With her hair down her back she could have worn short dresses and passed for sixteen. The smooth white forehead, the exquisite velvet skin with the first bloom still upon it, the fragile pink ears were all of unfolding womanhood.

"Since my mother died," he said, "you are the first woman who has ever made me serious."

"Have you been such a recluse then?"

"Not from principle. I have been a sort of office hermit by necessity."

"You should not have allowed an office to imprison you," she scolded. "You should have gone out more."

"I have—lately."

"And has it not done you good?" she challenged, not realizing his narrow application of the

statement.

"A world of good."

"It brightens one up."

"Wonderfully."

"If we stay too much by ourselves we get selfish, don't we?"

"Intensely. And narrow-minded, and morbid, and petty and—," the words came charged with bitterness, "and intensely foolish."

"I 'm glad you crawled out before you became all those things."

"You gave me a hand or I should n't."

"I gave you a hand?"

"Yea," he answered, soberly.

"Perhaps—perhaps this is another of the things that could n't have happened to either of us alone."

"I think you are right," he answered.

He did not dare to look at her.

"Perhaps that is true of all the good things in the world," she hazarded.

"Perhaps."

Once again the golden mist—once again the aching yearning.

The telephone jangled harshly. It was a warning from the world beyond the hedge, the world they had forgotten.

The sound of it was to him like the savage clang of barbaric war-gongs.

With her permission he answered it himself. It was a message from his man at the Waldorf.

"He's making an awful fuss, sir. He says as how he wants to go home. I can hold him all right, only I thought I 'd let you know."

"Thanks, I 'll be right down."

"I 'd better go back to your brother," he said to her as he hung up the receiver. "I want to have a talk with him before bringing him home."

Her eyes grew moist.

"How am I ever going to repay you for all you 've done?"

"You 've repaid me already," he answered briefly and left at once.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Making of a Man

Donaldson with hands in his pockets stood in front of Arsdale, who had slumped down into a big leather chair, and admired his work. There was much still to be done, but, comparing the man before him with the thing he had brought in here some thirty hours before, the improvement was most satisfactory. Arsdale, with trimmed hair and clean, shaven face, in a new outfit from shoes to collar, and sane even if depressed, began to look a good deal of a man.

"How do you feel now?" inquired Donaldson.

Arsdale hitched forward and resting his chin in his hands, elbows on knees, stared at the floor.

"Like hell," he answered.

Donaldson frowned.

"You deserve to, but you oughtn't," he said.

"Oh, I deserve it all right. I deserve it—and more!"

"Yes, you do. But that does n't help any."

Arsdale groaned.

"There is n't any help. I 've made a beastly mess out of my life, out of myself."

"I wish I could disagree, but I can't," answered Donaldson.

He walked up and down a moment before the fellow studying him. He was worried and perplexed. The task before him was an unpleasant one. He had to overcome a natural repugnance to interference in the life of another. Under ordinary circumstances he would have watched Arsdale go to his doom with a feeling of nothing but indifference. In his own passion for individual liberty he neither demanded nor accepted sympathy for personal misfortunes or mistakes, and in turn was loath to trespass either upon the rights or duties of another, but his own life, through the medium of the boy's sister, was so inextricably entangled with this other that now he recognized the inevitability of such interference. On his success or failure to arouse Arsdale largely depended the happiness of the girl.

"No," he reflected aloud, "the question is n't how much punishment you deserve, for the pain you suffer personally does n't, unfortunately, remedy matters in the slightest. It wouldn't do you any good for me to kick you about the room or I 'd do it. It would n't do you any good for me to turn you over to the police or I 'd do that. You 're hard to get hold of because there's so little left of you."

Arsdale made no reply. He remained motionless.

"But," continued Donaldson with emphasis, "that does n't make it any the less necessary. You 've got to pull what is left together—you 've got to play the man with what remains. You can't get all the punishment you deserve and so you 've got to deserve less. This, not for your own sake, but for the sake of the girl,—for the sake of the girl you struck."

"Don't!"

Arsdale quailed. He glanced up at Donaldson with a look that made the latter see again Barstow's dog Sandy as he had tottered in his death throes. But the mere fact that the man quivered back from this shameful thing was encouraging. It was upon this alone that Donaldson based his hope, upon this single drop of uncorrupted Arsdale blood which still nourished some tiny spot in the burned out brain.

"You must make such reparation as you can," continued Donaldson. "Your life is n't long enough to do it fully, but you can accomplish something towards it if you start at once."

Arsdale shook his head.

"It's all a beastly mess. It 's too late!"

Donaldson's lips tightened.

"Well," he asked, "if you are n't going to do what you can, what do you propose?"

Thickly Arsdale answered,

"I know a way; I 'm going to pull out for the sake of Elaine!"

Donaldson started as at the cut of a whip-lash. Then he straightened to meet face to face this new development. Somehow this contingency had never occurred to him. Now for the moment it disarmed him, for it brought him down, like a wounded bird, to the level of Arsdale himself. As voiced by the latter the act expressed the climax of simpering cowardice. Donaldson, in the first shock of finding himself included in the same indictment with the very man for whom he had had so little mercy, felt the same powerlessness that had paralyzed this other. He was shorn of his strength. He blinked as stupidly at Arsdale as Arsdale had blinked at him.

But even as he stood with loose lips before the infirm features of the younger man, he realized that Arsdale's talk had been the chatter of a child. He had used the phrase idly and, although it was possible he might in just as idle a mood commit the act itself, Donaldson was convinced that it was not yet a fixed idea. With this came the inspiration which gave him a fresh grip upon himself, that revealed his great opportunity; he would make Arsdale see all that he himself had learned in these few days. So in reality he would be giving the best of his life to another.

It was like oxygen to one struggling for breath through congested lungs. He went to the window and in great deep-chested inhalations stood for a moment drinking in not only the fresh air but with it the spirit of the eager, turbulent world which was bathed in it, the world that he now saw so clearly. The sun flashing from the neighboring windows glinted its glad message of life; the rumbling of the passing traffic roared it to him in a thundering message, like that of shattered sea waves; the deep cello-like undernote of the city itself sang it to him. And the message of all the voices was just, "It is good to live! It is good to be!"

He turned back, seeing a new man in the chair before him. Here was a brother—a brother in a truer sense than a better man could have been. Coming from different directions, along different roads,

through different temptations, they had reached at last the crumbling edge of the same dark chasm. They faced the same eternal problem. That made them brothers. But Donaldson had already seen, already learned; that made him the stronger brother.

His face was alight, his body alert, as he came to Arsdale's side. The latter looked up at him in surprise, feeling his presence before he saw. Donaldson's first words stirred him,

"You can't pull out," he said, "because you 're out already. You must pull in. Don't you see,—you must pull back!"

"You don't understand what I mean."

"A great deal better than you yourself do. And in the light of that understanding I tell you that you can't do it,—that it is n't the way."

"I 'm no good to any one," Arsdale complained dully. "I don't see why it would n't be better for everyone if I just quit."

The word quit was a biting gnome to Donaldson.

"I know," he answered. "But it is n't right—all because you don't know and you can't know what you 're quitting. You can't just look around you and see. You wouldn't just be quitting the girl who perhaps does n't need you, though you can't even tell that; you would n't be quitting just your friends who can get along without you—though even that is n't sure; you 'd be quitting the others, the unseen others, the unknown others, who are waiting for you, perhaps a year from now, perhaps twenty years from now, but in their need waiting for you. They are waiting for you, understand, and for no one else. Just you, no matter how weak you are, or how poor you are, or how worthless you are, because it is you and no one else who will fit into their lives to help complete them."

"I 'd bring nothing but trouble. I 've been no good to any one."

"You can't help being good to some one. Queer it sounds, but I believe that's true. A man never lived, so mean that he didn't do good to some one."

"You believe that?" demanded Arsdale.

"Yes. I know that. I know that, Arsdale!" he answered, his lips tremulous, a deep-seated light in his eyes. "I know that you can't possibly be so useless, so cowardly, so utterly bad, but what you 're still more useless, still more of a coward, still worse when you quit! Maybe we can't see how—maybe at the time we can't realize it, but it's so. Some one will get at the good in us if we just fight along, no matter how we may cover it up."

Arsdale straightened in his chair. His shaking fingers clutched the chair arms. But the next second his face clouded.

"Tell me what good I 've done," he demanded aggressively.

Donaldson smiled. He could n't very well tell the man the details of these last few days and what they meant to him, but they proved his claim. Arsdale had been, if nothing else, a connecting link. It was he, even this self-indulgent weakling, who had brought Donaldson to his own, who had led Donaldson, through a series of self-revealing incidents, to where he could stand quivering with the truth of life, and give of his strength back to this man to pay the debt. Yes, he knew what Arsdale had accomplished, and before he was through the latter should feel its effect.

"Man," answered Donaldson almost solemnly, "you have done your good—even you, in spite of yourself."

"But not to Elaine where I should have done most!"

Donaldson's hand rested a moment on Arsdale's shoulder.

"Yes," he said, "I like to think you have been of some service even to her."

Arsdale rose to his feet.

"If I could think that—if I could look her in the eyes again!"

"Look her in the eyes! Keep those eyes before you! Never get where those eyes can't follow you! And as you look take my word for it that even there by a strange chance you 've done your good."

The man in Arsdale was at the top. For a second he faced Donaldson as one man should face another. Then he tottered and fell back in his chair, covering his face with his hands.

"It's too late," he groaned, "God, it's too late!"

Donaldson seized him by the shoulder and dragged him to his feet—not in anger, not in contempt, but in his naked eagerness to make the man see. Half supporting him, he drew him to the window. He threw it wide open.

"Too late!" he cried, waving his hand at the brisk scene upon the street. "Too late! It is n't too late so long as there's a living world out there, so long as there's a man or a woman out there! It isn't too late because there's work for you to do, work for others that you 've shirked. What is it? I don't know, but it's there. Dig around until you find it. Maybe to-day it was only to give a nickel to the blind beggar at the corner, maybe it was only to help an old lady across the street, maybe it was to do some kindness to your sister. I don't know what it was, but I know it was something, and went undone because of you."

Arsdale, leaning against the window-sill, strained towards Donaldson.

"That's a queer idea," he whispered hoarsely.

"And another thing," continued Donaldson, "tangled up with those duties are all the joys of the world. You 've been looking for them somewhere else—I 've been looking for them somewhere else—but it is n't any use. They are right there with your duties—in the keeping of other people, the unseen others. And they couldn't be bought, not with all the gold in the world. They must be given if you get them at all."

Arsdale was listening eagerly. It was as much the spirit back of the words as the words themselves that made him feel the stirring of a new power which was a new hope.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You make a man feel that you know! But the hellish smoke-hunger—you don't know anything of that."

"It's a part of the same hellish selfishness which eats the vitals out of everything. Get out of yourself, get into the lives of others, and the smoke-hunger will quit you. You could n't go down where you 've been and made a beast of yourself if you cared more about others than yourself. The power that drove you down there would n't mean anything if a stronger power held you back. The point is, Arsdale, the point is, that all by himself a man is n't worth much. He does n't count. Either he dries up or he rots."

"That's true! That's true!" answered Arsdale. "And I 've rotted. If only I had found you a year ago!"

"A year ago is dead and buried. Let it alone. Think of the live things; think of the Now! There 's a big, strong world all around you, pulsating with life; there 's sunshine in the morning and stars at night—and they are alive; there are flowers, and birds, and grasses—all alive; there are live men and women, live questions, and there is your sister. The world would be alive—would be worth while if you had only her. She 's a world in herself."

"You are right. Man, how you know!"

"Can't you see it yourself? Can't you feel the thrill of it all?"

"Yes," answered Arsdale, his eyes as alive as Donaldson's, "I see. I feel. And if I had your strength —"

"You have the strength! You have everything you need in just your beating heart and the days ahead of you. Buck up to it!—Go and meet life half-way. Throw yourself at life! The trouble with you and me is that we stand still, all curled up in ourselves as in a chrysalis. You must give yourself room, you must break free from your own selfish conceit, you must reach a point where you don't give a damn about yourself! Do you hear—where all the worrying you do is about others? Then don't worry."

Arsdale was breathing through his nostrils, his lips closed.

"It's going to be a hard fight," he said. "It 's going to be a hard fight, but you make me feel as though I could do it."

"A hard fight," cried Donaldson. "Why, man, I 'd strip myself down to you—I 'd go back to where you stand to-day for the fighting chance you have."

"You'd—what?"

Donaldson caught his breath. For a moment he was silent, staring at the eager life upon the street. Then he turned again to Arsdale.

"I 'd like to swap places with you—that's all," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

A Miracle

Elaine, her pale face tense, heard the steps of Arsdale coming up the stairs to meet her. Donaldson

had telephoned at nine that if she had not yet retired he was going to bring her brother home. She dreaded the ordeal for herself and for him. She dreaded lest the aversion she felt for him with the horror of that night still upon her might overcome her sense of duty; she dreaded the renewed protestations, the self abasement, the sight of the maudlin shame of the man. She had gone through the hysterical scenes so many times that it was growing difficult, especially in her present condition of weakness, to arouse the necessary spirit to undergo it. Not only this, but she found herself inevitably pitting him against the strong self-reliant character of Donaldson. It had been easier for her to condone when she had seen Arsdale only as the loved son of the big-hearted elder, but now that this other unyielding personality had come into her life it was difficult to avoid comparison. Arsdale when standing beside a man was only pitiable.

He faltered at the door and then crossed the room with a poise that reminded her of the father who to the end had never shown evidence of any physical weakness in his bearing. In fact in look and carriage, even in the spotless freshness of his dress which was a characteristic of the elder, he appeared like his father. She could hardly believe. She sat as silent as though this were some illusion.

There was color in the ordinarily yellow cheeks, there was life in the usually dull eyes, though the spasmodic twitching testified to nerves still unsteady. When he held out his trembling hand, she took it as though in a trance. She saw that it was difficult for him to speak. It was impossible for her. The suggested metamorphosis was too striking.

He broke the strained, glad silence.

"Elaine, can you forget?"

She uttered his name but could go no further.

"I can't apologize," he stammered, "it's too ghastly. But if we could start fresh from to-day, if you could wait a little before judging, and watch. Perhaps then—"

She drew him quickly towards her.

"Can I believe what I see?" she asked.

"I—I don't know what you see," he answered unsteadily.

"I see your father. I see the man who was the only father I myself knew."

He bent over her. He kissed her forehead.

"Dear Elaine," he said hoarsely, "you see a man who is going to be a better man to you."

"To yourself, Ben,—be better to yourself! Are you going to be that?"

"That is the way,—by being a man to you and to the others."

"The others?"

"The unseen others. You must get Donaldson to tell you about the others."

She grasped his wrist with both her hands, looking up at him intently. Where was the change? A photograph would not have shown all the change. Yet it was there. Nor was this a temporal reformation based upon cowardly remorse. It showed too calm, too big an impulse for that. It was so sincere, so deep, that it did not need words to express it.

"I believe you, Ben," she said, "I believe you with all my heart and soul."

In the words he realized the divine that is in all women, the eagerness that is Christ-like in its eternal hunger to seize upon the good in man. He stooped again and with religious reverence kissed the white space above her eyes.

"We 'll not talk about it much, shall we?" he said. "I want you to believe only as I go on from day to day. I 've some big plans that I thought up on the way home. Some day we 'll talk those over, but not now. Donaldson is downstairs."

He saw the color sweep her face. It suggested to him something that he had not yet suspected. It came to him like a new revelation of sunlight.

