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"He turned and saw Nan"

**THE
ROOT OF EVIL**

A NOVEL

By

THOMAS DIXON

AUTHOR OF

"THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS," "THE CLANSMAN," "THE ONE WOMAN," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WRIGHT

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK

DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
THE REVEREND THOMAS DIXON
1820-1909

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THE ROOT OF EVIL

LEADING CHARACTERS OF THE STORY

SCENE: New York and the Mountains of North Carolina

TIME: 1898 to 1907

JAMES STUART, a young Southerner in New York.
 NAN PRIMROSE, his fiancée.
 MRS. PRIMROSE, her mother.
 JOHN C. CALHOUN BIVENS, a millionaire.
 DR. HENRY WOODMAN, who loves his neighbour.
 HARRIET, his daughter.
 HIS MAJESTY, the King of America.

THE ROOT OF EVIL

Book 1 — The Seed

CHAPTER I

A STAR BOARDER

At the end of a warm spring day in New York, James Stuart sat in the open window of his room on Washington Square, smiling. With a sense of deep joy he watched the trees shake the raindrops from their new emerald robes, and the flying clouds that flecked the Western sky melt into seas of purple and gold.

A huckster turned into Fourth Street, crying:

"Straw—berries! Straw—berries!"

And the young lawyer laughed lazily.

The chatter of the sparrows, the shouts of children in the Square and the huckster's drawling call seemed the subtines of a strangely beautiful oratorio of nature into which every sound of earth had softly melted. Even the roar of the elevated trains on Sixth Avenue and the screech of their wheels as the cars turned the corner of the filthy street in the rear were music. A secret joy filled the world. Nothing could break its spell—not even the devilish incessant rattle of the machine hammers flattening the heads of the rivets on the huge steel warehouse of the American Chemical Company rising across the avenue. The music he heard was from within, and the glory of life was shining from his eyes.

Again the huckster's cry rang over the Square:

"Straw—berries! Straw—berries!"

The dreamer closed his eyes and smiled. A flood of tender memories stole into his heart from the sunlit fields of the South. He had gone hunting wild strawberries with Nan Primrose on the hills at home in North Carolina the day he first knew that he loved her.

How beautiful she was that day in the plain blue cotton dress which fitted her superb young figure to perfection! How well he remembered every detail of that ramble over the red hills—he could hear now the whistle of a bob white sitting on the fence near the spring where they lunched, calling to his mate. As Nan nestled closer on the old stile, they saw the little brown bird slip from her nest in a clump of straw, lift her head, and softly answer.

"Look!" Nan had whispered excitedly. "There's her nest!"

He recalled distinctly his tremor of sympathetic excitement as her warm hand drew him to the spot. With peculiar vividness he remembered the extraordinary moisture of the palm of her hand trembling with eager interest as he counted the eggs—twenty beauties. But above all memories stood out one! As he bent close above her he caught for the first time in his life the delicate perfume of her dark rich hair and felt the thrill of its mystery.

"It's their little home, isn't it, Jim!" she exclaimed.

"I hope I can build as snug a nest for you some day, Nan!" he whispered gravely.

And when she stood silent and blushing, he made the final plunge. Looking straight into her dark eyes he had said:

"I love you, dear Nan!"

As she stood very still, looking down in silence, with a throb of fear and aching tenderness he dared to slip his arm around her waist and kiss the trembling lips. And then he noticed for the first time a deep red strawberry stain in the corner of her mouth. In spite of her struggles he laughingly insisted on kissing it away—a fact which led to his first revelation of her character—could he ever forget the glory and wonder of it! She had seized his arms, gasping for breath.

"Don't—don't, Jim—I can't stand that any more!" And then as a dreamy smile stole into her face she suddenly threw her own arms around his neck in passionate tenderness, returning with interest every kiss he had taken—

"Straw—berries!"

The man looked up and drawled his familiar cry.

"Yes—Yes!" he shouted. "Two boxes. Put them on the stoop—and keep the change!"

He threw the man a silver dollar, and the white teeth of the Italian signalled a smile of thanks as he bowed low, lifting his dirty cap in acknowledgment.

Nor was Nan's beauty merely a memory, it was the living presence, the source of the joy that filled his soul to overflowing to-day, for she had grown more beautiful than ever since her mother had moved to New York.

He had always believed that the real reason in the back of Mrs. Primrose's shallow head for this move to the North had been the determination to break his engagement and make a more brilliant marriage for Nan. And so when they left he followed.

The mother had always professed for him unbounded loyalty and admiration. But he had never been deceived. He knew that Mrs. Primrose lied as she breathed—politely, but continuously—by her involuntary muscles. Day and night since they had reached New York she had schemed for Nan. She had joined every society, club, and coterie into which she could buy, push, or manoeuvre her way. She had used her Revolutionary

ancestry and high social standing in the old South as the entering wedge and had finally succeeded in forcing her way into at least one charmed circle of the rich and powerful through the Daughters of the American Revolution.

She had leased a house in the fashionable neighbourhood of Gramercy Park, and to meet the extraordinary expense, began a careful and systematic search for rich young men to whom she could let two floors. Stuart had seen through her scheme at once—especially as she had insisted with increasing protestations of love that the engagement be kept a secret until they were ready to marry.

He was sure in his heart that Nan had never joined in those plans of her mother, though he had wished that she might have shown a little more strength in resisting them. He trusted her implicitly, and yet she was so beautiful he couldn't see how any man with red blood in his veins could resist her. And he had spent two miserable years. Every time her mother had come near, purring and smiling, he had always expected to collide with a rival as he went out the door.

Well, he was going to win at last, and the world was full of music! He had the biggest surprise of life in store for Nan—something no true woman's heart could resist. He had succeeded after incredible difficulties in secretly building a cottage by the sea in Brooklyn. Its lawn sloped to the water's edge, and a trim boat lay nodding at the dock. He had been out of town two weeks—ostensibly on law business in Baltimore—in fact he had spent the time putting the finishing touches on this home. He had planted hedges, fruit trees, vines and flowers, and covered every bare inch of soil with fresh green sod. Neither Mrs. Primrose nor Nan had the faintest suspicion of what he had been doing. He had written several letters to Nan and a friend had mailed them in Baltimore.

To-morrow he would lead his sweetheart into this holy of holies of Life—the home Love had built. He could see now the smile of tenderness break over her proud face as he should hand her the keys and ask her to fix the wedding day.

No matter on what his eye rested, he could see only Beauty, Glory, Sunlight!

An assortment of idlers, tramps, and thieves had drifted into the Square and crowded its seats. A drunken woman, her slouchy black dress bedraggled and drenched from the rain, lurched across the walk, dropped on a bench and sat muttering curses at a carriage on the north side. He had often looked at those flashing windows in the millionaire's row beside Fifth Avenue and then at the grim figures of the human wolves and reptiles that crawled into the Square from below Fourth Street, and wondered what might happen if they should really meet. But to-day he gazed with unseeing eyes. There was on all the earth no poverty, no crime, no shame, no despair, no pain, no conflict. The splendour of the sunset was in his soul and the world was athrob with joy.

His reveries were broken by a timid knock on the door and a faint call:

"Jim!"

"Come in!" he cried.

"You're not a bit glad to see me," the soft voice said. "I've been standing out there for ages!"

"Forgive me, Sunshine, I must have been dreaming," Stuart pleaded, leaping from his seat and seizing her hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you!"

"Then, don't call me that name again," she pouted.

"Why not?"

"Because it's undignified. All nicknames are."

"But isn't it beautiful?"

"It would be if my hair wasn't red and I didn't have freckles and was older," she protested, looking away to hide her emotion.

"But your hair isn't quite red. It's just the colour of the gold in honeycomb," he answered, gently touching her dishevelled locks—"besides, those few little freckles are becoming on your pink and white skin—and you are nearly fifteen."

"Well, my hair is red enough to make me think you're teasing when you call me Sunshine," she replied demurely.

"Then I won't call you that any more. I'll just say, little pal—how's that?"

"That's better!" she said with a smile and sigh.

"Oh, Jim, I've been so dreadfully lonely since you were away! Where did you go? And why did you stay so long? And why didn't you write me more than one little letter? And why didn't you answer the one I wrote in reply?—You know I'm almost an orphan anyhow. Papa spends nearly all his time at the factory, the drug store, the dispensary, and visiting his patients. I declare, Jim, I'll die if you go away again. I just can't stand it." She dropped at last into a chair exhausted.

Stuart smilingly took her hand:

"Lonely, Miss Chatterbox—when that big father of yours worships the very ground you walk on!"

"Yes, I know he does, Jim, and I love him, too, but you've no idea how dreadfully still the house is when you are gone. Oh, say! I'll tell you what I want—tell me you'll do what I ask—promise me! Say you will!"

"What is it?"

"I want you to be a real boarder, and eat with us! And when Papa's gone, I'll sit at the head of the table, smile and pour your tea. You'll do it, won't you? Say yes—of course you will!"

"But, my dear child, your father don't take boarders——"

"But he will if I ask him. I'll beg and tease him till he gives in."

"Oh, I couldn't think of letting you put him to all that trouble."

"But it wouldn't be any trouble. You see I'd keep house for you!"

"That would be very nice, dear, but I'm sure your father would draw the line at a real boarder. I'd never have gotten this beautiful room with that big old-fashioned open fireplace in your home if it hadn't happened that our fathers fought each other in the war, and became friends one day on a big battle-field. You see, my father took such a liking to yours that I came straight to find him when I reached this big town. It's been a second home to me."

"Be our boarder and I'll make it a real home for you, Jim!" she pleaded.

"Ah!—you'll be making a real home some day for one of those boys I saw at your birthday party—the tall dark one I think?"

"No. He doesn't measure up to my standard."

"What ails him?"

"He's a coward. My hero must be brave—for I'm timid."

"Then it will be that fat blond fellow with a jolly laugh?"

"No, he's a fibber. My Prince, when he comes, must be truthful. It's so hard for me always to tell the truth."

"Then it will be that dreamy looking one of fifteen you danced with twice?"

"No, he's too frail. My hero must be strong—for I am weak. And he must have a big, noble ideal of life; for mine is very small—just a little home nest, and a baby, and the love of one man!"

Stuart looked at her intently while a mist gathered in his eyes:

"I'm not sure about that being such a very small ideal, girlie!"

"But oh, my, I've forgotten what I came running home for! Papa sent me to ask you to please come down to the factory right away. He wants to see you on a very important matter. It must be awfully important. He looked so worried. I don't think I ever saw him worried before."

"I'll go at once," Stuart said, closing the window and blowing a kiss to the girl as he hurried down the stairs.

He strode rapidly across town toward the Bowery, through Fourth Street, wondering what could have happened to break the accustomed good humour of the doctor.

"Worry's something so utterly foreign to his character," the young lawyer mused.

The doctor had long since retired from the practise of medicine as a profession, and only used it now as his means of ministering to the wants of his neighbours. His neighbours were a large tribe, however, scattered all the way from the cellars and dives

of Water Street to the shanties and goat ranges of the Upper Harlem. Stuart had never met a man so full of contagious health. He was a born physician. There was healing in the touch of his big hand. Healing light streamed from his brown eyes, and his iron-gray beard sparkled with it. His presence in a sick-room seemed to fill it with waves of life, and his influence over the patients to whom he ministered was little short of hypnotic.

"Christian Science is no new doctrine, my boy," he had said one day in answer to a question about the new cult.

"I thought it was," Stuart answered in surprise.

"No. All successful physicians practise Christian Science. The doctor must heal first the mind. I can kill a man with an idea. So often I have cured him with an idea. If I can succeed with ideas, I do so. If there's no mind to work on, why then I use pills."

The young man stopped impatiently at Broadway, unable to cross. A little girl of ten, pale and weak and underfed, staggering under a load of clothing from a sweatshop on the East Side, had been knocked down trying to cross the street to deliver her burden to a Broadway clothier. A long line of cars stood blocked for a quarter of a mile, every car packed with human freight, every seat filled, every inch of standing room jammed with men and women holding to straps. Tired office boys even clung to the rear guards at the risk of death from a sudden collision with the car behind.

They were always crowded so at this hour. And yet Stuart recalled with a curious touch of irony the fate of the indomitable old man, Jake Sharp, who had fought for years to force this franchise for a public necessity through the city government. His reward was a suit of stripes, shame, dishonour, death. No one knew, or cared, or remembered it now. A new set of corrupt law makers took the place of the old ones, their palms still itching for money, money, money, always more money.

"And men who seek to serve the people must grease their itching palms or make way for those who will!" he muttered, fighting his way across. "A tough town—this, for a young lawyer with ideals. I wonder how long I'll hold out?"

Stuart found the doctor standing at the door of his factory, shaking hands and chatting with his employees as they emerged from the building at the close of a day's work. A plain old-fashioned brick structure just off the Bowery was this factory, and across the front ran a weatherbeaten sign which had not been changed for more than fifty years:

"HENRY WOODMAN, MANUFACTURING
CHEMIST"

The doctor's father had established the business fifty-two years ago, and the son, who bore the father's name, had succeeded to its management on his death, which occurred just after the return of the younger man with his victorious regiment from their last campaign with Grant before Petersburg and Appomattox.

He had given up the practise of medicine after the war, and devoted himself to the business of which his father had been justly proud. The house of Henry Woodman had been a pioneer in the establishing of a trade in pure drugs. In the time of the elder Woodman, adulteration and humbug were the rule, not the exception, in the business.

Woodman's stalwart figure towered in the doorway above his employees as they passed into the street. For every man, boy, and girl he had a nod, a smile, or a pleasant word. It was plain to see that the employer in this case had made his business the way to the hearts of the people who served him.

He took Stuart's hand in his big crushing grip and whispered:

"Have you any engagement this evening?"

Stuart smiled and hesitated.

"A girl—I see!" laughed the doctor. "Well, I'll get through by nine o'clock. You can give me the three hours till then? It's a matter of importance, and I want your advice."

"My advice—you!" Stuart exclaimed.

"Yes. You're the brightest young lawyer I know in town. I've gotten along without lawyers so far, but I guess I'm in for it now. You can come with me?"

"Of course," Stuart answered hurriedly. "Forgive my apparent hesitation, doctor. I was just surprised at your worry. What's the matter?"

The older man was silent a moment and then slowly said:

"I'll tell you later. I wish to show you something before I ask your advice on a question

of law; we must hurry. We will finish by nine and you will be a little late for dinner. But if she loves you, you can telephone and she will wait. It will be all right?"

Stuart coloured.

"Of course, it will be all right—besides, she doesn't know yet that I've returned."

The doctor handed the young lawyer a letter which he opened and read hastily.

NO. 60 GRAMERCY PARK.

TO DR. HENRY WOODMAN,

Dear Sir: I must have an answer to the proposition of the American Chemical Company before noon to-morrow. After that hour the matter will be definitely closed.

JNO. C. CALHOUN BIVENS.

April 2, 1898.

Still looking at the letter he asked:

"What does it mean?"

"An ultimatum from the Chemical Trust. I'll explain to you when you've seen something of my work to-night. The first hour I want you to put in with me at the dispensary."

Stuart's eye rested on the embossed heading of the letter, "No. 60 Gramercy Park," and he slowly crushed the paper. It was the Primrose house, Nan's home! Her mother had succeeded.

Bivens, the new sensation in high finance, she had established as her star boarder in his absence! Bivens, his schoolmate at college—Bivens, the little razorback scion of poor white trash from the South who had suddenly become a millionaire!

His blood boiled with rage. He could see the soft, cat-like movements of Mrs. Primrose and hear her purring while she spun the web to entangle him with Nan. As he turned and followed the doctor, he laughed with sudden fierce determination.

CHAPTER II

THINGS BEYOND PRICE

The dispensary was Woodman's hobby. The old-fashioned drug store stood on a corner of the Bowery, and in the rear extension which opened on the side street, he had established what he had laughingly called his "Life Line," a free dispensary where any man needing medicine or a doctor's advice could have it without charge if unable to pay.

For ten years he had maintained the work at his own expense, out of the profits of his store. The happiest hours of his life he had spent here ministering to the wants of his neighbours. He had come to be more than consulting physician at the dispensary. He had become the friend and counsellor of thousands.

The waiting room was crowded, and the line extended into the street. On the doctor's entrance the shadows suddenly lifted. Men and women smiled and called his name. He waved a cheerful salutation and hurried to his place beside the assistant.

For two hours Stuart saw him minister with patience and skill to the friendless and the poor. For each a cheerful word, and the warm grasp of his big hand with the prescription. The young lawyer watched with curious interest the quickened step with which each one left. The medicine had begun to work before the prescription was filled. Waves of healing from a beautiful spirit had entered the soul, and drooping heads were suddenly raised.

When the last applicant had gone, Stuart turned to the doctor:

"And what is the proposition which the distinguished young head of the Chemical Trust has made you?"

"That I sell my business to them at their own valuation and come into the Trust—or get off the earth."

"And you wish my advice?"

"Yes."

"What figure did he name?"

"More than its cash value."

"Then you will accept, of course?"

"I would if there were not some things that can't be reckoned in terms of dollars and cents. If I take stock in the American Chemical Company I am a party to their methods, an heir to their frauds."

"Isn't fraud a rather harsh word, Doctor?"

"No. It's the truth."

Stuart smiled good-naturedly.

"Yet isn't the old régime of the small manufacturer and the retailer doomed? Isn't combination the new order of modern life? Will it pay you to fight a losing battle?"

"The man who fights for the right can't lose."

"Unless they fight trusts!" Stuart said smilingly. "Bivens is not a man of broad culture, but he is a very smooth young gentleman——"

"He's a contemptible little scamp!" snapped the older man. "When I took him into my drug store six years ago, he didn't have a change of clothes. Now he's a millionaire. How did he get it? He stole a formula I had used to relieve nervous headaches, mixed it in water with a little poisonous colouring matter, pushed it into the soda-fountain trade, made his first half-million, organized the American Chemical Company and blossomed into a magnate. And now this little soda-fountain pip threatens me with ruin unless I join his gang and help him rob my neighbours. It happens that I like my neighbours. And the more I see of this city, the more thrilling its life becomes, the more wonderful its opportunities. Opportunity means one thing to me—quite another to Bivens. The world he lives in is a small one. I live in God's big world. I belong to no class. I know them all from the lonely multimillionaire on Murray Hill to his equally lonely brother thief who crawls into his lair by the river. And I don't envy one more than another. My business is to heal the sick, not merely to make money. Thousands of children die at my very door every summer who could be saved by a single prescription if they could get it. That's the thought that grips me when I begin to figure the profits in this trade. I'm making a fair living. I don't want any more out of my neighbours. I've shown you some of them to-night."

"I'll never forget them," Stuart broke in.

"We used to cry over Uncle Tom's woes," the doctor continued. "And yet there are more than five million white people in America to-day who are the slaves of poverty, cruel and pitiless, who haven't enough clothes to keep warm, enough food to eat, and are utterly helpless and forsaken in illness. The black slave always had food and shelter, clothes and medicine. My business is to heal the sick—mind you! Shall I give it up to exploit them?"

"But could you not use your greater wealth for greater good if you joined the trust?" the lawyer asked.

"No. What we need to-day is not merely more money given to charity. We need more heart and soul, manhood and womanhood, given in heroic service. We need leaders whose voice shall rouse the conscience of the nation that Justice shall be done."

"But the point is, Doctor, are you sure that you are on the side of Justice in this big business battle that's now on between competition and combination?" asked the younger man, quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that your building over there has an honourable history, but it's old, a little shabby, and, judged by the standards of the new steel structures of the Trust that are rising over the city, out-of-date. Won't they make drugs more economically than you do and drive you to the wall at last? Isn't this new law of coöperation the law of progress—in brief, the law of God?"

"That remains to be proven. I don't believe it."

"Well, I do, and I think that if you fight, it will be against the stars in their courses——"

"I'm going to fight," was the firm response.

"And you wanted my advice," Stuart laughed.

The doctor smiled at his own inconsistency.

"Well, I know I'm right, and I wished you to back me up. The law is on my side, isn't it?"

"The written law, yes. But you are facing a bigger question than one of statutory law."

"So I am, boy, so I am! That's why I gave you a glimpse to-night of the world in which I live and work and dream."

"Bivens has put up to you a cold-blooded business proposition——"

"Exactly. And there are things that can't be bought and sold. I am one of them!" The stalwart figure rose in simple dignity, and there was a deep tremor in his voice as he paused.

"But I'm keeping you. It's nine o'clock—and somebody's waiting—eh, boy?"

"Yes," Stuart answered apologetically. "I'm afraid I've not been of much use to you to-night."

The doctor bent closer, smiling:

"I understand—of course! The angels are singing in your heart this evening the old song of life that always makes the world new and young and beautiful. Over all ugliness the veil of the mystery of Love! The only real things to-night for you—the throb of triumph within your heart, the hovering presence of a woman's face, the tenderness of her eyes, the tangled light in her hair, the smile on her lips, the thrill of her voice, the pride of her step, the glory of her form——"

"Yes," Stuart echoed with elation.

"And yet—it couldn't be measured in terms of barter and sale—could it?" The doctor gripped his hand tenderly in parting.

The smile died from the younger man's face and his answer was scarcely audible:

"No!"

CHAPTER III

A LOVERS' QUARREL

It was half past ten before Stuart reached Gramercy Park. The wind had shifted to the southeast and a cold, drizzling rain, mixed with fog enveloped the city. Somehow the chill found his heart. The windows of Nan's room were dark. For the first time in his life he had called and found her out. He rang the door-bell in a stupor of disappointment. For just a moment the sense of disaster was so complete it was ridiculous.

A maid answered at last and ushered him into the dimly lighted parlour.

"Miss Nan is at home, Berta?" he asked eagerly.

The little Danish maid smiled knowingly:

"Na, but Meesis Primrose——"

With a groan Stuart sank to a chair. The maid turned up the lights and left the room. He looked about with astonishment. Things had been happening with a vengeance during his absence. The entire house had been redecorated. An oriental rug of dazzling medallion pattern was on the newly polished floor. Instead of the set of Chippendale mahogany the Primroses had brought from the South, a complete outfit of stately gilded stuff filled the room, and heavy draperies to match hung from the tall windows and folding doors.

On the table in the corner stood a vase filled with gorgeous red roses. The air was heavy with their perfume. It made him sick. The mother's velvet hand he saw at once.

Of course she had not borrowed the money from Bivens. She was too shrewd for that. But she had borrowed it beyond a doubt, and she had evidently gone the limit of her credit without a moment's hesitation. He wondered how far she had gotten with Bivens. Could it be possible that Nan was with him to-night? No—preposterous! He heard the rustle of Mrs. Primrose's dress and saw the smile of treacherous joy slowly working into position on her plausible face before she entered the room.

She greeted him with unusual effusion:

"Oh, Jim, this is such a glorious surprise! Nan didn't expect you till morning and she will be heartbroken to have missed you even for a half hour. My dear, dear boy, you have no idea how lonely both of us have been without you the past two weeks."

"You missed me too, Mrs. Primrose?"

"Of course, I missed you, Jim! You've come to be like one of us."

She leaned close and purred the last sentence in the softest feline accents. Stuart felt his nerves quiver as the imaginary claws sank into his flesh, but he smiled back his grateful answer.

"It's so nice of you to say that."

"What's more natural? You know I've always loved you next to Nan."

She spoke with such fervour that Stuart shivered. It was sinister. She evidently felt sure of his ruin. He was too much dazed to find a reply, and she went on earnestly:

"We needed you here so much to help us fix up. We've had the good luck to rent our second floor to a young millionaire——"

"Mr. Bivens, yes——"

"Why, how did you know?" she asked with a start.

"Dr. Woodman has just received an important letter from him dated here, and he asked my advice about it."

"Oh——"

"Where's Nan?" Stuart asked, with sudden anger in spite of his effort to keep cool.

"Why, she's giving a little box party at the theatre to-night——"

"And our mutual friend, Mr. John C. Calhoun Bivens, is presiding?"

"Why, Jim, how could you be so absurd," she protested indignantly. "I've been saving money for a month to give Nan this chance to return some courtesies she has received from rich friends. I need Mr. Bivens's money to pay the rent of this big house. But any attention on his part to Nan would be disgusting to me beyond measure."

"Yet he's the sensation in high finance just now," Stuart said, with an unconscious sneer. "They say he's destined to become a multi-millionaire."

"Come, come, Jim, it's not like you to be nasty to me. You know as well as I do his origin in North Carolina. His people are the veriest trash. He was at college with you——"

"And how did you know that?"

"Not from you, of course. You've never mentioned his name in your life. He told me."

"Oh, Bivens told you!"

"Yes, when I asked him if he knew you he told me with a touch of genuine pride that you were friends. He thinks you are going to be the greatest lawyer in New York. And I told him we'd known that for a long time."

Stuart turned his head to hide a smile.

"But of course he's not in Nan's social set. I told her the day he came that we would treat him politely but draw the line strictly on any efforts he may make to pass the limits of acquaintance. The men who associate with Nan must belong to her father's world—to your world, Jim—the world of good breeding and culture. I've dinned this into Nan's ears from babyhood. You know yourself it was the greatest joy of my life the day she told me of your love."

By a supreme effort Stuart suppressed a laugh and answered seriously:

"Your approval has always been an inspiration to me, Mrs. Primrose. I hope to prove

myself worthy of it."

A carriage stopped at the door.

"There's Nan now!" the mother exclaimed, rising to go. "I'll leave you to surprise her, Jim."

Stuart heard the carriage door slam, and in a moment the girl he loved stood in the hall, the joy of an evening's perfect happiness shining in her great dark eyes. He watched her a moment, unobserved, as she laid aside her opera cloak and stood before the big mirror proudly and calmly surveying her figure.

Never had her beauty seemed to him so dazzling. The cream-coloured evening gown fitted her to perfection. She lifted her bare arms and touched an old silver brooch that gleamed in the mass of black hair, and smiled at the picture she saw reflected. The smile was one of conscious power. The corners of the full sensuous lips curved the slightest bit as the smile faded and a gleam of something like cruelty flashed from the depths of her eyes, as her head lifted. She turned sidewise to catch the full effect of the shining bare neck and shoulders, and stood an instant with her beautiful bosom rising and falling with conscious pride.

Stuart, unable to wait longer, was about to spring to her side when she caught the flash of his laughing face in the mirror and turned.

"Oh! you rascal! To surprise me like this!" she cried, with joyous laughter.

"In all your pride and vanity!"

"Well, need I apologize to-night, sir?" she asked, with a shrug of her beautiful shoulders.

"No. You're glorious. I don't blame you."

She seized both his hands, still laughing.

"You know how it is yourself? You do the same thing when your door is locked—now don't you?"

"Of course."

"You can't help being a little vain, Jim, any more than I can. You know you're a stunning-looking fellow. These Yankee girls all love you at first sight—the tall, straight, sinewy figure, strong and swift in every movement, the finely chiselled face, the deep-set, dark brown eyes under their heavy brows, that big masterful jaw and firm mouth —"

Stuart suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her into silence.

"Hush, Nan. I don't like the way you say that!"

"Why? Am I too modest?"

"No, too deliberate and coldly mistress of yourself. I wish you loved me a little more tumultuously, as I do you."

"Well, let me whisper then that your return to-night has made a perfect ending to a perfect day. Oh, Jim, I've been so happy to-night! Seated in that big stage box, I felt that I was somebody. This is the first really decent dress I've ever had in my life."