He smiled. It was the smile of the father which she had so long missed, the smile that always greeted her when his sad heart was fullest of hope and gladness. It was so he used to smile when at twilight he stood at her side, his long thin arm over her shoulder and talked of Ben with a new hope born of his own victory.

"I was going to tell you," he said tenderly, "I was going to tell you of what a big fine fellow this Donaldson is. But—perhaps you know."

She refused not to meet her brother's eyes.

"Yes, Ben," she said, "I know that."

He took her hand, seating himself on the arm of her chair, the other arm resting affectionately across her shoulders. So the father had sometimes sat.

"Is there more?" he asked softly.

"So," she answered, starting a little, "not as you mean. But tell me about him—tell me all about him, Ben."

He felt her hand throb as he held it.

"It's just this; that I owe everything in the world to him. I owe my life to him; I owe," his voice lowered, "I owe my soul to him. You ought to have heard him talk. But it was n't talking, it wasn't preaching. I don't know what it was, unless—unless it was praying. Yet it was n't like that either. He got inside me and made me talk to myself. It was the first time words ever meant anything to me—that they ever got a hold on me. You 've talked, little sister, Lord knows how often, and how deep from the heart, but somehow, dear, nothing of it sank in below the brain. I understood as in a sort of dream. Sometimes I even remembered it for a little, but that was all.

"But he was different, Elaine! If I forgot every word he spoke, the meaning of it would still be left. I 'd still feel his hand upon my shoulder, the hand that sank through my shoulder and got a grip on something inside me. I 'd still feel his eyes burning into mine. I 'd still see that street out the window and know what it meant. I 'd even see the little old lady picking her way to the other side,—see the blind beggar on the corner and the Others. Oh, the Others, Elaine!"

He had risen from beside her and pressed towards the window as though once again he wished to taste the air that came down to him from the star-country to sweeten the decaying soul of him.

"What was it, Elaine?" he demanded.

"You heard," she answered, "because every fibre of him is true. Tell me more."

"He showed me the sun on the windows!" he ran on eagerly. "He showed me the people passing on the streets! He showed me what I—even I—had to do among them. Did you know that we are n't just ourselves—that we 're a part of a thousand other lives? Did you know that?"

"It takes a seer really to know that," she answered, "but it's true."

"That's it," he broke in. "He *knows*! He doesn't guess, he doesn't reason, he *knows*!"

She was leaning forward, her head a little back, her eyes half-closed. He saw the veins in her neck—the light purple penciling of them—as they throbbled. He was held a moment by the sight. Then he laughed gently.

"Little sister," he said, "you know him even better than I."

She started back.

He was surprised at the shy beauty he perceived. She had always seemed to him such a sober body.

The nurse rapped at the door.

"It is bedtime," she announced,

"Yes, nurse," she answered quickly.

"He asked if he might come to say good night. He 's going to stay here with me a day or so. Shall I bring him up?"

She hesitated a moment and then meeting her brother's eyes steadily, answered,

"Yes, Ben."

When Donaldson came into the room she was shocked at the change in his appearance. It was almost as though what Arsdale had gained Donaldson had lost. He was colorless, wan, and haggard. His eyes seemed more deeply imbedded in the dark recesses below his brows. Even his hair at the temples looked grayer. But neither his voice nor his manner betrayed the change. The grip of his hand was just as sure; there was the same certainty in gesture and speech, save perhaps for some abstraction.

"They tell me I may stay but a minute," he said, "but it is good to see you even that long."

"You brought him back home," she cried. "But it has cost you heavy. You look tired."

"I am not tired," he answered shortly. Then turning the talk away from himself, as he was ever eager to do, he continued,

"I brought him home, but the burden is still on you."

"Not a burden any longer. You have removed the burden."

"I 'm afraid not. There still remains the fight to make him stay. This is only a beginning."

His face grew worried.

"He will stay," she answered confidently, "he will stay because you reached the father in him and the father was a fighter. I saw the father in his eyes—I heard his father's voice. It is a miracle!"

"No. The miracle is how we men keep blind."

"I feel blind myself when I think how you see."

"I am no psychic," he exclaimed impatiently. "I see nothing that is n't before me. You can't help seeing unless you close your eyes. The world presses in upon you from every side. It is insistent. Even now the stars outside there are demanding recognition."

He drew back the crimson curtains draping the big French windows, which opened upon a balcony. The silver stiletto rays darted a greeting to him. He swung open the windows.

"Come out with me and see my friends," he said.

She rose instantly and followed him.

He stood there a moment in silence, his head back as he seemed to lead her into the limitless fragrant purple above. She caught his profile and saw him like some prophet. It was as though a people were at his back and he trying to pierce the road ahead for them. The thin face and erect head seemed to dominate the night. He looked down at her, a sad smile about his mouth.

"Out here," he said, "out here with a million miles over our heads we are freer."

In her eyes he saw now just what he saw in the stars, the same freedom of unpathed universes. He saw the same limitlessness. Here there were no boundaries. A man could go on forever and forever in those eyes—in their marvelous unfolding. More! More! He would go beyond the cognate universe, straight into the golden heart of universes beyond. Eternity was written there. The beacon of her eyes flamed a path that reached beyond the stars!

She seemed like nothing but a trusting child. So, she was one with the great poets. So, she was a great poem. He listened to the same music which had moved Isaiah.

"The stars,—they seem to be dancing!" she exclaimed.

It was to the music of the spheres they were dancing.

"You!" he commanded, "you must get away from this house. You must take Ben and get away from here. You must go into a new country. You must begin your life anew and forget all this, forget everything."

He paused.

"Everything," he repeated. "They tell us that the road is straight and narrow. It's narrow, but it is n't straight. It's crooked and it's winding and it goes through brake and brush. It's a hard road to find and a hard road to keep, even with the polestar over our heads. Maybe, if we were a little above earth—maybe for those who are winged—the road is straight, but we are n't all winged. Some of us have n't even sturdy legs and have to creep. Some of us find our legs only after we are helplessly lost. For down below there is a terrible tangle with things to be gone around, with things to beat down, and always the tangle above our heads. So what wonder that we get lost? What wonder?"

"But I am not lost—you are not lost!"

"I! I do not matter," he answered slowly. "You must n't let me matter. I come into your life and I go out of your life and I pray that I have done no harm."

His words to her were like words caught in a wind. She heard snatches of them, but she was unable to piece them together.

"In your new life you must forget even me. We have met in the brush and gone on a little way together. We have helped each other in finding each his true road again. Whether the paths will meet again—whether the paths will meet again—" he repeated as though deep in some new and grander reflection, "why, God knows. If we go on forever, perhaps they will in an aeon or two."

He paused to give her an opportunity to say something which he might use as a subject for proceeding farther. His thoughts did n't go very far along any one line. Always he seemed checked by a wall of darkness. But she said nothing. The silence lengthened into a minute.

"Do you understand?" he asked gently.

"No," she answered frankly.

"Then—then perhaps we had better go in," he said, fearing for himself.

He led the way through the swinging windows and closed them behind him. In the light he saw that she was shivering.

"I 'm afraid I kept you out there too long," he said anxiously. He reached her shawl and placed it about her shoulders. His throat ached.

"I haven't hurt you?"

"I think you have hurt yourself, somehow."

She raised her head a little.

Marie was calling.

"Good night," he said quickly.

"Good night."

CHAPTER XX

A Long Night

Donaldson retired to his room, and without undressing threw up his window and stared at the hedge and the dark that lay beyond. Then he tried to work out some solution to the problem which confronted him. There was no use for him to try to blind himself to the fact that he loved this girl—that was but to shirk the question. She stood out as the supreme passion of his life and forced upon him a future that had a meaning beyond anything of which he had ever dreamed. She quickened in him new hopes, new aspirations, new ambitions. She made him see the triviality of all that he had most hoped to enjoy during this week; she opened his eyes to all that he had tried to make Arsdale see. With her by his side every day would be like that first afternoon; every hour thrilling with opportunities. The barren future which he had so feared, even though it offered no greater opportunities than had always lain before him, would tingle with possibilities. Wait? He could wait an eternity with her by his side and every waiting minute would be a golden minute. He could go back to that little office now and find a thousand things to do. He could hew out a career that would honor her. He saw numberless chances for reform work into which he could throw himself, heart and soul, while waiting. But there would be no waiting; life would begin from the first hour. What more did he need than her? He shuddered back from his luxurious room at the hotel as from something cheap.

A loaf of bread without even so much as a jug of wine would be paradise enow. Just the opportunity to live and breathe and have his being in this big pregnant universe was all he craved. He needed nothing else. So the universe would be his.

He dared not try to read her thoughts. He had no right to do this. It did n't matter. Her love was not essential. If he deserved it, that would come. It was enough that she had given him back his dreams, that she had taken him back to those fragrant days when his uncrusted soul had known without knowing. It was enough that the sweetness of her had become an inseparable part of him for evermore. She was his now, even though he should never again lay eyes upon her. The only relief he had was in the thought that she had accomplished this without committing herself. At least he did not have the burden of her tender love upon his soul further to complicate matters.

So much he admitted frankly; so much was fact. The problem which now confronted him was how he could best escape from involving her at all in the inevitable climax—how he could make his escape without destroying in her the ideals with which she had surrounded him and which she had a right to keep. He owed this to her, to Arsdale, and to the world of men.

A dozen times he was upon the point of pushing out into the dark. If he had followed his own impulse he would have taken some broad road and footed it hour after hour, through the night, through the next day, through the next night, and so till the end overtook him, striking him down in his tracks. He would get as far away as possible, keeping out under the broad expanse of the sky above. He could find rest only by taking a course straight on over the hills, turning aside for nothing, tearing a path through the tangle.

But he still had his work to do. He must lend his strength to the boy so long as any strength was left. He must pound into him again and again the realization of life which he himself had been tempted to shirk. He must make him see,—must make him know. In recalling that scene in the room by the window, in recalling his own words to Arsdale, he felt strangely enough the force of his own thoughts entering into himself with new life. He listened as it were to himself. Even for him there were the Others. Down to the last arrow-spiced minute there would still be the Others. Who knew what remained for him to do—charged with what influence might be even the manner in which he drew his last breath?

If he stood up to it sturdily, if he faced death with his head high, his shoulders back, even though he might be cornered in his room like a rat in its hole, so the message might be wired silently into the heart of some poor devil struggling hard against his death throes and lend him courage.

At the end of two hours he undressed and tumbled upon the bed.

His room was next to Arsdale's room and during the night the latter came in.

"I 've had bad dreams about you," the boy exclaimed. "Is anything the matter?"

"I 'm not sleeping very well," Donaldson answered.

"You haven't a fever or anything?"

"No. Just restless."

"I have n't slept very well myself. I 've been doing so much thinking. That keeps a fellow awake."

"Yes—thinking does. You 'd better let your brain close up shop and get some rest."

"I can't. I 've been chewing over what you said, and the more I think of it, the more I see that you have the right idea. The secret of keeping happy is to fight for others. It's the only thing that will make a man put up a good fight, isn't it?"

"The only thing," answered Donaldson.

"I don't understand why I did n't realize that before—with Elaine here. You 'd think she would make a man realize that."

Donaldson did not answer.

"I think one reason is," continued the boy, "that until now, until lately, she's been so nery herself that she did n't seem to need any one. She 's been stronger than I. But last night she looked like a little girl. And now, I'd like to die fighting for her."

Donaldson found the boy's hand.

"Never lose that spirit," he said earnestly. "But remember, she 's worth more than dying for, she 's worth living for."

"That's so. You put things right every time. She is worth living for. You are n't much good to people after you 're dead, are you?"

"Not as far as we know."

The boy hesitated a moment, a bit confused, and then blurted out,

"I 'm going to take up some sort of work. Perhaps you can help me get after something. We have loads of money, you know. I don't think much of giving it out as cash,—the charity idea. I 've a hunch that I 'd like to study law and then give my services free to the poor devils who need a man to look after their interests. They are darned small interests to men who are only after their fee, but they are big to the poor devils themselves. And generally they get done. Do you think I have it in me to study law?"

"You have it in you to study law with that idea back of you. You 'd make a great lawyer with that idea."

"Do you think so?" asked the boy eagerly.

"I know it."

"Then perhaps—perhaps—say, would you be willing to take me in with you?"

Donaldson moved uneasily.

"It sounds sort of kiddish, but I know that I 'd do better alongside of you. I 'd help you around the office. I 'd feel better, just to see you. Anyway, would you be willing to try me for a while until I sort of get my bearings?"

"I like the idea," answered Donaldson. "Let 's talk it over later. You see there's a chance that I may give up law."

"Give it up?"

"I may have to leave this part of the country—for good."

"Why, man," burst out Arsdale, "you wouldn't leave Elaine?"

The silence grew ominous. The fighting spirit rose in Arsdale at the suggestion.

"You would n't leave Elaine?" he demanded again, turning towards the form on the bed which looked strangely huddled up.

"I must leave her with you," answered Donaldson unsteadily. The boy scarcely recognized the voice, but it roused him to a danger which he felt without understanding.

"Why, man dear," he exclaimed, "what would I count to Elaine with you gone? Don't you know? Have n't you seen?"

They were the identical words Donaldson had used in trying to open Arsdale's eyes to another great truth. And Donaldson knew that if they cut half as deep into the boy as they now cut into him they had left their mark. He found no answer. He listened with his breath coming as heavily as the boy's breath had come when they had stood before the open window.

Arsdale faltered for words.

"Why—why Elaine loves you!" he blurted out.

"Don't!"

So, too, the boy had exclaimed.

"Don't you know? I thought you knew everything, Donaldson! I don't see how you help seeing that. But I suppose it's because you 're so thoughtful of others that you can't see your own joys. But it's true, Donaldson. I don't suppose I ought to tell you about it, but man, man, she loves you! Give me your hand, Donaldson."

He found it in the dark, hot and dry.

"I want to tell you how glad I am. I suppose I must be a sort of father to her now, and I tell you that I would n't give her to another man in the world but you. You 're the only one worthy of her."

He pressed the big hand.

"You 're the one man who can make her happy," he ran on. "You can give her some of the things she 's been cheated out of. Why, when I was talking to her last night, her face looked like an angel's as I spoke of you. It is you who makes it easier for her to forget all the past—even—even the blow. I knew what it was when I came home—that you 'd done even that for me—though she couldn't see it. You 've blotted out of her mind every dark day in her life!"

"That is something, is n't it?" asked Donaldson almost pleadingly.

"Something? Something? It's everything. Don't you see now that you can't go away?"

"I see," he answered.

"Well, then, give me your hand again. Sort of trembly, eh? But I 'll bet you sleep better the rest of the night. And don't you on your life let her know I told you. She 's proud as the devil. But she would have done the same for me. They say love is blind," he laughed excitedly, "but, Holy Smoke, this is the worst case of it I ever saw!"

Donaldson lay passive.

"Now," concluded Arsdale, "I 'll go back and see if I can sleep. Good night."

Donaldson again lay flat on his back after Arsdale had gone. So he lay, not sleeping, merely enduring, until, almost imperceptibly at first, the dark about him began to dissolve. Then he rose, partly dressed, and sitting by the open window watched the East as the dawn stole in upon the sleeping city. It came to the attack upon the grim alleys, the shadows around buildings, the stealthy figures, like a royal host. A few gray outriders reconnoitred over the horizon line and sent scurrying to their hovels those who looked up at them from shifty eyes. Then came a vanguard in brighter colors with crimson penants who attacked the fields and broad thoroughfares; then the King's Own in scarlet jackets and wide sweeping banners, bronze tinted, who charged the smaller streets and factory roofs, and finally the brave array of all the dazzling host itself, who hurled their golden, sun-tipped lances into every nook and cranny, awaking to life all save those whose souls were dark within.