"You were just as beautiful in that blue cotton one, the day I first kissed you, Nan."

"I know you thought so, Jim. But the world wouldn't have said it——"

"And to-night?"

"They agreed with you. I could see it in the craning necks, the glances, the whispered comments, and the stare of mannerless men."

"And you were proud and happy!"

"Proud for your sake, Jim,—yes—and happy in your love."

Stuart's face clouded and he turned away, startled for the first time by a strange similarity in the tone of Nan's voice to her mother's.

The painful impression was suddenly broken by a quick touch of Nan's hand on his arm.

"Oh, Jim, I'm glad you came a day earlier. I've something to tell you, something wonderful—something that will bring our happiness near——" Her voice sank to the

tenderest accents.

"What on earth——"

"You know Mr. Bivens—John C. Calhoun Bivens?"

"Yes," Stuart answered evenly, controlling himself with an effort.

"Well, he has taken our second floor, I had a long talk with him last week."

"Indeed!"

"But of course, goosie, it was business—all business. By the merest accident I learned that his big Trust, the American Chemical Company, needs another lawyer. They pay an enormous salary with all sorts of chances to get rich. They are making millions on millions. I told him that you were the very man for the place and that you were going to be the greatest lawyer in New York. Imagine my joy—when he not only agreed with me, but said he would double the salary if you would accept it. He thought you wouldn't, merely because you lived in the house of old Woodman with whom the Company may have a fight. I told him it was nonsense—that I knew you would accept. Of course, Jim, dear, I couldn't tell him why—I couldn't tell him what it meant to me, though I felt like screaming it in his face. You'll accept, of course?"

"Emphatically no!"

"You can't be so absurd!"

"Yes I can."

"Why?"

Stuart looked away in moody silence.

"Have you been receiving the attentions of this distinguished young millionaire, Nan?"

"I've been cultivating him."

"Cultivating?"

"Yes, for your sake only—you big, handsome, foolish, jealous boy! You can't be in earnest when you say that you will refuse such an offer?"

"I am in earnest," was the grim reply.

"But why, why—why?"

"First, because I will not become the hireling of a corporation, to say nothing of this particular one headed by Mr. Bivens."

"Nonsense, Jim. You wouldn't be a hireling. You would lay the law down for them to follow."

"No. A modern corporation has no soul, and the man who serves this master must sell both body and soul for the wages he receives. I am a lawyer of the old school. My work is illumined by imagination. My business is to enforce justice in the relations of men."

"But some of the greatest lawyers in America are corporation attorneys——"

"All the reason more why I should keep clean. Lawyers once constituted our aristocracy of brain and culture."

"But, Jim, you could prevent injustice by your will and ability!"

"Nonsense, Nan. It's the kind of work you have to do. The very nature of it excludes an ideal. Its only standard is gold—hard, ringing metallic gold! I can't prostitute my talents to a work I don't believe in. A man's work is a revelation of what he is. And what he is will depend at last on what he does."

A frown of impatience had steadily grown in the girl's face and the curves of her lips hardened with sudden determination.

"But you mean to be rich and powerful, Jim?"

"If it comes with the growth of manhood and character, yes. But I will not degrade myself with work I hate, or take orders from men I despise. The world is already full of such slaves. I mean to make one less, not one more of them."

"You know I don't wish you to be degraded," Nan broke in, earnestly. "I want you to be great."

"Then, don't forget, sweetheart, that it's the great man who can be content now with a fair share of money. It requires more stamina, more character, more manhood to live a sane, decent life in this town to-day than it does to become a millionaire."

"But I want you to be ambitious, Jim!" the girl exclaimed, passionately.

"I am ambitious—for big things—the biggest things. For that reason it will take more than a child's rattle to satisfy me, though it's made of gold. I must have the real thing—the thing inside. I hope to have the applause of the world, but the thing I must have is the approval of my better self—can't you understand, Nan?"

Stuart paused and laid his hand gently on the girl's white round arm, and she turned with a start.

"I didn't hear your last sentence, Jim——"

"Of what were you thinking?"

"Of what a woman is always thinking. Consciously or unconsciously, of my home—whether it shall be a hovel or a palace."

"It all depends on whether Love is the builder——"

"It all depends on the man I marry," was the laughing answer. "I've always dreamed of you as a man of wealth and power. Your splendid talents mean this. When you came to New York I was more sure of you than ever. You've simply got to make money, Jim! Nothing else counts in the world to-day. I hate poverty—I fear it—I loathe it! Money is the badge of success, the symbol of power. Nothing else counts."

"And yet," the lover said, drawing closer, "I hold the touch of your little finger of greater value than all the gold on the earth or beneath it."

"Don't interrupt me, please, with irrelevant remarks," Nan cried, laughing in spite of herself. "Seriously, Jim—you must listen to me. I'm in dead earnest. There's no virtue in riding behind a donkey if you can own a carriage. There can be no virtue in shivering in a thin dress if you can wear furs. Even the saints all dream of a Heaven with streets of gold, chariots to ride in, and gleaming banquet halls! I'm just a practical saint, Jim. I want mine here and now. You must have money, if for no other reason, because I wish it!"

"Even if I enter a career of crime with Bivens as my master?"

"Come! Mr. Bivens is a devout member of the church. And you know that he's in dead earnest——"

"About getting to Heaven? Of course. That's simply his insurance policy against fire in the next world."

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, Jim. The possession of money is not a crime."

"No. Crime, Nan, is in the heart and its seed always springs from the soul. Its roots must always strike one soil to live—*the selfish will to have what one wants regardless of the cost to others.*"

"Is it a crime," Nan asked, passionately, "to wish to live a life that's worth the struggle? You must take conditions as you find them."

"That's just it. I won't. I'd rather create new conditions and mould life. I'd rather lead, organize and inspire, than follow. I refuse to become a mere money-grubber, because I'm in love with Life."

"And you would be willing," the girl said dreamily, "to sacrifice the happiness of all those you love and all who love you to follow this whim?"

"Sacrifice your happiness? Why, the one purpose of my life is to make you happy——"

"Well, I can't be happy in poverty. The man I love must be rich. Oh, Jim, you shall be! Wealth is the only road now from the vulgar crowd—the only way to climb on top."

"But, suppose I don't wish to climb on the top of people?"

"You can't be such a fool!"

"But suppose I am? Money is the most obvious sign of success in a new crude world. Ours is no longer new, no longer crude or isolated. True civilization has always placed manhood above money. The only names in our history worth remembering—are there, because they did something else than make money. Washington was the richest man in America in his day. But nobody remembers this—why? Because it is of no importance.

The men you call great would simply reduce life to the terms of a commercial dividend. Yet nothing pays that's really worth while."

"Jim, are you crazy?"

"It's true, dear. The lover who watches by the side of a stricken loved one and loses time and money—is he crazy? My father gave up his law practice to bend over my mother's bedside for six months. He was a giant in mind and body—she a poor little, broken, withered invalid. He lost money and clients and never regained them. Did it pay? Does anything that's born of love pay? Surely not children. I was always a dead expense. The biggest fee I ever received as a lawyer in New York was a shout of joy from a poor woman, whose boy I freed from a false charge of crime. She fell sobbing before me and actually kissed my feet."

"Oh, Jim, why can't you be practical? Why are you not willing to fight for a fortune—as other men——"

"Because, dear," he answered quickly and tenderly, "we haven't time—you and I. Life is too short. Love is too sweet. The fields are too green. The birds sing too sweetly. The treasures of earth are already mine, for Love has given me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to feel. Perhaps I'm just a little crazy by the standard of New York, but, dear, I thought you were my mate! Have you forgotten our old day dreams in the fields at home?"

"I've forgotten everything," she answered bitterly, "except that you are failing me when put to the first test. And it would be such a little thing for you to do."

"At the price of my self-respect—and you call this a little thing—great God!"

Nan rose with a sudden gesture of impatience.

"You refuse absolutely to consider this generous offer?"

"Absolutely."

"And you are not willing to let these romantic fancies wait until you've made your fortune?"

The girl spoke with cold deliberation.

"How can I wait to live? I'm twenty-six. I'll never have those glorious days of my young manhood again. My ears will never be so keen again or eyes so clear again. What is the use of years of preparation to live, if at last you don't know how?"

"And you are willing that the woman you love shall live in poverty while her more fortunate sisters laugh and dance in luxury?"

"The one joy of my life will be to gratify every reasonable wish of your body and soul."

"Yet the first reasonable wish I express, you refuse to consider."

"It would be suicide——"

"Oh, Jim, don't talk like a fool! Mr. Bivens says he would make you a millionaire in five years."

The blood suddenly rushed to Stuart's face, and the square jaws came together with a snap.

"That's very kind of Mr. Bivens, I'm sure. When I need his patronage, I'll take my place in line with other henchmen and ask for it. At present I'm paddling my own canoe."

Nan suddenly extended her hand.

"Good-night."

He attempted to draw her into his arms.

"Not like that, Nan."

She repulsed him and repeated her cold dismissal:

"Good-night."

"Nan, dear," he pleaded, "we've never parted in anger before. Of all the hours of my life this is one in which I—I—least dreamed of such a thing."

Without a word, she turned toward the stairs.

"Nan!" he called tenderly.

The proud white figure slowly mounted the first step. He seized his hat and coat and grasped the door, fumbling at the knob in rage.

A dress rustled and he turned, confronting Nan. Her face was scarlet and two tears were creeping down her cheeks. With a sob she threw herself into his arms.

"Forgive me, Jim!"

"Forgive me, dear, if I've seemed unreasonable," was the low answer.

"But you will think it over, won't you? just for my sake—just because I ask it—won't you?"

"Just because you ask it—yes, I will, dearest!"

He kissed her tenderly and walked home with a great sickening fear slowly creeping into his heart.

CHAPTER IV

MR. BIVENS CALLS

Stuart waked next morning with a sense of hopeless depression. He had intended to make an engagement with Nan to visit the little home. It was impossible to suggest it in the mood he had found her. What strange madness had come over the woman he loved? They had never discussed money before. Bivens was the only explanation.

He dressed himself mechanically and went down stairs. A letter was on the hall rack which had been sent by a messenger. He broke the seal with nervous haste. It was from Bivens asking him to call his office telephone at eleven o'clock.

He tore the note into tiny pieces, stepped into the parlour and threw them into the grate. He stood for a moment gazing into the glowing coals in brooding anger. Slowly he became conscious of music. Some one was playing an old-fashioned Southern melody, and the tenderest voice accompanied the piano. He walked to the door of the music-room.

It was Harriet.

As he listened, the frown died from his face and the anger melted out from his heart. The music ceased. Harriet looked up with a start.

"Oh, Jim, I didn't know you were there!"

"It was beautiful, little pal."

"Yes, I knew you'd like that piece. I heard you humming it one day. That's why I got it."

"What a sweet voice you have, child, so clear, so deep and rich and full of feeling. I didn't know you could sing."

"I didn't either until I tried."

"You must study music," he said, with enthusiasm.

The girl clapped her hands and leaped to her feet, exclaiming:

"Will you be proud of me, Jim, if I can sing?"

"Indeed I will," was the earnest answer.

The laughing eyes grew serious as she slowly said:

"Then, I'll do my level best. I'm off—good-bye."

With a wave of her hand she was gone, and Stuart hurried to his office, whistling the old tune she had just sung.

What curious, sensitive things—these souls of ours! An idea enters and blackens the sky, makes sick the body, kills hope and faith. The soft strains of an old piece of music steals into the darkened spirit, the shadows lift, the sun shines, the heart beats with life

and the world is new again.

On reaching his office on lower Broadway, Stuart rang Bivens's telephone, and the president of the American Chemical Company made an engagement to call at once.

Stuart would not have stooped to the trick of keeping his young millionaire visitor waiting, on imaginary business, but he was grateful for the timely call of a client who kept him in consultation for fifteen minutes while Bivens patiently waited his turn in the reception-room, his wealth and prestige all lost on the imperturbable office boy, who sat silently chewing gum and reading a serial.

The first view of Bivens was always unimpressive. He was short, thin, and looked almost frail at first glance. A second look gave the impression of wiry reserve force in his compact frame. His hair was jet black and thinning slightly on top which gave him the appearance of much greater age than he could really claim. His thin features were regular, and his face was covered with a thick black beard which he kept trimmed to a keen point on the chin. His most striking features were a high massive forehead, abnormally long for the size of his body, and a pair of piercing, bead-like black eyes. These eyes were seldom still, but when they rested on an object they fairly bored through it with their penetrating light.

He rarely spoke except to a purpose, and his manners were quiet, almost furtive. He had thus early in his career gained a nickname that was peculiarly significant in Wall Street. He was known as *The Weasel*.

His whole makeup, physical and mental, was curiously complex—a mixture of sobriety and greed, piety and cruelty, tenderness and indomitable will, simplicity of tastes with boundless ambition.

His friendship for Stuart and his deference to him personally and socially dated from their boyhood in North Carolina—and particularly from an incident which occurred in their college days. Bivens's father had been a notorious coward in the Confederate army and had at last deserted the service. A number of very funny stories about his actions in battle had become current everywhere. On Bivens's arrival at college, a particularly green freshman, Stuart had discovered a group of his classmates hazing him. They had forced the coward's son to mount a box and repeat to the crowd the funny stories about the "valour" of his father. The boy, scared half out of his wits, stood stammering and perspiring and choking with shame as he tried to obey his tormentors.

Stuart protested vigorously, and a fight ensued in which he was compelled to thrash the ring-leader and rescue the victim by force of arms. From that day Stuart was Bivens's beau-ideal of a gentleman. He had tolerated rather than enjoyed this friendship, but it was so genuine he couldn't ignore the little dark-eyed taciturn fellow who was destined to play so tremendous a rôle in his future life.

Bivens sat patiently waiting for the young lawyer, his black eyes gazing dreamily over the roofs of the houses. He was smoking a huge black cigar. He was always smoking. The brighter his eyes gleamed the harder he smoked until the fire-tipped tobacco seemed a spark from smouldering volcanoes somewhere below. The one overwhelming impression which Bivens's personality first gave was that he was made out of tobacco. His fingers were stained with nicotine, and his teeth yellow from it. He had smoked so fast and furiously the room was soon fog-bound. The boy looked up from his paper with a gasp and hastened inside to see if he could get rid of his obnoxious presence. In a moment he ushered out the client and showed Bivens into the office.

He shook hands quietly and took a seat beside Stuart's desk.

"Well?" said the lawyer at length.

"I've come to make you an important proposition, Jim," Bivens began slowly, while his restless eyes looked up at the ceiling, and he pulled at the point of his beard. "We need another attorney. The business of the company is increasing so rapidly our force can't handle it. I need a big man close to me. If you'll take the place I'll give you a salary that will ultimately be as big as the President gets in the White House. Twenty thousand to start with."

Stuart looked at his visitor curiously.

"Why do you want me, Cal? There are thousands of lawyers here who would jump at the chance. Many of them are better equipped for such work than I am."

"Because I know that you won't lie to me, you won't swindle or take advantage of me —"

"Why not?" Stuart asked with a smile. "Isn't that the game? Why shouldn't I learn the tricks?"

"Because it's not in you."

"I see. You want to capitalize my character and use me to ambush the other fellow?"

"That's one way to look at it—yes."

"But that's not the real reason you come to me to-day with this proposition—is it?"

"Not the only one. You know my friendship for you is genuine. You know there's not a man in New York for whom I'd do as much as I will for you if you'll let me. Isn't that true?"

"I believe it—yes. And yet—there must be another reason. What is it?"

"Does it matter? I've made you the offer. If the salary isn't enough, name your figure."

"You're not afraid of Woodman and wish to reach him through me?" Stuart continued, ignoring his last answer.

The ghost of a smile flitted around the shining little black eyes.

"Afraid?" he asked contemptuously. "I'm not even interested in him. The old fossil's a joke. He thinks he can stop the progress of the world to attend a case of measles in Mott Street."

The financier leisurely lifted his right hand, removed the cigar from his mouth, and struck the ashes lightly with his finger. Stuart noticed how small his hand, how delicately shaped, how smooth and careful its movements. Beyond a doubt it was the hand of an expert thief. And yet this man, by an accident of birth, was a devout member of the church and complied with the written laws of modern society.

Stuart was silent a moment, watching the dark masked face before him. At last he blurted out:

"Well, Cal, what's the real reason you make me this offer to-day?"

Bivens moved uneasily in his chair, fidgeted, hesitated and finally leaned close, speaking in a whisper:

"You can keep a little secret?"

"You ought to know that before making me such an offer."

"Yes. Yes, of course I know you will." Bivens paused and resumed his cigar. "The fact, is —Jim—I'm in love—"

Stuart cleared his throat to strangle an exclamation.

"In love?" he echoed in a tone of light banter.

"Hopelessly, desperately in love!"

"Then you need a minister, not a lawyer," Stuart said, with quiet sarcasm.

"It's no joke, old man," Bivens went on soberly. "It's the most serious thing I was ever up against. Fell in love at first sight."

"But where do I come into this affair?" Stuart interrupted, maintaining his self-control with an effort.

"Simple enough. The Primroses—"

"Oh, it's Miss Primrose?"

"Yes—Miss Nan. You see, they think the world of you. She said you grew up together in the same town. I was telling her about my business. I must have been bragging about what we were going to do. I was crazy, just looking at her. Her beauty made me drunk. I told her we needed a new attorney. She said you were the man. I told her I'd offer you the place. She seemed pleased. When I told her I was afraid you wouldn't take a place under my direction, she laughed at the idea—said she knew you would accept. And so you've got the whole truth now, Jim. You've got to accept, old man. I want to make her feel that her word is law with me. Don't you think that would please her?"

"It ought to please any woman," was the slow, thoughtful reply.

"Tell me, do you think I've got a chance with a girl like that? You know I've never gone with girls much. I'm timid and awkward. I don't know what to do or what to say. But my money will help, won't it?"

"Money always helps in this town, Cal."

"And it means so much to a woman too,—don't it?"

"Yes. Have you said anything to Miss Nan yet?"

"Lord, no! Haven't dared. Just get drunk looking at her every time I see her, but I couldn't open my mouth if I tried. I'm kinder shying up to the old lady to get her on my side. She seems awfully friendly. I think she likes me. Don't you think it a good plan to cultivate her?"

"By all means," was the dry reply.

"Say, for God's sake, Jim, help me. Take this attorneyship. It will please her and I'll make you rich. Come in with me and you'll never regret it. I know my folks were not your social equals in the old days down South. But you know as well as I do that money talks here. Have common sense. Look at things as they are. Come in with me and let's get at these Yankees. They left you and me cradles of poverty. They owe us something. Come in with me and we'll get it!"

There was no mistaking the genuineness of Bivens's feelings. Stuart knew that he felt deeply and sincerely every word that he uttered. The first rush of his anger had died away and he begun to realize the pathos of the little man's appeal. He forgot for the moment that he was a millionaire and had made his money by devious tricks with that smooth, delicately moulded hand. He only saw that Bivens, his old schoolmate, had unconsciously fallen into a trap. A word from him—the word he wished spoken, and the woman he loved would be lost. He had but to speak that word, accept the generous offer made in good faith, and every cloud between him and Nan would vanish! They could be married at once and the future was secure. All he had to do was to keep silent for the moment as to his real relations to Nan and compromise his sense of honour by accepting the wages of a man whose principles he despised. His decision was made without a moment's hesitation. It was yet the morning of life.

"I refuse the offer, Cal," he said firmly.

Bivens rose quickly and placed his smooth hand on his friend's.

"I won't take that answer now. Think it over. I'll see you again."

He turned and left the room before Stuart could reply.

The lawyer drew a photograph from his desk and looked at it, smiling tenderly.

"I wonder, Nan! I wonder!"

The smile slowly faded, and a frown clouded his brow. The lines of his mouth suddenly tightened.

"I'll settle it to-day," he said with decision, as he rose, took his hat and left for Gramercy Park.

CHAPTER V

AN ISSUE IS FORCED

It was noon when Stuart reached the Primrose house and Nan was again out. He received the announcement from her mother with a feeling of rage he could ill conceal.

"Where is she? I seem never to be able to find her at home."

"Now, don't be absurd, Jim. You know she would have broken any engagement to see you, had she known you were going to call to-day. She has only gone to the dressmaker's."

"How long will she be there?"

"Until four."

"Four hours at a dressmaker's——"

"And then she's going to the hair dresser's."

"And then?"

"She has an engagement for tea. I don't expect her home until seven. I'm awfully sorry."

"Of course, I understand, Mrs. Primrose," Stuart said with a light laugh, "I should have told her—but I didn't know until a few moments ago that I was coming."

"Nothing serious has happened, I hope?" she asked, with carefully modulated sympathy which said plainly that she hoped for the worst.

"No. Just say that I'll call after dinner."

"All right, Jim, dear," the mother purred. "I'll see that she's here if I have to lock the door."

Stuart smiled in spite of himself as he passed out murmuring:

"Thank you."

It was useless to try to work. His mind was in a tumult of passionate protest. He must have this thing out with Nan once for all. Their engagement must be announced immediately.

He went to the Players' Club and lunched alone in brooding silence. He tried to read and couldn't. He strolled out aimlessly and began to ramble without purpose. Somehow to-day everything on which his eye rested and every sound that struck his ear proclaimed the advent of the new power of which Bivens was the symbol—Bivens with his delicate, careful little hand, his bulging forehead, his dark keen eyes! An ice wagon dashed by. It belonged to the ice trust. A big coal cart blocked the sidewalk. The coal trust was one of the first. The street crossing at Broadway and Twenty-third Street was jammed with a string of delivery waggons from the department stores whose growth had crushed a hundred small trades. The clang of the cars proclaimed the Street Railway Merger and a skyscraper called "The Flatiron" was just raising its giant frame on the little triangle where a half-dozen old-fashioned buildings had stood for generations. Across Madison Square the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was tearing down a whole block, section by section, and a palace of white marble was slowly rearing its huge form. The passing of an era was plain. He could see the hand of the new mysterious power building a world before his very eyes. Strange he hadn't noticed it until Bivens's dark sneering face this morning, insolent in its conscious strength, had opened his eyes. What chance had his old friend Woodman against such forces?

Yet why should he resent them personally? He was young. The future was his—not the past. He didn't resent them. Of course not. What he did resent was the approach of the particular Juggernaut named John C. Calhoun Bivens toward the woman he loved. That Bivens should fall hopelessly and blindly in love with Nan at first sight was too stupefying to be grasped at once. She couldn't love such a man—and yet his millions and that slippery mother were a sinister combination. He congratulated himself that his interview with Bivens had put him in possession of a most important secret, and he would force the issue at once.

By evening he had thrown off his depression and met Nan with something of his old gaiety, to which she responded with a touch of coquetry.

"Tell me, Jim," she began with a smile of mischief in her eyes, "why you called at the remarkable hour of twelve noon, to-day? Am I becoming so resistless that work no longer has any charms? You must have something very important to say?" Her eyes danced with the consciousness of her advantage.

"Yes. I have, Nan," he answered soberly, taking her hand. "I want a public announcement of our engagement in to-morrow morning's papers."

"Jim!"

"I mean it."

"But why? You know the one concession, the only one I have ever made to my mother's hostility to you, is that our engagement shall be kept a secret until we are ready to marry. We must play fair."

"I will, we are ready now."

Nan's voice broke into a ripple of laughter.

"Oh, are we?—I didn't know it."

"Yes, that's what I came to tell you," Stuart went on, catching her spirit of fun and pressing her hand. "I've arranged a little trip to the country to-morrow, and I'm going

to convince you before we return. You can go?"

"Of course, I'm open to conviction."

"And you consent to the announcement?"

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"No. You must convince me first. You've planned the trip for that purpose."

"Make the announcement to-night, dear! On my honour I promise to convince you to-morrow that we are ready. I've an argument that never fails—an argument no woman can resist."

"Not to-night, Jim," was the laughing reply.

"Can't you trust me, when I tell you that I've discovered something to-day that makes it necessary?"

The girl looked at him sharply.

"Now, I can't trust you at all! I've got to know the secret of your call this morning. What has happened since we parted last night?"

"I have seen Mr. Bivens."

Nan leaped to her feet, her face flushed, her voice ringing with triumph.

"And you did what I asked you—oh, you're a darling! Why did you tease me so last night? You accepted his offer?"

"You misunderstand, I didn't call on Bivens. He came to see me."

"And you refused! Oh, Jim, don't tell me you were so foolish!"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, dear, but I had to—that's all."

The girl dropped into her seat with a sigh, while he went on:

"My interview with Bivens led to a most important and embarrassing discovery."

"Embarrassing—what do you mean? He offered you the position?"

"Yes, and finally confessed that he did it wholly to please you."

Nan's figure suddenly straightened.

"Indeed! I'm glad to hear that my wishes find favour somewhere!"

"Bivens further confided in me the fact that he is hopelessly and desperately in love with you."

A flash of anger mantled Nan's cheeks.

"That will do, Jim," she said in quiet cold tones. "Your joke has gone far enough."

"Joke! Do you think I could joke on such a subject?"

A smile began to play about the corners of the full lips.

"You don't mean it—really?"

"Certainly. He told me so in the plainest sort of blunt English. And you mean to say that you have not suspected it?"

"I never dreamed he was so easy!" Still smiling dreamily Nan crossed her hands over her knees and studied the pattern in the rug, ignoring the presence of her lover.

"Then you underestimate your powers."

"Evidently."

Her eyes were laughing again mischievously.

"Let's not joke, Nan. It's too serious."

"Serious! I fail to see it."

"Can't you see that we must at once announce our engagement?"

The girl's lips curled with the faintest suggestion of sarcasm.

"I don't see it at all. You may be a good lawyer, but I fail to follow your logic."

Stuart rose with a gesture of anger.

"Come to the point, Nan. Let's not beat the devil around the stump any longer. You know as well as I do that you've been trying to flirt with this little insect——"

"Trying to flirt?"

"Yes."

"Trying? Don't you think I could if I wished without bungling the effort? What a poor opinion you hold of my talent."

"You know in your heart of hearts you despise Bivens."

"On the contrary, I vastly admire him. The man who can enter with his handicap this big heartless city and successfully smash the giants who oppose him is not an insect. I'd rather call him a hero. All women admire success."

"I see," Stuart replied with suppressed fury, "you enjoy your conquest."

"And why not?" she drawled, with lazy indifference.

"It's disgusting!"

Nan fixed her dark eyes on Stuart.

"How dare you use such a word to me?"

"Because it's true and you know it."

"True or false, you can't say it"—she rose deliberately—"you may go now!"

"Forgive me, dear," Stuart stammered in a queer muffled voice. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I was mad with jealousy."

"You may go," was the hard even answer.

"I can't go like this, dearest," he pleaded. "You must forgive me—you must! Look at me!"

She turned slowly, stared him full in the face for a moment without the quiver of an eyelid, her fine figure tense, erect, cold, as she quietly said:

"You are tiring me, Jim."

For an instant an impulse of overwhelming anger mastered him. He returned her look with one of concentrated rage and their eyes met in the first supreme clash of wills. For a moment he saw the world red, and caught in its glare something he had never seen in Nan before, a conscious cruelty and a joy in her power that was evil—a cruelty that could spring only from the deepest and most merciless self-worship. For the first time he saw a cold-blooded calculation behind her beautiful eyes, caught its accent in the richly modulated voice, and felt it in the smile which showed the white teeth—the smile of a woman who would pause at nothing to get what she wanted. The old savage impulse to strangle surged through his veins, and he was startled into the consciousness of his situation by the fierce grip of his finger nails in his fists clinched so tight they began to cut the flesh.

A blush of shame tinged his face as he tremblingly said:

"Please, dear, let's not part like this! I've suffered enough to-day. You're only teasing me. And I've acted like a fool. Say that you forgive me!"

"Our engagement is at an end, Mr. Stuart," was the quiet answer.

"Nan——"

Before he could recover from the shock or utter a protest, she opened the door and he had passed out into the night.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORGOTTEN MAN

The suddenness of his dismissal broke the strain under which Stuart had been labouring for hours. It was ridiculous. He began to laugh at the silliness of the whole thing—what an idiotic performance anyhow—these lovers' quarrels! He saw the comedy of it, ate a hearty supper, and went to bed firm in the conviction that he would see Nan again the next day.

But the morning came with a sense of growing uncertainty. It was raining. He would have enjoyed a storm, but it was just a drizzle with a penetrating dampness that found the marrow of his bones. He called a messenger and sent a note to Nan asking her to forget the ugly memory of the night before and fulfill her promise to go to the country when the rain ceased. If it continued to rain he would call at eight. He told the boy to wait for an answer. The messenger returned promptly and handed back his note unopened.

Of course she was bluffing. She knew she had the whip hand for the moment and meant to use it.

"Well, two can play this game," he muttered. "We'll see who wins!"

He turned to his work with grim resolution.

For two weeks the battle between pride and love raged in silence. Each day he rose with the hope of some sign from Nan, and each day hope died in a more desperate and sullen despair. At last he began to question the wisdom of his course. Should he not fight his battle at closer range? What if he were in reality engaged in a mortal combat with Bivens's millions for Nan's soul and body! The idea was too hideous to be thinkable. In his anger he had accused her of flirting with Bivens, but in his heart he didn't believe it. The personality of the little money-grubber made the idea preposterous. He was not only frail, insignificant, and unattractive physically, but he had personal habits which were offensive to Nan's feelings of refinement. His excessive use of tobacco was one thing he knew she could not tolerate. Tobacco was her pet aversion.

And yet the more he thought of the scene of their parting, the more sickening became the conviction that her anger at his use of an ugly word was merely a subterfuge to break their engagement. The perfidy and cruelty of such an act was too hideous for belief—yet if the thing were possible! He had left her to struggle alone with the first great temptation of life, and he began to feel that it was cowardly. He should have stood his ground and fought for his love.

He made up his mind to go at once and fight for his old place beside her on any terms she would grant. He seized his hat and opened the door. To his amazement Bivens was leisurely ascending the steps.

What on earth could he want? Was he making a social call without announcement, as was the habit of his village days in the South? At this moment Bivens was the last man he wished to encounter, yet a meeting seemed inevitable. He stepped into the parlour and sat down with resignation to await his entrance.

To his amazement he heard the maid say:

"This way, sir, Dr. Woodman asks you to wait for him in the library."

So Bivens was calling on his arch enemy by appointment. Stuart replaced his hat on the rack and returned to his room, determined to await the outcome of this extraordinary visit. That its significance was sinister he couldn't doubt for a moment. Little could he dream how fateful for his future life was the message the little dark man bore. Stuart closed his door with a sensation of foreboding, sat down and tried to read.

On Dr. Woodman's entrance, Bivens rose to greet him with unusual animation and unmistakable good will.

When the doctor grasped the outstretched hand a more striking contrast could scarcely be imagined—the one big, bluff, jovial, sunny, powerful and straight of figure as he was always straight in speech and manners—the financier, small and weak in body, his movements sinuous, flexible, with eyes that never looked at the man he was talking to, yet always seemed to be taking in everything in the room—eyes unusually dark, yet seemingly full of piercing light as from hidden fires beneath.

"Well, Bivens, what can I do for you? I understand from your note that the matter is important."

"Of the gravest importance to us both, Doctor," he answered with a smile. "For a peculiar personal reason I want us to get together and settle our differences."

"Are there any differences between us? You go your way and I go mine. You run your business to suit yourself and I'll do the same. The world's big enough for us both——"

"That just the trouble," Bivens interrupted. "It isn't. We are entering a new era of combination, merger, coöperation."

"Compulsory coöperation!" the doctor laughed.

"It may be so at last," the little man said soberly. "Certainly the old idea of competition is played out. We no longer believe that business men should try to cut each other's throats."

"Oh, I see," sneered the doctor, "they should get together, corral their customers, and cut their throats. That certainly is better for business, but how about the customers?"

"Business is business," was the grim answer.

"For beasts of the field, yes—but for men?"

"Still, you must recognize the fact that the drug trade is a business enterprise, not a charity organization."

"Even so, still I happen to know that within a stone's throw of my store swarms a population of a quarter of a million human beings so poor that only three hundred of them ever have access to a bathroom. The death rate of the children is 254 in a thousand. It should be about 20 in a thousand, if normal. I don't want any higher profits out of my customers. If I've got to fight I'd rather fight the trade than fight the people. I choose the lesser evil."

"But I don't ask you to do evil."

"You ask me to enter with you into a criminal conspiracy to suppress freedom of trade, and use fraud and violence if necessary to win——"

"Fraud and violence?" Bivens interrupted, smilingly.

"Certainly. What sort of merchandise does the 'organizer' of modern industry bring to market? Tricks and subterfuges in the form of printed paper called stocks which represent no value. From the moment a financier once tastes this blood he becomes a beast. With the first fierce realization of the fact that under modern legal forms he can coin money out of nothing by binding the burdens of debt on the backs of helpless millions, he begins to laugh at the laws of man and God."

"Come, come, Doctor, you must realize the fact that in the drug business we are bringing order out of chaos and at last putting the trade on a paying basis."

"But at what a price! You have closed mills instead of opening them, thrown out of work thousands, lowered the price paid for raw material, bringing ruin to its producers, increased the price charged for your products to the ruin of the consumer, and saddled millions of fictitious debts on the backs of their children yet unborn. Combine, yes, but why not pay the people whose wages you have stolen as well as the owners whose mills you have closed? If combination is so extremely profitable, it should bring some benefit to the millions who are consumers—not merely make millionaires out of a few men. Who is bearing the burden of this enormous increase of fictitious wealth? The people. The price of living has been increasing steadily with the organization of each industry into a trust. Where will it end?"

Bivens's eyes narrowed to the merest points of concentrated light, while an amused smile played about them as he listened patiently to the doctor's tirade. When at last the big figure towering above him paused for breath, he remarked quietly:

"The trust is here to stay, Doctor. Legislation against it is as absurd and futile as a movement to stop the tides. We will never pull down these big department stores or go back to the little ones. The skyscraper will not come down from the heavens merely because a belated traveller rails that his view of the stars has been obscured. You cannot make economy a crime, progress a misdemeanour, or efficiency a felony! If so, you can destroy the trusts."

"I'm not clear yet how it is to be done," was the passionate answer—"but as sure as God lives we are going to do *something*. The spirit of America is progressive, up hill, not down hill, mind you. At present we are putting wreckers in charge of Organization and famine producers in charge of Production. It can't last. At no period of the world's history have the claims of tyranny been so quickly seen and dared, as here and now. Nowhere and in no age has tyranny confronted such a people as ours with life and

culture and ideals as high—a people so in love with liberty, so disciplined in its struggles! When the day comes that we shall be confronted with death or degradation, the young American will know how to choose. Patriotism with me is not an empty word. It is one of the passions of my life. I believe in this Republic. For the moment the people are asleep. But time is slowly shaping the issue that will move the last laggard. We are beginning dimly to see that there is something more precious in our life than the mere tonnage of national wealth—the spirit of freedom and initiative in our people! Shall they become merely the hired men of a few monied kings? Or shall the avenues of industry and individual enterprise remain open to their children? Is it more important to grow men or make money? Shall we transform the Republic into a huge money-stamping machine and turn its freemen into slaves who tend this machine, at the command of a master? The people will answer these questions!"

Bivens gave a cynical little chuckle.

"Then I'm sure we'll get the wrong answer, Doctor," was the response.

"They will get it right bye and bye. The nation is young. You say you believe in God. Well, see to it—a thousand years are but a day to Him! Among the shadows of eternity He is laughing at your follies. Nature in her long, slow, patient process is always on the side of Justice."

Bivens rose with a movement of impatience.

"I'm sorry you can't see your way to listen to any proposition from me, Doctor. I'm a practical man. I wish to incorporate your business into the general organization of the American Chemical Company on terms that will satisfy you——"

"Such terms can't be made, Bivens," the doctor said impetuously. "Your purpose is to squeeze money out of the people—the last dollar the trade will bear. That is your motto. I simply refuse. I refuse to devote my life to gouging out my neighbours' eyes to increase the profits of my trade. I put myself in his place, the place of the forgotten man, the consumer, the man you are organizing to exploit. The strong and the cunning can always take advantage of the weak, the ignorant, the foolish and generous. I have an imagination which makes vivid the sense of fellowship. I meet, in the crowds I pass, thousands of friends I never speak to, but the world is brighter because I've seen them."

"But if I don't see them?" the little black eyes mildly asked.

"Certainly! You can't see them. To you the city is merely a big flock of sheep to be sheared, while to me its myriad sounds are the music of a divine oratorio, throbbing with tears and winged with laughter! To you, the crowd are so many fools who may be buncoed out of their goods; while to me, some of their eyes, seen but for a moment, look into mine with infinite hunger and yearning, asking for friendship, comradeship, and love. And so, I call them my neighbours—these hurrying throngs who pass me daily. Because they are my neighbours, they are my friends. Their rights are sacred. I will not rob, maim, or kill them, and I will defend them against those who would!"

With the last sentence the stalwart figure towered above the little financier in a moment of instinctive hostility.

Bivens merely shrugged his shoulders and answered in measured, careful tones:

"Then I suppose I'll have to fight you whether I wish it or not?"

"Yes, and you knew that before you came here to-night. Your generous impulse for a settlement on my own terms is a shallow trick and it comes too late. I'm not fighting my own battle merely. I'm fighting for the people. You have heard that I am beginning a suit for damages against your Company——"

Bivens laughed in spite of himself, bit his lips, and looked at the doctor.

"I assure you I had heard nothing of such a suit, and now that I have it does not even interest me."

"Then may I ask the real reason for this urgent call and request for a compromise of our differences?"

"You may," was the cheerful response. "And I will answer frankly. I am engaged to be married to Miss Nan Primrose. The wedding is to occur in a few weeks. In some way she has learned of a possible conflict between your interests and mine, and asked me to settle them."

"And, may I ask, why? I don't even know Miss Primrose!"

"A woman's whim, perhaps. Possibly because our mutual friend, Mr. Stuart, lives in

your home, and she feared to lose his friendship in the conflict which might ensue."

The doctor was silent a moment and glared angrily at his visitor.

"Bivens, you're a liar," he cried in a sudden burst of rage.

The dark face flushed and the slim little hand began to tremble.

"I am your guest, Doctor——"

"I beg your pardon, I forgot myself."

"I assure you," the little financier continued smoothly, "that my intentions were friendly and generous. My only desire was to help you and make you rich."

Again the doctor's eyes blazed with wrath and he completely lost his self-control.

"Damn you, have I asked for your help or patronage? Its offer is an insult! I want you to remember, sir, that I picked you up out of the streets of New York, ill, hungry, out of work, friendless, and gave you your first job."

Bivens, breathing heavily, turned in silence and hurried to the door. The doctor followed.

With his hand on the knob, the financier turned, his face black with hate and slowly said:

"I'll make you live to regret this interview, Woodman!"

With a contemptuous grunt, the doctor closed the door.

CHAPTER VII

A VISION

When Stuart heard the door close and Bivens's step die away on the pavement below, he came down to see the doctor, haunted by a strange vision. Through every day of his subsequent life the most trivial details of that hour stood out in his memory with peculiar and terrible vividness. From every shadow he saw Nan's face looking into his. He was not superstitious; this impression he knew was simply a picture burned into his tired brain by days and nights of intense longing. But what increased the horror of the fancy was the fact that the picture changed in quick succession, from the face of the living to the face of the dead. He closed his eyes at last and in sheer desperation felt his way down the last flight of stairs. The fiercer the effort he made to shut out the picture, the more vivid it became until he found himself shivering over the last persistent outline which refused to vanish at any command of his will. It was the ghost of Nan's face—old, white, pulseless, terrible in its beauty, but dead.

"Of what curious stuff we're made!" he exclaimed, pressing his forehead as if to clear the brain of its horrible fancy. He paused in the lower hall and watched for a moment a scene between father and daughter through the open door of the library.

Harriet had just bounded into the room and stood beside the doctor's chair with an arm around his neck and the other hand gently smoothing his soft gray hair. She was crooning over his tired figure with the quaintest little mother touches.

"You look so worn out, Papa dear—what have you been doing?"

"Something very foolish, I'm afraid, Baby—I've just refused a fortune that might have been yours someday."

"Why did you refuse it?"

"Because I didn't believe it was clean and honest."

"Then I shouldn't want it. I'd rather be poor."

The doctor placed both hands on the fair young face, drew it very close and whispered:

"Had you, dearie?"

"Why, of course I had!"

The big hands drew the golden head closer still and pressed a kiss on the young forehead.

"My husband will love me, won't he? I shall not mind if I'm poor," she went on, laughing, as Stuart entered the room.

"See, boy, how's she's growing, this little baby of mine!" the doctor exclaimed, wheeling her about for Stuart's inspection. "It's a source of endless wonder to me, this miracle of growth—to watch this child—and see myself, a big brute of a man—growing, growing, slowly but surely into the tender glorious form of a living woman—that's God's greatest miracle! Run now, girlie, and go to bed. I want to talk to Jim."

She paused a moment, smiling into Stuart's face and softly said:

"Good-night, Jim—pleasant dreams!"

Through all the riot of emotions with which that night ended and through the years of bitter struggle which followed, that picture was the one ray of sunlight which never faded.

"Well, my boy, I've just done a thing which I know was inevitable, but now that it's done I'm afraid I may have made a tragic mistake. Tell me if it's so. There may be time to retract."

"Bivens has threatened to ruin your business?"

"On the other hand, he has just offered to buy it at my own price."

"And you refused?"

"To sell at any price—but it's not too late to change my mind. I can call him back now and apologize for my rudeness. Tell me, should I do it?"

"Do you doubt that you're right in the position you've taken?"

"Not for a moment. But the old question of expediency always bobs up. I'm getting older. I'm not as old as this white hair would make me, but I feel it. Perhaps I am out-of-date. Your eyes are young, boy; your soul fresh from God's heart. I'm just a little lonely and afraid to-night. See things for me—sit down a moment."

The doctor drew Stuart into a seat and rushed on impatiently.

"Listen, and then tell me if I should follow that little weasel and apologize. I'll do it if you say so—at least I think I would, for I'm afraid of myself." He paused, and a look of pain clouded his fine face as his eye rested on a portrait of Harriet on the table before him.

"There are several reasons why you couldn't have a more sympathetic listener to-night, Doctor—go on."

"Grant all their claims," he began impatiently, "for the Trust—its economy, its efficiency, its power, its success—this is a free country, isn't it?"

"Theoretically."

"Well, I wish to do business in my own way—not so big and successful a way perhaps as theirs, but my own. I express myself thus. When I hint at such a thing to your modern organizing friend, that these enormous profits for the few must be paid out of the poverty of the many—against whom the strong and cunning are thus combining—a simple answer is always ready, 'Business is business,' which translated is the old cry that the first murderer shrieked into the face of his questioner: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

"That's why I'm afraid of these fellows. The unrestrained lust for money is always the essence of murder, and the man or woman who surrenders to its spell will kill when put to the test. The law which holds burglary constructive murder is founded on an elemental truth. The man who puts on a mask, arms himself with revolver, knife, and dark lantern and enters my house to rob me of my goods will not hesitate to kill if a human life stands in the way of his success."

"I should not put it quite so strongly of these men——"

"I do. And I know I'm right. I saw murder in those black bead eyes of Bivens's to-night. Do you think he would hesitate to close a factory to increase a dividend if he knew that act would result in the death of its employees from weakness and hunger? Not for a minute. He hesitates only at a violation of the letter of the criminal code. What, then, is the difference between a burglar and a modern organizer of industry? Absolutely none."

Stuart laughed.

"Understand me, boy, I'm not preaching any patent remedy for social ills. I'm not in a hurry. I can wait as God waits. But this question is with me a personal one. I simply hold the biggest thing on earth is not a pile of gold, stolen or honestly earned. The biggest thing on this earth is a man. Our nation is not rich by reason of its houses and lands, its gold or silver or copper or iron—but because of its men. I believe in improving this breed of men, not trying to destroy them. For that reason I refuse success that is not built on the success and happiness of others. I refuse to share in prosperity that is not the growth of prosperity."

"But if you sell your business to these men and retire, will you necessarily share in their wrong-doing?"

"In a very real and tragic sense, yes. I'm a coward. I give up the fight. I've been both a soldier and a merchant. Why does the world honour a soldier and despise a merchant? Because a soldier's business is to die for his country, and a merchant's habit is to lie for profit. Isn't old Ruskin right? Why should not trade have its heroes as well as war? Why shouldn't I be just as ready to die as a merchant for my people as I was on the field of battle?"

The doctor paused, and his eyes grew dim while Stuart bent closer and watched and listened as if in a spell. He realized that his old friend was not really asking advice, but that a great soul in a moment of utter loneliness was laid bare and crying for sympathy.

The doctor's voice took a tone of dreamy tenderness.

"I am just passing through this world once. I can't live a single day of it over again. There are some things I simply must do as I pass. They can't wait, and the thing that has begun to strangle me is this modern craze for money, money, money, at all hazards, by fair or foul means! In every walk of life I find this cancer eating the heart out of men. I must fight it! I must! Good food, decent clothes, a home, pure air, a great love—these are all any human being needs! No human being should have less. I will not strike down my fellow man to get more for myself while one human being on this earth wants as much."

Unconsciously the young man's hand was extended and grasped the doctor's.

"You'll never know," Stuart said with deep emotion, "how much I owe to you in my own life. You have always been an inspiration to me."

The patient gray eyes smiled.

"I'm glad to hear that to-night, my boy. For strange as it may seem to you, I've been whistling to keep up my courage. I'm going to make this fight for principle because I know I'm right, and yet somehow when I look into the face of my baby I'm a coward. I'm going to make this fight and I've a sickening foreboding of failure. But after all, can a man fail who is right?"

"I don't believe it!" was the ringing answer which leaped to Stuart's lips. "I've had to face a crisis like this recently. I was beginning to hesitate and think of a compromise. You've helped me."

"Good luck, my boy," was the cheery answer. "I was a poor soldier to-night myself until the little weasel told me an obvious lie and I took courage."

"Funny if Bivens should do anything obvious."

"Wasn't it? He pretended to have come in a mood of generosity—his offer of settlement inspired by love."

"The devil must have laughed."

"So did I—especially when he told me that he was engaged to be married."

"Engaged—to-be-married?" Stuart made a supreme effort to appear indifferent—"to whom?"

"To Miss Nan Primrose, a young lady I haven't the honour of knowing, and he had the lying audacity to say that he came at her suggestion."

Stuart tried to speak and his tongue refused to move.

"I was frank enough to inform him that he was a liar. For which, of course, I had to apologize. Well, you've helped me to-night, boy, more than I can tell you. It helps an old man to look into the eyes of youth and renew his faith. Good-night!"

The doctor began to lower the lights, and Stuart said mechanically:

"Good-night!"

In a stupor of blind despair he slowly fumbled his way up to his room, entered, and threw himself across the bed without undressing. It was one thing to preach, another to face the thing itself alone in the darkness.

Through the shadows of the long night he lay with wide staring eyes, gazing at the vision which would not vanish—the face of the woman he loved—cold, white, pulseless, terrible in its beauty, dead.

CHAPTER VIII

STRUGGLE

The longer Stuart wrestled with the problem of Nan's yielding to the lure of Bivens's gold the more hideous and hopeless it became. He cursed her in one breath, and with the next stretched out his arms in the darkness in desperate voiceless longing.

He rose at last and stood looking out his window on the moonlit Square. He began to feel that he had been to blame. Why had he allowed the foolish pride of a lovers' quarrel to keep them apart for two weeks? A clock in a distant tower struck three. The radiance of the massed lights of Broadway still glowed in the sky and dimmed the glory of the moon. The roar of the elevated trains sounded unusually loud and sinister. Perhaps because Bivens was on their board of directors. The whistle of their air brakes seemed to hiss his name. A crowd of revellers passed in a cab, with their feet out the windows, singing a drunken song. There was something sickening in the thought of this swiftly moving remorseless rush of a city's endless life. After all, was Nan worse than others—thousands of others caught in the merciless grip of its eternal spell?

The clock struck five, he looked out the window, startled by the first soft light of the dawn.

He came downstairs, let himself out of the front door and began to walk furiously. When at last he became conscious of his surroundings he had reached Central Park and was seated in the little summer house on a big pile of boulders near the Sixth Avenue entrance. The sun was rising. It was the first sunrise he had ever seen in New York. The effect on his imagination was startling. The red rays streaming through the park and the chirp of birds in the bushes were magic touches that transformed the world. He was back again in the South, where Nature is the one big fact of life, and the memories of the girl he had learned to love beside its beautiful waters again overwhelmed him.

He rose with a cry of pain, plunged into the crowds streaming downtown to their work and, scarcely conscious of anything save the ache within, found himself again in his room. He disarranged his bed that his sleepless night might not excite comment. He was just a little ashamed that his loss of poise had been so complete and overwhelming.

When he came downstairs he paused at the door. Harriet was playing and singing again, and the soft tones of her voice were healing. He walked gently to the door of the music-room, leaned against the panel, and watched and listened.

She played, not as a schoolgirl practising a lesson, but with a lingering touch of joy in her work caressing each note. The thrill of hope and faith in her voice was soothing. It soothed the wounded soul and slowly brought a smile to his face.

At last she stopped reluctantly, tipped her golden head sideways in a coquettish little triumphant movement, and in the quaintest imitation of a man's voice said:

"I congratulate you, Miss Harriet—I like that very much!"

"Do you, professor? Oh, I'm so glad to please you!"

She shook her curls with genuine delight, and played out the little dialogue with vivid imaginary touches.

Stuart laughed.

The girl leaped to her feet, blushing scarlet, rushed to his side and seized his hand.

"Did you see me, Jim? Was I very foolish?"

"Certainly not. I quite agree with the professor. You will some day sing before kings

and queens, little girl. You sing as the birds, because it's in your soul. And I want to thank you, too. You've helped me again. I had a hard day's work before me, and you've made it easy."

"Then I shall be very happy all day, Jim!"

"Thank you, little pal—*au revoir*—"

He left her waving and smiling to him from the steps. He walked with new vigour and a deepening sense of gratitude.

Strange what a gracious influence the child had over him. She was always a ray of sunlight. This morning the touch of her hand and the thrill of her voice had brought his dead soul back to life again. His breath deepened and his step grew firm and swift.

He would fight for his own! He would go straight to Nan and laugh at this announcement. He would compel her to hear him. It was an absurd hour to call, but all the better. The more absurd, the deeper impression he would make and the more certain would be his success. He had written a note before—she had easily returned it unopened. She would find it a difficult undertaking to get him out of the house!

Mrs. Primrose's greeting was so cordial, so genuinely friendly, that for a moment he was puzzled. Could it be possible he had misjudged her? Could it be possible that her professions of love and admiration had been genuine? His hunger for sympathy was so keen, his sense of loneliness in his fight so utter, he could not help allowing himself the luxury of a momentary doubt.

She pressed his hand warmly and lingeringly.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so glad you've come! Why have you stayed away so long? It was so foolish of you. You gave up without a struggle. I'm shocked beyond measure at Nan."

Stuart's heart gave a bound of hope and he looked with fierce earnestness into the mother's face. It was only for an instant. Her eyes roamed and shifted and her tongue went faster.

"I told her that his millions would never bring happiness unless her heart went with them—that her love for you was a thing she couldn't lay aside as a cloak she had worn."

When Mrs. Primrose's eyes blinked and turned away under Stuart's gaze, he knew that she was lying again and ceased to listen.

"Well, I haven't given her up yet, Mrs. Primrose," he said bluntly.

"I knew you wouldn't, Jim. And I told Nan the day she promised to marry Mr. Bivens that you were worth a dozen such men, no matter how many millions he had. You have always been my choice—you know that. How she could throw you over for a little scrap of a man like that is beyond me."

Stuart could control himself no longer. He rose and faced Mrs. Primrose with a look which brought her eloquence to an abrupt end.

"Mrs. Primrose, for once in my life I am going to tell you the truth."

"Why, you always do Jim," she feebly answered.

"I never do. Your example has been contagious. I've had to play out the farce with you. To-day I won't play. I'm too hurt, angry, wounded, sore. You have always been my bitterest foe. You brought Nan to New York to get her away from me."

The mother's eyes blazed with honest wrath.

"Yes, I did—and I'm glad I did it—you ungrateful wretch!"

"And you have always been busy poisoning her mind against me and corrupting her imagination with dreams of a life of luxury."

"And thank God I've succeeded at last in bringing her to her senses in time to save her from throwing herself away on you, Jim Stuart!"

"Thank you, mother dear, we understand each other now—"

"Don't you dare call me mother, sir!"

"Why not? I'm going to win in the end, and you're on my side. You know that I'm worth a dozen such fellows as the little scrap of a man on whom she's about to throw herself away."

"How dare you, sir!"

"Because you've just told me. I'm only quoting your words."

As Mrs. Primrose left in speechless anger, Nan quietly entered the room. Her face was set for battle in a proud defiant smile. She was totally unprepared for the way in which Stuart met her.

With a quick step he was at her side, seized both her hands in a grip of fierce tenderness and in low tones of vibrant passion said:

"This thing don't go with me, Nan. I won't accept it. I'm going to fight—fight for my own—for you are mine—mine by every law of God and man, and you are worth fighting for!"

The hard smile of defiance melted from the beautiful face, and a flush of tenderness slowly overspread her cheeks. It was sweet to be loved like that by a strong masterful man. One of the things that had stung her pride deepest during the past weeks was the thought that after all he didn't seem to care. Now that she knew how deeply he cared, her heart went out to him in instinctive tender response.

"I suppose, then," she began slowly, "I've nothing to do but agree to your plan of action?"

"That's it exactly," he replied firmly. "How could I dream that you would regard our quarrel so seriously——"

She started to speak, and he raised his hand:

"I know, dear, you said our engagement was broken. I didn't believe you meant it. I couldn't. I was hurt when you returned my note unopened, but I watched and waited every hour of every day for a word. The news of your engagement to Bivens came as a bolt out of the blue sky. I refuse to accept such an act as final. You did it out of pique. You don't mean it. You can't mean it!"

"And what are your plans?"

"I told you the other day I had a surprise for you—I have. It's worth a day—you promised me one in the country before our foolish quarrel. I want it now. You will come?"

She hesitated a moment and said:

"Yes."

Within an hour they had reached the hills overlooking Gravesend Bay, and the magnificent sweep of water below the Narrows. Nan had scarcely spoken on the way, answering Stuart's questions in friendly nods, smiles, and monosyllables.