In watching it Donaldson found the first relief in the long night. His own mind cleared with the dawn. The day broke so clean and fresh, so bathed in morning dew, that once again his mind, grown perhaps less active, clung in some last spasm to the present as when he had sat with Elaine at breakfast, part of the little Dutch picture. Without reasoning into the to-morrow, he felt as though this day belonged to him. As the sun rose higher and stronger, enveloping the world in its catholic rays, the night seemed only an evil dream. He was both stronger and weaker. He was swept on, unresisting, by the high flood of the new day. This world now before his eyes acknowledged nothing of his agony but came mother-like to ease his fretting. She would have nothing of the heavy tossings inspired by her sinister sister, the Night. She was all for clean glad spirits, all for new hopes. So he who had first frowned at it, who had then watched passively, now rose to its call.

He was entitled to this day, sang the tempter sun,—one big day out of all his life. The crisis would

be no more acute upon the morrow and he might be stronger to meet it. This day was his and hers, and even the boy's. To accept it would be to shirk nothing; it would be only to postpone—to weave into the sombre grave vestments he was making for himself one golden thread. Arsdale's talk had removed the last vestige of hope. The worst had happened. Surely one gay interlude could add no burden. A day was always a day, and joys once lived could never be lost. Always in her life and in his this would remain, and since he had shouldered the other days as they had come to him, it seemed no more than right that he should take this. Not to do so would be but sorry self-imposed martyrdom.

Arsdale came in, still in his bathrobe, with brisk step and his face a-beaming.

"Well," he demanded, "how do you feel now?"

"Better," answered Donaldson, unhesitatingly.

"Better! You ought to feel great! Look at the sun out there! Smell that air! Have you had your tub?"

"Not yet," smiled Donaldson.

Arsdale led the way to the shower, and a few minutes later Donaldson felt his skin tingle to new life beneath the cold spray.

CHAPTER XXI

Facing the Sun

When he came down-stairs he found her dressed in white and looking like a nun. Her hair was brushed back from her forehead and the silk-figured Japanese shawl was over her shoulders. He recalled the shawl and with it the picture she had made that first night.

At the door he called her name and she looked up quickly, swiftly scanning his face. He crossed to her side.

"You should n't stay in here," he said. "Come outdoors a moment before breakfast. It's bright and warm out there."

She arose, and they went out together to the lawn. Each blade of grass was wearing its morning jewels. The sun petted them and bestowed opals, amethysts, and rubies upon them. The hedge was as fresh as if newly created; the neighboring houses appeared as though a Dutch housewife had washed them down and sanded them; the sky was a perfect jewel cut by the Master hand. The peeping and chattering of the swallows was music, while a robin or two added a longer note to the sharp staccatos.

They stood in the deep porch looking out at it, while the sun showered them with warmth.

"You 've seen Ben?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, turning her face up to his with momentary brightness. "Yes. And he was like this out here! The change is wonderful! It is as though he had risen from the dead!"

Donaldson lifted his head toward the stark blue of the sky.

"The dead? There are no dead," he exclaimed passionately. "Even those we bury are ever ready to open their silent lips to us if only we give them life again. We owe it to them to do that, through our own lives to continue as best we can their lives here on earth. But we can't do that as long as we have them dead, can we? And that is true of dead hopes, of dead loves. We have to face the sun with all those things and through it breathe into them a new spirit. Do you see, Miss Arsdale?"

He did not look at her, but as her voice answered him it seemed to be stronger.

"I think—I think I do."

"Nothing can die, unless we let it die," he ran on, paving the way for what he realized she must in the end know. "Some of it can disappear from our sight. But not much. We can bury our dead, but we need n't bury their glad smiles, we need n't bury the feel of their hands or the brush of their lips, we need n't bury their songs or the brave spirit of them. We can keep all that, the living part of them, so long as our own spirit lives. It is when that dies in us that we truly bury them. And this is even truer of our loves—intangible spirit things as they are at best."

He did not wish that part of him to die utterly in her with his doomed frame.

"But—" she shivered, "all this talk of graves and the dead?"

"It is all of the sun and the living," he replied earnestly. "You must face the sun with me to-day. Will

you?"

"Yes! Yes! But last night you made me afraid. Was it the dark,—did you get afraid of the dark? I know what that means."

"Perhaps," he answered gently. "But if so, it was because I was foolish enough to let it be dark. And you yourself must never do it again. If things get bad at night you must wait until morning and then come out here. So, if you remember what I have said, it will get light again. Will you promise to do that?"

"Yes."

"I 'd like to make this day one that we 'll both remember forever. I 'd like to make it one that we can always turn back to."

"Yes."

"Perhaps after to-day we 'll neither of us be afraid of the dark again."

"I 'm not afraid now."

"Nor I," he smiled.

The voice of Arsdale came to them,

"Oh, Elaine! Oh, Donaldson!"

She led the way into the house with a lighter step and Arsdale met them with a beaming face which covered a broad grin.

"I suppose you two can do without food," he exclaimed, "but I can't. Breakfast has been waiting ten minutes."

"It's my fault," apologized Donaldson.

"You can't see stars in the morning, can you?" chuckled Arsdale.

"Maybe," answered Donaldson.

Elaine checked the boy's further comments with a frightened pressure as she took his arm and passed into the white and green breakfast room.

There stood the table by the big warm window again, and as she took her place it seemed as though they were stepping into the same picture framed by the hedge. She caught Donaldson's eye with a little smile and saw that he understood.

Arsdale broke in with renewed enthusiasm for his philanthropic project and outlined his ambitions to Elaine.

"You see," he concluded, "some day, little sister, you may see the law sign 'Donaldson & Arsdale, Counsellors at Law.' Not a bad sounding firm name, eh?"

"I think it is great—just great, Ben!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "It's almost worth being a man to make your life count for something like that."

"I want you to make out a list of books for me to get and I 'll go down-town this afternoon. I suppose you 've a pretty good law library yourself?"

"I had the beginning of one. I sold it."

"What did you do that for?"

"My practice was n't big enough to support it. But you—you 'll not be bothered with lack of clients."

With school-boy eagerness Arsdale was anxious to plunge into the scheme at once.

"And say," he ran on, "I 'm going to look up some offices. I 'll stake the firm to some good imposing rooms in one of the big law buildings. Nothing like looking prosperous at the start. Guess I 'll drop down-town right after breakfast and see what can be had."

Donaldson didn't have the heart to check him. Later on he would write him a letter sustaining him in his project and recommending him to a classmate of his, to whom this partnership would be a godsend, as, a week ago, it would have been to himself. That was the best he could think of at the moment and so he let him rattle on.

As soon as they had finished breakfast Arsdale was off.

"I 'll leave you two to hunt out new stars as long as that occupation does n't seem to bore you. I 'll be back for dinner."

Miss Arsdale looked a bit worried and questioned Donaldson with her eyes.

"He 'll be all right," the latter assured her. "Good Lord, a man with an idea like that is safe anywhere. It's the best thing in the world for him."

A little later Donaldson went up-stairs to his room. He took out his wallet and counted his money. He had over four hundred dollars. At noon forty-eight hours would be remaining to him. He still had the ample means of a millionaire for his few needs.

He was as cool as a man computing what he could spend on a summer vacation. He was not affected in the slightest by the details of death or by the mere act of dying itself. He was of the stuff which in a righteous cause leads a man to face a rifle with a smile. He would have made a good soldier. The end meant nothing horrible in itself. It meant only the relinquishing of this bright sky and that still choicer gift below.

He rose abruptly and came down-stairs again to the girl, impatient at being away from her a minute. She was waiting for him.

"This," he said, "is to be our holiday. I think we had better go into the country. I should like to go back to Cranton. Is it too far?"

"Not too far," she answered. "But the memories of the bungalow—"

"I had forgotten about that. It does n't count with the green fields, does it? We can avoid the house, but I should like to visit the orchard and ride behind the old white horse again."

"I am willing," she replied.

"Then you will have to get ready quickly."

They had just time to catch the train and before they knew it they were there.

The old white horse was at the little land-office station to meet them for all the world as though he had been expecting them, and so, for that matter, were the winding white road, the stile by the lane, and the orchard itself. It was as though they had been waiting for them ever since their last visit and were out ready to greet them.

The driver nodded to them as if they were old friends.

"Guess ye did n't find no spooks there after all," he remarked.

"Not a spook. Any more been seen there since?"

"H'ain't heern of none. Maybe ye took off the cuss."

"I hope so."

They dismissed the driver at the lane and then went back a little way so as to avoid the bungalow. Donaldson was in the best of spirits, for at the end of the first hour he had solaced himself with the belief that Arsdale had been mistaken in his statement. She was nothing but a glad hearted companion in look and speech. They sat down a moment in the orchard and he was very tender of her, very careful into what trend he let their thoughts run. But soon he moved on again. He needed to be active. It was the walk back through the fields to which he had looked forward.

They brushed through the ankle-deep grass, pausing here and there to admire a clump of trees, a striking sky line, or a pretty slope.

To Donaldson it did not seem possible that this could ever end, that any act of nature could blot this from his mind as though it had never been. It was unthinkable that through an eternity he should never know again the meaning of blue sky, of blossoms, of such profligate pictures as now met his eye at every step, but above all, that he should be blind to the girl herself and all for which she stood. No matter how long the journey he was about to take, no matter through what new spheres, these things must remain if anything at all of him remained. So his one thought was to fill himself as full of this day as possible, to crowd into his flagging brain the many pictures of her and this setting which so harmonized with her. The deeper joys of love he might not know, save as his silent heart conjured them, but all that he could see with his eyes should be his. He would fill his soul so full of light that the unknown trail would be less dark to him. He would carry with him for torches the sun and her bright eyes.

"Let's go back as the crow flies," he suggested. "'Cross country—over hill and dale. We must n't turn out for anything," he explained, "we must go crashing through things—trampling them down."

"My," she cried, mocking his fierceness—little realizing the emotion to which they gave vent, "my, things had better look out!"

He paused, caught his breath, and turned to her, an almost terrified smile about his tense mouth.

"Oh, little comrade, you 'd best let me be serious."

"No, no. Not to-day. Let us be as glad as we can,—let us celebrate."

"Celebrate what?" he demanded, lest she might think that he had confessed his thoughts to her.

"Spring," she answered, with a laugh that came from deep within her big happy heart. "Just spring."

"Then we must n't trample down anything?" he queried.

"Nothing that we can help. But we can take the straight course just the same. We 'll turn aside for the flowers and little trees."

"And nothing else."

"Nothing else," she agreed.

He led the way, his shoulders drooping a trifle and his step not so light as her step. She could have trodden upon violets without harm to them. Still, he marched with a sturdiness that was commendable considering the load he carried. They made their way down through the orchard and over the sun-flecked grass until they encountered their first obstacle. It was a stone wall made out of gray field rocks. He gave her his hand. The fingers clung to his like a child's fingers. Their warm, soft caress went to his head like wine so that for a moment, as she stood near him, it was a question whether or not he could resist drawing her into his arms which throbbed for her. He spoke nothing; she spoke nothing. There was no boldness in her, nor any struggle either. With her head thrown back a little, she waited. So for ten seconds they stood, neither moving. Then he motioned and she jumped lightly to the ground. He led the way and they took up their march again, though once behind him she found it difficult to catch her breath again.

They moved on down the green hill, across a field, ankle deep in new grass, into the heavier green of the low lands. So they came to a meadow brook running shallow over a pebbly bottom but some five yards wide. There were no stepping stones, but a hundred rods to the right a small foot bridge crossed.

Again she waited to see what he would do, while he waited to see what he would dare. With his heart aching in his throat he challenged himself. It was asking superhuman strength of him to venture his lips so near the velvet sheen of her cheeks—he who so soon was going out with a hungry heart. Her arms would be about his neck—that would be something to remember at the end—her arms about his neck. He knew that she expected him in even so slight a thing as this to keep true to his undertaking and march straight ahead. She realized nothing of the struggle which checked him. Tragic triviality—the problem of how to cross a brook with a maid! There was but one way even when it involved the mauling of a man's heart.

He held out his arms to her and she came to them quite as simply as she had taken his proffered hand at the wall. He placed one arm about her waist and another about her skirts. She clasped her fingers behind his neck and sat up with as little embarrassment as though riding upon a ferry.

He lifted her and the act to him was as though he had condensed a thousand kisses into one. He walked slowly. This was a brief span into which to crowd a lifetime of love. In the middle of the brook he stopped—just a second, to mark the beginning of the end—and then went on again. When he set her down he was breathing heavily. She had become a bit self-conscious. Her cheeks were aflame.

Her low black shoes with their big silk bows tied pertly below her trim ankles were a goodly sight to see against the green grass as he might have observed had he looked at them at all. But he did n't. He wiped his moist forehead as though, instead of a dainty armful, she had been a burden.

She shook the wrinkles from her skirt and looked up at him laughing. Then she frowned.

"Mr. Donaldson," she scolded, "you walked across there with your shoes and stockings on."

"Why, that's so," he exclaimed, looking down at his water-logged shoes as though in as great surprise as she herself.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," he answered helplessly.

"You ought to spread them out in the sun to dry."

"You can't spread out shoes, can you? Besides we have n't time. We must hurry right on. Right on, this minute," he added as the motherly concern in her face set his throat to aching again.

With the stride of a pioneer he led off, praying that they might not find in their path another brook. For a stretch of a mile, he pressed on without once looking around, taking a faster pace than he realized. The course was a fairly smooth one over an acre or so of pasture, through a strip of oak woods, and up a stiff slope. It was not until he reached the top of this that he paused. He looked around and saw her about halfway up the hill, climbing heavily, her eyes upon the ground. Even as he watched her, he saw her sway, catch herself, and push on again without even looking up. It was the act of a woman almost exhausted. He reached her side in a couple of strides. He tried to take her arm but she broke free of him and in a final spurt reached the top of the hill and threw herself upon the ground to

catch her breath.

"I did n't realize how fast I was going," he apologized kneeling by her side. "That was unpardonable, but why did n't you call to me?"

She removed her hat. Then she leaned back upon her hands until she could speak evenly. A light breeze loosened a brown curl and played with it.

"Why did n't you call to me?"

"Because I wished to keep pace with you." He turned away from her.

"When you are rested we will start again," he said.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Then I am ready."

"You will take my arm?"

"No," she answered.

"Then you must keep by my side where I can watch you."

They took the remaining distance in more leisurely fashion, now realizing that they were nearing the outskirts of this fairy kingdom. With this thought he relaxed a little and instantly the sun and burgeoning nature claimed him, making light of every problem save the supreme one of bringing together a man and his mate.

They crossed a field or two and so came again into the road which they had left three miles back. Walking a short distance along this, they found themselves on a sharp hill overlooking the station a few hundred yards below. With the same impulse they turned back far enough to be out of sight of this. Twenty minutes still remained to them. They sat down by the side of the road where they had rested before. A light breeze pushing through the top of a big pine made a sound as of running water in the distance.

With her chin in one hand, elbow on knee, she studied him a moment as though endowed with sudden inspiration. A quick frown which had shadowed his face at sight of the railroad had driven home a suspicion which she had long held. Now she dared to voice it.

"Have things been mixed up for you—back there?"

The question startled him. He gave her a swift look as though to divine the reason for it. It was so direct that it was hard to evade. And he would not lie directly to her. So he replied bluntly,

"Yes."