"Before we go farther," Stuart said when they had left the car, "I want to show you a model home a friend of mine has built out here. It's my ideal, and I think you'll like it."

Nan nodded and followed his long strides along the narrow path of a single flagstone pavement to the crest of the hill which sloped to the water's edge.

As they entered the gate, half hidden in the hedge, the girl exclaimed:

"What a lovely little place!"

A gardener who was watering some flowers, on a sign from Stuart hastened up the gravel walk and opened the door.

Every window commanded entrancing views of the bay and ocean. Every ship entering or leaving the harbour of New York must pass close and could be seen for miles going to sea.

When Stuart finally led Nan out on the broad veranda of the second floor, she was in a flutter of excitement over the perfection of its details.

"I think it's wonderful, Jim!" she exclaimed with enthusiasm. "I'd like to congratulate your friend on his good taste. And just look at those dear little terraces which lead down to the boathouse—on one of them a strawberry bed, on the other a garden, on the last a grape arbor, and then the boathouse, the wharf—and look—a lovely little boat tied to the float—it's just perfect!"

"And this outlook over bay and sea and towering hills— isn't it wonderful?" he asked soberly—"the hills and sea with their song of the infinite always ringing in one's soul!"

"It's glorious," she murmured. "I've never seen anything more nearly perfect. Whose is it?"

Stuart looked into her dark eyes with desperate yearning.

"It's yours, Nan!"

"Mine?"

"Yes, dear, this is my secret. I've been building this home for you the past year. I've put all the little money my father gave me with every dollar I could save. It's paid for and here's the key. I meant to ask you out here to fix our wedding day. I ask you now. Forget the nightmare of the past two weeks and remember only that we love each other!"

The girl's eyes grew dim for a moment and she turned away that the man who watched might not know. Her lips quivered for just an instant, and her hand gripped the rail of the veranda.

When she answered it was with a light banter in her tones that cut Stuart's heart with cruel pain.

"If I'd seen it four weeks ago, Jim, I really don't see how I could have resisted it—but now"—she shook her head and laughed—"now it's too late!"

"My God, don't say that, Nan!" he pleaded. "It's never too late to do right. You know that I love you. You know that you love me."

"But I've discovered," she went on with bantering, half challenging frankness, "that I love luxury, too. I never knew how deeply and passionately before—" she paused a moment, looking toward Sea-Gate. "Isn't that the anchorage of the Atlantic Yacht Club?"

"Yes," he answered impatiently.

"Then that's Mr. Bivens's yacht—the big, ugly black one lying close inshore with steam up. He told me he would send her into dry dock to-day. He was talking last night of a wedding cruise in her to the Mediterranean. I confess, Jim, that I want to shine, to succeed, and dazzle, and reign. Every ambitious man has this desire. Why shouldn't I? You say I have rare beauty. Well, I wish to express myself. It's a question of common sense. Marriage is my only career. This man's conquest was so easy it startled me and I came down out of the clouds. I don't know a girl in New York to-day who has youth and beauty who does not in her soul of souls aspire to the highest rank and the greatest wealth. This is perhaps the one chance of my life——"

"Do you hold yourself so cheap?"

"You see I'm not so prejudiced an observer as you, Jim. I've looked the facts squarely in the face. You can't realize how much the power of millions means to a woman who chafes at the limitations the world puts on her sex. My imagination has been set on fire by dreams of splendour and power. It's too late——"

"Don't, don't say it, Nan!"

"Why not be frank? This little cottage is a gem, I admit. But I've seen a splendid palace set in flowers and gleaming with subdued light. Soft music steals through its halls mingled with the laughter of throngs who love and admire me. Its banquet tables are laden with the costliest delicacies, while liveried servants hurry to and fro with plates and goblets of gold! And all this wild dream, Jim, seems real, a part of my very life. Perhaps somewhere in another world my spirit lived in such surroundings——"

"Perhaps," Stuart interrupted bitterly, "in the breast of a cruel, merciless half-savage princess who killed her lover to win a throne——"

Nan suddenly grasped his arm.

"What are you saying!"

"Only interpreting your dream."

"You mustn't say horrible things like that to me. It's bad enough, God knows, when I face it. But at least I'm not a murderess."

"I'm not at all sure," he persisted, with desperation. "That a girl who can deliberately kill the soul of the man who loves her, might not kill his body if put to the test——"

"For heaven's sake, Jim, if you do love me don't say such things! I'll never forget them! I can't help it—I've got to do this. The spell is on me, and I must——"

Stuart seized her arm with fierce strength that hurt.

"Then I'll break the spell. You shall not do this hideous thing. You are mine, I tell you, and I am bigger than money. I have the power to think, to create ideas, to create beauty—the power that remakes the world. I expect to have all the money we shall need. In the years to come we shall be rich whether we seek it or not. But the sweetest days of all life will be those in which we fight side by side the first battles of life in youth and poverty when we shall count the pennies and save with care for the little ones God may send us! With your sweet face bending above me and the touch of your hand, the highest success is sure. Marry me now. Here is your home. We don't need to be rich to be happy—a loving heart, generous sympathies, comradeship, high ambitions, strong young bodies and clean souls—and the angels will envy us!"

"But life is short, Jim! I can have things now. He has already promised them—a palace in town, another by the sea, a great castle in the heart of the blue southern mountains we used to watch as children, and armies of servants to do my bidding—I can live now!"

"And you call these trappings and tinsel life?"

"I want them."

"My God, Nan, haven't you a soul? Hasn't the life within no meaning for you? To me such luxury is sheer insanity. The possibilities of personal luxury have been exhausted thousands of years ago. It's commonplace, vulgar, and contemptible. If you wish for power why choose the lowest of all its forms? The way you are entering is worn bare by the feet of millions of forgotten fools whose bodies worms have eaten. Not one of them lives to-day even in a footnote of history. They sailed no unknown seas. They conquered no new worlds. They merely got dollars, spent them and died."

"And yet, Jim, you know as well as I do that money is the sign of success and power; its absence, of failure and weakness."

"To those who see the surface of things only—oh, Nan, why have you let this brood of black-winged bats build their nest in your heart?—this greed, this avarice, this envy of the rich——"

The girl lifted her hand with a gesture of impatience.

"You persist in misunderstanding me. Why should your desire for power be called high ambition, and mine a vulgar avarice? If you make a mistake in your career, you can correct it and begin again. Being a woman I cannot, for marriage is my only career. A mistake now would be to me fatal."

"And you are making the one tragic mistake no repentance can undo. You are choosing to commit the one unpardonable sin—the sin against the Spirit."

"And what, pray, is that?"

"The deliberate choice of evil, knowing it to be evil. Your heart is mine—mine, I tell you! Do you deny it?"

Again he seized her hand, gripped it fiercely, and looked into her eyes with tender, searching gaze.

Nan looked away.

"Oh, Nan, dear, believe me," he pleaded. "You can't deny this voice within the soul and live! Happiness is inside, not outside, dear. You say you want to own a castle on a mountain side. You can't do it by holding a deed and paying taxes on it. I can own it without a deed. I haven't a million, but I own this great city. This mighty harbour is mine. That's why I built our little home nest here on the hill overlooking it. It's all mine—these miles of shining ocean sands, the sea, and these landlocked waters. The great city that stretches northward, its miles of gleaming lights that will come out to-night and dim the stars, the hum and thrill of its life, the laughter and the tears, the joys and the fears—are all mine because I see and hear and feel and understand! Nor can the tax gatherer put his hand on my wealth. It's beyond his touch."

The girl's spirit was caught at last in the grip of his passionate appeal, and her rebellion ceased for the moment as she watched and listened with increasing sympathy.

"Beauty is always a thing of the soul, Nan," he rushed on. "The things we possess are signs of the spirit or we don't possess them—they possess us. The dress you wear expresses something within you when it fits your beautiful body so perfectly. The mere possession of houses and lands and things has no meaning unless they reveal *us*. If they merely express the labour of an ancestor, the mind of an architect or the genius of a manager, we are only intruders on the scene, not the creator and therefore the possessor of the beauty we aim at. A home, a dress, are symbols, or nothing but goods and chattels. I have seen you wear dresses made by your own hand that revealed a whole conception of life and hats that were poems. The dress you wear to-day is perfect

because it expresses you. The clothes of a millionaire's wife have no meaning except conformity to fashion and the expenditure of vast sums of money. The poetic taste, the subtle mystery of personality which you put into your dress have always been a joy to me."

In spite of her fierce determination to give no response to his appeal her fingers instinctively tightened on the hand which had seized hers. His own pressed with new courage and he went on.

"Bivens may think he owns that big black hulk lying out there belching smoke from her huge funnels. But he only pays the bills to keep her going. It takes fifty men to run her. I have a little sloop with a cabin for two. She cost me fifteen hundred dollars and I own her, because I dreamed every rib in her body, every rivet, every line of her graceful form. I created her and gave her a soul. I feel the beat of her proud little heart in the storm and the soft touch of her sleepy wings in the calm. She is part of the rhythm of my life.

"It is not money that gives value or ownership to things. You can only own that which expresses you. For that reason you cannot own the palaces of which you dream. Their service will require a hundred thieving hirelings whose very names you cannot know. This house is mine because I have built it as a work of love and art and expressed myself in it with infinite tenderness and infinite pains. It is not a palace in size, but it is a palace, glorious and wonderful, in a deeper spiritual sense, because it is a poem. Every spar of wood in it is perfect of its kind. Every stone in it is a gem because it is the right thing in the right place. There isn't a shoddy bit of material or a slipshod piece of work from the green tile in its roof to the stone boulders on which it rests. It will last our lives and generations to follow. The very mortar between the bricks and the cement between the stones are perfect because they were mixed with tears of joy that bubbled from my heart as I stood here, watched and sang my love for you——"

The lover paused a moment, overcome with his emotion, and he knew by the quick rising and falling of the girl's breast that a battle was raging.

Quick to see his advantage he drew her gently inside.

"See, Nan, there are no cheap imitations in here, no vulgar ornaments which mean nothing. There has been no copying of models. These rooms I planned with your spirit, dearest, hovering over me, and each one has its little surprise—a nook, a turn, a window opening unexpectedly on its entrancing view. The ornaments on its walls will grow as we grow—pictures we shall find and always love, and tapestries your own dear hands shall paint. This home will be a real one because it will have a soul. There can be no coarse or menial tasks within its walls because its work shall be glorified by the old immortal song of love and life."

Stuart leaned close and spoke in a low tense voice:

"And it will always be beautiful, Nan, because it will be penetrated with the touch of your hand. Every piece of furniture will glow with that radiance. Gold and precious stones can have no such lustre. See, here I have planned to place your piano. There will be no music on earth like the songs those throbbing strings shall make to my soul when they quiver beneath the touch of your hand. Here on this seat I shall lie by the window, looking out over the sea, dream and think great thoughts of life and death and immortality while you play for me. And with each passing year, dearest, the songs that you sing will be deeper and richer and more and more full of divine meaning."

The lover slipped his arm gently around the girl's yielding form, her head drooped on his shoulder, the great dark eyes blinded with tears. For a moment he held her in silence broken only by a deep sob. His hand touched her hair with the tenderest gesture as he whispered:

"We can only know a few real friends in this world, dearest—but one great love comes to any human soul, and life is all too short to lose a single day——"

"Hush—hush! Jim," the girl cried in anguish, "don't say any more, please!"

"Tell me that it's all right, dear," he urged. "You know you cannot leave me now. You know that you love me and that your love is a deathless thing."

"Yes, yes, I know," she gasped. "But I'm going to marry him! I can't help it. The spell of his millions is on me and I can't shake it off!"

So sure was Stuart of victory, Nan's outburst made no impression on his mind. He continued to soothe her as he would a tired child.

"Of course I know you don't mean that—you are only reproaching the imaginary girl who betrayed her love for money. The real Nan is sobbing here in my arms—mine forever——"

With a determined effort she drew herself from his embrace and in hard cold tones said:

"No. Jim, you must face the truth. I am going to marry this man, and the most horrible thing I can say about myself is that, deeply as I love you, I know I shall be content with the splendid career that will be mine. I shall never regret my marriage."

The lover looked at her in a dazed way as if unable to grasp the meaning of her words.

"Nan," he cried at last, "you can't mean that!"

"I do."

"But you can't do this vile thing. Since the world began I know that vain, weak, ignorant women have sold themselves to men they could not love, for money, rank and luxury. But you are not of that breed, Nan. You are not weak, you are not ignorant. You are strong in body and soul, with high aims and the inheritance of rich blood in your veins.

"You are the typical American girl, the daughter of the line of men and women who have made this Republic the glory of the world—women whose hearts have been pure, whose lives have been clean, who have kept burning in the hearts of men the great faiths of the soul. Respect for this woman has been one of the foundations of our moral life. In the worship I have paid you, there has been more than the charm of sex, there has been always this instinctive recognition of the divine. Are you going to kill my faith in God? The woman who sells herself to buy bread, stands higher in the moral world than you——" He hesitated.

"Go on, Jim, say the worst. And still I'm going to do it."

"Knowing full well that no ceremony of Church or State, no words of priest or judge, no pealing of organ, or pomp or pageantry can make this thing a marriage? There is but one vile word in the English tongue that fits the woman——"

Nan straightened her figure with a smile of defiance:

"Say it!"

The lover dropped in silence to the window seat and buried his face in his hands in a paroxysm of emotion beyond control.

At length he rose and looked at the girl he loved long and tenderly.

"God in heaven! It's inconceivable, when I took into your beautiful face! Have you no pity in your heart?"

The full lips smiled a cruel little smile.

"Men are strong, Jim. They can stand hard blows. You come of fighting stock. I know that you will survive——"

"And the solemn pledge of love and loyalty we gave to each other—this means nothing to you?"

"Our engagement was informal. The world knew nothing of it."

"No, but God knew, Nan, and our young souls were their own witness."

"I'm sorry to hurt you, Jim. But I must—it's fate; the big world, I somehow feel I'm akin to, is calling me and I'm going——"

"And Bivens is this big world! If you will throw me over for money, can't you wait until a real man goes with it? It wouldn't be so bad if I felt you had chosen one who was my equal physically and mentally in culture and breeding—but Bivens!"

"You underestimate his ability. You may hate him—but he is a man of genius."

"He is everything you loathe, and yet you are going to marry him. Great God! don't you understand what a close, intimate, personal thing marriage is! You are the most fastidious girl I have ever known. The ceremony with which you keep your beautiful body is a religion. Bivens is physically everything you despise. His teeth are yellow with nicotine, and his lips cracked and stained with tobacco. With every quivering fibre of your delicate and sensitive being you know that you loathe him. And yet you are going to give your body to be his—without reserve—you, the delicate, the exquisite beauty—you who worship your dainty body in a mirror daily. God—have you no real reverence for your own being?"

"No, Jim," she interrupted at last, with deep pity in her heart for his suffering, "I don't think I have, and it's better so after all. I'll never love another, I shall not try."

"Then if you will sell yourself, Nan, dear, let's make a better bargain—wait! You are giving up too easily. Bivens has only a couple of millions, and he may lose them. Don't hold yourself so cheap. If you were on the block for sale I'd give a million for each dimple in your cheek. That pile of glorious black hair is worth a million—I'd give it without haggling at the price! Come, let's have more bids! The smile that plays about your lips should bring millions. The arch of your proud young neck should add another—and your deep dark eyes, I swear are worth a million each."

Stuart's voice had grown husky and sank into a sob as she placed her hand on his arm and gently said:

"Hush, Jim, dear, we must go now. I can't stand any more. I've let you go on like this and say anything you pleased because I'm heartsick to see how cruelly I've hurt you—but there's a limit."

"Yes, I know, forgive me."

Without another word he led her from the place, closed the little gate quietly and returned to her home.

Alone inside the parlour they stood in silence a moment and she took his hand in hers.

"I'm sorry, but it must be good-bye. Your love has been a sweet and wonderful thing in my life——"

"And you throw it aside as a worthless rag."

"No," she answered smiling. "It shall be mine always—good-bye."

She raised her lips to his in a cold kiss.

Dazed with anguish, he turned and left. The door closed on his retreating figure, and Nan sank among the cushions and burst into a flood of passionate tears.

CHAPTER IX

DESPAIR

To the very dawn of Nan's wedding day Stuart had refused to give up hope.

The little financier had sent him an invitation, and worst of all had called to ask that he act as his best man. He refused so curtly that Bivens was deeply wounded. He hastened to soothe his feelings with a plausible explanation.

"The fact is, Bivens, I've always hated church funerals and weddings—of the two I prefer funerals——"

"Nonsense!"

"I assure you I'm not joking. Those long hideous veils and white shroud-like dresses to me always symbolize Death. The pallor of the bride's face perhaps adds to my delusion—but it's painfully real. I never go to a church wedding. The apparition haunts me for days."

Bivens smiled wanly.

"But what will you do when your time comes, old man? You can't run away then."

"That's just what I will do—run away and take my girl with me. We'll elope and be married in street clothes. It's more human."

While he spoke, Stuart's eyes suddenly sparkled with the thought that his words, spoken in jest, might be a prophecy of what could really happen. It had happened again and again. The miracle might happen to him.

"But I say, Jim, that's all rot. I want you to stand by me. I've always taken as much of your friendship as you would give and been grateful for it. I don't make new friends easily. I want you, and you've just got to do it."

Stuart shook his head and firmly set his jaws. A grim temptation flashed through his imagination. If he should accept, it might be the one thing which would prevent Nan's betrayal of her love at the altar. Might he not by the power of his personality, the

hypnotic force of his yearning passion and will, stop the ceremony? In the moment of deathlike silence which should follow the minister's words asking if there were any cause known why these two should not be made one, might not a single movement of his body at that moment, a groan of pain, a sob, a cry of agony in a supreme act of his will, cause the white figure to reel and fall at his feet? It was possible.

But it would be too cheap. It would be a worthless victory, a victory of the flesh without the spirit—and he refused to take the body without the soul.

With a frown he turned to Bivens:

"It's no use talking, Cal, I've made up my mind. I won't do it."

"Well, if you won't, you won't," the little man said with a sigh. "At least you'll come to the church. For God's sake let me get a glimpse of one friendly face. I'll be scared to death. You know I'm not used to this."

Stuart smiled:

"All right, I'll be there."

"And a seat, Jim, where I can see you. I want a friend near the door when I start, or I'll never make it—I'll drop on the way. You won't fail?"

"No. You can depend on me."

As Bivens closed the door the young lawyer threw himself back in his chair with a bitter laugh.

"What a farce our lives become sometimes. If we could all see behind the scenes would there be a single illusion left—I wonder?"

His memory rested with bitterness on the fact that he had feared to lift the curtain on Nan's character at one point in their final struggle over this marriage. He had fought with desperation to win and hold her heart, but he had fought fairly. There had always been a way—he might have won by the sacrifice of character. He had not offered to yield his ideal, accept her views, and change his life purpose. The act would have been dishonourable only to his own sense of right. He would have done exactly what Bivens asked. He had never questioned this decision to the day of her wedding. But when the fateful morning came he was stunned by the feeling of incredible despair which crept into his heart. The day was chill and damp. Dull, grayish, half-black clouds rolled over the city from the sea—clouds that hung low and wet over the cold pavements without breaking into rain.

He knew that Nan was as superstitious as the old black mammy of the South who had nursed her. Aunt Sallie had come to New York for the wedding of her "baby," and Stuart could hear her now crooning over the sayings of wedding days:

"Marry in May you'll rue the day; marry in Lent you'll live to repent——"

"Monday for wealth, Tuesday for health, Wednesday best of all; Thursday for crosses, Friday for losses, and Saturday no luck at all." It was Monday, and Nan must have known it when she fixed the day—but there was another important saying he recalled now:

"Happy is the bride the sun shines on——"

Perhaps these lowering clouds and the coming storm might cause her to hesitate and postpone the marriage. All morning he sat brooding by his window, watching the swaying branches of the trees in the Square—and though he knew at best that he was a fool—confidently expecting the miracle of a message. As the hour of noon approached, despair slowly settled over his heart.

How could he reconcile himself to the horrible reality? This woman and the dreams of her had become part of his very being. The memory of his hopes began to strangle him—the wonderful life they were to live together, whose pictured scenes stretched out now before him—of home, of love, of motherhood and fatherhood hallowed by adoration, the pain, the glory, the passion, the tenderness, the sanctity, the mystery of it all—and this the end. A marriage sordid, cold, vulgar to such a man—this little tobacco-stained, bead-eyed weasel.

And she had talked to him about her career. As if she didn't know that the career of any woman was immeasurably grander than that of any man—if she fulfil her destiny that links her to God in the creation of a child—a being whose simple word may mould a million wills and change the fate of centuries—and yet she had deliberately strangled her soul and chosen this little pig, who rooted in the dirt for gold, to be the father of her children.

He rose, breathing hard and brushed a tear from his eye—a tear that had come unbidden in spite of his iron will.

He wished he had not made the foolish promise to Bivens. He knew now that he had never really believed he would have to keep it. And yet the day had come and the hour had struck, and no miracle had been wrought.

He walked with leaden steps through Tenth Street to Broadway, stopped and gazed for a moment on the graceful spire of the church before whose altar Nan would soon stand and perjure herself for money. How could she! He had long felt that in every true man's religion was a supreme belief in himself—in a woman's, faith in some one else. He knew that she believed in him, not in the man to whom she was surrendering herself. And yet she wished to consummate this act of blasphemy—in the House of God before His high altar.

"Why? Why? Why?"

His heart fairly shrieked its cry of despair. He moved mechanically toward the church and waked from his reverie to find himself jammed in a solid mass of humanity. Never before had he realized the utter vulgarity of a public wedding. Why should any one wish a crowd of curious fools to witness even the happiest wedding? Its meaning is surely frank enough without shouting it from the housetops. Should not its joys and mystery be something too shy and sweet and holy for a vulgar crowd of strangers to gaze on? And stripped of the sanctity of love, this ceremony becomes merely a calling of a mob to witness the sale of a woman's body. There could be no illusions about the fact and it was hideous.

He forced his way into the side door and stood waiting the arrival of the bride and groom. When Bivens came, the sight of him roused the slumbering devil in Stuart. The excitement of his triumph had evidently steadied the little man's nerves. His yellow teeth were shining in a broad grin, and from his piercing eyes there flashed the conscious success of the adventurer. His fine clothes and well-groomed body gave him dignity. Never had his shrimp-like figure looked so slippery and plausible.

He extended his slender hand and touched Stuart's in passing. To save his life the lawyer could not repress a shudder. In that moment he could have committed murder with joy. The agony of defeat was on him.

He knew he could beat this man in every fair fight with his bare hands or with equal weapons. And yet there he was carrying off with a grin before his very eyes the woman he loved. He felt in that moment his kinship with all the rebels and disinherited of the earth.

At last the bride came and the surpliced choir moved slowly and solemnly down the aisles through a sea of eager faces as the great organ pealed forth the first bars of the wedding march from "Lohengrin."

Nan was leaning on the arm of a stranger he had never seen before—an uncle from the West. She was pale—deathly pale and walked with a hesitating movement as though weak from illness. Suddenly his heart went out to her in a flood of pity and tenderness. He tried to make her feel this, but she passed without a glance. She had not seen him. The procession moved slowly back to the altar, and a solemn hush fell on the throng.

Stuart listened to the ceremony with a vague impersonal interest, as if it were something going on in another world.

A single question was burning itself into his brain—the price of a woman!

"Have we all our price?" he asked, searching deep into his own soul. Something pathetic in the white face of the bride had touched the deepest sources of his being.

"Have I, too, my price, oh, boastful soul?" he cried. "Would I sell my honour for a million? No. For ten, fifty, a hundred millions? No—not in the market place, no—but would I sell by a compromise of principle in the secret conclave of my party—at a sale the world could never know—would I sell for the Presidency of the Republic? Or would I sell now to win this woman? Would I? Would I? If so, I should hold her blameless. Have all men and all women a price if we but name it? Answer! Answer!" And then from the depths of his being came the burning words:

"No. By God, I swear it. No!"

He looked up with a start, wondering vaguely if the crowd had heard this cry from something inside which he knew in that moment was bigger than the world without.

No, they were intent on the drama at the altar. The minister was saying:

"With this ring I thee wed——" he couldn't see, but he knew the ring was being placed

on the third finger of the left hand—chosen by tradition because a vein of blood was supposed to run direct from that finger to the heart—what a solemn farce!

And now he was saying:

"What God hath joined together—let not man put asunder——"

"God!" Surely he didn't say 'God,'" Stuart brooded. "Does God, the august, mysterious, awful creator of the universe, work like this? Did not the God of heaven and earth give this woman to him beneath the sunny skies of the South while their souls sang for joy?"

They were moving again down the aisle, the organ throbbing the recessional from Mendelssohn. A wave of emotion swept the crowd inside and they became a mob of vulgar, chattering, gossiping fools swarming over the church as if it were the grandstand of a racecourse, without hesitation tearing down and stealing its decorations for souvenirs.

When Stuart reached the door it was pouring rain. He was glad of it. The splash of the rain in his face was refreshing and the breath of the storm was good. He walked for an hour facing the wind, not knowing or caring where it might lead.

By a curious law of reaction, all resentment and anger were gone, and only a great pity for Nan began to fill his heart.

CHAPTER X

GROPING

Stuart reached home from his walk thoroughly tired and dropped into a feverish sleep. A strange dream haunted this attempt to rest. He found himself laughing and chatting with Bivens on terms of intimate friendship. All feeling of resentment against him had gone. The little man had grown to be a great figure and he was happy in remembering their boyhood associations. And strangest of all, they had united in a feeling of hatred for Nan. She was the common enemy of both, and not only so, she was the enemy of all men. As she passed through the street, crowds were hissing and insulting her, and as she was entering her home they tried to kill her. A stone struck her beautiful forehead, and the blood was trickling down the white drawn face. He was hurling himself against the mob in a vain effort to reach her side, and while the crowd laughed and mocked, an officer mounted the steps and, instead of driving the mob back, began to strike her furiously with his club.

Stuart waked with a cry—pressed his head and looked about the room, bewildered. The tip of a swinging limb was pounding against his window pane.

He opened the window quickly and broke the twig.

"What a nightmare!" he exclaimed, with a shiver.

For hours its horror haunted his imagination.

He dressed and started to his club for dinner, changed his mind and turned down Broadway for the old Café Boulevard on Second Avenue. He stopped again in front of the dingy Bible House at the head of the Bowery and watched the flood of shopgirls and clerks passing across the street from the department stores. What an endless throng! Hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands, men and women, girls and boys, hurrying homeward. He had never noticed them before—this mighty host of three hundred thousand women and five hundred thousand men who rush into these swarming hives every morning and stream out again in the gathering dusk of spring and the deepening nights of winter.

For the first time they seemed human beings who might have hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, even as he.

How strange the world began to look through the new eyes of pity a great sorrow had given him. How worn the faces of these children. They must be horribly overworked. What a pitiful, starved life for a child. He thought of his own childhood, and saw himself with swift bare feet roaming the open fields of the South.

He was struck with the wistful faces of the very young girls—eager and wise beyond their years. What an incongruous thing this mingling of the tense eagerness of young girlhood in the straight open stare of worldly wisdom with which some of them looked

at him, and, passing, turned to look again. It made him shiver. They ought to be at school, these children; why were they here, jostling, elbowing, and fighting their way through this crowd? A floor walker passed, holding a pretty girl's arm. His position was unmistakable. No other man strolls through the world with just his step and just his elevation of chin—a chin that will hold its angle in death. Among the hurrying throng that jostled by were men and women with the deep cut lines of sorrow and tragedy in faces that had seen better days, but had somehow lost their way.

Stuart's heart went out to the passing crowd in a throb of sympathy—these slaves of the Modern Invisible Master without a soul—who asked always and without comment for efficiency and economy. They must make money for him or fall by the wayside, and, if they fell, the master never knew and couldn't care.

He ate his dinner in a whirl of confused emotion and again found himself on Broadway walking at a furious pace uptown. He had no idea how furious the pace until he suddenly noticed that he was an object of mild curiosity. He slackened his speed, conscious at last that big forces were fighting within the first pitched battle for the mastery of life.

Could high ideals survive the white heat of this furnace—the focus of the modern world's fiercest desire to live and to will—the money centre of the earth? Was not the whole structure of Society at last thoroughly materialistic? Was not religion merely a tradition, honour and virtue merely the themes of song and story? Had not self and self-interest at last become the sole force behind all great deeds? It looked that way. Then why should any man be a sentimental fool? Why not grasp the main chance?

Why not turn now and beat Bivens at his own game? There was yet time to accept his offer, join his powerful group of the exploiters of modern industry, crush this little shrimp in the hollow of his fist at last, and take the woman he loved from him by the law of might. Deep within he felt throbbing forces of savage cruelty that in the centuries of the past had given his ancestors the leadership of men before the finer virtues of love and mercy which permitted a Bivens to exist had been born. The big nostrils of his long straight nose dilated, the white hard teeth of his strong jaw snapped, and his eyes flashed.

Why not?

Again and again these fierce questions surged within. The "Great White Way" flashed its splendours of electric light. But there was no warmth in it for his spirit. He noted to-night for the first time that the lights were not hung on high for the joy of those who pass. They were flames in the temple of the new god Mammon. They were the signs of hucksters who had goods to sell to the crowds at a profit. The profusion of light, the rush of eager throngs to the theatres, the flash and clatter of passing carriages, the streets piled with débris, the half-finished steel skyscraper whose black ribs stood out against the stars, all brought to his imagination this evening the impression of exhaustless power.

But what power?

Certainly not the power of love, pity, heroism, and unselfish devotion to ideals. There could be but one answer. These flaming signs in the sky were the signals of the advance skirmish line of a huge host—growing in number and power each hour—the army of Mammon!

He paused before a theatre into which a stream of pleasure seekers were pouring. The ticket speculators were yelling their wares on the sidewalk. The play was a famous musical comedy. He knew to-night why musical comedy had such vogue in the money centres of the world. It had become the supreme expression of the utterly absurd—the reduction of life to the terms of an absurdity expressed in rhythmic and sensuous beauty. For men whose god was money, it would doubtless become ultimately the only form of public entertainment.

He began to negotiate with one of the young Hebrew philanthropists of the pavement for a ticket, but stopped in disgust and moved on. There was something inside that hadn't surrendered. He began to be dimly conscious of the fact that the real fight had scarcely begun. The philanthropist's feelings were hurt by his abrupt departure. He followed for half a block holding to Stuart's coat, protesting his affectionate and earnest desire to promote his pleasure without a cent of profit. He offered to cut the price of a seat to \$3.50 and solemnly swore that the unfeeling and unprincipled manager had made him pay \$3.00 for the ticket.

Stuart paused a moment, his imagination caught by the ravenous eagerness of the man's face. Here surely was a true worshipper in the modern temple.

The young lawyer smiled and said:

"I salute you, my brother—I'm thinking of joining you soon!"

The speculator suddenly let go his sleeve and hurried back to his place, glancing over his shoulder with a vague fear that the lunatic might follow him.

Stuart hurried on to one of the more dignified and serious theatres just off Broadway. He bought a ticket and entered, wondering if he would find the house empty. To his surprise it was full—orchestra, balcony, and gallery. The play was a serious effort by a brilliant young dramatist of the modern school of realism. In two minutes from the rising of the curtain the play had gripped him with relentless power. Slowly, remorseless as fate, he saw the purpose of the author unfold itself in a series of tense and terrible scenes. The comedy over which the crowd laughed with such contagious merriment was even more sinister than the serious parts. No matter what the situation—whether set to laughter, to terror, or to tears—beneath it all throbbed one insistent question:

"Has the woman who sells herself for money a soul?"

With breathless interest he watched the cruel carving of her body into tiny pieces. Without sniffing, whining, or apology, with arms bared and gleaming scalpel firmly gripped in a hand that never quivered once, the author dissected her. Always he could hear this white invisible figure bending over each scene talking to the audience in his quiet terrible way:

"Well, if be she has a soul, we shall find it. Perhaps it's here!" The knife flashed and the crowd laughed. The result was so unexpected, yet so remarkable they had to laugh.

"We'll try again!" the white figure said with a smile, "Perhaps we should go deeper."

And then with firm strong hand the last secret of muscle and nerve and bone was laid bare and the white face looked into the eyes of the audience through a mist of tears.

"I'm sorry, my friends. But we must face the truth. It's better to know the truth, however bitter, than to believe a lie. I do not dogmatize. I do not draw conclusions. I merely show you the thing that is."

With a soft rush the big curtain came down in a silence that could be felt. The dazed crowd waked from the spell and poured into the aisles, while Stuart still sat gripping the arms of his seat with strangling emotion.

At last he said to himself with choking emphasis:

"He was cruel, inhuman, unjust—I refuse to believe it—she has a soul— She has a soul!"

And yet a question had been raised in his mind that was destined to change the whole motive and purpose of his life.

CHAPTER XI

ILLUMINATION

Stuart left the theatre with the mysterious conviction stirring within him that only God could have directed his steps to that building. The more overwhelming the author's argument the fiercer became his rebellion and the higher rose this cry of his heart for a nobler faith in the possibilities of humanity. He began dimly to feel that the source of light and love might be very near if he but had eyes to see. As yet he was in the dark, but he felt in a dim way that he was groping toward the light and that suddenly his hand might touch the spring of a hidden door which would open and reveal the shining face of God! How strange that these old ideas of the religion of his childhood should come surging back into his heart from the past in just this moment when he was apparently fighting a losing battle to hold the last shred of his faith in anything human or divine!

He went to bed in a calmer frame of mind than he had known for days. His sleep was deep and refreshing and for the second time since he came to New York he woke with the dawn. He watched the light of the coming sun spread from the eastern horizon until its gray mantle covered the world. And then came the first dim notes of the call of the morning to the great city, and then the long dull roar along the line of battle where millions were rising and girding themselves for the struggle of life.

He drew a breath of gratitude for the dawn of a new day, God's miracle of love—the old weariness gone, the loneliness and heartache easier to bear because new thoughts and

new hopes had begun dimly to stir and the world was suddenly flooded with the glory of a new sun.

He went to his office with his mind keyed to a higher pitch of power. He felt that he was on his mettle. The fight was not yet won, but this morning he was winning. He plunged into his work with tireless zeal. Everything he touched seemed illumined with a new light.

At the close of the day's work he was still conscious of an exhaustless pity which had found no adequate expression in his labour on his clients' cases. His mind wandered to the dark silent millions into whose world the doctor had led him that night—millions who have no voice in courts because they have no money to sustain a fight for the enforcement of justice. He had never thought about these people before. They were calling now for his help. Why? Because he had been endowed with powers of head and heart which they did not possess. The possession of these gifts carried a responsibility. He felt this very dimly as yet, but still he felt it. Never before had he been conscious of such an idea.

On reaching his club on Gramercy Park he saw that the Primrose house was closed. Nan's mother had gone with the bridal party on Bivens's big yacht for a cruise which would last through the summer. Somehow, for all his brave talk he didn't feel equal to the task of seeing that window of Nan's old home from his club. He was about to beat a retreat when he stopped abruptly and the lines of his mouth tightened.

"What's the use of being a coward? I've got to get used to it—I'd as well begin at once."

He deliberately took his seat on the little pillared balcony of the clubhouse and watched the darkened window through the gathering twilight. For the moment he gave up the fight—the devil had him by the throat. He let the tears come without protest. He was alone and the shadows were friendly.

He looked at his watch at last by the flickering light of the street lamp and found to his surprise that it was nine o'clock. He had forgotten to eat and felt no hunger. But he must do something. He might get drunk and make a night of it. He couldn't feel any worse. He was in hell anyway, and he had as well join the festivities for once.

He stepped inside, touched a bell and ordered a cocktail. He placed the glass on the little table by his side, and looked at it. What an asinine act, this pouring of poison into the stomach to cure a malady of the soul! He smiled cynically and suddenly recalled something the doctor was fond of repeating.

"My boy, I'm rich so long as there are millions of people in the world poorer than I am."

Perhaps there was an antidote better than this poison. If he could lift the curtain for a single moment in another life more hopeless and wretched than his? It was worth trying.

He rose, left the liquor untouched, and in a few minutes was treading his way through the throngs of the lower East Side. The pathetic figure of a sleeping boy curled up beside a doorstep caught his eye—he stopped and looked at him. Somewhere on this green earth a mother had bent over the cradle of each of these little wild arabs and taught them human speech at least! Now they were as the beasts of the field—and worse—for the fields in which beasts roam at least are free. A great wave of pity swept his heart and the hurt of his own tragedy began to ease before the greater pain of the world. How happy his fate after all—a sound mind in a sound body, youth, strength, power, friends, culture, the inheritance of proud, untainted blood—what a fool he had been an hour ago!

His eye caught the light streaming from a basement saloon on the corner. Crowds of ugly looking wretches were hurrying down the rickety stairs, and the sound of wheezy dance-hall music floated up from below. He pulled his hat down over his eyes and entered.

The ceiling was low, and a crowd of more than fifty half-drunken men and women, smoking and drinking stale beer, sat at the little tables which were placed against the walls. The centre of the room was kept clear for the dancers. He was amazed to find among them a lot of boys and girls not out of their teens. Many of the dark-visaged brutes who sat at the tables watching the dancers were beyond a doubt professional thieves and crooks.

Here and there he saw one of them nod to a girl who was dancing with a boy under age. He knew the meaning of that signal. She was his slave and he lived on her wages. Was there no crime in all the catalogue of human infamy to which man would not stoop for money!

The wheezy little orchestra of three pieces began a waltz, and the dancers swung around the tobacco-fogged room. Stuart rose in disgust to go, when he stopped near

the door suddenly frozen to the spot. A fat beastly Negro swept by encircling the frail figure of a white girl. Her dress was ragged and filthy, but the delicate lines of her face, with its pure Grecian profile, and high forehead bore the stamp of breeding and distinction. Two red spots on her cheeks and the unnatural brightness of her big blue eyes told only too plainly that Death had marked her as his own.

To the young Southerner the sight was one of incredible horror. His first impulse on recovery from this surprise was to rush in, knock this Negro down and take the girl to a place of safety.

He looked about among all the men who filled the room, for a single face in which was left a trace of human pride. With one to stand by him, it could be done. He looked in vain. To strike alone in such a den of beasts would be the act of a madman.

Quivering with rage he took a seat and watched the Negro send this girl from side to side of the room to do his bidding. He made up his mind to track the brute to his lair and tear her from his claws, no matter what the cost. The Negro suddenly beckoned to the girl and she left with him.

Stuart followed close on their heels. Two blocks from the place the black figure stopped and demanded her money. She fumbled nervously in the folds of her filthy skirt and drew from her pocket some small coins. He turned it over in his greasy palm with a sneer.

"All right fur ez hit goes, but come over wid de res'."

"It's all I've got—I swear it is," she sobbed.

He glared at her with a savage growl.

"You're a liar!"

"It's true—I swear it's true!" the trembling voice pleaded.

"Didn't I tell ye las' night I'd kill ye if ye didn't do better to-day?"

"Please, don't beat me again—I've done the best I could——"

Strangling and trembling with rage Stuart edged his way close, keeping his form out of range of the Negro's eyes. The brute was looking neither to the right or left now, his whole being absorbed in the cruel joy of the torture he was about to inflict on the helpless, cringing thing that clung to his arm sobbing and begging for mercy.

"Den ef you'se done de bes' you could—I'se gwine ter teach ye ter do better!" His yellow teeth in their blue gums flashed in a devilish smile. He gripped the slender little wrists in one of his claws and doubled his fist to strike, as a blow from Stuart caught him in the neck and laid him on the pavement. The young lawyer sprang on the prostrate figure with fury. It was the joyous work of a minute to beat and choke him into insensibility. He rose and gave the black form a parting kick that rolled him into the gutter, turned to the crouching white figure and said sharply:

"Come with me."

Without a word she followed timidly behind.

He stopped and spoke tenderly:

"Don't walk behind me."

"I'm not fit to walk beside you," she answered meekly.

"I'll be the judge of that. You're a woman. My mother was a woman. And I'm a little bit ashamed of myself to-night for living in such a world as this without having killed somebody."

She hung her head and tried to walk by his side, instinctively shrinking back.

He stopped to ask an officer the way to the Crittenden Mission. Somewhere he had read that a merchant by the name of Crittenden whose heart was broken over the death of a little girl had given all he possessed to found and endow missions for saving other men's daughters.

The girl heard his question and looked up into his face with a new terror in her feverish eyes.

"Won't they lock me up?"

Stuart took the cold thin hand in his.

"Not unless they lock me up too, child. Don't worry. I'm a lawyer. I'll see that no harm comes to you."

"All right. I'll do just as you say," she responded gratefully.

When the matron at the Mission had soothed away the poor creature's last fear, Stuart turned to go.

The girl stepped quickly forward as he extended his hand.

"Good-bye, child, I hope you'll soon be better. If I can help you, let me know. I'm glad to have had the chance to be of service to you to-night. You have done more for me than I have for you. I am very grateful."

The unnaturally bright eyes gazed into his as if they didn't quite understand, and then through the tears she slowly said:

"You have saved me from hell. I'm afraid I haven't long to live. I'll only ask God that it shall be long enough for me to show you how grateful I am."

Stuart walked home with a sense of spiritual elation he had never felt before. For the first time he had given himself utterly without the hope of reward. A new joy filled his heart with a warm glow. Life began to take a deep, new meaning. The boundaries of the world had been extended to include millions whose existence he had ignored. How vast and thrilling their life! As yet, no new purpose had shaped itself within, but his soul was stirring with vague, mighty impulses.

When he reached the house on Washington Square it was yet early in the evening. He longed for the sweet restfulness which Harriet's presence always brought. He had often come home from a visit to Nan, which had been a continuous torture, to find in her a grateful peace. How strange that we so often love those who have the supreme faculty of torturing instead of making us happy. He found Harriet reading in the library.

"Oh, Jim, dear, where on earth have you been for nearly two days?" she cried. "I haven't seen you since the wedding——"

"Won't you sing for me?" he broke in.

A smile of pride made her face radiant.

"You want to hear me this late?"

"Yes—you'll not disturb anybody."

"All right——" she paused and suddenly clapped her hands. "I'll get my mandolin. You've never heard me play that, have you? I've learned 'Way down on the Swanee Ribber' on it. I know you'll like it."

She ran up the stairs and returned in a moment with the mandolin. Softly touching a note, she seated herself and began to sing, accompanying her song with the little half-doubtful touch on the plaintive strings.

Stuart listened, entranced. He had heard that old song of the South a hundred times. But she was singing it to-night with a strange new power. Or was it his imagination? He listened with keen and more critical ears. No. It was not his imagination. The change was in her voice. He heard with increasing wonder. The quivering notes of tenderness sought his inmost being and stirred the deepest emotion—not with memories of his boyhood days in the South whose glory the song was telling—but in visions of the future, thoughts of great deeds to be done and heroic sacrifice to be endured.

How selfish his life had been after all. Every dream and struggle had been for himself. A feeling of shame overspread his soul as he watched the girl's soft little hand touch the strings, and he contrasted his own life with the sweetness of her spirit. In all the years he had known her he could not recall a single mean or selfish act. Her face was not beautiful by the standard of artists, but the sunlight lingered in her eyes, her hands were cunning, and her feet swift to serve those she loved. For the last two years as she had blossomed into maidenhood, a subtle fragrance had enveloped her being, making significant and charming all she said or did, revealing new beauty and grace at every turn.

From some shadowy memory of a Sunday's service in his boyhood came floating into his heart the words "He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it."

The groping hand that had been fumbling in the dark suddenly touched the hidden spring, and the darkened soul was flooded with light. A strange peace entered to abide forever. A man had been born again—of the spirit, not the flesh.

The rapt look still held his face when the music had ceased, and Harriet watched his

expression for a moment in silence.

The girl leaned forward at last with eager interest and laid her friendly hand on his. She had a trick of leaning forward like that when talking to him that had always amused Stuart.

He watched the flashes of light in her eyes beneath their long lashes and the quiver of the mobile mouth.

"Tell me what you are thinking about, Jim?" she said, a smile flitting around her tender, expressive eyes.

Stuart noticed two dainty dimples come with the smile in the faintest suggestion of coquetry.

"I was seeing a vision, little pal," he began slowly—"the vision of a gala night of Grand opera. Broadway blazed with light and I was fighting my way through the throng at the entrance to hear a great singer whose voice had begun to thrill the world. At last amid a hush of intense silence, she came before the footlights, saw and conquered. The crowd went mad with enthusiasm. For once an American audience forgot its cold self-possession. Men leaped on their seats, cheered and shouted as Frenchmen or Italians. Women in resplendent gowns and jewels rose in their boxes and split their gloves clapping their hands. And through it all the singer stood bowing in simple dignity, looking over the sea of faces as if in search of one she knew. I lifted my hat and waved it on high until she saw. A beautiful smile lighted her face and straight over the heads of the people she blew me a kiss——"



"I was seeing a vision, little pal"

The tiniest frown clouded the girl's brow.

"Who was she, Jim?"

"One who shall yet sing before Kings and Princes—I call her 'Sunshine'—her name is Harriet Woodman."

With a sigh of relief she threw herself back in the big armchair in a pose of natural grace, her lips twitched, the golden head tipped to one side thoughtfully, and he waited for her to speak.

"But, Jim, suppose I'm not ambitious? Suppose I'm just a silly little home body who only wishes to be loved?"

"And so you will be loved. They will come in troops—these lovers—serious and gay, and fall at your feet——"

"But if I only want one—and he is not there—they will tire me, won't they?"

"When I see those two dimples come into your cheeks now and then I think you will enjoy it."

"Perhaps I would."

The head nodded in quick friendly understanding. She raised her arms and touched the bow of ribbon on her luxuriant hair with another suggestion of coquetry, quickly lowered them, drew the short skirt down further over her knees, gazed thoughtfully at Stuart, and with a quizzical look in her eyes asked:

"How old do you think a girl must be to really and deeply and truly love, Jim?"

Stuart's brow contracted and he took her hand in his, stroked it tenderly and studied the beautiful lines as they melted from the firmly shaped wrist into the rounded arm and gracefully moulded body.

"I'm afraid you've asked a bigger question than I can answer, dear," he said, with serious accent. "I've been wondering lately whether the world hasn't lost the secret of happy mating and marrying. A more beautiful even life I have never seen than the one in the home of my childhood. Yet my mother was only fourteen and my father twenty-one when they were married. You see, dear, that was in the old days when boys and girls were not afraid—when love dared to laugh at cares about houses and lands and goods and chattels, when Nature claimed her own, when the voices of the deepest impulses of our bodies and souls were heard first and the chatterings about careers and social triumphs were left to settle themselves. Now folks only allow themselves to marry in cold blood, calculating with accuracy their bank accounts. My mother had been married six months at your age, and yet here I sit on a pedestal and have the impudence to talk to you as a child——"

"But you're not impudent, Jim," she broke in eagerly, "and I understand."

Her eyes were looking steadily into his.

"I'm beginning to wonder," Stuart continued, "whether Nature made a mistake when she made woman as she is. I once knew a girl of fifteen to whom I believe life was the deepest tragedy or the highest joy of which her heart will ever be capable. Else why did the blood come and go so quickly in her cheeks?"

A sudden flush mantled Harriet's face and she turned away that he might not see.

"Why did she feel the loud beating of her heart at the approach of the man she imagined to be her hero? Why did she drop her eyes in confusion——"

The deep brown eyes were looking into his now with a steady light. She had mastered herself and he could not guess her secret. Her heart beat so loudly she wondered if he could hear.

Stuart's voice had grown dreamy, as if a thousand tender memories were trooping into his heart from the past and he was talking to himself.

"Why were her hands so moist and warm to the touch of the boy who held them, and why did they tremble so violently? Why did she turn so pale?—so pale and so suddenly, he thought she was about to faint? When again in life can one see this moment of the blossoming of both soul and body—this quivering readiness for the touch of the lover for whose coming she waits with such frank and honest eagerness?"

Again the little figure bent forward with breathless interest as she slowly asked:

"Oh, Jim, when did you see this?"

Stuart's head bent low and rested between his hands.

"I loved such a little girl once, dear——"

Harriet's face suddenly flushed with joy. It was too wonderful to be true, but it was true! And he had chosen this curious way to tell her. Her voice sank to the softest whisper as she bent closer:

"And you love her still, Jim?"

His head drooped lower as he sighed:

"I loved and lost her, little pal! She was married two days ago. God called me in the morning of life to claim my own. But I wasn't bold enough. I waited, and worldly wisdom, prudence, and common sense became her tutors to make her wise. She came to the great city, learned its ways and sold herself for gold. A priest of God standing

before his altar confirmed the sale while a crowd of fools looked on in awe——"

The colour had slowly returned to the little freckled face with its crown of golden hair, and the deep brown eyes overflowed with tears for just a moment. She brushed them away before he raised his head, so that he never knew.

She put her hand on his head and stroked the dark hair tenderly.

"I'm so sorry, Jim," she said simply, "I understand now."

He raised his head and took her hand in his again.

"It's very sweet to have you share this ugly secret of my life, little pal. It will help me."

"And you are sorry you ever knew her, Jim?"

"No, I'm not sorry. You see, dearie, there's just one thing even God can't do—create a human character. He can only give us a will—the spark from his own soul. We must do the rest. I've grown to see that there's just one thing in the world that's really big—big as God is big—the man who has attained a character. I haven't lived at all yet. I'm just beginning to see what it means to live. Until now I've thought only of myself. A new light has illumined the way. Now—I'm going to live for others. From to-day I shall ask nothing for myself, and I can never be disappointed again."

Harriet looked up quickly.

"Would it please you, Jim, if I should make a great singer?"

"More than I can tell you, dear. Your voice is a divine gift. I envy you its power."

Her eyes were shining with a great purpose.

"I know that it means years and years of patient work—but I'll do it," she cried.

Stuart rose and pressed her hand to his lips. She wondered if he could feel it tremble beneath the pounding of her heart.

When the last echo of his footstep in the hall above died away and his door had closed, the little golden head bowed low in a passionate tender prayer:

"God help me to keep my secret and yet to love and help him always!"

Book 2 — The Root

CHAPTER I

AN OLD PERFUME

Stuart sat in his office holding a letter from Nan which was hard to answer.

For nine years he had refused to see or speak to her. He met Bivens as a matter of course, but always down town during business hours or at one of his clubs. For the first year Nan had resented his attitude in angry pride and remained silent. And then she began to do a curious thing which had grown to be a part of his inmost life. For the past eight years she had written a brief daily diary recording her doings, thoughts and memories which she mailed to him every Sunday night. She asked no reply and he gave none. No names appeared in its story and no name was signed to the dainty sheets of paper which always bore the perfume of wild strawberries.

But the man who read them in silence knew and understood.

The letter he held to-day was not an unsigned sheet of her diary—it was a direct, personal appeal—tender and beautiful in its sincerity. She begged him to forget the past, because she needed his friendship and advice, and asked that he come to see her at once.

This letter was his first temptation to break the resolution by which he had lived for years. He rose and paced the room with fury, as he began to realize how desperate was his desire to go.

"Have I fought all these years for nothing?" he cried.

The thing that drew him with all but resistless power was the deeper meaning between the lines. He knew that each day the incompleteness of her life had been borne in upon her with crushing force. He knew that the mad impulses which had expressed themselves in luxury, dress, extravagance, balls and bizarre entertainments were but the strangled cries of a sorrowing heart. And he knew that the fatuity of it all had begun at last to terrify her. The more desperately he fought the impulse to go the keener became his desire to see her again. And yet he must not. He felt, by an instinct deeper than reason, that the day he returned from his exile and touched her hand would mark the beginning of a tragedy for both.

And yet the desire to go clamoured with increasing madness. The changes that had come into his life counted for nothing—to-day only a great passion remained—torturing, challenging, tempting. Could he never live it down? He looked about his office, reminded himself of his dignity and responsibility, and sought refuge in his sense of duty to the people.

"I've done some things worth while!" he cried, with brooding pride.

And the record confirmed his boast.

In the past nine years he had thrown his life away only to find it in greater power. He recalled it now with a renewed sense of gratitude.

The first year which he had given of unselfish devotion to the service of the people had been a failure. He saw at the end of it that in reaching an individual here and there he was merely trying to bale out the ocean with a soup ladle. He saw that if he would serve the people he must work through them. He must appeal to the masses, teach, lead, uplift and inspire them to action. And he entered politics. Only organic social action could get anywhere or accomplish anything worth while. He joined the organization of the local Democracy in his district and went to work.

It happened that he joined just before an exciting municipal election. He threw himself into the campaign with the zeal of a crusader. The people who crowded to hear him were not merely thrilled by the eloquence of his impassioned speeches—they felt instinctively that the heart of a real man was beating back of every word.

His advancement was remarkable. At the end of four years he was nominated for District Attorney, and was swept into office by a large majority.

Under his vigorous administration of this important and powerful office the enforcement of justice ceased to be a joke and became a living faith.

His work had stirred the State to a nobler and cleaner civic life. During the past year he had become one of the foremost figures in American Democracy—the best loved and the most hated and feared man in public life in New York.

He remained alike indifferent to the cheers of his friends or the threats of his enemies. He was the most powerful man who had ever held such an office because he had no ambition beyond the highest service he could render the people. He asked no favours—he sought no preferment.

To the men who secured his nomination and election he was an insolvable mystery. He said he wanted nothing. They had taken that as a wise saying of a very shrewd man. When he accepted the nomination, they smiled knowingly. But when they demanded that he use his high office to punish enemies and reward friends—and he politely refused—they served notice on him of political death unless he yielded within a given number of hours.

His answer was a laugh as he opened the door and pointed the way by which the astonished delegation might find a safe and swift way of exit. They passed out in speechless astonishment, and sent their big chief to browbeat and bully the young upstart into submission. The incredible swiftness with which he returned left the question open as to how he got out of the District Attorney's office. He claimed to have bowed himself politely out the door—but, from the condition of his clothes and the rumpled state of his hair, his comrades cherished the secret but sure conviction that he was kicked down the stairs. Be that as it may, from that day Stuart was left to his own

devices by the professional politicians, who were loud in their accusations of treachery and ingratitude. His political education was given up as hopeless.

Yet in spite of their gloomy predictions of his speedy ruin, he had steadily grown in power and influence.