She waited. He saw her expectant eyes, but he went no further. Part of the price he paid for being here was renunciation of the balm he might have in the sharing of his trouble with her. He knew that she would take his silence for a rebuff, but he could not help that. He said nothing more, the silence eating into him.

But something stronger than her pride drove her on.

"Mr. Donaldson," she said, "you have given a great deal of time to me and mine—if there is anything I may do in return, you will give me the privilege?"

"There is nothing," he answered.

He saw the puzzled hurt in her eyes.

"I know all that you with your big heart would do for me," he declared earnestly, "but honestly there is nothing possible. My worry will cure itself. I can see the end of it even now."

"Will the end of it come within a month?"

"Within a week."

"Perhaps," she said, "I could hasten the end to a day."

"No," he smiled, "I 'd rather you would n't. I 'd rather you would prolong it if you could."

"Is that a riddle?"

"To you."

"Then I can't answer it for I never guessed one in my life."

So with his knuckles kneading the grass by his side, he made light of it until she turned away from the subject to admire the blue seen through the pine needles above their heads.

Soon he heard the distant low whistle of the engine which was coming for them like a sheriff with a warrant.

He was not conscious of very much more until they were back again in the house and he heard Arsdale's voice,

"I 've rented the offices, old man! Swellest in the city. To-morrow you must come down and see them!"

CHAPTER XXII

Clouds

Arsdale was somewhere about the house and Elaine had gone up-stairs when Donaldson, who had come out-doors to smoke, saw a man with broad shoulders and a round unshaven face step from a cab, push through the hedge gate, and come quickly up the path. He watched him with indifferent interest, until in the dusk he recognized the stubborn mouth which gripped a cigar as a bull-dog hangs to a rag. Then he hurried forward with hand extended.

"Good Lord, Saul," he exclaimed, "where did you drop from?"

"Hello, Don. I rather hoped that I might run across you here."

"I 'm ashamed of myself," answered Donaldson guiltily. "I did n't notify you that we had found him. But the last I heard of you, you were out of town."

"Oh, that's all right. Tung gave me the whole story."

"The rat! He made a lot of trouble for us."

"And for me, too."

"Still working on the Riverside robberies?"

Saul glanced up quickly. Then looking steadily into Donaldson's eyes as though the reply had some significance he answered,

"Yes."

"I wish you luck. And say, old man, I 've worried since for fear lest you lost a good opportunity for a hot scent the time I kept you out."

"I did. But I picked it up again by chance."

"You did? Have you caught the man?"

"No," answered Saul abstractedly. "Not yet."

He chewed the stub of his cigar a moment, glancing frequently at the house.

"Say," he asked abruptly, "come down the road here a piece with me, will you?"

Saul led him to the street and far enough away from the cab so that their conversation could not be overheard, yet near enough to the electric light for him to see Donaldson's face clearly.

"I want you to tell me something about young Arsdale," he began. "Is he in the house there now?"

"Yes. And happy as a clam at high water."

"Has he talked any since he came back?"

"Talked? He's clear-headed enough, if that is what you mean?"

"Has he appeared at all worried—as though he had something on his mind?"

"Not in the slightest He's taken such a new grip on himself that the last few days are almost blotted out. You 'd never know him for the same boy, Saul. He's quit the dope for good."

"So? Remorse!"

"Not the kind of remorse you mean, Beefy. This is the real thing."

Saul thought a moment. Then he asked,

"You told me, did n't you, that he had no money with him that night?"

"Not more than a dollar or so."

"He spent a lot at Tung's."

"The heathen probably robbed him of it!"

"Yes, but where did Arsdale get it?"

Donaldson started. There was something ominous in the question. But he could n't recount to Saul that disgraceful attack the boy had made upon his sister when returning for funds. It wouldn't be fair to the present Arsdale.

"I don't know," he answered. "What have you up your sleeve, Beefy?"

"Something bad," replied Saul bluntly. He lowered his voice: "It is beginning to look as though your young friend might know something about the robberies that have been taking place around here."

"What!"

If an earthquake had suddenly shattered the stone house behind the hedge, it would have left him no more dazed.

"I won't say that we 've got him nailed," Saul hastened to explain, "but it begins to look bad for him."

"But, man dear," gasped Donaldson, "he is n't a thug! He isn't—"

"If he 's like the others he 's anything when he wants his smoke. I 've seen more of them than you."

"Saul," he said, "you 're dead wrong about this! You 've made a horrible mistake!"

"Perhaps. But he 'll have to explain some things."

Donaldson took a grip on himself.

"What's the nature of your evidence?"

"There 's the question of where he got his funds, first; then the fact that all the attacks took place within a small radius of this house; then the motive, and finally the fact, that in a general way he answers to the description given by four witnesses. He 'll have to take the third degree on that, anyway."

The third degree would undoubtedly kill the boy, or, worse, break his spirit and drive him either to a mad-house or the solace of his drug. It was a cruel thing to confront him with this at such a point in his life. It was fiendish, devilish. It was possible that they might even make the boy believe that in his blind madness he actually did commit these crimes. Then, as in a lurid moving picture, Donaldson recalled the uneasiness of the girl; the morning papers with their glaring headlines of the Riverside robberies, which he had found that morning scattered about the floor; her fear of the police, and the mystery of the untold story at which she had hinted. Take these, and the fact that in his madness Arsdale had actually made an attack upon the girl and upon himself, similar to those outside the house, and the chain was a strong one. The pity of it—coming now!

Yes, it was in this that the cruel injustice lay. Even admitting the boy to be guilty, it was still an injustice. The man who had done those things was outside the pale of the law; he was no more. Arsdale himself, Arsdale the clean-minded young man with a useful life before him, Arsdale with his new soul, had no more to do with those black deeds than he himself had. Yet that lumbering Juggernaut, the Law, could not take this into account. The Law did not deal with souls, but bodies.

To this day—what a hideous climax!

Saul detected the fear in Donaldson's eyes,

"You know something about this, Don!" he asked eagerly.

He was no longer a friend; he was scarcely a man; he was a hound who has picked up his trail. His eyes had narrowed; his round face seemed to grow almost pointed. He chewed his cigar end viciously. He was alert in every nerve.

"You'd better loosen up," he warned, "it's all right to protect a friend, but it can't be done in a case of this sort. You as a lawyer ought to know that. It can't be done."

"Yes, I know, I know. But I want to tell you again that you 're dead wrong about this. You haven't guessed right, Beefy."

"That's for others to decide," he returned somewhat sharply. "It 's up to you to tell what you know."

"It's hard to do it—it's hard to do it to you."

Donaldson's face had suddenly grown blank—impassive. The mouth had hardened and his whole body stiffened almost as it does after death. When he spoke it was without emotion and in the voice of one who has repeated a phrase until it no longer has meaning.

"I realize how you feel," Saul encouraged him, "but there's no way out of it."

"No, there's no way out of it. So I give myself up!"

"But it is n't you I want,—it's Arsdale."

"No, I guess it's I. See how your descriptions fit me."

Saul pressed closer.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just this," answered Donaldson dully, "I can't see an innocent man go to jail."

To his mind Arsdale was as innocent to-day as though not a shadow of suspicion rested upon him.

"Are you mad?"

"Not yet," answered Donaldson.

Saul waited a moment. In all his professional career he had never received a greater surprise than this. He would not have believed enough of it to react had it not been for Donaldson's expression. Back of the impassiveness he read guilt, read it in the restless shifting of the eyes and in the voice dead to hope. Then he said deliberately,

"I don't believe you, Don."

"No? Yet you 've got as much evidence against me as against Arsdale."

"But, God A'mighty, Donaldson, why should you do such a thing?"

"Why should the boy?"

Saul seized his arm.

"You don't tell me that you've fallen into that habit?"

"Sit in a law-office and do nothing for three years, then—then, perhaps, you 'll understand."

Saul threw away his cigar. He studied again the thin face, the haggardness that comes of opium, the nervous fingers, the vacant shifty gaze of those on the sharp edge of sanity. Then he lighted a fresh cigar and declared quietly,

"I don't believe you!"

"You 'll have to for the sake of those in the house. They 've been good to me in there."

His voice was as hard as black ice and as cold. He looked more like a magnetized corpse than he did a man.

"I wish," he continued evenly, "I wish I might have been knocked over the head before it came to this. If I had known I had to face you, I would have let it come to that. But I didn't expect this, Beefy."

"If this story is on the level, you 'd better shut up," warned Saul. "What you say will be used against you."

"Thanks for reminding me, but things have come out so wrong that I can't even shut up. If you should go inside that house with the dream you sprang on me, you 'd drive the boy crazy and kill the girl. The boy has been in a bad way, but he's all straight again now, and yet you might make him believe he did these jobs when out of his head. And then—and then—why, it would kill them both! That's why I could n't let you do it. That's why you *must n't* do anything like that."

Saul did not answer. He waited.

"So I might as well make a clean breast of it. Do you remember when the last job was?"

"Last Saturday morning."

"Remember where you were at that time?"

"Why—that was the morning I went out with you!"

"Just so," answered Donaldson, his eyes leveled over Saul's head. "I hate to tell you, but—but it was necessary to do that in order to keep you away from headquarters."

Saul reached for his throat, pushing him back a step.

"You played me traitor like that?" he demanded.

"It was part of the game," answered Donaldson indifferently. Saul, fearful of himself, drew back.

The latter tried to reason it out. A man can change a good deal in a year, but even with opium it seemed impossible for Donaldson so to abuse a friendship. But he was checked in his recollection of the man as he had known him by the memory of that very morning. He had been suspicious even then that something was wrong. Donaldson had appeared nervous and altered.

"Donaldson," he burst out, "I 'd give up my rank to be out of this mess."

He added impulsively,

"Tell me it's all a damned lie, Don!"

"No," replied Donaldson, "the sooner it's over the better. I 'm all through now."

Still Saul hesitated. But there seemed nothing left.

"Come on," he growled.

Donaldson followed him to the cab. He was like a man too tired to care.

"Had n't you better make up some sort of a story for them in there?" asked Saul, with a jerk of his head towards the house.

"That's so," answered Donaldson. "Will you trust me for a few minutes?"

"Take your time," said Saul.

Donaldson went back up the path and found both Arsdale and his sister in the library.

"I 'll have to ask you to excuse me for to-night," he said. "I 've just had word from a friend who wishes me to spend the night with him."

They both looked disappointed.

"He 's waiting out there for me now."

"Perhaps you will come back later," suggested Arsdale.

"Not to-night. Perhaps in the morning. I 'll drop you a word if I 'm kept longer."

He spoke lightly, with no trace of anything abnormal in his bearing.

"All right, but we 'll miss you," answered Arsdale.

The girl said nothing but her face grew suddenly sober.

They went to the door with him and watched him step into the cab.

Saul had prayed that he would not return, and now looked more as though it were he that was being led off. He chewed his unlighted cigar in silence while the other sat back in his corner with his eyes closed.

Once on his way to headquarters he leaned forward, and clutching Donaldson's knee, repeated his cry,

"Tell me it's all a lie," he begged. "There's time yet. I 'll hustle you to the train and stake you to Canada. Just give me your word for it."

Donaldson shook his head.

"It would only come back on Arsdale, and that is n't square."

"Then God help you," murmured Saul.

The cab stopped before headquarters and Saul, with lagging steps, led his man in. The Chief listened to the story he told with his keen eyes kindling like a fire through shavings. He saw the end to the bitter invective heaped upon him during the last three weeks by the press. Then he began his gruelling cross-examination.

The story Donaldson told was simple and convincing. He had come to New York full of hope, had waited month after month, and had finally become discouraged. In this extremity he had taken to a drug. His relations with the Arsdales began less than a week ago and they knew nothing of him save

that he had been of some assistance in helping young Arsdale straighten out. Arsdale had borrowed money of him, although doubtless he could not remember it, and had taken it to go down to Tung's. Feeling a sense of responsibility for the use the boy had made of this money and out of regard to the sister, he had done his best to help him pull out.

When pressed for further details of the crimes themselves, Donaldson admitted that his memory was very much clouded. He had committed the assaults when in a mental condition that left them in his memory only as evil dreams. The substantiation of this must come through his identification by the witnesses. He could remember nothing of what he had done with the purses, or the jewels and papers which they contained. He had used only the money.

An officer was sent to search his rooms at the hotel, and in the meanwhile men were sent out to bring in the victims of the assaults. It was for this test that Donaldson held in check all the reserve power he had within him. If his story was weak up to this point, he realized that this identification would substantiate it beyond the shadow of a doubt. This he knew must be done in order to offset Arsdale's possible attempt to give himself up when he should hear of this. As a student he had been impressed with the unreliability of direct evidence, and here would be an opportunity to test his theory that much of the evidence to the senses is worthless. From the moment he had determined upon this course he had based his hopes upon this test. Saul had made it clear that the descriptions given by the witnesses were vague, and now in the excitement of confronting their assailant they were apt to be still more unsubstantial. If he could succeed in terrifying them, he could convince them to a point where they would make all their excited visions fit him to a hair.

And so as each man was brought before him, Donaldson looked at him from beneath lowering brows with his mind fixed so fiercely upon the determination to force them to see him as the shadowy brute who had attacked them that he in reality looked the part. Two of the men withdrew, wiping their foreheads, after making the identification absolute.

The third witness, a woman, promptly fainted. When she revived she said she was willing to take her oath that this was the man. Not only was she sure of his height, weight, and complexion, but she recognized the same malicious gleam which flashed from the demon's eyes as he had stood over her. She shivered in fright.

The fourth victim was a man of fifty. He was slower to decide, but the longer he stood in front of Donaldson, the surer he became. Donaldson, with his arms folded, never allowed his eyes to move from the honest eyes of this other. And as he looked he made a mental picture of the act of creeping up behind this man, of lifting his weapon, finally of striking. With the act of striking, his shoulders lifted, so intense was his determination.

The man drew back from him.

"Yes," he said, "I am sure. This is the brute."

It was two hours later before Donaldson was finally handed over to the officers of the Tombs, and Saul turned back reluctantly to give to the eager reporters as meagre an outline of the story as he could.

CHAPTER XXIII

When the Dead Awake

Donaldson, without removing his clothes, tumbled across his bunk and fell into a merciful stupor which lasted until morning. He was aroused by a rough shaking and staggered to his feet to find Saul again confronting him. The latter had evidently been some time at his task, for he exclaimed,

"I thought you were dead! You certainly sleep like an honest man."

"Sleep? Where am I?"

"You are at present enjoying a cell in the Tombs. You seem to like it."

Donaldson pressed his hand to his aching eyes. Then slowly the truth dawned upon him.

"What day is this?" he asked.

"Thursday."

"Yes. Yes. That's so. And to-morrow is Friday."

"That's a good guess. Do you remember what happened last night?"

"Yes, I remember. I 'm under arrest. I remember the terror in the face of that woman!"

Saul laughed inhumanly.

"Of all the bogie men I ever saw you were the worst."

"I suppose I 'll be arraigned this morning."

"I doubt it, old man. In some ways you deserve it, but I'm afraid the Chief won't satisfy your morbid cravings. Remember the story you told him?"

"Yes."

"And you 're wide enough awake to understand what I 'm saying to you now?"

"Perfectly," answered Donaldson, growing suspicious.

"Then," exploded Saul, "I want to ask you what the devil your blessed game is?"

"I could n't sacrifice an honest man, could I?"

"Then," went on Saul with increasing vehemence, "I want to tell you plainly that you 're a chump, because you sacrificed an honest man after all."

"You have n't arrested Arsdale? Lord, Saul, you haven't done that, have you?"

"No," answered Saul, "I was ass enough to arrest you."

"It would be wrong, dead wrong, to touch the boy. He didn't have anything to do with this. There was no one with me."

Saul took a long breath.

"I 'm hanged if I ever saw a man *hanker* after jail the way you do. And you 've got the papers full of it. And pretty soon I 'll be getting frantic messages from the girl. And you 've made all sorts of an ass of yourself. Do you hear—you chump of a hero, you?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Donaldson.

"I mean just this; that we 've nailed the right man at last! Got him with the goods on, so that we won't need the identification of a bunch of hysterical idiots to prove it. We won't even need a loose-jointed confession, because we caught him black-handed. But my guess wasn't such a bad one—it was n't Arsdale, but it was Jacques Moisson, his father's valet."

"Jacques Moisson?"

"The son of that old crone Marie there. He caught the dope habit evidently from his master and has been to the bad ever since Arsdale senior died. The old lady has been hiding him part of the time in the garret of the house."

Donaldson's thoughts flew back to the bungalow; it was this fellow then and not Arsdale who had attacked him,—if Saul's story was true.

Saul approached him with outstretched hand.

"You played a heavy game, Don."

Donaldson grew suspicious.

"I don't know what you 're talking about," he said, his lips coming tightly together again.

"No. Of course not! That's right. Keep it up! But I 'll have my revenge. I 'll give the newspaper boys every detail of it. I 'll see your name in letters six inches higher than they were even this morning. I will; I swear it!"

"Saul," said Donaldson quietly, "you 're doing your best to make me go back upon my story. You can't do it."

Saul folded his arms.

"Of all the heroic liars," he gasped, his face beaming, "you 're the prince. And," he continued in an undertone, "it 's all for the sake of a girl."

Donaldson sprang to his feet.

"Don't bring in *her* name, Saul," he commanded.

"All for the sake of a girl," continued Saul undisturbed. "It took me some time to work it out, but now I see. Take my hand, won't you, Donaldson? I want to say God bless you for it."

Donaldson hesitated. But Saul's eyes were honest.

"This is the truth you're telling me?" he trembled.

"The truth," answered the other solemnly.

"Then you won't touch the boy? There is no further suspicion resting upon him?"

"To hell with the boy!" exploded Saul. "You 're free yourself! Don't you get that?"

"Yes," answered Donaldson.

He passed his hand thoughtfully over his face. Then he glanced up with a smile.

"I need a shave, don't I?" he asked.

"You sure do. Let's get out of here. And if I were you I 'd get back to her about as soon as I could. It's early yet, so maybe she has n't seen the papers. I gave the boys the real arrest, so that they could get out an extra on it and take the curse off the first editions. And now," he added, "and now I 'm going to give them the story of their lives—the inside story of all this."

"Don't be a chump, Beefy!"

"I'll do it," answered Saul firmly. "I'll leave out the girl but I 'll give them the rest. I 've got some rights in this matter after the way you 've used me."

"I know," he apologized, "but there didn't seem any road out of it. If you 'll just keep quiet about—"

"Not a word. You 'll take your medicine. Besides, the dear public will think you were crazy if they don't learn the truth."

"I don't care about that, if—"

"Bah! Come on. I 'll get you past the bunch now, but you 'll have to run for your life after this."

Saul put him with all possible despatch through the red tape necessary to secure his acquittal, and then led him out by a side door. He summoned a cab.

"They 're waiting," he chuckled. "Twenty of 'em with sharpened pencils and,—Holy Smoke,—the story! The story!"

"Forget it, Saul. Forget it—"

But Saul only pushed him into the cab and hurried back to his joyous mission.

Donaldson ordered the driver to the Waldorf. He must get a clean shave, change his clothes and get back to the Arsdale house before the first editions were out heralding his arrest. If Jacques had been arrested at the house it was possible that the excitement might have prevented them from learning anything at all of his part in the mess.

He found a letter from Mrs. Wentworth waiting for him. He tore it open. She wrote:

"Oh, Peter Donaldson, I wish I had the gift to make you understand how grateful I am for all you 've done. But I can't until you come up and visit us. We reached here safely and found everything all right. The deed was given to me and the money you put in the bank for me. The house now is all clean and the children are playing out doors. My heart is overflowing, Peter Donaldson. It is better than anything I ever dreamed of here. My prayers are with you all the time and I know they will be heard."

So she ran on and told him all about the place and what she had already accomplished. Happiness breathed like a flower's fragrance from every line of it, until it left him with a lump in his throat.

"That is something," he said to himself as he finished it. "It has n't been all waste."

He went to the barber in better spirits and came back to his room to read the letter again. It was like a tonic to him. He looked from his window a moment, to breathe the fresh morning air.

The street below him was alive once more with its eager life. Men and women passed to the right and left, the blind beggar still waited at the corner, the world, expressed now through this one human being, had abated not one tittle of its activity. The Others were still about him. The pigeons still cut gray circles through the sunshine and the girl still waited. As he stood there he heard the raucous cries of the newsboys shouting "Extra," and knew that he must go on and face this final crisis. He could not delay another minute.

When he reached the house he found his worst fears realized. She was in the library with a crumpled paper in her hand and Arsdale was bending over her. As he greeted them they both pushed back from him as though one of the dead had entered. The boy was the first to recover himself. He sprang to Donaldson's side with his hand out.

"I told her it was n't true," he exclaimed. "I told her it was all a beastly lie!"

He grasped Donaldson's hand and dragged him towards his sister.

"See," he cried, "see, here he is! The papers lied about him!"

The girl tottered forward. Donaldson put out his arm and supported her.

"I 'm sorry you saw the papers," he said quietly. "I was in hopes I should reach here before that."

"But what is the meaning of it?"

"The police made a mistake, that 's all," he explained.

Arsdale broke in,

"We 'll sue them for it, Donaldson! I 'll get the best legal talent in the country and make them sweat for this! It's an outrage!"

"I 'm sorry you saw the paper," he repeated to the girl.

Her pale face and startled eyes frightened him. She had withdrawn from his arm after a minute and now fell into a chair.

"The blasted idiots," raged the boy.

The telephone rang imperiously and Arsdale went to answer it, chewing invectives.

Donaldson crossed to the side of the girl.

"Where is Marie?" he asked.

"She is in bed again. Her poor knees are troubling her."

"I have both good news and bad news for you," he said after a moment's hesitation, "the real assailant has been found and it is Jacques Moisson."

The girl recoiled.

"Jacques!"

"So the police feel sure. They say they caught him this morning in the attempt to commit another robbery. The Arsdale curse is upon him."

"Oh," she cried, "that is terrible."

But as he had guessed, it was good news also. There was no longer any doubt of who brought that wallet to the bungalow. There was no longer the grim suspicion of who might have rifled her rooms. The spectres which had seemed to be moving nearer and nearer her brother vanished instantly. That burden at least was lifted from her shoulders, even though it was replaced by another.

"Poor Marie! Poor Marie!" she moaned.

"I think she may suspect this," he said. "But it will be better for you to tell her than the police."

"Yes, I must go to her at once."

Arsdale came to the door, his face strangely agitated. He paused there a moment clinging to the curtains. Then, almost in awe, he came unsteadily towards Donaldson. The latter straightened to meet him. The boy started to speak, choked, and, finding Donaldson's hand, seized it in both his own. Then with his eyes overflowing he found his voice.

"How am I ever going to repay you for this?" he exclaimed in a daze.

Elaine was at his side in an instant.

"What is it, Ben? What is it now?"

"What is it?" he faltered. "It's so much—it's so much, I can't say it all at once."

Donaldson turned away from them both.

"He," panted the boy, "he gave himself up for me. They thought it was I, and he went to jail for me."

"It was a mistake on their part," answered Donaldson. "They did n't know."

"And so you shouldered it," she whispered.

"I knew it would come out all right," he faltered.

"A reporter rang me up just now," ran on Arsdale. "He told me the whole thing. The papers are full of it. They—they say you 're great, Donaldson, but they don't know *how* great!"

"If you would n't talk about it," pleaded Donaldson.

"Talk about it? I want to scream it! I want to get out and stand in Park Row and yell it. I want every living man and woman in the world to know about it!"

"It's all over—it's done with!"

"No," answered Arsdale, "it's just begun. I feel weak in the knees. I must go—I must be alone a minute and think this over."

He staggered from the room and Donaldson turning to the girl, said gently, "Go to Marie now. She will need you."

"You," she exclaimed below her breath, "you are wonderful!"

He turned away his head and she left him there alone.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Greater Master

In the fifteen minutes that Donaldson waited in the library, he fought out with himself the question as to whether he had the strength to remain here in the house on this the day before the end.

In his decision he took into account his duty towards the boy, the possible danger to the girl, and his own growing passion. There was but one answer: he owed it to them all to pull free while there was yet time. It would be foolhardy to risk here a full day and an evening.

He felt the approaching crisis more than he had at any time during the week.

At times he became panic-stricken at his powerlessness to check for even one brief pendulum-swing this steady tread of time. Time was such an intangible thing, and yet what a Juggernaut! There was nothing of it which he could get hold of to wrestle, and yet it was more powerful than Samson to throw him in the end. Sly, subtle, bodiless, soulless, impersonal; expressed in the big clock above the city, and in milady's dainty watch rising and falling upon her breast; sweeping away cities and nursing to life violets; tearing down and building up; killing and begetting; bringing laughter and tears, it is consistent in one thing alone,—that it never ceases. There is but one word big enough to express it, and that is God. Without beginning, without end, and never ceasing. At times he grew breathless, so individualized did every second become, so fraught with haste. Where was he being dragged, and in the end would the seconds rest? No, they would go on just the same, and he might hear them even in his grave.

With his decision came the even more vital question as to what he should tell this girl. With the strength of his whole nature he craved the privilege of standing white before her. He longed to tell her the whole pitiful complication that he might stand before her without shadow of hypocrisy. He could then leave with his head up to meet his doom. But even this crumb of relief was refused him. To do this might break down the boy and would leave her, if only as a friend, to bear something of the ensuing hours. He must, then, leave her in darkness, suffering the lesser stings of doubt and suspicion and bewilderment. He must leave her in false colors to whatever she might imagine.

She came back again with her lips quivering.

"Poor Marie," she gasped. "She lies there broken hearted, praying to die."

"I am sorry for her," he said gently.

"I feel the blame of it," she answered. "Why must the curse of the house have fallen upon her?"

"It is difficult to work out such matters," he replied. "But I don't think you should shoulder the responsibility. We each of us must bear the burden of our own acts. It makes it even harder when another tries to relieve us of this."

"But I can't relieve her. That is the pity of it. She turns away her head from me for she has taken upon herself all the responsibility for Jacques."

"That is the mother in her. There is nothing you can do."

"She will die of grief."

"Then she will be dead. So her relief will come."

The girl drew back a little.

"She must not die. I must not let her die."

She looked up at him as though she expected him even in this emergency to suggest some way out of it. But he was speechless.

"I must go back to her," she said after a minute. "I must go and comfort her."

"Yes," he said, "that is the best you can do. Take her hand and hold it. That is all you can do. Ben is upstairs?"

"Yes. I have n't told him yet."

"Tell him," he advised. "It will help him to have an opportunity to help another."

"Then you will excuse me?"

"Of course. But there is something that I must tell you before you go. I must leave you both now."

"You will come back to dinner with us?"

"I 'm afraid I shall be unable. I start on a long journey. I must say good bye."

She fixed her eyes upon him in a new alarm, waiting for what he should say next. But that was all. That was all he had to say. In those two words, "Good bye," he bounded all that was in the past, all that was in the future.

"You have had some sudden call?"

"Yes."

"But you will come back again. Don't—don't make it sound so final."

"I have no hope of coming back."

"Oh," she cried, "I thought that now you might find a little rest."

"Perhaps I shall. I do not know. But before I go I wish to insist again that you and Ben leave this house and get back into the country somewhere. Don't think I am presuming, but I should feel better if I knew you had this in mind. I see so clearly that it is the thing for you to do."

"Don't speak as though you were going so far," she shuddered. "What will Ben do without you?"

"Get him away from these old surroundings. Let him make friends—clean, wholesome friends. Let him pursue his hobby. There are other places besides New York where he is needed. If he is kept busy I do not fear for him."

She tried to pierce the white mask he wore. It was quite useless. She knew that there was something in him now that she could not reach. Yet she felt that there was need of it. She felt that there was need that she of all women in the world should force her way into his soul and there comfort him as he had bidden her comfort Marie. She felt this with an insurge of passion that left her girlhood behind forever. It swept away all thoughts of Ben, all thoughts of Marie, all thoughts of herself. She heard his voice as though in the distance.

"It is better," he was saying, "to be direct—to be as honest as possible at such a time as this. We can't say some things very gently, try as we may, because they are brutal facts in themselves. But I am going to tell you all I can as simply as I can. I must leave you. It is n't of my own free will that I go, though at the beginning it was. Now I go because I must. Perhaps you will never again hear of me. If you don't you must remember me as you know me now. Do you understand that, Miss Arsdale? You know me now as I am—as no other human being knows me. Will you cling to this?"

"You are to me as you are. So you always will be."

She met his eyes unflinchingly, feeling a new strength growing within her. He went on:

"If we cling to what we ourselves know of our friends—if we cling to that through thick and thin, nothing that happens to them can matter much. It is that confidence which lifts our friendships beyond the reach of the cur snappings of circumstance. So you, whatever you may hear afterwards, whatever things you find yourself unable to understand, must hold fast to this week. You must say to yourself," his voice grew husky, "you must say this,—'If it had been possible for him to do so, he would have lived out his life as I wished him to live it out.'"

As he spoke on, it seemed to him that she, in some subtle way, was rising superior to him. Instead of losing strength as she stood there before him, he felt her growing in power. He had been talking to her as to a child, and now he suddenly found himself confronting a woman. She was now the dominant personality. When she spoke to him her voice was firmer and possessed of a new richness.

"I have heard you," she said. "All the things you spoke are true. Why are you going?"

He hesitated at the direct question.

"Because I must."

"Why must you?"

"I cannot tell you."

She placed a steady hand upon his arm.

"Yes. You must tell me."

"Don't tempt me like that!"

He felt himself weakening. If only he might stand before her with his mask off. It meant freedom, it meant peace. That was all he asked—just the privilege of standing stark white before this one woman.

He turned away. The burden was his and he must bear it, if it crushed his very soul into the clay. Away from those eyes, he might be able to write some poor explanation. But to put it into cold words would be only to force upon her the torture of the next few hours. It was better for her to believe as she now saw him, as she might guess, than to suffer the ghastly truth and then shiver at the mud idol that was left.

He moved back a step.

"You must not look at me," he cried. "You must keep your eyes away from me and—and let me go."

But she followed, pressing him to the wall as they all had done. The color leaped to her cheeks. Her eyes grew big and tender.

"I do not think you understand me," she said.

He stood awed before what he now saw. It was as though he were looking at a naked soul.

"I do not think you understand," she continued, lifting her head a little. "You will not go, because there can be no call so great as that which bids you stay."

He answered, "My master is the master of us all."

"Then," she returned, "I too must go to meet your master. He must claim us both."

"God forbid," he exclaimed.

"You talk of masters," she ran on more excitedly, "and you are only a man. We women have a master greater than any you know. You taught me a moment ago to be direct—to be honest. It is so I must be with you now. I must be brave," her voice trembled a little, "I must stand face to face with you. Oh, if you were not so unselfish—so unseeing, you would not make me do this!"