The work on which he had just entered was an investigation before an unusually intelligent Grand Jury of the criminal acts of a group of the most daring and powerful financiers of the world. These men controlled through their position as trustees of the treasuries of great corporations more millions than the combined treasuries of the governments of the Republic—State and National. The act was not only daring, it was extremely dangerous. Under certain conditions it might produce a panic—so daring and dangerous was the move that its first announcement was received as a joke by the press. The idea of a young upstart questioning the honesty and position of the men who controlled the treasuries of the great insurance and trust companies was ridiculous. When he realized the magnitude of the task he had undertaken, he at once put his house in order for the supreme effort. It was necessary that he give up every outside interest that might distract his attention from the greater task.

The one matter of grave importance to which he was giving his time outside his office was his position as advisory counsel to Dr. Woodman in his suit for damages against the Chemical Trust, which had been dragging its course through the courts for years. To his amazement he had just received an offer from Bivens's attorneys to compromise this suit for a hundred thousand dollars. He would of course advise the doctor to accept it immediately. He had never believed he could win a penny.

What could be Bivens's motive in making such an offer? It was impossible that the shrewd little president of the American Chemical Company had anything to fear personally from this attack. His fortune was vast and beyond question. His wealth had grown in the past nine years like magic. Everything his smooth little hand touched had turned to gold. Wherever an industry could pay a dividend, his ferret eyes found it. The process was always the same. He brought together its rival houses, capitalized the new combine for ten times its actual value and bound the burden of this enormous fictitious value as an interest-bearing debt on the backs of the consumers of the goods. The people and their children and their children's children would have to pay it.

His fortune now could not be less than forty millions and the issue of such a suit as the one Woodman had brought and on which he had spent so much of his time and money was to Bivens a mere bagatelle.

The more Stuart pondered over this extraordinary offer, the more completely he was puzzled. He sought for outside influences that might move him to such an act. It might be Nan—it must be! Her letter surely made the explanation reasonable. She knew this suit was an obstacle in the way of their meeting. If she had made up her mind to remove that obstacle, she would do it. Her will had grown in imperious power with each indulgence.

During the past winter she had become the sensation of the metropolis. Her wealth, her beauty, her palaces, and her entertainments had made her the subject of endless comment. She had set a pace for extravagance which made the old leaders stand aghast. And the one thing which made her letter well nigh irresistible was that he alone of all the world knew the inner life of this beautiful woman whose name was on a thousand lips. Her worldly wise mother might have guessed it but she had been dead for the past five years, and the secret was his alone.

He read her letter over again and looked thoughtfully at the pile of legal documents in the case of *Woodman against the American Chemical Company* lying on his desk.

"It's her work beyond a doubt!" he said at last, "and the doctor will never believe it."

He was waiting the arrival of his old friend for a conference over Bivens's offer of compromise and he dreaded the ordeal. If he should refuse this final chance of settlement he would make a mistake that could not be undone. The result was even worse than he could possibly foresee.

"So the little weasel has offered to compromise my suit for half the sum we named, eh?" the doctor asked in triumph.

"I assure you that if the case comes to its final test you are certain to lose."

"So you have said again and again, my boy"—was the good-natured reply, "but his sudden terror and this offer shows that we have won already and he knows it. Greater thieves, who have ruined their competitors in the same way, are urging him to settle this suit and prevent others from being brought."

"I don't think so."

"It's as plain as daylight."

"There's another motive."

"Nonsense," persisted the doctor, his whole being aglow with enthusiasm, "Bivens has seen the hand-writing on the wall. When the American people are once aroused their wrath will sweep the Trusts into the bottomless pit."

"Bivens isn't worrying about the people or their wrath."

"Then it's time he began!" the doctor cried. "Mark my word, the day of the common people has dawned. This mudsill of the world has learned to read and write and begun to think. He has tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and begins dimly to see his own nakedness. He will never be content again until he turns the world upside down. My country will lead the way as in the past."

"But if in the meantime you and yours go down in ruin?"

"I refuse to consider it. The cause of the people and their day has come. I will stand or fall with them. Remember, my boy, that at last the idea has been born that we are all—men! It's new—it's revolutionary. A few centuries ago the people slept in ignorance. Of the twenty-six barons who signed the Magna Charta only three could write their names—the rest could only make their mark. The average workingman of to-day is more cultured than the titled nobleman of yesterday—the people once thoroughly aroused—let fools find shelter!"

"But you and I have both agreed, Doctor," Stuart interrupted with a frown, "that Mr. Jno. C. Calhoun Bivens is not a fool. You must consider this offer. You have too much at stake. Your factory has been closed for five years. Your store has been sold—your business ruined and you are fighting to pay the interest on your debts. I've seen you growing poorer daily until you have turned your home into a lodging house and filled it with strangers."

"I've enjoyed knowing them. My sympathies have been made larger."

"Yes, you won't even collect your rents."

"Still I've always managed to get along," was the cheerful answer. "I've yet a roof over my head."

"But is this battle yours alone, Doctor? You are but one among millions. You are trying to bear the burden of all—have you counted the cost? Harriet's course in music will continue two years longer—the last year she must spend abroad. Her expenses will be great. This settlement is a generous one, no matter what Bivens's motive."

"I can't compromise with a man who has crushed my business by a conspiracy of organized blackmail."

"Oh, come, come, Doctor, talk common sense. The American Chemical Company has simply dispensed with the services of the jobber, and the retailer. They manufacture the goods and sell them direct to the consumer through their own stores. The day of the jobber and retailer is done. They had to go. You were not ruined by blackmail, you were crushed by a law of progress as resistless as the law of gravity."

The doctor's gray eyes flashed with sudden inspiration.

"If the law of gravity is unjust it will be abolished. If civilization is unjust it must be put down. There can be no contradiction in life when once we know the truth. I can't compromise with Bivens—I refuse his generosity. I'll take only what the last tribunal of the people shall give me—justice."

"The last tribunal of the people will give you nothing," the lawyer said, emphatically.

"I'll stand or fall with it. I make common cause with the people. I know that Bivens is a power now. He chooses judges, defies the law, bribes legislatures and city councils and imagines that he rules the nation. But the Napoleons of finance to-day will be wearing stripes in Sing Sing to-morrow. We are merely passing through a period of transition which brings suffering and confusion. The end is sure, because evil carries within itself the seed of death. A despotism of money cannot be fastened on the people of America."

"But, Doctor," Stuart interrupted persuasively, "he is not trying to fasten a despotism on America, on you, or anybody else in this offer."

The older man ignored the interruption and continued with a dreamy look:

"Only a few years ago a great millionaire who lived in a palace on Fifth Avenue boldly said to a newspaper reporter: 'The public be d—d!' Times have changed. The millionaires have begun to buy the newspapers and beg for public favour. We are

walking on the crust of a volcano of public wrath."

"But how long must we wait for this volcanic outburst of public wrath?"

"It's of no importance. The big thing is that in America a new force has appeared in the world, the common consciousness of a passion for justice in the hearts of millions of enlightened freemen clothed with power! Never before has manhood had this supreme opportunity. Under its influence this insane passion for gold must slowly but surely be transformed into a desire for real wealth of mind and soul. The evils of our time are not so great as those of our fathers. We merely feel them more keenly. The trouble is our faith grows dim in these moments of stress. As for me I lift up my head and believe in my fellow-man. We are just entering a new and wonderful era—the era of electricity and mystery, of struggle, aspiration, the passion for the eternal. I am content to live and fight for the right, win or lose, and play my little part in this mighty drama!"

"I had hoped you were tired of fighting a losing battle."

"Tired of fighting a losing battle? You've forgotten, perhaps, that I'm a veteran of the civil war. You know we were defeated year after year, battle after battle, until it looked as if Lee was invincible. And then a silent dark man with a big black cigar in his thoughtful mouth came slowly out of the West and we commenced to move forward under his leadership inch by inch. It was slow, and the dead lay ever in piles around us—but still we moved—always forward, never backward. And when at last the men saw it, they began to laugh at Death. Their eyes had seen the first flash of the coming glory of the Lord!"

The doctor paused a moment and looked at Stuart with a curious expression of pity shining through his gray eyes.

"What a wonderful old world this is, if we only lift up our heads and see it. Across its fields and valleys armies have marched and counter-marched for four thousand years, a world of tears and blood, of tyranny and oppression, of envy and hate, of passion and sin—and yet it has always been growing better, brighter and more beautiful. Wooden shoes have always been ringing on stairs of gold as men from the depths have climbed higher and higher. I'll fight this battle to a finish and I'll win. If God lives I'll win—I'm so sure of it, my boy."

The doctor paused and his eyes flashed.

"I'm so sure of it, that I'm not only going to refuse this bribe from Bivens, but my answer will be a harder blow. I'm going to begin another bigger and more important suit for the dissolution of the American Chemical Trust."

"You can't mean this!"

"I do!" was the firm response.

Stuart slipped his arm around the older man with a movement of instinctive tenderness.

"Look here, Doctor, I've lived in your home for fourteen years and I've grown to love you as my own father."

"I know, my boy."

"You must listen to me now!" the younger man insisted with deep emotion. "I can give no time to your suit. I am just entering on a great struggle for the people. Tremendous issues are at stake."

"And your own career hangs on the outcome, too?" the doctor interrupted.

"Yes."

"You'll go down a wreck if you fail."

"Perhaps."

"And you're going to risk all without a moment's hesitation?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It's my duty."

"Good boy!" the older man cried, seizing Stuart's hand. "You can't fail. That's why I'm going to risk all in my fight."

"But the cases are not the same."

"No, I'm old and played out—my life's sands are nearly run, I haven't much to risk—but such as I have I offer it freely to God and my country. I envy you the opportunity to make a greater sacrifice—and you advise me to compromise for a paltry sum of money a righteous cause merely to save my own skin while you tell me in the same breath that you are just entering the lists against the one unconquerable group of financial buccaneers in America and that you've set your life on the issue."

The doctor seized Stuart's hand, wrung it and laughed.

"Congratulations, my boy—I'm proud of you—proud that you live in my house, proud that I've known and loved you, and tried to teach you the joy and the foolishness of throwing your life away!"

With a wave of his hand the stalwart figure of the old man passed out and left him brooding in sorrowful silence.

"If the doctor and Harriet were only out of this!" he exclaimed. "It makes me sick to think of the future!"

He picked up Nan's unanswered letter and read it again and the faint perfume of the delicate paper stole into his heart with a thousand aching memories.

He seized his pen at last, set his face like flint and resolutely wrote his answer:

Dear Nan:

Your letter is very kind. I'll be honest and tell you that it has stirred memories I've tried to kill and can't. I hate to say no, but I must.

Sincerely,

JIM.

As he drew down the door of the letter box on the corner to post this reply he paused a moment. A wave of desperate longing swept his heart.

"My God! I must see her!" he cried in anguish.

And then the strong square jaw came together and the struggle was over. He dropped the letter in the box, turned and walked slowly home.

CHAPTER II

AN INTRUDER

On the night following Stuart worked late in his office, developing his great case. He was disappointed in the final showing of the evidence to be presented to the Grand Jury. His facts were not as strong as he expected to make them.

At ten o'clock he quit work and hurried home to refresh his tired spirit with Harriet's music. He could think more clearly while she played for him.

As he hurried up the steps he suddenly collided with a handsome young fellow just emerging from the door.

His first hope was that he had crippled a lodger. He hated the sight and sound of them. He had always felt their presence in the house an unpardonable intrusion. A second look showed him that the youngster who had hurried down the steps with profound apologies and much embarrassment was not a lodger. He was dressed too handsomely and he had evidently been calling on some one.

Perhaps on Harriet!

A sudden fear gripped his heart. He felt like following him to the corner and demanding his reasons for such impudence.

Where had he seen that boy's face?

Somewhere, beyond a doubt. But he couldn't place him.

He let himself in softly and started at the sight of Harriet's smiling face framed in the

parlor doorway. His worst fears were confirmed. She was dressed in a dainty evening gown and had evidently enjoyed her visitor.

Stuart pretended not to notice the fact and asked her to play.

He fell lazily into an arm chair while the deft fingers swept the keys. As he sat dreaming and watching the rhythmic movement of her delicate hands, he began to realize at last that his little pal, stub-nosed, red haired and freckled, had silently and mysteriously grown into a charming woman. He wondered what had become of the stub-nose? It seemed to have stretched out into perfect proportions. The freckles had faded into a delicate white skin of creamy velvet. And what once threatened to be a violent red head had softened into beaten gold.

But the most charming feature of all was the deep spiritual tenderness of her eyes, blue sometimes, gray and blue sometimes, but always with little brown spots in them which Nature seemed to have dropped by accident the day she painted them. Stuart always imagined she had picked up a brown brush by mistake. He thought with a sudden pang of the possibility of losing her. She was twenty-three now, in the pride and glory of perfect young womanhood, and yet she had no lovers. He wondered why? Her music of course. It had been the one absorbing passion of life. Her progress had been slow for the first years, while at college. But during the past two years of training every lesson seemed to tell. He had watched her development with pride and brooding tenderness. And her eyes had always sparkled with deep joy at his slightest word of praise. For the first time it had occurred to him as an immediate possibility that she might marry and their lives drift apart.

He resented the thought with unreasonable anger. Of course she must marry. And he would have to give her up.

He began to realize dimly how much he owed to her of peace and happiness during the past nine lonely years. A sweet comradeship had grown between them deeper and more tender than the tie which binds a brother and sister, and he had taken it as a matter of course. He resented the idea of a break in their relations. Yet why should he? What rights had he over her life? Absolutely none, of course. He wondered vaguely if she were sly enough to have a sweetheart and let nobody know? Who was that fellow? Where had he met him before?

He rose with a sudden frown. Sure as fate—the very boy—the tall, dreamy-looking youngster who danced with her so many times that night ten years ago at her birthday party! She said he was too frail—that her prince must be strong. Well, confound him, he had gotten strong. That's why he had failed to place him at first. He made up his mind to put a stop to it. He was her guardian anyway. Her father was so absorbed in saving the world, any thief could slip in and steal his daughter under his very nose. The fellow who took Harriet would have to measure up to the full stature of a man. He made up his mind to that.

He walked over to the piano and stood behind her a moment.

When the last note died softly away and she began turning the pages of a pile of music sheets without looking up, Stuart said, with a studied indifference:

"Tell me, little pal, who was that tall young fellow I ran into on the steps?"

"Why, don't you remember my frail young admirer of long ago?"

"Do you love him, girlie?"

Stuart bent low and looked searchingly into her eyes.

Her fingers slipped lazily over the keys in little touches of half-forgotten songs.

"When I was very, very young, I thought I did. It makes me laugh now. It's wonderful how much we can outgrow, isn't it?"

"I'm glad you've outgrown this."

"Why? He's an awfully nice fellow."

"Perhaps—but I don't like him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I just don't like him and I don't want you to like him."

"Oh!"

"You see, little pal, I'm your guardian."

"Are you?"

"Yes, and I'm giving you due legal notice that you have no right to marry without my consent—you promise to make me your confidant?"

A soft laugh full of tenderness and joy came from the girl as she turned her eyes upward for the first time:

"All right, guardie, I'll confer with you on that occasion."

CHAPTER III

A STRAIGHT TIP

Nan received the announcement of Bivens's failure to settle Woodman's suit with a grim resolution to win now, at all hazards. The sensational reports of Stuart's action against the big financiers had given her quick mind the cue to a new line of stratagem. She began cautiously.

"You are not going to give up a thing I've set my heart on merely because old Woodman's a fool, are you?" she asked her husband, with a touch of scorn. "Jim Stuart is the best friend you ever had. He has become one of the most famous men in America. He would lend distinction to our house. I want him at our next entertainment."

"The thing that puzzles me," Bivens broke in, "is why the devil he will not come to the house. When I meet him down town he's always friendly."

Nan's lips quivered with a queer little smile.

"Will he succeed in this action against these men?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He can't get the facts."

"If he could get them and did succeed, what would happen?"

"He'd shake the foundations of the financial world."

"You could get the facts, couldn't you, dear?"

Nan spoke in the softest tones.

"I have them already."

"Why not give them to him?"

"I had thought of that—but it's dangerous."

"Why dangerous?"

"It might bring on a panic."

"What have you to lose by it?"

"Nothing, if I'm wise."

"I've never known anybody to call you a fool."

"A panic's a dangerous thing to monkey with."

"Nonsense!" Nan cried with enthusiasm. "I'll back you to win when the test comes."

Bivens smiled with pride.

"Yes. I could win, I think, having a little inside information about what may happen."

"Why don't you do it, then?"

"It's dangerous," Bivens repeated, thoughtfully.

"It couldn't injure Stuart?" his wife asked cautiously.

"No. It couldn't hurt him. On the other hand, I might make him the unconscious instrument of a great personal vengeance, double my fortune and possibly land Jim in the White House."

"You must do it, dear!" his wife cried, trembling with suppressed excitement. Bivens hesitated and shook his head.

"It's playing with dynamite."

"It's worth the risk to double your fortune—do it for my sake!"

Nan leaned close and pressed her husband's hand while her dark eyes found their way into his heart. The hard mouth smiled as he took her flushed face in his hands and kissed her.

"I'll do it," he said with firm accent.

"I know you'll win—you never fail!" she cried, "You'll not lose a moment?"

"No. I'll 'phone him at once."

Bivens called Stuart and made an appointment to meet him at the Algonquin Club for dinner two days later.

"Why two days' delay?" Nan asked petulantly.

"It will require that time to prepare the papers. Don't worry. I'll put the thing through now."

When Stuart sat down with Bivens in one of the magnificent private dining rooms of his millionaire club two days later, he was struck with the perfection of the financier's dress, and the easy elegance of his manners.

"Nan has surely done wonders with some pretty crude material!" he mused.

As the meal progressed the lawyer's imagination continued to picture the process of training through which she had put Bivens to develop from the poor white Southerner, the polished little man of the gilded world he now saw. No flight of his fancy could imagine the real humour of it all. He recalled Nan's diary with grim amusement.

While Bivens had really been wax in her skillful hands since the day of her marriage, the one task she found hard was her desperate and determined effort to make him a well-groomed man. She was finally compelled to write out instructions for his daily conduct and enforce them with all sorts of threats and blandishments. She pasted this programme in Bivens's hat, at last, and he was in mortal terror lest some one should lift the inside band and read them. They were minute and painfully insistent on the excessive use of soap and water. They required that he wash and scrub two and three times daily. Not only did they prescribe tooth brushes and mouth washes, with all sorts of pastes and powders, but that he should follow it with an invention of the devil for torturing the gums known as "dental floss." To get even with the man who invented the thing Bivens bought him out and stopped its manufacture—only to find the scoundrel had invented a new one and had it on the market three weeks later.

In the midst of this agony of breaking him to the copious use of water, Bivens found a doctor who boldly declared that excessive bathing was ruinous to the health—that water was made for fish and air for man. The little millionaire made him chief of the staff of his household doctors, but Nan refused to admit him when she learned his views. Bivens secretly built him a hospital, endowed it, and gave a fund to found a magazine to proclaim his gospel.

It took two years to thoroughly break him so that she could always be sure that his nails were trimmed and his clothes in perfect style. He had long since ceased to struggle and had found much happiness of late years in vying with her in the perfection of his personal appearance until he had come to fit into the great establishments, which he had built at her suggestion, as though to the manor born.

When the dinner was finished Bivens dismissed the waiter, lighted one of his huge cigars and drew from a morocco case which he had placed beside his chair a type-written manuscript. He turned its leaves thoughtfully a moment and handed them to Stuart.

"There's a document, Jim, that cost me ten thousand dollars to prepare; for whose suppression a million dollars would be paid and no questions asked."

"And you give it to me?" the District Attorney asked, with a smile.

"I give it to you."

"But why this generosity on your part, Cal?"

The sarcasm which the lawyer threw into the playful banter of his tone was not lost on the financier. The mask of his cunning, dark visage was not slipped for a moment as he slowly replied:

"I have anticipated that question. I answer it fully and frankly. There is enough dynamite in that document to blow up half of Wall Street and land somebody in the White House."

"And many in the morgue?"

"And some in the penitentiary. I've watched your work the past nine years with genuine pride, Jim. You've said a lot of hard things about rich malefactors, but you've never touched me."

"No, I think you're too shrewd to be caught in that class, Cal."

"I pride myself that I am. It's only the clumsy fool who gets tangled in the criminal law. But a lot of them have done it—big fellows whose names fill the world with noise. I've taken the pains to put into that type-written document the names, the dates, the places, the deeds, the names of the witnesses and all the essential facts. Do what you please with it. If you do what I think you will, some men who are wearing purple and fine linen will be wearing stripes before another year and you will be the biggest man in New York."

"And your motive?"

"Does it matter?"

"It vitally affects the credibility of this story."

"You must know my motive?"

"I prefer to be sure of it before taking so important and daring an action as you suggest."

Bivens rose and stood before his friend with his smooth hands folded behind his back.

"You believe me, Jim, when I say that my pride in your career is genuine?"

"I've never doubted it," was the quick answer.

"Then two suggestions will be enough. Perhaps I wish to get even with some men who have done me a dirty trick or two, and perhaps, incidentally, in the excitement which will follow this exposure of fraud and crime, I may make an honest penny—is that enough?"

"Quite."

"And you'll make the attack at once?"

Stuart glanced rapidly through the first page of the document and his eyes began to dance with excitement.

"The only favour I ask," Bivens added, "is twenty-four hours' notice before you act."

"I'll let you know."

Stuart rose quickly, placed the document in his inside pocket and hurried home.

CHAPTER IV

EVERY MAN'S SHADOW

The deeper the young lawyer probed into the mass of corruption Bivens had placed in his hands the more profound became his surprise. At first he was inclined to scout the whole story as an exaggeration invented in the fierce fight with financial foes.

It was incredible!

That men whose names were the synonyms of honesty and fair dealing, men entrusted with the management of companies whose assets represented the savings of millions of poor men, the sole defense of millions of helpless women and children—that these trusted leaders of the world were habitually prostituting their trusts for personal gain, staggered belief.

He delayed action and began a careful, patient, thorough investigation. As it proceeded, his amazement increased. He found that Bivens had only scratched the surface of the truth. He found that the system of fraud and chicanery had spread from the heads of the big companies until the whole business world was honeycombed with its corruption.

New York, the financial centre of the Nation, had gone mad with the insane passion for money at all hazards—by all means, fair or foul. The Nation was on the tidal wave of the most wonderful industrial boom in its history. The price of stocks had reached fabulous figures and still soared to greater heights. Millionaires were springing up, like mushrooms, in a night. Waiters at fashionable hotels, who hung on the chairs of rich guests with more than usual fawning, were boasting of fortunes made in a day. Broadway and Central Park and every avenue leading to the long stretches of good country roads flashed with hundreds of new automobiles, crowded with strange smiling faces.

Two months had passed since Bivens placed in the District Attorney's hands the document which was destined to make sad history in the annals of the metropolis. Stuart felt that the time had come to act. It was his solemn duty to the people.

He sat in his private office in one of the great skyscrapers down town holding in his hand a list of the men he was about to ask the Grand Jury to indict for crimes which would send them to prison, exile and dishonoured death. It was a glorious morning in May. The window was open and a soft wind was blowing from the south. The view of the blue expanse of the great harbour and towering hills of Staten Island in the distance was entrancing. The south wind filled his heart with memories of high ideals, and noble aspirations born in his own land of poverty and want.

His people in the South had known the real horrors of want, had fought the grim battle, won an honest living and kept their lives clean and strong. And just because they had, his heart was filled with a great pity as he read over and over again the illustrious names he was about to blacken with the stain of crime. He thought of women in sheltered homes up town whose necks would bend to the storm; of the anguish of old-fashioned fathers and mothers who could think no evil of their own, whose spirits would droop and die at the first breath of shame. He rose at last with calm decision.

"I've got to do it—that's all. But before I do, I'm going to know one or two things beyond the shadow of a doubt."

He seized his telephone and made an appointment to call at once on Bivens.

The financier extended his delicate hand and with a cordial smile led Stuart to a seat beside his desk. The only sign he betrayed of deep emotion was the ice-like coldness of his slender fingers.

"Well, Jim, you've completed your very thorough investigation?"

"How did you know I was making a thorough investigation?"

Stuart looked at Bivens with a quick movement of surprise. The little man was gazing intently at the ceiling.

"I make it my business to know things which vitally interest me. You found my facts accurate?"

"Remarkably so."

"And you are ready to strike?"

The black eyes flashed.

"When I have confirmed some statements you have made in your story concerning the private life of these men. How do you know the accuracy of the facts you state in a single line, for instance, about the private life and habits of the president of a certain trust company?"

A cold smile played about Bivens's mouth for a moment.

"You don't suppose I would make a statement like that unless I know it to be true?"

"I found all your other facts correct. This I haven't been able to verify. You make it incidentally, as though it were a matter of slight importance. To my mind it's the key to the man's character and to every act of his life. How did you discover it?"

"Very simply."

Bivens walked to his door, opened it, looked outside, stepped to one of the great steel safes and drew its massive doors apart. He pulled a slip from a cabinet fitted with a card-case index, noted the number, replaced the card, opened another door and drew out a manuscript notebook of some three hundred pages of type-written matter. Each page was written without spacing and contained as many words as the average page of a printed novel. On the back of the morocco cover was printed in plain gold lettering:

"THE PRIVATE LIFE OF NO. 560."

He handed the volume to Stuart, closed the safe, and resumed his seat.

"You may take that book with you, Jim," he said quietly. "I trust to your honour not to reveal its contents except in the discharge of your sworn duty as an officer of the law. You will find in it the record of the distinguished president's private life for the past ten years without the omission of a single event of any importance."

Stuart glanced through the book with amazement.

"How did you come into possession of such facts?"

"No trouble at all," was the easy answer. "It only requires a little money and a little patience and a little care in selecting the right men for the right job. Any man in the business world who thinks he can do as he pleases in this town will wake some morning with a decided jolt. The war for financial supremacy has developed a secret service which approaches perfection. The secret service of armies is child's play compared to it.

"Not only do I systematically watch my employees until I know every crook and turn of their lives, but I watch with even greater care the heads of every rival firm in every department of the industrial world where my interests touch theirs.

"I not only watch the heads of firms, I watch their trusted assistants and confidential men. In that big safe a thousand secrets lie locked whose revelation would furnish matter enough to run the yellow journals for the next five years.

"Every man who holds a position of trust and puts his hands on money has his shadow. It's a question of business. The wholesaler must know the character of the retailer to whom he extends credit. A trust must know what its remaining independent rivals are doing, what business they are developing, what big orders they seek. I must know, and I must know accurately and fully what every enemy is doing, what he is thinking, with whom he drinks, where he spends his time and how he lives.

"Modern business is war, the fiercest and most cruel the world has ever known. It is of greater importance to a modern captain of industry to know the plans of his enemy than it ever was to the commanding general of an opposing army."

"I see," Stuart responded, thoughtfully.

"There are men down there in the street now," Bivens went on dreamily, "who are wearing silk hats to-day for whom the prison tailor is cutting a suit. I have their records in that silent little steel-clad room. It's a pitiful thing, but it's life. And, believe me, the realities of our every-day life here are more wonderful than the wildest romance the novelist can spin.

"Last year I had a man of genius at the head of one of my corporations. Not the slightest suspicion had ever been directed against him. But my men reported to me that he was supporting two establishments, besides the one he kept for his family, and that in those two secret orchards which he tended he was making presents of fine jewelry. An examination of his office by experts revealed the fact that he was wrong. He was bounced. He would have gone no matter what his accounts showed. It is only a question of time and a very short time when such a man goes wrong.