He stood speechless—his throat aching the length of it.

"You treat me like a child, when you have made me a woman! You treat me like a weakling, when you have given me strength! You tell me you have some great trouble and then you refuse to allow me to share it! Don't you see?"

Her face was transfigured by pure white courage. He trembled before it. Yet he only gripped himself the firmer and stood before her immovable, every word she spoke leaving a red welt upon his soul.

"Peter," she trembled, not in fright but because of her overflowing heart, "you have shown me the wonder of life during this last week. You have taken me by the hand and have led me out of the gray barren land into the flowers and perfume of the orchard. You have done for me as you did for Ben. Why should I be ashamed to say this? I would not measure up to you if I kept silent now and let you go alone. I am not ashamed."

To himself he said,

"God give me courage to stand firm."

"You make it harder for me when you say nothing."

"I must not listen!"

"Don't keep me in the dark," she pleaded. "Don't send me back alone into the dark. It's being alone that hurts."

To himself he said,

"God keep me from telling her. God keep me from letting her know of my love. So it is best."

"Don't you see now?"

Again that phrase of his which had come back through Arsdale's lips to scorch him.

All he could say aloud was,

"I must go, and if I can, I will come back."

"I mean nothing to you if I cannot help you now," she said steadily. "If the road were smooth to you do you think I could tell you what I have? It is your need—it is your need that has given me the strength."

To himself he said,

"God keep my lips sealed."

To her he said,

"I must go."

She was startled.

"You remember the orchard, Peter?"

"As long as I remember anything, I shall remember that."

"You remember the walk straight through things?"

"Yes—you at my side."

"I have just taken it again—alone. I have pressed straight through."

There was a pause of a few seconds. Then,

"That is a hard thing for a woman to do."

There was a longer silence. Then she said tenderly,

"You look very tired. This day has been heavy to you. Go up-stairs to your room and rest. Then in the morning—why, in the morning we may both see clearer."

"I can rest nowhere. There is no rest left to me."

"Ah, you look so tired," she repeated.

He seized her hand and pressed it. Then he turned abruptly towards the hall. She watched him with a new fright. He paused at the door, his eyes drawn back to her against his will. She was standing there quite helpless, a growing pallor sweeping over her cheeks that so lately had been as richly red as rose leaves.

"God help me hard now," he moaned.

She stood before him like a marble statue. There were no tears.

"I have been very bold," she murmured. "I can never forgive myself that."

"You have been wonderful!" he cried.

"Perhaps you had better go at once, Peter Donaldson," she said.

He saw her in a blinding white light.

"God keep you," he managed to say. "God keep you forever and ever."

He stumbled to the hall, found his hat, and staggered through the door.

At the hedge a shadow stole out to meet him. It was an ambitious young reporter.

"Is this Mr. Donaldson?" he asked.

"Damn you, no!" shouted Donaldson. "Donaldson is dead!"

CHAPTER XXV

The Shadow on the Floor

Donaldson toiled up the dark staircase leading to Barstow's laboratory. To him it was as though he were fighting his way through deep water reaching twenty fathoms above his head. The air was just as cold as green water; it contained scarcely more life. He felt the same sense of clammy, lurking things, unknown things, such as crawl along the slimy bottoms where rotting hulks lie. He was impelled here by the same sort of fascination which is said to lead murderers back to their victims, yet it seemed to be the only place where he would be able to think at all. It was getting back to the beginning—to the source—where he could start fresh. It was here, and here alone, that he could write his letter to her. Perhaps here he could make something out of the chaos of his thoughts.

When he reached the top of the stairs, he paused before the closed door. He did not expect Barstow to be in. He hoped that he was not. He did not wish to face him to-day. To-morrow perhaps—but he realized that if Barstow had gone on his proposed vacation he would not be back even then. That did not matter either. The single thing remaining for him to do was to make Elaine understand something of what his life had meant, what she had meant in it, what he hoped to mean to her in the silent future. That must be done alone, and this of all places was where he could best do it. The mere thought of his room at the hotel was repulsive to him.

He listened at the door. There was no sound—no sound save the interminable "tick-tock, tick-tock" which still haunted him through the pulse beats in his wrists. He reached forward and touched the knob; listened again, and then turned it and pressed. The door was locked. But it was a feeble affair. Barstow had made his experimental laboratory in this old building to get away from the inquisitive, and half of the time did not take the trouble to turn the key when he left, for there was little of value here.

He knocked on the chance that Barstow might have lain down upon the sofa for a nap. Again he waited until he heard the "tick-tock, tick-tock" at his wrists. Then, pressing his body close to the lock, he turned the knob and pushed steadily. It weakened. He drew back a little and threw his weight more heavily against it. The lock gave and the door swung open.

The sight of the threadbare sofa was as reassuring as the face of an old friend. Yet what an eternity it seemed since he had sat there and discussed his barren life with Barstow. The phrases he had used came back to mock him. He had talked of the things that lay beyond his reach, while even then they were at his hand, had he been but hardy enough to seize them; he had spoken of what money could buy for him, with love eagerly pressing greater gifts upon him without price; he had hungered for freedom with freedom his for the taking. Sailors have died of thirst at the broad mouth of the Amazon, thinking it to be the open salt sea; so he was dying in the midst of clean, sweet life.

He sat down on the sofa, with his head between his hands and stared at the glittering rows of bottles which caught the sun. Each one of them was a laughing demon. They danced and winked their eyes—yellow, blue, and blood-red. There were a hundred of them keeping step to the bobbing shadows upon the floor. Row upon row of them—purple, brown, and blood-red—all dancing, all laughing.

"You come out wrong every time," Barstow had said.

And he—he had laughed back even as the bottles were doing.

He was not cringing even now. He was asking no pity, no mercy. When he had stepped across the room and had taken down that bottle, he had been clear-headed; he had been clear-headed when he had swallowed its contents. The only relief he craved for himself was to be allowed to remain clear-headed until he should have written his letter. Coming up the stairs he feared lest this might not be. Now he seemed to be steadying once more.

He thought of Sandy. Poor pup, he had gone out easily enough. He had curled up on a friendly knee and gone to sleep. That was all there had been to it. It would be an odd thing, he mused, if the dog was where he could look down on this man-struggle. This braced him up; he would not have even this dog see him die other than bravely.

As far as he himself was concerned, he knew that he would go unflinchingly to meet his final creditor, but there were the Others—with Sandy there had been no Others. It was easy enough to die alone, but when in addition to one's own death throes one had to bear those of others,—that was harder. When he died, it would be as when several died. There would be that mother in Vermont—part of her would die with him; there would be Saul—even part of him would die with him; there was Ben—some of him would die, too; and there was Elaine—good God, how much of her would die with him?

He sprang to his feet and began to pace the stained wooden floor. As he did so, a shadow crawled, from beneath the sofa and stole across the room like a rat. But unlike a rat, it did not disappear into a hole; it came back again towards Donaldson. He stopped. Close to the ground the shadow crept nearer until he saw that it was a dog. Then he saw that it was a black terrier. Then he saw that in size, color, and general appearance it was the living double of Sandy.

He stooped and extended his hand. He tried to pronounce the name, but his lips were too dry. The dog crouched, frightened, some three feet distant. Donaldson, squatting there, watched him with straining eyes. Once again he tried to utter the name. It stuck in his throat, but at the inarticulate cry he made, the dog wagged his tail so feebly that it scarcely moved its shadow. Donaldson ventured nearer. The dog rolled over to its back and held up its trembling forefeet on guard, studying Donaldson through half closed eyes with its head turned sideways.

Donaldson put forward his trembling fingers and touched its side. The dog was warm, even as

Sandy had been when he first picked him up. The dog feebly waved his padded paws and finally rested them upon Donaldson's hand.

"Sandy! Sandy!" he murmured, his voice scarcely above a whisper.

The dumb mouth moved nearer to lick the man's fingers, but his movements were negative as far as any recognition of the name went. It was just the friendly overture of any dog to any man.

If he could get him to answer to the name! It meant life—a chance for life! It meant, perhaps, that there had been some mistake—that, perhaps, after all, the poison was not so deadly as Barstow had thought it.

He threw himself upon the floor beside the dog. In the body of this black terrier centred everything in life that a man holds most dear. If he could speak—if the dumb tongue could wag an answer to that one question!

The dog turned over and crawled nearer. Donaldson fixed his burning eyes upon the blinking brute.

"Sandy," he cried, "is this you, Sandy?"

The moist tongue reached for his fingers.

He took a deep breath. He said,

"Dick—is this you, Dick?"

Again the moist tongue reached for his fingers.

Donaldson picked him up.

"Sandy," he cried, "answer me."

The dog closed his eyes as though expecting a blow.

Donaldson dropped him. The animal crawled away beneath the sofa. Donaldson felt more alone that minute than he had ever felt in all his life. It was as though he sat there, the sole living thing in the broad universe. There was nothing left but the blinking eyes of the bottles dancing in still brisker joy. He could not endure it.

Moving across the room he knelt by the sofa and tried to coax the frightened animal out again.

"Sandy. Come, Sandy," he called.

There was no show of life. He snapped his fingers. He groped beneath the old lounge. Then, in a frenzy of fear, lest it had all been an apparition, he swung the sofa into the middle of the room. The dog followed beneath it, but he caught a glimpse of him. He pushed the sofa back to the wall and began to coax again.

"Come out, Sandy. I 'll not hurt you. Come, Sandy."

There was a scratching movement and then the tip of a hot, dry nose appeared.

"Come. That 's a good dog. Come."

He could hear the tail vigorously thumping the floor, but the head appeared only inch by inch. Donaldson held his breath.

"Come," he whispered.

Slowly, with the sly pretension that it demanded a tremendous physical effort, the dog emerged and stood shivering beneath the big hand which smoothed its back with cooing words of assurance.

"Why, I was n't going to hurt you, Sandy," whispered Donaldson, finding comfort in pronouncing the name. "I was n't going to hurt you. We 're old friends. Don't you remember, Sandy? Don't you remember the night I held you? Don't you remember that, Sandy?"

The dog looked up at him moistening its own dry mouth. In every detail this was the same dog he had held upon his knee while arguing with Barstow. He made another test.

"Mike," he called.

In response the pup wagged his tail good naturedly and with more confidence now.

Donaldson caught his breath. Locked within that tiny brute brain was the secret of what waited for him on the morrow: love and the glories of a big life, or death and oblivion. The answer was there behind those moist eyes. But if he could reach Barstow—

Here was a new hope. He could ask him if this was Sandy, and so spare himself the terrors of the night to come. He had the right to do that as long as he abided by the decision. There was a telephone

here, and he knew that Barstow lived in an up-town apartment house, so that some one was sure to be in. He found the number in the battered, chemical-stained directory, and put in his call. It seemed an hour before he received his reply.

"No, sir, Mr. Barstow is away. Any message?"

"Where has he gone?" asked Donaldson dully.

"He's off on a yachting cruise, sir."

It would have been impossible for him to withdraw more completely out of reach.

"When do you expect him back?"

"I don't know, sir. He said he might be gone a day or two or perhaps a week."

"And he left?"

"Last Friday—very unexpectedly."

Donaldson hung up the receiver, which had grown in his hand as heavy as lead. He turned back to the dog, who had jumped upon the sofa and was now cuddled into a corner. He lifted his head and began to tremble again as Donaldson came nearer.

"Still afraid of me?" he asked with a sad smile. "Why, there is n't enough of me left to be afraid of, pup. There 's only about a day of me left and we ought to be friends during that time."

He nestled his head down upon the warm body. The dog licked his hair affectionately. The kindness went to his heart. The attention was soothing, restful. He responded to it the more, because this dog was to him the one thing left in the world alive. He snuggled closer to the silky hide and continued to talk, finding comfort in the sound of his own voice and the insensate response of the warm head.

"We ought to be good comrades—you and I—Sandy, because we 're all alone here in this old rat trap. When a man's alone, Sandy, anything else in the world that's alive is his brother. The only thing that counts is being alive. Why, a fly is a better thing than the dead man he crawls over. And if there be a live man, a dead man, and a fly, then the fly and the live man are brothers. So you and I are brothers, and we must fight the devil-eyes in those bottles together."

They danced before him now—yellow, blue, and blood-red. A more perfect semblance of an evil gnome could not be made than the flickering reflection of the sunlight in the bottle of blood-red liquid. It was never still. It skipped from the bottom of the bottle to the top and from one side to the other, as though in drunken ecstasy.

It fascinated Donaldson with the allurements of the gruesome. It was such a restless, scarlet thing! It looked as though it were trying to get out of its prison and in baffled rage was shooting its fangs at the sides, like a bottled viper.

"See it, Sandy? It's trying to get at us. But it can't, if we keep together. It's only when a man's alone that those things have any power. And the little devil knows it. If it were not for you, Sandy, the thing might drive me mad—might make me mad before I had written my letter!"

He sprang to his feet in sudden passion, and the dog with all four feet planted stiffly on the sofa gave a sharp bark. This broke the tension at once.

"That's the dog," Donaldson praised him. "When the shadows get too close bark at 'em like that!"

The bellicose attitude of the tiny body brought a smile to Donaldson's mouth. This, too, was like a bromide to shaking nerves.

But in this position the dog did not so closely resemble that other dog which he had held upon his knee. He looked thinner, more angular. His ears were cocked like two stiff v-shaped funnels. Now he looked like an older dog. It was more reasonable to suppose, Donaldson realized, that Barstow had two dogs of this same breed than that a dead dog had come to life.

"Sandy!" he called sharply.

The dog wagged his stub-tail with vigor.

"Spike!" he called again.

The tail wagged on with undiminished enthusiasm.

Donaldson passed his hand over his forehead.

This was as useless as to try to solve the enigma of the Sphinx. The dog's lips were sealed as tightly as the stone lips; the barrier between his brain and Donaldson's brain was as high as that between the man-chiseled image and the man who chiseled. He was only wasting his time on such a task, time that he should use in the framing of his letter.

He sat down again upon the sofa, took the dog upon his knee, and tried to think. Before him the bottles danced—purple, brown, and blood-red. He closed his eyes. He would begin his letter like this:

"To the most wonderful woman in all the world."

He would do this because it was true. There was no other woman like her. No other woman would have so helped an old man in his battle with himself; no other woman would have stayed on there alone in that house and would have helped the son in his battle with himself; no other woman would have followed him as she had wished to do and help him fight his battle with himself. But she was the most wonderful woman in the world because of the white courage she had shown in standing before him and telling of her love. The eyes of her—the glory in her hair—the marvel in her cheeks—the smile of her!

He opened his eyes. The devil in the bottle directly in front of him was more impish than it had been at all. Donaldson rose. The pup rolled to the floor. Donaldson crossed the room, picked out the bottle, drew back his arm, and hurled it against the wall, where it broke into a thousand pieces. It left a gory-looking blotch where it struck. He went back to the sofa. The dog crept to his side again. Before him a devil danced in a purple bottle. He closed his eyes.

He would begin his letter, then, like that. He would go on to tell her that he was unable to compute his life save in terms of her, that it had its beginning in her, grew to its fulness through her, and now had reached its zenith in her. At the brook when he had clasped her in his arms, he had drunk one deep draught of her.