"The scarcest thing in New York to-day, Jim, is the man who can't be bought and sold. The thing that's beyond price in the business world is character—combined with brains. That's why I made you the offer I did once upon a time to come in with me. There are positions to-day in New York with a salary of half a million a year waiting for men who can fill them. If I could find one man of the highest order of creative and executive ability who would stand by me in my enterprises I could be the richest man in the world in ten years."

Stuart lifted his eyes from the record he was casually scanning and smiled into Bivens's dark, serious face.

The look silenced the speaker. The little man knew instinctively that Stuart was at that moment weighing his own life and character by the merciless standard he had set up

for others. Judged by conventional laws he had nothing to fear. He was a faithful member of his church. He gave liberally to its work and gave generously to a hundred worthy charities. He loved his wife with old-fashioned loyalty and tenderness and grieved that she was childless. He stood by his friends and fought his enemies, asking no quarter and giving none.

Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that, judged in the great white light of the Eternal when all things hidden shall be revealed, he could not stand blameless. He knew that while he had kept within the letter of the law, his genius consisted in the skill with which he had learned to divert other men's earnings into his own coffers.

And deep down in the depths of his memory there lay one particular deed which lent colour to all that followed. He knew that however loftily he might discourse at present about "character," "honour," "integrity," and "fair dealing," he had stolen the formula from his big-hearted employer with which he had laid the foundation of his fortune. It was the first half-million that came hard. It was this first half-million that bore the stain of shame. He had justified it with fine sophistry until he counted himself a benefactor to Woodman, but the grim fact stood out in his memory with growing clearness as his millions piled up with each succeeding year.

His other questionable acts on which the fate of millions had often hung he had no difficulty in justifying. Business was war. In war it was fair to deceive, to march in the night, to attack when least suspected, to strike to kill, to destroy and lay waste the fairest countries and starve your enemy into submission.

All this had flashed through Bivens's imagination when Stuart smiled, and in spite of his conscious dignity and power, he had fallen silent. The smile had made him nervous. He wondered vaguely what was in the mind of the tall quiet man that provoked a smile at such a serious moment.

He wondered particularly whether the lawyer could have suspected his hobby, for he had one of the most curious—a collection of historic material on the origin of American fortunes. The origin of his own had early made Bivens suspect that all great fortunes which had mounted into millions, like his own, may have been built in their first foundations on fraud. He wondered if Stuart had by any accident stumbled on this information. Even if he had he could not understand his real motive in such an investigation, and yet the lazy smile with which he looked up from that record was disconcerting.

Bivens waited for him to speak. The moment was one big with fate. Stuart was about to reach a decision that would make history. No one knew so well its importance as the keen intellect that gleamed behind the little black eyes watching with tireless patience.

Bivens was the one odd man in a thousand who knew that big events were not to be found in earthquakes, tornadoes and battles. He had long since learned that the events which shake the world are always found in the silent hours when the soul of a single man says, "I will!"

Below he could hear the roar of the city's life. On the Curb brokers were shouting their wares with their accustomed gusto. On the floor of the Exchange the tide of business ebbed and flowed with the fierce pulse of an apparently exhaustless strength. Men bought and sold with no fear of to-morrow. Yet a single word from the lips of the tall, clean-shaven young officer of the law and a storm would break which might tear from the foundations institutions on whose solidity modern civilization seemed to rest.

The silence at length became suffocating to Bivens. He moistened his lips and drew his smooth fingers softly over his silky beard.

"Well, Jim," he said at length. "You are going to act?"

In the moment's pause the little swarthy body never moved, his breath ceased and every nerve quivered with the strain and yet he betrayed nothing to the man who sat before him, silent, thoughtful.

Stuart rose abruptly, his reply sharp and clear.

"Yes, I'm going to act."

"At once?"

"It's my duty."

Bivens grasped his hand.

"I congratulate you, Jim. You are going to do a big thing, one of the biggest things in our history. You are going to teach the mighty that the law is mightier. It ought to land you at the very top in politics or any other old place you'd like to climb."

"That's something which doesn't interest me yet, Cal. The thing that stuns me is that I've got to do so painful a thing. But my business is the enforcement of justice. There's one thing I still can't understand."

He paused and looked at Bivens curiously.

"What's that?" the financier softly asked.

"Why you of all men on earth should have put this information in my hands. The honour of the achievement, if good shall come to the country, is really yours, not mine."

"And you can't conceive of my acting for the country's good?"

Bivens's black eyes twinkled.

"Not by the wildest leap of my imagination."

The twinkle broadened into a smile as the lawyer continued:

"Your code is simple, Cal. There's no provision in it for disinterested effort for others. Few financiers of modern times can conceive of a sane man deliberately working for the good of the people as against his own. In your face, there has never been any doubting, any perplexity, since you made your first strike in New York. Behind your black eyes there has always glowed the steady, deadly purpose of the man who knows exactly what he wants and how he is going to get it. This time you've got me up a tree. You have rendered the people a great service. You have placed me under personal obligations. But how you are going to get anything out of it is beyond me."

"Oh, I'll have my reward, my boy," Bivens answered jovially, as his dainty fingers again stroked his beard, pressing his mustache back from the thin lips, "and I assure you it will not be purely spiritual."

The door had scarcely closed on Stuart when Bivens pressed the button which called his confidential secretary.

In a moment the man stood at his elbow with the tense erect bearing of an orderly on the field of battle. The quick nervous touch of the master's hand on that button had told to his sensitive ears the story of a coming life-and-death struggle. His words came with sharp nervous energy:

"Yes sir?"

The financier slowly drew the big cigar from his mouth and spoke in low tones:

"A meeting of the Allied Bankers here in 30 minutes. No telephone messages. A personal summons to each. They enter one at a time that no one on the outside sees them come. You understand?"

"I understand."

Bivens raised his finger in warning. "Your life on the issue."

Trembling with excitement the secretary turned and quickly left the room.

CHAPTER V

GATHERING CLOUDS

The sensation which the District Attorney sprang in the sudden indictment of the president of the Iroquois Company was profound and far-reaching. The day before the indictment was presented to the Grand Jury stocks began to tumble without any apparent cause. The "big interests" who had hitherto counted on exhaustless funds to sustain them in any market they might choose to make were paralyzed by the suddenness of the attack on stocks and the daring of its hidden leader.

When the warrant for the arrest of the great man had been served and he was admitted to bail to await his coming trial, there was a feeble rally in the market, but the rats quickly began to desert a sinking ship. The president under indictment had ceased to be a power. There was a wild scramble of his associates who were equally guilty to save their own skins. The press, which at first denounced Stuart, now boldly demanded the merciless prosecution of all the guilty. And they hailed the brilliant young District Attorney as the coming man.

In the meantime all kinds of securities continued to tumble. For six consecutive days stocks had fallen with scarcely an hour's temporary rally. Every effort of the bull operators, who had ruled the market for the two years past, to stem the tide was futile. Below the surface, in the silent depths of growing suspicion and fear, an army of sappers and miners under the eye of one man were digging at the foundations of the business world—the faith of man in his fellow-man.

Each day there was a crash and each day the little financier and his unscrupulous allies marked a new victim. The next day the death notice was posted on a new door, and when the bomb had exploded they picked up the pieces and moved to a new attack.

In the midst of the campaign for the destruction of public credit which Bivens and his associates, the Allied Bankers, were conducting with such profound secrecy and such remarkable results, when their profits had piled up into millions, a bomb was suddenly exploded under their own headquarters.

The Van Dam Trust Company was put under the ban of the New York Clearing House. The act was a breach of faith, utterly unwarranted by any known law of the game. But it was done.

When the president of the company walked quietly into Bivens's office and made the announcement, for a moment the little dark man completely lost his nerve—cold beads of sweat started from his swarthy forehead.

"Are you joking?" he gasped.

"Do you think I'd joke about my own funeral?"

"No, of course not, but there must be some mistake."

"There's no mistake. It's a blow below the belt, but it's a knockout for the moment. They know we are solvent, two dollars for one. But they know we have \$90,000,000 on deposit and we have some big enemies. They know that the group we have supported have smashed this market, and they've set out to fight the devil with fire. They're determined to force a show-down and see how much real money is behind us. We can pull through if we stand together."

The stolid face of the banker became a motionless mask as he asked:

"Are we going to stand together?"

Bivens sprang to his feet, exclaiming fiercely:

"Until hell freezes over!"

The banker smiled feebly for the first time in a week.

"Then it's all right, Mr. Bivens. We'll pull through. They'll start a run on us to-morrow. Five millions in cash will meet it and we'll win, hands down. We have powerful friends. Our only sin is our association with your group. We must have that five millions in the safe before the doors are opened to-morrow."

"You shall have it," was the firm answer.

With a cheerful pressure of the hand the president of the Van Dam Trust Company left and Bivens called his secretary.

"We turn the market to-morrow—orders to all our men. Knock the bottom out of it until the noon hour, then turn and send it skyward with a bound. You understand?"

"Yes sir."

With an instinctive military salute the secretary hurried to execute the order.

When Dr. Woodman returned home that night from one of his endless tramps among the poor, Harriet opened the door.

Something about the expression of his face startled her. For the first time in her life she saw in its gaunt lines the shadow of despair. He had aged rapidly of late, but the sunlight had never before quite faded from his eyes.

"What is it, Papa dear?" she asked tenderly, slipping an arm about his neck as she drew him down into his favourite chair.

"What, child?" he responded vaguely.

"You look utterly worn out. Tell me what's the matter. I'm no longer a child. I'm a woman now—strong and well and brave. Let me help you."

"You do help me, baby!" he laughed with an effort at his old-time joyous spirit. "Every time I touch your little hand, you give me new life. Every note from your sweet voice thrills me with new hope. And I dream dreams and build castles and plan for to-morrow as if I were a boy. What more can a woman do? What more did God mean for a beautiful daughter to do for her old father?"

"Well, I want to do more, I want to share your troubles and help you carry your burdens."

"And so you shall, my dear. Some day your voice will thrill thousands as it now thrills my heart. You'll win fame and wealth for your father. You shall care for him in old age. And his pride and joy shall be to say to those he meets—the great singer, yes, my daughter, sir—my little baby!"

Harriet nestled closer.

"But I want to help now. I'm afraid I've been thoughtless and selfish. You look so miserable to-night. It cuts me to the heart."

"Nonsense, Baby dear," he broke in cheerfully. "I'm not miserable. I've really had a good day. I've spent the whole afternoon superintending the distributing of flowers among the hospitals. And I've discovered a curious thing—you couldn't imagine what it is?"

The doctor paused and laughed in his old playful way.

"What?" she cried.

Harriet clapped her hands with a moment's childish happiness as she had done so often when her father propounded one of his mysterious problems for her solution.

The doctor whispered:

"I've discovered that pinks are feminine and roses masculine."

"How?"

"Because the men in the hospitals all beg for pinks and the women for roses. It's curious. I never hit on the explanation before. Isn't it reasonable?"

"Yes, quite," was the sober answer. "But it doesn't explain the lines of suffering in your dear face to-night—I'm worried."

"But I'm not suffering!" he insisted with a frown. "On the other hand I'm cheerful to-night. I saved a kid's life with a flower. His father used to work for me in the old days. They asked me to come to see him. There was no hope. He had been given up to die. I gave him a fragrant white pink. His thin feverish fingers grasped it eagerly. In all his life he had never held a flower in his hand before. He pressed it to his lips, his soul thrilled at its sweet odour, and the little tired spirit came staggering back from the mists of Eternity just to see what it meant. He will live. It was the feather's weight that tipped the beam of life the right way. How little it takes sometimes to give life and happiness. And how tragic and pitiful the fact that so many of us can't get that little at the right moment!"

The joy and laughter had slowly faded from his face and voice as he spoke until the last words had unconsciously fallen into accents of despair.

The girl's arms slipped around his neck in a tightening hold and she pressed her cheek against his a moment in silence.

"Papa dear, it's no use trying to deceive me. I've the right to know what is troubling you. I'm not a child. You must tell me."

"Why, it's nothing much, dearie," he answered gently. "I'm worried a little about money. I've a note due at the bank and they've called on me unexpectedly to meet it. But I'll manage somehow. Don't you worry about it. Everything will come out all right. I feel like a millionaire among the people I've seen to-day."

"I'll give up my music, go to work and help you right away."

"Sh!"

The father placed his hand gently over her lips and the tears sprang into his eyes in spite of his effort to keep them back.

"Don't talk sacrilege, my child. Such words are blasphemy. God gave me a man's body for the coarse work of bread-winning. He gave you the supreme gift, a voice that throbs with eloquence, a power that can lift and inspire the world. Only when you are cultivating that gift are you working. Then you are doing the highest and finest thing of which you are capable. I should be a criminal if I permitted you to do less. Never say such a thing again unless you would make me utterly miserable."

He paused and took her cheeks between his hands.

"Promise me, dear—it's the one wish of my heart, the one thing worth working and struggling for—promise me that you will never stop until the training of your voice is complete, that no matter what happens you will obey me in this. It is my one command. You will obey me?"

There was dignity and compelling power now in the deep tones of his voice.

The girl felt instinctively its authority.

"Yes, Papa, I promise, if it will make you happy."

"It's the only thing I live for. I've never said this to you before, but I say it now and I don't want you ever to forget it. Now run along to bed and never bother your pretty head again about such things. I'll find food and a home for my baby and she shall live her own beautiful life to the last reach of its power. All I ask is that you do your level best with the gift of God."

"I'll try, Papa dear," was the quiet answer as she kissed him again and softly left the room.

Harriet had scarcely reached her room when Adams, the cashier of one of the Allied Banks, who owed the doctor for three months' rent, entered the library with quick nervous tread.

"I've big news, sir," he said excitedly.

The doctor looked up with a half bantering smile.

"You don't mean that you've got the whole of your three months' rent? If you have, break it to me gently, Adams, or I'll faint."

"Better than three months' rent," the cashier whispered nervously. "I've a big tip on the stock market."

The older man grunted contemptuously.

"Yes, that's what ails you, I know. You've been getting them for some time. That's why you owe me for your rooms. That's why there's something the matter with your accounts."

"I swear to you, Doctor, my accounts are clean. My expenses have been so big the past year, with the doctor's bills I've had to pay, I simply couldn't live. The price of everything on earth has gone up fifty per cent. except my wages. I've bought a few stocks. I've made a little and lost a little. I've got the chance now I've been waiting for. I've a real piece of information from the big insiders who are going to make the market to-morrow."

The doctor shook his head and looked at the cashier with humourous pity. The man was trembling from excitement he could not control.

"So you've really got it straight, this time?"

"Beyond the shadow of doubt!" he cried excitedly. "I want you to share with me the fortune I'm going to make."

He paused and breathed heavily, his eyes widening into an unnatural stare, as he continued:

"My God, if I only had ten thousand dollars to-morrow I could be worth a hundred thousand before night!"

The doctor leaned forward with deepening interest.

"You really believe such rot?"

"Believe it, man, it's as certain as fate! There can't be any mistake about it. At twelve o'clock the tide will turn and they'll begin to leap upward in the wildest market that's been seen in a generation. Doctor, you've been so good to me and I can trust you implicitly. You're the only man on earth I've told. You need money. If you can raise five

hundred dollars in cash you can make five thousand in six hours."

The older man's eyes flashed with sudden excitement, which he suppressed with an effort.

"Adams, you're crazy," was the gruff reply.

"I've got it straight, I tell you!" he went on breathlessly. "I got it from Bivens's private secretary. The little weasel has made millions on this break and he has been selling the market short for two weeks. To-morrow morning he is going to smash it for the last time and at noon throw his millions on the bull side. The market will go down three points on the break in the morning. It will jump five points in ten minutes when it turns the other way. There are stocks on the list that will recover ten points before the market closes."

"Bivens is going to do this?" the older man interrupted.

"Yes. I got it from the man who took his order."

"Then it's a trick. It's a lie. Take my advice and do just the opposite from what you understand. Bivens will sell out his partners in the deal."

"Man, he can't sell out!" the cashier insisted. "It's his own deal. He's in it for all he's worth!"

The doctor rose with sudden excitement.

"Adams, this is the first time in my life I've ever been tempted to buy stocks."

"You can't lose, sir."

"But I'm in desperate need of money. I've a note for three thousand due. I've two thousand dollars set aside to finish my little girl's musical studies. I've got to meet that note somehow and I've got to have the money for her. It looks like a chance. I'll go in and watch the market to-morrow."

"If it don't act exactly as I say—don't touch it. If it does, go in for all you're worth. If stocks start down as I say they will, sell short, cover at noon, and then buy for the rise. Don't listen to fools, just buy, buy, buy! You can sell before the market closes and make twenty thousand dollars."

"I'll drop into a broker's office and watch the market open any way, Adams."

The doctor seized his hand cordially.

"And I want to thank you for your thoughtfulness in coming to me."

"I wish I could do more, sir," the cashier said, with deep feeling. "I'll never forget your kindness to me the past three months. When the sun shines again, you'll hear from me."

"Oh, that's all right, my boy. Some men invest in stocks, some in bonds, some in real estate. My best investments have always been in the good turns I've done my neighbours. Good night."

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM BREAKS

The morning came in a mist of dull gray clouds that clung in rings about the street lamps like the damp fog of a typical February thaw, yet it was the last day of October. Such weather was uncanny. It added to the strange feeling of impending calamity which had been hanging over the business world during the summer and had broken at last into the fierce storms of disaster of the past two weeks. Men who usually rose at nine o'clock were up at dawn. Some of them hadn't slept at all.

The more optimistic traders on the Stock Exchange expected to-day a change in the market. Stocks had declined for two weeks with appalling swiftness and fatality. Every hour had marked the ruin of men hitherto bulwarks of solidity. Experienced men reasoned and reasoned from experience that there must be a turn somewhere. The bottom surely had been reached. The time for a rally had come. Nine men out of every ten in the market at its close the night before expected the rally to begin at the stroke of the gong the next morning. The men who bought stocks in the closing hour were

sure of this.

They rose to curse the weather. For the weather always affects speculation. Wall Street is superstitious. The proud intellect that struts the floor of the Exchange and scorns the powers of his feeble fellow-men carries secretly a horse chestnut in his pocket for luck. Without an exception all these great men believe in signs and wonders, in witches, palmists, spells and hoodoos.

Weather always gets on their nerves. Half the fluctuations of stocks under normal conditions of trade are purely the results of the mental states of the men who buy and sell.

The doctor rose early with a new hope filling his heart which no cloud could obscure. He watched Harriet pour his coffee at breakfast with his old-time smile of good cheer playing about his fine mouth.

Stuart was sleeping late. He was up until one o'clock writing a reply to a peculiarly venomous attack on his integrity which a morning paper had printed. The writer had boldly accused him of being the hired tool of the group of financial cut-throats who were coining millions out of the ruin of others in the destruction of public faith.

His reply was simple and his concluding paragraph was unanswerable, except by an epithet.

"My business is the enforcement of justice. I am the servant of the people. If Wall Street can not stand the enforcement of law, so much the worse for the Street. It's no affair of mine. I didn't make the laws of the State any more than I made the law of gravitation. Nor did I write the Ten Commandments, but I have an abiding faith that they will stand when the last stone in the Stock Exchange building shall have crumbled into dust. I refuse to believe that the only way to save Wall Street is by a sworn officer of the law compounding a felony."

The doctor hurried down town to the office of a friend on Pine Street, an old-fashioned banker and broker whose name had always stood for honesty and fair dealing and conservative business. It was half an hour before the Stock Exchange opened but the dingy little office was packed with an excited crowd of customers. They all talked in low tones as if fearing the spirits of the air that hovered near. An eager group leaned over the bulletin from the London market. London was up half a point. The credulous were pleased. It was a good omen. The pessimists scoffed.

"Rigged from New York!" sneered a fat German the office boy had nicknamed the "Judge."

The doctor was struck with the curiously mottled crowd that jostled one another, waiting for the first cry of the opening quotations. Every walk and profession of life had its representative there—merchants, lawyers, doctors, clerks, clergymen, barbers, boot-blacks, retired capitalists and capitalists about to retire permanently.

The saddest group of all was in the adjoining room reserved for ladies. An opening through the partition wall allowed them to see the quotations as they were placed on the board around which the throng of jostling, smoking, perspiring men moved and stood. Most of these pale excited women with their hats awry and their hair disordered were the wives of solid business and professional men who wouldn't allow their husbands to know of their little venture into stocks for the world. They peeped through the opening occasionally and turned their backs quickly to avoid the gaze of the men.

But the most ominous figures were two or three "vultures" who stood grim and silent on the outer fringe of the moving crowd. Only one or two of the older ones recognized them.

The "Judge" saw them first.

"Ach, Gott, look at dem!" he exclaimed. "They never come except for carrion; they've scented the dead. It's all over with us, poys!"

One of the most curious things in the history of Wall Street is the appearance of these vultures in a panic. They scent the final death-struggle with unerring accuracy. They never buy stocks except in those awful moments of ruin. They hold them grimly until the next tidal-wave of prosperity, sell out at the top, and wait patiently for the next killing. They are the only outsiders who ever make a dollar in Wall Street.

The doctor followed old Dugro, the head of the firm, into his private office and asked his advice. He got it—sharp, short and to the point.

"Go home, Doctor, and stay there. This market is no place for an amateur. It's all I can do to keep the wolf from my door in these days."

"But I've received some important information."

"Keep it dark," old Dugro scowled. "Don't tell it to your worst enemy. If you've got a dollar, nail it up and sleep on the box."

"But I've some information I think I'm going to act on and I want to open a small account with you."

"All right. I've warned you," was the grim answer. "I wish you good luck."

The doctor drew his check for two thousand dollars and smilingly took his place among the crowd before the board. He was never surer of anything in his life than he was of Adam's sincerity. He prided himself on the fact that he was a judge of character. He was sure the cashier was wrong in his accounts; he was equally sure that the information he had received from Bivens's private secretary was accurate, provided, of course, the little weasel carried out the program he had mapped out.

The ticker would tell the story in the first hour. If stocks should sell off three points before noon, he would know. He determined to put this to the test first. He would not sell the market short. He would be content with the big jump the market would make upward when it started.

The ticker began its sharp metallic click.

The crowd stirred as if the electric shock had swept every nerve. A moment of breathless silence and the board boy leaning over the ticker shouted:

"Atch—92½!"

A groan, low, half-stifled, half-articulate came from the room and then a moment of silence followed.

"There, Gott," muttered the "Judge." "I knew London was rigged—I told you so!"

In quick, sharp, startling tones the man at the ticker called out the quotations as the market rapidly sank.

For half an hour the downward movement never paused for a moment. The silence of the crowded room became more and more suffocating. Men stood in their tracks with staring eyes and dry lips as they watched the last hope of a morning rally fade into despair.

The doctor's breath came quicker and his eyes began to sparkle intense excitement.

Now and then old Dugro's stolid face appeared at the door and summoned another man to his inner office—"the chamber of horrors"—where the lambs are sheared. The story was always the same. The customer squirmed and asked for a little more time to watch the market. The old man was adamant.

"I've got to have more money to margin your stock or I'll sell it in five minutes. This firm is sound as a dollar and it's going to stay sound as long as I'm at the helm. If I carry weak accounts I imperil the money of every man who has put his faith in my bank."

If the squirming victim had more money he always put it up. If he had drawn his last dollar he just wiped the cold sweat from his brow and gasped:

"You'll have to sell out."

Quick as a flash the old man's hand was on the telephone and his broker on the floor of the Exchange was executing the order.

As the noon hour drew near the doctor's heart was beating like a sledge hammer. Bivens's programme had been carried out to the letter. Stocks had declined for the first hour a point, and in the second hour suddenly smashed down two more points amid the wildest excitement on the Exchange.

There was a momentary lull and the market hesitated. For ten minutes the sales dragged with only fractional changes—first up, then down.

The moment to buy had come. The doctor was sure of it. Stocks had touched bottom. The big bear pool would turn bull in a moment and the whole market would rise by leaps and bounds.

He called old Dugro.

"Buy for me now, Amalgamated Copper, the market leader, for all I'm worth!"

The broker glared at him.

"Buy! Buy in this market? Man, are you mad?"

"I said buy!" was the firm answer. "What's the limit?"

"Not a share without a stop loss order under it."

"Well, with the stop?"

"I'll buy you 400 shares on a four-point stop."

"And when it goes up five points?" the doctor asked eagerly.

"I'll double your purchase and raise your stop, and every five points up I'll keep on until you are a millionaire!"

The old broker smiled contemptuously, but it was all lost on the doctor.

"Do it quick."

The order was scarcely given before it was executed. Dugro handed the memorandum to Woodman with a grunt.

"It don't take long to get 'em to-day!"

The words had scarcely left his lips when a hoarse cry rose from the crowd hanging over the ticker.

Copper had leaped upward a whole point between sales. A wild cheer swept the room. For ten minutes every stock on the list responded and began to climb.

The doctor's face was wreathed in smiles. Men began to talk and laugh and feel human for the first moment in two weeks.

Dugro grasped the doctor's hand and his deep voice rang above the roar:

"You're a mascot! You've broken the spell! For God's sake stay with us!"

Suddenly another cry came from the crowd at the ticker. The boy at the board sprang to the instrument with a single bound, his eyes blazing with excitement. His cry pierced every ear in the room with horror.

"The hell you say! Down a whole point! No!"

There was a moment's hush, every breath was held. Only the sharp click of the ticker broke the stillness.

"It was one point," groaned the Judge, "now, Gott, it's two—now it's three!"

The last words ended in a scream. Hell had broken loose at last.

The panic had come!

In ten minutes stocks tumbled five points and the doctor's last dollar was swept into space while the whole market plunged down, down, down into the abyss of ruin and despair.

Men no longer tried to conceal their emotion. Some wept, some cursed, some laughed; but the most pitiful sight of all was the man who could do neither, the man with white lips and the strange hunted expression in his eyes who was looking Death in the face for the first time.

A full quarter of an hour of the panic had spent itself before the dazed crowds in the broker's offices read the startling news that caused the big break. The ticker shrieked its message above the storm's din like a little laughing demon:

"The Van Dam Trust Company Has Closed Its Doors and Asked for the Appointment of a Receiver!"

"Impossible!"

"A fake!"

"Hell—it's a joke!"

From all who read it at first came these muttered exclamations. It was beyond belief.

The "Judge" was particularly emphatic.

"Dot's a lie, chentlemens! Take my vord for it! Dey haf ninety millions on deposit."

It took the second bulletin with particulars to convince them. Bivens had not kept his solemn pledge. The great bank had stood the run for two hours and closed its doors. And the work of destruction had just begun.

At three o'clock, the doctor walked out of Dugro's office without a dollar. It was utterly impossible for a man of his temperament to realize it. The crash had come so suddenly, its work was so complete and overwhelming it seemed a sort of foolish prank Fate had played on him.

He walked home in a state of strange excitement. He had seen many sights in his eventful life among the people of New York; never had he passed through a scene so weird, so horrible, so haunting as the five hours he had just spent among those men and women whom the struggle for money had transformed into raving, jibbering, snivelling maniacs. It was too absurd to be real. His own loss was appalling but at least he thanked God he was not mad. He yet had two good hands and legs. He could see, hear, smell, taste and feel, and he had a soul with five more senses still turned upward toward the infinite and eternal by which he could see the invisible and hear the inaudible. He felt almost happy by contrast with the fools he had left shuffling over the floor of Dugro's office.