He lost himself in one hot love phrase after another. He poured out his soul in words he had left unspoken to her. He was back again before the fire, telling her all that he did not tell her then. One gorgeous image after another swarmed to his brain. He was like a poet gone mad. He crowded sentence upon sentence, superlative upon superlative, until he found himself upon his feet, his cheeks hot, and his breath coming short. Then he caught sight of the crimson stain upon the wall and felt himself a murderer. He staggered back and threw himself full-length upon the couch, panting like one at the end of a long run. He lay here very quietly.

The dog crawled to his side and licked the hair at his hot temple.

CHAPTER XXVI

On the Brink

Donaldson was aroused by the dog which was at the door barking excitedly. It was broad daylight. As Donaldson sprang up he heard the brisk approach of footsteps, and the next second a key fumbling in the lock. Before he had fully recovered his senses the door swung open, and Barstow, tanned and ruddy, burst in. Donaldson stared at him and he stared at Donaldson. Then, striding over the dog, who yelped in protest at this treatment, Barstow approached the haggard, unshaven man who faced him.

"Good Heavens, Peter!" he cried, "what ails you?"

Donaldson put out his hand and the other grasped it with the clasp of a man in perfect health.

"Can't you speak?" he demanded. "What's the matter with you?"

"I 'm glad to see you," answered Donaldson.

"But what are you doing here in this condition? Are you sick?"

"No, I 'm not sick. I lay down on the sofa and I guess I fell asleep."

"You look as though you had been sleeping there a month. Sit down, man. You have a fever."

"There 's your dog," said Donaldson.

Barstow turned. The dog, with his forefeet on Barstow's knee, was stretching his neck towards his master's hand.

"Hello, pup," he greeted him. "Did the janitor use you all right?" He shook him off.

Donaldson sat down. Barstow stood in front of him a moment and then reached to feel his pulse. It was normal.

"I 'm not sick, I tell you," said Donaldson, trying to laugh, "I was just all in. I came up here to see if you were back and slumped down on the couch. Then I fell asleep. There 's your dog behind you."

"What of it?" demanded Barstow.

"Why—he looks glad to see you."

"What of that?"

"Nothing."

Barstow laid his hand on Donaldson's shoulder.

"Have you been drinking?" he asked.

"Drinking? No, but I've a thirst a mile long. Any water around here?"

Barstow went to the closet and came back with a graduating glass full of lukewarm water. Donaldson swallowed it in a couple of gulps.

"Lord, that's good!"

Barstow again bent a perplexed gaze upon him.

"You have n't been fooling with any sort of dope, Peter?"

"No."

"This is straight?"

"Yes, that's straight," answered Donaldson impatiently. "I tell you that there is n't anything wrong with me except that I 'm fagged out."

"You did n't take my advice. You ought to have gone away. Why did n't you?"

"I 've been too busy. There's your dog."

Barstow hung down his hand, that the pup might lick the ends of his fingers.

"Peter," he burst out, "you ought to have been with me. If I 'd known about the trip I 'd have taken you. It was just what you needed—a week of lolling around a deck in the hot sun with the sea winds blowing over your face. That's what you want to do—get out under the blue sky and soak it in. If you don't believe it, look at me. Fit as a fiddle; strong as a moose. You said you wanted to sprawl in the sunshine,—why the devil don't you take a week off and do it?"

"Perhaps I will."

"That's the stuff. You must do it. You were in bad shape when I left, but, man dear, you 're on the verge of a serious breakdown now. Do you realize it?"

"Yes, I realize it. That 's a good dog of yours, Barstow."

"What's the matter with the pup? Seems to me you 're taking a deuce of a lot of interest in him," he returned suspiciously.

"Dogs seem sort of human when you 're alone with them."

"This one looks more human than you do. See here, Don, Lindsey said that he might start off again to-morrow on a short cruise to Newport. I think I can get you a berth with him. Will you go?"

"It's good of you, Barstow," answered Donaldson uneasily, "but I don't like to promise."

Would Barstow never call the dog by name? He could n't ask him directly; it would throw too much suspicion upon himself. If Barstow had left his laboratory that night for his trip, the chances were that the bottle was not yet missed. He must be cautious. It would be taking an unfair advantage of Barstow's friendship to allow him to feel that indirectly he had been responsible for the death of a human being. Donaldson glanced at his watch.

It had stopped.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Half past nine."

Two hours and a half longer! He determined to remain here until eleven. If, up to that time, Barstow had not called the dog by name he would leave. He must write that letter and he must put himself as far out of reach of these friends as possible before the end. If he died on the train, his body would be put off at the next station and a local inquest held. The verdict would be heart disease; enough money would be found in his pocket to bury him; and so the matter would be dropped.

"I want you to promise, Don," ran on Barstow, "for I tell you that it's either a rest or the hospital for you. You have nervous prostration written big all over your face. I know how hard it is to make the initial effort to pull out when your brain is all wound up, but you 'll regret it if you don't. And you 'll like the crowd, Don. Lindsey is a hearty fellow, who hasn't anything to do but live—but he does that well.

He's clean and square as a granite corner-stone. It will do you good to mix in with him.

"And his boat is a corker! He spent a quarter of a million on it, and he 's got a French cook that would make a dead man eat. He 'll put fat on your bones, Don, and Lindsey will make you laugh. You don't laugh enough, Don. You 're too serious. And if you have such weather as we 've had this week you 'll come back with a spirit that will boost your law practice double."

He felt of Donaldson's arm. It was thin and flabby.

"Good Heavens—here, feel of mine!"

Donaldson grasped it with his weak fingers. It was beastly thick and firm.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"It is twenty minutes of ten. Is time so important to you?"

"I must get down-town before long."

"Rot! Why don't you drop your business here and now. Let things rip."

"Where 's the dog?" demanded Donaldson. The pup was out of sight. He felt strangely frightened. He got up and looked all about the room.

"Where 's he gone?" he demanded again.

Barstow grasped him by the shoulder.

"You must pull yourself together," he said seriously. "You 're heading for a worse place than the hospital."

"But where the devil has he gone? He was here a minute ago, was n't he?"

"Easy, easy," soothed Barstow. "Hold tight!"

"Find him, won't you, Barstow? Won't you find him?"

To quiet him Barstow whistled. The dog pounded his tail on the floor under the lounge.

"He 's under there," said Barstow.

"Get him out—get him out where I can see him, won't you?"

Barstow stooped.

"Come, Sandy, come," he called.

Donaldson leaped forward.

"What did you call him?" he demanded as Barstow staggered back.

"Have you gone mad?" shouted Barstow.

"What did you call him?" repeated Donaldson fiercely. "Tell me what you called him?"

"I called him Sandy. Control yourself, Don. If you let yourself go this way—it's the end."

"The end?" shouted Donaldson. "Man, it 's the beginning! It's just the beginning! Sandy—Sandy did n't die after all!"

"Oh, that's what's troubling you," returned Barstow with an air of relief. "Why did n't you tell me? You thought the dead had risen, eh? No, the stuff didn't work. The dog only had an attack of acute indigestion from overeating. But Gad, the coincidence *was* queer, when you stop to think of it. I 'd forgotten you left before he came to."

"Then," cried Donaldson excitedly, "you did n't have any poison after all!"

"No. I was so busy on more important work that my experiments with that stuff must all of them have been slipshod. But it did look for a minute as though Sandy here had proven it. But, Lord,—it was n't the poison that did for him—it was his week. His week was too much for him!"

"Give me your hand, Barstow. Give me your hand. I 'm limp as a rag."

"That's your nerves again. If you were normal, the mere fact that you thought you saw a spook dog would n't leave you in this shape. Come over here and sit down."

"Get me some water, old man—get me a long, long drink."

When Barstow handed him the glass, which must have held a pint, Donaldson trembled so that he could hold it to his lips only by using both hands, as those with palsy do. He swallowed it in great gulps.

He felt as though he were burning up inside. The room began to swim around him, but with his hands kneading into the old sofa he warded off unconsciousness. He must not lose a single minute in blankness. He must get back to her—get back to her as soon as he could stand. She was suffering, too, though in another way. He must not let another burning minute scorch her.

"Perhaps you 'll take my advice now," Barstow was saying, "perhaps you were near enough the brink that time to listen to me. Tell me I may ring up Lindsey—tell me now that you 'll go with him."

"Go—away? Go—out to sea?" cried Donaldson.

"Yes. To-morrow morning."

"Why, Lord, man! Lord, man!" he panted, "I—would n't leave New York—I would n't go out there—for—for a million dollars."

"You damned ass!" growled Barstow.

"I—I would n't—go, if the royal yacht—of the King of England were waiting for me."

"Some one ought to have the authority to put you in a strait-jacket and carry you off. I tell you you 're headed for the madhouse, Don!"

Donaldson staggered to his feet. He put his trembling hands on Barstow's shoulders.

"No," he faltered, "no, I 'm headed for life, for life, Barstow! You hear me? I 'm headed for a paradise right here in New York."

Barstow felt baffled. The man was in as bad a way as he had ever seen a man, but he realized the uselessness of combatting that stubborn will. There was nothing to do but let him go on until he was struck down helpless. From the bottom of his heart he pitied him. This was the result of too much brooding alone.

"Peter," he said, "the loneliest place in this world is New York. Are you going to let it kill you?"

"No! It came near it, but I 've beaten it. I 'm bigger now than the dear old merciless city. It's mine—down to every dark alley. I 've got it at my feet, Barstow. It is n't going to kill me, it's going to make me grow. It is n't any longer my master—it's a good-natured, obedient servant. New York?" he laughed excitedly. "What is New York but a little strip of ground underneath the stars?"

"That would sound better if your eyes were clearer and your hand steadier."

"You 'd expect a man to be battered up a little, would n't you, after a hard fight? I 've fought the hardest thing in the world there is to fight—shadows, Barstow, shadows—with the King Shadow itself at their head."

Was the man raving? It sounded so, but Donaldson's eyes, in spite of their heaviness, were not so near those of madness as they had been a moment ago. The startled look had left his face. Every feature stood out brightly, as though lighted from within. His voice was fuller, and his language, though obscure, more like that of the old Donaldson. Barstow was mystified.

"Had n't you better lie down here again?" he suggested.

"I must go, now. What—what time is it, old man?"

"Five minutes past ten."

Donaldson took a deep breath. Time—how it stretched before him like a flower-strewn path without end. He heard the friendly tick-tock at his wrists. The minutes were so many jewel boxes, each containing the choice gift of so many breaths, so many chances to look into her eyes, so many chances to fulfil duties, so many quaffs of life.

"My watch has run down," he said, with curious seriousness. "I 'm going to wind it up again. I 'm going to wind it up again, Barstow."

He proceeded to do this as though engaged in some mystic rite.

"May I set it by your watch? I 'd like to set it by your watch, Barstow."

He adjusted the hands tenderly, again as though it were the act of a high priest.

"Now," he said, "it's going straight. I shall never let the old thing run down again. I think it hurts a watch, don't you, Barstow?"

"Yes," answered the latter, amazed at his emphasis upon such trivialities.

"Now," he said, "I must hurry. Where's my hat? Oh, there it is. And Sandy—where's Sandy?"

The dog crawled out at once at the sound of his name, and he stooped to pet him a moment.

"I don't suppose you 'd sell Sandy, would you, Barstow?"

"I 'll give him to you, if you 'll take him off. I have n't a fit place to keep him."

"May I take him now? May I take him with me?"

"Yes—if you'll come back to me to-morrow and report how you are."

"I 'll do it. I 'll be here to-morrow."

He cuddled the dog into his arm and held out his hand.

"Don't worry about me, old man. Just a little rattled that's all. But fit as a fiddle; strong as a moose, even if I don't look it as you do!"

Barstow took his hand, and when Donaldson left, stood at the head of the stairs anxiously watching him make his way to the street, hugging the dog tightly to his side.

CHAPTER XXVII

The End of the Beginning

When Donaldson appeared at the door of the Arsdale house he was confronted by Ben whose eyes were afire as though he had been drinking. Before he could speak a word the latter squared off before him aggressively.

"What the devil have you done to my sister?" he demanded.

Donaldson drew back, frightened by the question.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, the dog dropping from his arms to the floor.

"She 's in bed, and half out of her mind," returned the other fiercely. "She said you 'd gone! Donaldson, if you 've hurt her—"

The boy's fists were clenched as though he were about to strike. Donaldson stood with his arms hanging limply by his side. He felt Arsdale's right to strike if he wished.

"I have n't gone," he answered.

"I don't know what has happened," Arsdale ran on heatedly, "but I want to tell you this—that as much as you 've done for me, I won't stand for your hurting her."

"Let me see her," demanded Donaldson, coming to himself.

"She won't see any one! She 's locked up in her room. She may be dead. If she is, you 've killed her!"

Arsdale half choked upon the words. It was with difficulty that he restrained himself. He was blind to everything, save that in some way this man was responsible for the girl's suffering.

"Perhaps she 'll see me. Where is she?"

Donaldson without waiting for an answer pushed past Arsdale and the latter allowed it, but followed at his heels. Donaldson knew where she was without being told. She was in the big front room where the balcony led outdoors. He went up the stairs heavily, for he knew that more depended on the next half hour than had anything so far in all this harrowing week. Though there was plenty of light he groped his way close to the wall like a blind man. At the closed door he paused to catch his breath. In the meanwhile the boy, half frantic, pounded on the panels, shouting over his shoulder,

"She won't let us in, I tell you! She won't let us in! She may be dead!"

At this, Donaldson forced Arsdale back. He put his mouth close to the insensate wood and called her name.

"Elaine."

There was no answer.

He knocked lightly and called again. Again the silence, the boy stumbling up against him with an inarticulate cry. The nurse joined them, and the three stood there in shivering terror. Donaldson felt panic clutching at his own heart. Before throwing his weight against the door, he tried once more.

"Elaine," he cried, "it is I—Donaldson."

There was the sound of movement within, and then came the stricken plea,

"Go away. Please go away."

Arsdale answered,

"Let me in, Elaine. Nothing shall hurt you. I'll—"

Donaldson turned upon him and the nurse.

"Go down-stairs," he commanded.

His voice made them both shudder back.

"Go down-stairs," he repeated. "Do you hear! Leave her to me!"

Arsdale started a protest, but the nurse, in fright, took his arm and half dragged him towards the stairs. Donaldson followed threateningly. His face was terrible. He stood at the head of the stairs until they reached the hall below. Then he returned to the door.

"Elaine," he said, "I have come back. Do you hear me, Elaine? I have come back."

He heard within the sound as of muffled sobbing. He himself was breathing as though a great weight were on his chest.

"Elaine," he cried, "won't you open the door to me?"

The sobbing was broken by a tremulous voice.

"Is that you, Peter Donaldson?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then go away and leave me, Peter Donaldson."

"Elaine, can you hear me clearly?"

There was the pause of a moment, and then the broken voice.

"Go away."

"No," he answered steadily, "I can't. I can't go away again until I see you. You must tell me face to face to go. I 've come back to you."

She did not answer.

"Elaine," he cried, "open the door to me. Let me see you."

"I don't want to see you."

He waited a moment. Then he said more soberly,

"Elaine, I can't go away. I must stay right here until I see you. I sha'n't move from here until my soul goes. Whether you hear me or not, you will know that I am right here by the door. At the end of one hour, at the end of two hours, at the end of a day, I shall still be here. If they try to drag me away, they 'll have to fight—they 'll have to fight hard."

There was no answer. He leaned back against the wall. Below, he heard a whispered conversation between Arsdale and the nurse; within, he heard nothing. So five minutes passed, and to Donaldson the world was chaos. He felt as though he were locked up in a tomb. There was the same feeling of dead weight upon the shoulders; the same sensation of stifling. Then he heard her voice,

"Are you still there, Peter Donaldson?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Won't you please go away?"

"I shall not go away until I have seen you."

Then another long suspense began, but it was shorter than the first.

"If I let you come in for a minute, will you go then?"

"Yes," he answered, "I will go then."

It seemed an eternity before he heard the key turn in the lock and saw the door swing open a little. He stepped in. She had taken a position in a far corner. She had drawn the Japanese shawl tightly

about her, and was standing very erect, her white face like chiseled marble. He started towards her, but she checked him.

"Do not come any nearer," she commanded.

He steadied himself.

"I told you," he began abruptly, "that I was going because I must. That was true; I went thinking I was to meet Death."

She took a step towards him.

"You were ill? You are ill now?"

"No."

He paused. Now that the time had come when he could tell her all, it was a harder thing to do than he had thought. If she withdrew from him now—what would she do after she had learned? Yet he must do this to be a free man, to be even a free spirit. There must be no more shadows between them, not even shadows of the past.

"I told you," he said, "of my life up to the time I came to New York, of the daily grind it was to get that far. That was only the beginning—after that came the real struggle. It was easy to fight with the enemy in front—with something for your fists to strike against. But then came the waiting years. I was too blind to see all the work that lay around me. I was too selfish to see what I might have fought for. I saw nothing except the wasting months. I lost my grip. I played the coward."

He took a quick, sharp breath at the word. It was like plunging a knife into his own heart to stand before her and say that.

"One day in the laboratory," he struggled on, "Barstow told me of a poison which would not kill until the end of seven days. Because I was not—the best kind of fighter—I—stole it and swallowed it. That was a week ago. I am here now only because the poison did n't work."

"You—you tried to kill yourself?" she cried in amazement.

"Yes," he answered unflinchingly, "I tried to quit. There were many things I wanted—cheap, trivial things, and at the time I did n't see my course clear to getting them in any other way. The other things—the things worth while were around me all the time, but I could n't see them."

He paused. She drew away from him.

"So you see I did not do bravely. I wanted you to know this from the first, but there didn't seem to be any way. I did n't want to stand before you as a liar—as a hypocrite, and yet I did n't want to balk myself in the little good I found myself able to do. That silence was part of the penalty. I left you yesterday without telling, for the same reason. That and one other: because I did n't want you to think me a coward when death might cut off all opportunity for ever proving otherwise."

Again he paused, hoping against a dead hope. But she stood there, cringing away from him, her frightened lips dumb.

"That is all," he concluded. "Now I will go. But don't you see that I had to intrude long enough to tell you this? I stand absolutely honest before you. There isn't a lie in me. Now I am going to work."

He made an odd looking picture as he stood there. Haggard, hot-eyed, with a touch of color above his unshaven cheeks, he was like a victorious general at the end of a hard week's campaign.

He turned away from her and went out of the room. At the foot of the stairs he passed in silence Arsdale and the nurse. He turned back.

"Sandy! Sandy! Where are you?"

The dog came scrambling over the smooth floor with a joyous yelp. He picked him up and passing out the door went down the street. The few remaining dollars he had left burned in his pocket. He tossed them into the first sewer. He was now free—free to begin clean handed.

A little farther along he came to a gang of men at work upon the excavation for a new house. He needed money for food and a night's lodging. He went to the foreman.

"Want an extra hand?"

"Wot th' devil ye 're givin' us?"

"I 'm in earnest. I have n't a cent. I need work. Try me."

The burly foreman looked him over with a grin. Then as though he saw a good joke in it, he gave him a shovel and sent him into the cellar.

Donaldson removed his coat and rolling up his sleeves took his place beside the others. Sandy

found a comfortable nest in the discarded garment and settled down contentedly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Seventh Noon

When Arsdale with the nurse at his heels rushed up-stairs, he found his sister before the mirror combing her hair. There was nothing hysterical about her, but her white calmness in itself was ominous.

"What is it, Elaine?" he panted, "has Donaldson gone mad?"

"No," she answered, "I should say that he is quite sane now."

"But what the deuce was the trouble with him? He looked as though he had lost his senses."

"Perhaps he has just found them."

The nurse interrupted him, in an aside,

"I would n't agitate her further." To the girl, she said, "Don't you think you had better lie down for a little, Miss Arsdale?"

"Please don't worry about me," she replied calmly, "I am going to change my dress and then I shall come down-stairs. I wish you would go to Marie—both of you. It is she who needs attention."

"But—" broke in Arsdale.

"There's a good boy. Do what you can to make her comfortable. I will join you in a few minutes."

Uncomprehending, Arsdale reluctantly led the way out. She closed the door behind them and turned to her mirror again.

"Well," demanded her reflection, "what are you going to do now?"

"Do? I shall go on as I have always done."

"Shall you?"

"Why not? There is Ben. Perhaps we shall go out into the country to live—perhaps we shall travel."

"Shall you?"

"That is certainly the sensible thing to do."

"Shall you?"

She smoothed back the hair from her throbbing temples.

"He looked very much in need of help," suggested the mirror.

"Who?"

"Peter Donaldson."

"Oh," gasped Elaine, "why did he do it? Why did he do it?"

The mirror recognized the question as one which every woman has asked at least once in her lifetime. But somehow this did not swerve her from her insistence.

"You must judge him from what you yourself have seen of him," the mirror harped back to Donaldson's own words.

"He acted bravely before me—before Ben. He did do bravely," cried the girl.

"And yet below these acts he had a craven heart?" hinted she of the mirror.

"No. No. It isn't possible! It isn't possible!"

"But he admitted the dreadful thing he tried to do."

"That was the folly of a moment. He has grown through it. He asked no mercy—asked no pardon. Did n't you see the expression upon his haggard face as he left the room?"

"Were you looking?" queried she of the mirror in surprise. "Your eyes were away from him."

"But one couldn't help but see that!"

The woman in the mirror found herself suddenly put upon the defensive.

"Where has he gone?" cried the girl. "What is he going to do now?"

"Will he do bravely whatever lies before him?"

"Yes. He will! He will!"

"How do you know?"

"I know. That is enough."

"Then why do you not call him back?"

The girl's cheeks grew scarlet.

"The shame of what I told him yesterday!"

"Was it not a bit brave of him to turn away from you?"

"He should have explained to me at that time why he was going. He needed me then."

"Do you not suppose that he knew it? Do you not suppose that it took the strength of a dozen men to go alone to what he thought was waiting for him?"

"I know nothing."

"And yet you saw his eyes as he stood before you then? And you saw his eyes as he left you five minutes ago?"

"I won't see. I can't risk—again!"

"Yet you love him?"

Once again the flaming scarlet in her cheeks. Her lips trembled. She turned away from the mirror.

"I said nothing of love," she insisted.

"Yet you love him?"

"Why did he do it?" she moaned.

"Yet you love him?"

"He did so bravely—he spoke so bravely, yet—"

"He learned. If, of all the world of men, you were to choose one to stand by your side when hardest pressed, whom would you choose?"

"I would choose him," answered the girl without hesitation.

"Why?"

"Because—"

"After all, is n't that enough? You would trust him to fight an eternity as he has fought for you these few days. Twice he staked his life for you—once his good name."

"But he thought he was soon to die."

"All the more precious the time that was left."

Her eyes brightened.

"Yes. Yes. I had not thought of that."

"Yet he did this and further risked what was left to save an unknown messenger boy."

"Oh, he did well!"

"Then he came to you like a man and told what you might never have discovered, just because he wished to stand clean before you."

"Yes," she breathed.

"Why did he do that?" demanded her reflection.

"I—I don't know."

"Why did he do that?"

"Because—"

"After all, isn't that enough?"

"But he said nothing. If only he had turned back!"

"What right had he to say the thing you wish? If he had been less a man he *would* have turned back."

"Where has he gone? What is he going to do?"

"Why don't you find out?"

"It would be unmaidenly."

"Yes, and very womanly. Do you owe him nothing?"

"I owe him everything."

"Then—"

"I must send Ben to find him. I must—oh, but I need n't do anything more?"

"No. Nothing more."

Her heart pounded in her throat in her eagerness to finish her toilet. Her fingers were so light that she could scarcely hold her comb. She hurried into a fresh gown and then down-stairs where she found Ben anxiously pacing the library. He appeared greatly agitated—anchorless.

"Ben," she began, "I had no right to allow Peter Donaldson to go away as I did."

"Little sister," he demanded, "was he unkind to you?"

"No. No," she broke in eagerly, "he was most generous with me. But for the moment I could n't see it. It was my fault that he went."

"But what was the cause of it?" he insisted, puzzled and dazed by the whole episode.

"It was nothing that counts now. I want you to promise me, Ben, that you will never refer to it, that you will never permit him to tell you of it."

His face cleared.

"Just a little tiff? But he took it hard. I never saw a man so worked up over anything."

"It belongs to the past," she hurried on, eager to allow it to pass as he interpreted it. "It would be cruel to him to bring it up again. Will you promise me, Ben?"

"I will promise. But I 'm afraid you overdid it. It is going to be hard to straighten him out."

"No. It is all straightened out now. All that remains for you to do is to find him and say that I—that I wish him to come back for lunch."

"Is it that simple?"

He smiled, his easy-going nature glad to seize upon anything that promised relief from such a jumble as this.

"You must say nothing more than that," she put in, frightened at the sound of her own words. Supposing that he would not come—supposing that even now she had presumed too far?

"You will tell him just that?"

"Yes," he agreed, "and this morning I would have thought that it was enough."

"It is enough now—whatever happens," she said hastily.

"I must hurry back to Marie," she concluded breathlessly. "You must not delay. It may be that he is planning to leave town. If so, you must catch him before he starts."

He placed his arm tenderly about her slight waist and led her to the foot of the stairs.

"You will let me know as soon as you come in?" she pleaded.

"Yes, and don't worry while I 'm gone."

Arsdale did not take a cab. He needed a walk to clear his head. The air was balmy with the fragrance of growing things and he was sensitive to its influence as he had never been in his life. As he strode along he felt twice his normal size. And yet what a puppet he was as compared to this Donaldson who had been willing to take upon his shoulders the ghastly burden which had been his own. He himself might bear it to-day, but yesterday it would have crushed him. He had not realized how low he had sunk until he learned that it was considered a possibility that he might have committed such crimes as those. If at first the suspicion had roused his wrath, the sober truth that Jacques under the same influence was actually guilty had been enough to disarm him. The past was like a nightmare, and this Donaldson was the man who had found his hand in the dark and roused him. He quickened his pace. A small black dog nosing about the fresh dirt thrown from an excavation to his left attracted his attention to a new house which was going up. He glanced at the men at work and then stood still in his tracks. Down there, in his shirt sleeves, bent over a shovel was Peter Donaldson.

It was impossible to believe, but he stared at the illusion with his hands getting cold. Then he turned back to the dog. It was the same pup Donaldson had brought into the house with him.

He riveted his eyes once more upon the figure standing out among his fellow workers like a uniformed general in a rabble. He strode to the side of the foreman of the gang who stood near.

"Who is that man down there?" he demanded.

"Dunno," the foreman answered briefly, "he asked fer work this mornin' and I give him a job."

"I 'm going to speak to him."

"Fire erway."

Arsdale clambered into the hole and reached Donaldson's side before the latter glanced up. When he did raise his head, it was with an easy, unembarrassed nod of recognition.

"Good Lord," gasped Arsdale, "it *is* you!"

"Yes."

Donaldson wiped his wet brow. He was not in particularly good training for such heavy work.

"But what the deuce—"

"I needed money for a night's lodging and took the first job that offered," he explained.

There was nothing melodramatic in his speech or attitude. He was not posing. He spoke of his necessity in the matter-of-fact way in which he had accepted it. It was necessary to earn the sheer essentials of life, in order to get a footing—to get sufficient capital to open up his office again. He would not have borrowed if he could, and a penniless lawyer in New York is in as bad a position as a penniless tramp. Not only was he glad of this opportunity to earn a couple of dollars, but he found pleasure, in spite of the physical strain, in this most elemental of employments. There was something in the act of forcing his shovel into the earth that brought him comfort in the thought that he was beginning in the cleanest of all clean ways. He was earning his first dollar like a pioneer. He was earning it by the literal sweat of his brow.

He turned back from Arsdale's astonished expression to his task.

"See here, Donaldson," protested the latter excitedly, "this is absurd! You must quit this. I 've money enough—"

"And I have n't," interrupted Donaldson heaving a shovel full of moist dirt into the waiting dump cart.

Even Arsdale was checked by the expression he caught in Donaldson's eyes. He ventured nothing further, but, bewildered, stood there, dumb a moment, before he remembered his message.

"I came out to find you," he managed to speak. "Elaine wants you to come back to lunch."

"What?"

Donaldson paused in his work and searched Arsdale's face.

"What did you say?" he demanded slowly.

"Elaine wants you to come back for lunch. She sent me to find you."

Arsdale saw Donaldson's lungs expand. He saw every vein in his face throb with new life. He saw him grow before his eyes to the capacity of two men. He saw him step forth from this aching begrimed shell into a new physique as vibrant with fresh strength as a young mountaineer. It was as startling a metamorphosis as though the man had been touched with a magician's wand.

"Thank you," answered Donaldson on a deep intake of breath. "I shall be glad to come."

"Drop your shovel then and come along now."

"No," he replied, as he dug his spade deep into the soil, "I can't quit my job. The whistle blows at noon."

At noon! At the seventh noon, the whistle was to blow! He tossed the weight of two ordinary shovelfuls of gravel into the cart as lightly as a child tosses a bean bag.



***At noon! At the seventh noon, the
whistle was to blow!***

Perceiving the uselessness of further argument Arsdale climbed out to the bank, and, sitting on a big boulder, watched Donaldson with dazed fascination. The foreman passed him once.

"May be cracked," he remarked, "but I 'd' take a hundred men, the likes of him."

"You could n't find them on two continents," answered Arsdale.

The dog made overtures of friendship and he took him on his knee.

Donaldson never glanced up. With the precision of a machine he bent over his shovel, lifted, and threw without pause. The men near him looked askance at such unceasing labor.

In time, the foreman blew a shrill note on a whistle and as though he had applied a brake connected with every man, the shovels dropped and the motley gang scrambled for their dinner pails. Donaldson for the first time then lifted his face to Arsdale. The seventh noon had come, and never had a midday been ushered in to such a sweet note as the foreman had blown on his penny whistle.

Donaldson, picking up his coat, made his way to the side of Arsdale, who had risen to meet him with Sandy barking at his heels.

"I have only an hour," apologized Donaldson, "I 'm afraid I 'm hardly in a condition to go into the house."

"You are n't coming back here?"

"Yes."

Once again Arsdale found his protest choked at his lips. What was the use of talking to a man in such a stubborn mood as this? He led the way to the house.

In the hall, he shouted up the stairs,

"Elaine, Peter Donaldson is here!"

The girl stepped from the library clutching the silken curtains. She hesitated a moment at sight of

him and then faltering forward, offered her hand.

"I 'm glad you came back," she said.

His fingers closed over her own with a decisiveness that made her catch her breath. As the woman in the mirror had divined, there was nothing more left for her to do.

"But the old chump is going again in an hour," choked Arsdale, "he 's taken a job shovelling dirt."

She met Donaldson's eyes. For a moment they questioned him. Then her own eyes grew moist and she smiled. The joy of it all was too much for her. She stooped and patted Sandy who was clawing her skirts for recognition.

"Oh, little dog," she whispered in his silken ear, "I am glad you came back. Glad—glad—glad!"

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SEVENTH NOON ***

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