His own sense of loss was merely a blur. The revelation he had just had of the mad lust for money which had begun to possess all classes was yet so fresh and startling he could form no adequate conception of his own position.

It was not until he entered his own door, and paused at the sound of Harriet's voice, that he began to realize the enormity of the tragedy that had befallen him.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE KING'S COMMAND

Bivens's plan would have gone through without a hitch but for one thing. He had overlooked the fact that the Kingdom of Mammon in America has a king and that the present ruler is very much alive. This king has never been officially crowned and his laws are unwritten, but his rule is none the less real, and he is by far the most potent monarch Wall Street has ever known. A man of few words, of iron will, of fiery temper, of keen intellect, proud, ambitious, resourceful, bold, successful, a giant in physique, and a giant in personality. He moves among men with the conscious tread of royalty, thinks big thoughts and does big deeds as quietly and effectively as small men do small ones, and then moves on to greater tasks.

It happens that his majesty is an old time Wall Street banker with inherited traditions about banks and the way their funds should be handled. He had long held a pet aversion. The Van Dam Trust Company had become an offense to his nostrils.

His own bank, hitherto the most powerful in America, is a private concern which bears the royal name. It had long been the acknowledged seat of the Empire of Mammon and within its unpretentious walls the king has held his court for years, extending his sceptre of gold in gracious favour to whom he likes, refusing admission to his presence for those who might offend his fancy.

The Van Dam Trust Company had built a huge palace far up town and its president had attempted to set up a court of his own. He had gathered about him a following, among them an ex-president of the United States. Gold had poured into the treasury of the great marble palace in a constant stream until its deposits had reached the unprecedented sum of \$90,000,000, a sum greater than the royal bank itself could boast.

When the king heard the first rumour of the fact that the Van Dam Trust was backing the schemes of the Allied Bankers in their sensational raid on the market his big nostrils suddenly dilated.

At last he had them just where he wanted them. He signed the death warrant of the bank and handed it to his executioner without a word of comment. And then a most curious thing happened. The king summoned to his presence a little dark swarthy man.

When Bivens received this order to appear at court he was dumfounded. He had long

worshipped and feared the king with due reverence and always spoke his name with awe. To be actually called into his august presence in such a crisis was an undreamed-of honour.

He was sure that his majesty had heard of his generous offer to help the Van Dam Trust in its hour of trouble and meant to reward him with promotion to high rank in the Empire.

He hastened into the royal presence with beating heart.

A court official conducted him into the king's private room where the ruler sat alone, quietly smoking.

The sovereign glanced up with quick energy.

"Mr. Bivens, I believe?"

The little man bowed low.

"I hear that you are about to aid the Van Dam Trust with four millions in cash?"

Bivens smiled with pride.

"My secretary will deliver the money to the bank within an hour."

The king suddenly wheeled in his big arm chair, raised his eyebrows and fixed the little man with a stare that froze the blood in his veins. When he spoke at length his tones were smooth as velvet.

"If I may give you a suggestion, Mr. Bivens, I would venture to say that the Van Dam Trust Company is beyond aid. The larger interests of the nation require the elimination of this institution and its associates.

"I have heard good reports of you and I wish to save you from the disaster about to befall the gentlemen who have been conducting the present campaign in Wall Street. If your secretary will report to me at once with the four millions you have set aside for the Van Dam Company I shall be pleased to place your name on my executive council in the big movement we begin to-day. The other gentlemen whom I have thus honoured are now waiting for me in the adjoining room. They represent a banking power that is resistless at the present moment.

"When the Van Dam Trust closes its doors to-day, a temporary panic will follow. We will give the gentlemen who started this excitement a taste of their own medicine, render a service to the nation, and, incidentally of course, earn an honest dollar or two for ourselves. I trust I have your hearty support in this programme?"

Bivens again bowed low.

"My hearty support and my profoundest gratitude!"

"I'll expect your secretary with your check for four millions within thirty minutes."

The king waved a friendly gesture of dismissal and the little dark figure tremblingly withdrew.

It was not until he had reached the seclusion of his own office that the magnitude of the crisis through which he had passed fully dawned on Bivens. One of the dreams of his life had been to touch elbows with this mighty ruler at whose name he had often trembled. To-day he had joined the magic circle of those about the throne. The place had been bought at a fearful price. But the end would justify the means. No one knew with clearer perception than he what the king meant by his "suggestions." They were orders. He had been ordered to stab his associates.

At first he had raged in silent fury, but as the king continued his wonderful speech and revealed his generous intentions, his anger had melted into glowing gratitude.

"After all, business means war!" he exclaimed, "a war in which dog eat dog and devil take the hindmost becomes sooner or later the supreme law."

It hurt to break his word—the pledge he had made the president of the Van Dam Company—but it was unavoidable. Their death warrant had already been signed. His money would only be sunk in the bottomless pit the king had dug beneath them. He felt himself for the moment in the grip of forces beyond human control, blind, inevitable, overwhelming. The only thing for a sane man to do was to ride the storm and take care of himself. He had found a place of safety. And such a place—at the right hand of the king himself.

He had dreamed of making a paltry five millions when the raid on the market had

ended. Now his very soul stood blinded by the splendour of the vision before him. Beyond a doubt in the holocaust which would follow the day's work he would more than treble his entire fortune, perhaps multiply it by four. He could see it all before it happened. His slender hands trembled as he fumbled his beard and his bead eyes became two scintillating points of light. The thirst for gold was now a raging fever and his blood molten fire. The lust for gain had ceased to be a human passion—it was the hunger of a beast.

Without a moment's hesitation he gave the cruel orders that sent his associates hurling over the precipice. As the day progressed he stood with one hand on the tape of his private ticker and the other holding the receiver of the telephone which connected him with the floor of the Stock Exchange. He received no word from friend or foe without. Only the king's messenger could reach him. He paused not a moment for food or drink, and at three o'clock when the market closed he stood with a hundred yards of tape from the ticker coiled serpent like about his legs, the wreck of empires of wealth beneath his feet, his heart still beating a single wild cry—"more, more, more!"

What a day! In all the annals of man's inhumanity to his fellow-man never were there more opportunities for generosity, for kindly deeds and noble acts of kingly heroism. Never were so few recorded.

Martial war at least has for its justification the flag and the life of a nation for which it stands the gleaming symbol in the sky, and in real war they do not kill the wounded or fire on women and children. Even the Turk does not fire on a hospital. But in this war which maniacs waged for gold, they fired on women and children without mercy and when night had fallen they searched the field, dragged out and stabbed to death the wounded!

When the president of the Van Dam Trust Company failed to receive the promised millions from Bivens he called his telephone and receiving no answer sprang into his automobile and dashed down town to the little main office.

When the clerk at the door informed him that Mr. Bivens could not be seen by anyone, he turned quickly on his heel, drove back to the palatial house of his bank, smiled sadly at the mob in front of its huge pillars, ordered its bronze doors closed, walked around the corner to his home, locked himself in his room and blew his brains out.

CHAPTER VIII

A RAY OF SUNLIGHT

For a week the panic held the financial world in the grip of death. A dozen banks had closed their doors and a score of men who had long boasted their courage among men had died the death of cowards when put to the test.

One of the most curious results of the panic was the revulsion of popular feeling against the daring and honest young officer of the law who had rendered the greatest service to the people wrought by any public servant in a generation.

His enemies saw their opportunity. When the panic was at its worst they opened their artillery of slander and falsehood. The people who yesterday had shouted his praises for the fearless work in their behalf joined his enemies and vied with each other now in reviling him. He was hailed as the arch traitor of the people, the man who had used his high office to produce a panic and carve a fortune out of the ruin of millions whose deposits were tied up in banks that might never again open their doors.

Stuart, stung to desperation by their infamous charges, attempted at first to repel them. He stopped at last in disgust and maintained afterward a dignified silence.

From the first day of the run Bivens had laughed in the face of the crowd that besieged the door of his big Broadway bank. He stood on top of the granite steps and shouted in their faces:

"Come on, you dirty cowards! I've got your money inside waiting for you, every dollar of it, one hundred cents on the dollar!"

The crowd made no reply. They merely moved up in line in stolid silence a little closer to the door. Each day this line had grown longer. Bivens was not worrying. The king had spoken. The people outside did the worrying. They had lost faith in everything and every man. What they wanted was cash. They camped on the doorstep at night and in grim silence held their place in line.

The folly of these people in their insane efforts to wreck Bivens's bank was making impossible a return to normal business.

Stuart determined to face this crowd and have it out with them. He believed that a bold appeal to their reason would silence his critics and allay their insane fears.

He told Bivens of his purpose over the telephone, and the financier protested vigorously:

"Don't do it, Jim, I beg of you," he pleaded. "It will be a waste of breath. Besides, you risk your life."

"I'll be there when the bank opens at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," was the firm answer.

Stuart left his office at three and hurried to his room. He wished to be alone and collect the vague ideas of passionate appeal which he felt rioting through his mind. He stood by his window looking across the square. The fall winds had strewn the grass with dead leaves and the half-bare limbs swayed desolately. The big houses on the north side, were unusually quiet. He could see crêpe fluttering from two doors. The widow of the dead president of a suspended bank lived in one of them; in the other the widow of a great man who was found dead in his office the second day of the panic. He had been buried yesterday.

A feeling of stupid depression crept over his senses, and held them in its deadly embrace. He couldn't think. He gave up the effort and asked Harriet to go with him for a ramble over the hills, up the Hudson. They took the subway to the end of the line, climbed to the top of the hills overlooking the river, sat down in the woods on a fallen tree and watched the sun slowly sink in scarlet glory behind the Palisades.

Neither had spoken for several minutes. He loved these rambles with his slender golden-haired little pal, because it wasn't necessary to talk. She had developed the rarest of all gifts among womankind, a genius for silence. He wondered at it, too, for she was such a little chatterbox as a kid.

A squirrel climbed down from a tree nearby where he was storing his winter food, paused, and looked up in surprise at his unexpected visitors. Stuart smiled and pressed Harriet's hand, nodding toward the squirrel. She smiled an answer in silence. The faintest little flush tinged the smooth white skin of her neck at the touch of his hand, but he never noticed it.

A ruffled grouse suddenly sprang on the end of the log, cocked his head in surprise and stood trembling with fear, uncertain whether the intruders in his domain were friend or foe.

Harriet saw him first, gently pressed Stuart's hand and whispered:

"Look, Jim."

As Stuart turned his head, the bird rose with a roar that brought a cry of terror to the girl's lips. Involuntarily she gripped his hand and nestled closer.

"Scared you out of a year's growth, didn't he?"

"He certainly did."

"What a flood of memories the whirl of those wings brings back to my tired soul," Stuart dreamily cried; "of woods and fields and hills and valleys of the South, where men and women yet live a sane human life! I'd begun to forget there were any hills and fields."

"I wish I lived down South, Jim!"

"Why?"

"I don't know, it's just an idea of mine. I suppose I get it from hearing you tell about their old-fashioned ways, their neighbourly habits and the sweet home life."

The man was silent. The deep soft note of a mallard drake far above the treetops caused him to look up.

He seized Harriet's arm.

"Watch now, little pal—the river—you'll see a flock of ducks swing into that open space under the sun!"

He had scarcely spoken when the ducks circled the broad sweep of the river in a graceful curve, their wings flashing in the rays of the setting sun, and slowly one at a time dropped their feet and pitched in the little smooth bay at the foot of the hill. The

sun was just sinking behind the tree tops on the Palisades, lighting the calm mirror-like surface of the water with every colour of the rainbow.

"Now, look behind you, dear!" Stuart exclaimed.

"Why, it's the moon just rising, isn't it? I never saw the moon rising through the treetops before. It's glorious, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's full moon to-night. See how high the tide is on the river banks. It's just high water now—the highest, fullest tide of the month. It will be less to-morrow and the next and the next day until it falls back to its lowest point two weeks from now, then starts climbing up again for the next full moon. Every sailor, man and bird, knows this. I wonder how many men and women in this money-mad city know that the tide ever ebbs and flows around Manhattan Island at all."

"It's wonderful—isn't it?"

"What dear, the men and women of New York or the tides?"

"Both, Jim, when we try to understand them, isn't it all God's work?"

"I don't know, child. I sometimes think God made the world and only man or the devil built the cities afterward. I believe the reason why the spirit grows savage and we forget that we are human here so often is that we never see the sun or moon. We never hear the stir of wings in the sky, feel the throb of Nature's heart in the ebb and flow of tides, or walk with our heads among the stars."

Harriet sat in thoughtful silence a while and a curious searching look crept into her eyes as she softly asked:

"You have seen much of Mr. Bivens lately, Jim—I've wondered if you have never yet looked your dead love in the face?"

"No, little pal."

"You are still afraid?"

An answer started to his lips and he choked it back.

She laid her warm hand on his.

"Tell me, I want to help you. We *are* pals, you know."

"Well, I'm ashamed to confess it dear, but I am afraid, horribly afraid! I've been fighting some grim battles, but I'll have to see her sooner or later."

"I wish you wouldn't," the girl said, wistfully.

"I'll try to keep away—but every turn in the wheel seems only to bring us closer. My association with Bivens in this prosecution of crime was not of my choosing, but it came. I shall be compelled to see him often."

"Does she know that you are afraid?"

"I think not. She feels that I've never forgiven her treachery, but come, dearie, it's growing dark, we must hurry. I've a hard night's work before me. You've helped me immensely."

"How?"

"I don't know, child. The sunlight just seems to get tangled in your hair, and it always shines in your eyes day and night. You warm me into life and health, just being near you."

Harriet smiled tenderly, and hurried across the hills in silence by his side.

When they passed out of the last clump of trees near the subway station she looked up into his face and slowly asked:

"Did any one else ever have that effect on you, Jim?"

"Yes," he answered soberly.

"Who?"

The question was asked in a low whisper, but it was not so low that Stuart failed to catch its accent of pain.

He laughed, teasingly.

"My mother."

"And no one else?"

"No one else."

"Well, I'm jealous of that sort of influence. I wish a monopoly."

"You have it, dear. Somehow others bring pain and storm and stress. But you have always brought peace and rest."

"Then I'm content."

She looked up and laughed softly.

CHAPTER IX

BENEATH THE SKIN

Stuart rose next morning with a dull headache. The more he had puzzled over the speech he should make to the mob besieging Bivens's bank the more doubtful seemed the outcome. Still to remain silent longer, amid the accusations which were being daily hurled at him, was intolerable. He was possessed with a fierce desire to meet at least one of his foes face to face.

He took his breakfast early and walked down town to his office through the Bowery and Centre Street as he was in the habit of doing occasionally. Everything rubbed him the wrong way this morning. Every sight and sound of the city seemed to bruise and hurt. Never before had the ugliness of the elevated railroad struck him with such crushing hopelessness. He felt that its rusty hideous form, looming against the sky line, was a crime. The crowded trolley cars, the rushing, rattling lines of drays, the ugly, dirty, cheap-looking people hurrying past—it was all horrible!

The sense of loneliness and isolation grew upon him—a sort of dumb hatred of all these unthinking stolid beasts of burden who were bending their backs daily to their stupid tasks, trampling each other to death, too, in their own mad sordid scramble for money.

He paused at the Brooklyn Bridge and stood in silence while the black torrent of unmeaning faces, whose expression this morning was distinctly inhuman, rolled past and spread out into the square and streets.

He was glad for the moment that not one of them knew him, though he was daily giving his life to their service.

He turned and pushed his way through the throngs, crossed the City Hall Square and in a few minutes reached the Broadway corner on which the Bivens bank stood. Its magnificent marble façade, crowned with gilded dome, gleamed white and solemn in the morning sun like some proud temple man had built to the worship of God.

The crowd about its doors, which had not yet been opened, was unusually large and turbulent. With the aid of two officers he pushed and fought his way unrecognized through the mob and at last reached the side entrance of the bank.

Bivens, watching from within, opened the door and he stepped inside.

"Jim, if you try to speak to that gang of madmen you're a fool," the financier began, with a scowl. "What they need is not eloquence, they need a club."

"You can't blame them for wanting their money, Cal, after all it's theirs, not yours, you know."

"You're going to talk to them?"

"I'm going to try."

"It's a foolish and dangerous thing to do."

"Nonsense. They are at least human. They have reason."

A low howl of rage stirred the crowd without. A fight for place in the line had broken out.

"Is that reason?" Bivens asked, cynically. "It's not even human. It's the growl of the beast that always sleeps beneath the skin."

"I haven't lost faith in my fellow-men yet," was the dogged answer.

"All right, good luck. I know your intentions are the best. You think it's your duty to yourself and the people. I'm sorry I can't stay to hear you. I've an important meeting this morning. I must go at once. I've instructed my detectives inside to stand by you if you need help."

"Thanks, I won't need them."

The little swarthy figure paused at the door.

"Don't fool yourself into believing anybody in that crowd cares about the work you have done in their service. Scores of them are under deep personal obligations to me. But I'm leaving this building by my neighbour's roof this morning. You don't want to forget, Jim, that the rabble for whom even Christ lived and died, shouted in his face at last 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'"

Stuart smiled at the incongruous farce of Bivens's familiarity with the Bible—yet there was no mistaking the fact of his emotions and the sincerity of his religious faith. The little financier had already begun to pose to himself as a martyr and a public benefactor. In spite of howling mobs and crushing markets he was busy now saving the credit of the Nation! He was one of the group of the king's council engaged in that important work. The "undesirable" had been eliminated and now a vast pool was being formed to support the market and kindly hold the securities until the people could get their breath and make money enough to buy them back at a profit. In due time he knew that his name would be enrolled with the king's as a patriot and public benefactor.

Bivens lingered a moment as if reluctant to give up dissuading Stuart, waved him a friendly adieu at last, stepped into the elevator and left by the roof.

It was yet fifteen minutes to ten, the hour for opening the bank's doors, and Stuart decided to address the crowd immediately.

In accordance with Bivens's instructions the cashier opened the bronze doors and squeezed through, admitting Stuart and two detectives. At the sight of the cashier a thrill of horror swept the crowd—half-groan, half-sigh, half-cry, inarticulate, inhuman, beastly in its grovelling fear.

"Great God!"

"They're going to suspend!"

"It's all over!"

The groans melted into broken curses and exclamations and died into silence as the cashier lifted his hand.

"I have the honour, gentlemen, of presenting this morning a distinguished servant of the people who has a message for you, the man whose unselfish devotion to the cause of Justice has earned him the right to a hearing, the Honourable James Stuart, your District Attorney."

The young lawyer stepped from the doorway in front of the cashier, who retired.

A roar of rage swept the crowd. Howls, curses, catcalls, hisses, hoots and yells were hurled into his face. It was a new experience in Stuart's life. He flushed red, stood for a moment surveying the mob with growing anger, and lifted his hand for silence.

The answer was a storm of hisses. Apparently he hadn't a friend in all the swaying mass of howling maniacs. He drew his heavy brows down over his eyes and the square jaws ground together with sullen determination. He folded his arms deliberately and waited for silence. Evidently these people had swallowed every lie his enemies had printed. It was incredible that rational human beings should be such fools, but it was true.

For a moment the hideous thought forced itself into his soul that a life of unselfish public service was futile. In all this babel of jangling cries and cat-calls not one voice was lifted in decent protest. He felt that his work was a failure and he had been pitching straws against the wind.

As wave after wave of idiotic hissing rose and fell only to swell again into greater fury a feeling of blind rage filled his being. He understood at last the persistence in the human mind of the doctrine of hell. It was a necessity of the moral universe. God simply must consume such trash. Nothing else could be done with it.

With a sudden impulse, he threw his right hand high above his head and his voice

boomed over the crowd in a peal of command. The effect was electrical. A painful hush followed. The swaying mass stood rooted in their tracks by the tones of authority his first word had expressed.

"Gentlemen!"

He paused and his next words were spoken in intense silence.

"My answer to the extraordinary greeting you have given me this morning is simple. I am not working for your approval, I work for my own approval, because I must in obedience to the call within me. Long ago in my life I gave up ambition and ceased to ask anything for myself. You cannot destroy my career because I cherish none. If I succeed in the work to which I have been called it is well. If I fail, it is also well. I have done my duty and obeyed the call to the service of my fellow-man!"

Again he paused as his voice choked with deep emotion. The crowd stared as if in a spell.

"The scene you are enacting here this morning is a disgrace to humanity. You have surrendered to the unmeaning fear that drives a herd of swine over a precipice. You have, by an act of your will, joined in a movement to paralyze the motive power of the world—faith! There is but one thing that runs this earth of ours for a single day—faith in one another.

"You are scrambling here for a few dollars in this bank. What can you do with it when you draw it out? There is not enough cash in the world to transact a single day's business. Business is run on credit—faith.

"Faith is the sustaining force of all personal and social life; a panic is its end—a lapse to the level of the beast of the field whose life is ruled by fear.

"Banks were not made as strong boxes for the hoarding of money. Money was hoarded in strong boxes centuries before banks were invented. Banks are institutions of public credit, to facilitate the useful circulation of money, not its withdrawal from use. The business of a bank is to keep money moving and make it do the world's work. You are attempting to stop the work by the destruction of its faith."

Suddenly a man who had quietly pushed his way through the crowd sprang on the step before the speaker and thrust a revolver into his face.

A cry of horror swept the crowd, as Stuart paused, turned pale and looked steadily down the flashing barrel into the madman's eyes.

"Who started this work of destruction?" he cried—"You—You—Do you hear me? And I've been commanded by God Almighty to end this trouble by ending you!"

As Stuart held the glittering eyes levelled at him across the blue-black barrel he could see the man's nervous and uncertain finger twitching at the trigger.

For the first time in his conscious existence he felt the stinging anguish of physical fear. Never had life—life for its own sake with strong sound limbs and alert mind—seemed so sweet. At the first touch of fear his tall body had suddenly stiffened and the pallor of death shrouded his face. The next instant came the conscious shame and horror of the moment's cowardice. The crowd that watched the tragic situation had not known, but he knew and it was enough. His face flushed red and his deep set eyes began to sparkle with anger, the red animal-anger of power wrought to insane fury. Every nerve and muscle and sinew quivered with the desire to kill, a consuming passionate desperate lust! His fingers closed involuntarily as the claws of a beast and he drew his breath with trembling intensity.

For one brief instant he hated all men. Not merely the fool who had shamed his soul with fear but all the mob of hissing howling brutes that surged about him and all the millions like them that crawl over the earth.

There was a pause of only a few seconds while these ideas flashed with the vividness of lightning through his imagination. The crowd noted no pause of any kind. His action seemed instantaneous.

With a sudden panther-like spring he leaped across the five feet which separated him from the man who held the revolver. His left hand gripped the weapon and threw it into the air as it was fired while his right hand closed on the throat of his assailant. With his knee against the man's breast he hurled him down the steps, wrenched the revolver from his hand and with a single blow knocked him into insensibility.



"He hurled him down the steps"

The spell was broken. The mob that hated him saw their chance. A yell of rage swept them, and a dozen men sprang toward him with curses. For a moment he held his own, when suddenly a well-directed blow from behind knocked him down.

He sprang to his feet instantly, climbed on the shoulders of the mass of enraged men who pressed on him from every direction and attempted to walk on their heads toward the two detectives who were fighting their way toward him. He made two successful leaps missed his foothold and fell in the arms of his enemies. In blind fury he felt the smash of blows on his face and head. A stream of blood was trickling down his forehead and its salty taste penetrated his mouth. With a desperate effort he freed his hands and knocked two men down.

A sudden crash from space seemed to send the world into a mass of flaming splinters and the light faded. He heard the soft rustle of silk and felt the pressure of a woman's lips on his. Surely he must be dead was the first thought that flashed through his mind. And then from somewhere far away in space came Nan's voice low and tense:

"Come back, Jim, dear, I've something to tell you. You can't die, you shall not die until I've told you!"

A tear fell on his face and he knew no more until suddenly, into the dark cave in which he lay dead a ray of sunlight flashed.

He opened his eyes and found Nan bending over him. His hand rested on her soft arm and his head lay pillowed on her breast.

"Why, Nan, it's you."

Her lips quivered. She closed her eyes and murmured:

"Thank God, you're alive!"

"Why, yes," he said, slowly rising. "Very much alive; what's happened?"

She placed her finger on his lips.

"Oh, I remember now."

"You mustn't talk, Jim," she said, with quiet authority. "The doctor will be here in a moment."

"Oh, I'm not hurt much, just a few scratches and bruises." He lifted himself on his elbow. "Oh the snake that choked me! If I could only have killed him I think I'd be happy."

He looked at Nan in a stupor.

"But what on earth are you doing here, Nan?"

He looked about the room and saw that he was in the inner office of the president of the bank, alone with Bivens's wife. He was lying on the big leather couch.

"I heard that you were going to speak this morning. I wanted to hear you and came. I arrived just as you began and managed to get into the bank. I saw that man try to kill you, Jim, and that crowd of wild beasts trampling you to death. I saw you knock them down one at a time while I watched you, paralyzed with fear. I wanted to rush out and fight my way to your side—but I was a coward. I tried to go, but my legs wouldn't move. I only stood there trembling and sobbing for some one else to go. I'm afraid I'm not very heroic."

Stuart smiled feebly.

"I understand, Nan, I felt the same thing out there."

"The two detectives pulled you out and dragged you into the bank."

The doctor entered and quickly dressed Stuart's wounds, and turned to Nan.

"He'll be all right in a week or so, Mrs. Bivens—provided he doesn't insist on breaking the run on another bank by the spell of his eloquence. I hope you can persuade him not to try that again."

"I think I'm fully persuaded, Doctor," Stuart answered grimly, "I've seen a great light to-day."

When the doctor had gone and Nan was left alone with Stuart an embarrassed silence fell between them.

She was quietly wondering if he were fully unconscious when she was sobbing and saying some very foolish things. Above all she was wondering whether he knew that she had kissed him.

And the man was wondering if the memory of the tear that fell on his face and the pressure of a woman's lips were only a dream.

He scouted the idea of going to a hospital and Nan insisted on taking him home.

When her car stopped at South Washington Square and Stuart insisted on scrambling out alone, she held his hand tight a moment and spoke with trembling earnestness:

"You will see me now, Jim, and be friends?"

He answered promptly.

"Yes, Nan, I will. The world is never going to be quite the same place for me after to-day. There was one moment this morning in which I think I lived a thousand years."

A hot flush stole over the woman's beautiful face as she looked steadily into his eyes and quietly asked:

"What moment was that?"

"The moment I looked down that gun barrel, saw the stupid hate in that fool's eyes and felt the throb of the insane desire to kill in the people behind him, the people for whom I've been giving my life a joyous sacrifice."

Nan smiled a sigh of relief.

"Oh! I see—well, you've made me very happy with your promise, I know you'll keep your word."

Stuart looked at her a moment curiously. Was there a tear trembling in the corner of her dark eyes as she spoke the last sentence, or was it his imagination?

He pressed her hand firmly.

"You are more beautiful than ever, Nan. Yes, I'll keep my word. Good-bye until I call."

And the woman smiled in triumph.

THE DEMI-GOD

The clouds of the panic slowly lifted and the sun began once more to shine. A fearless officer of the law had struck a blow for justice that marked the beginning of a new era of national life. And yet apparently the only men to profit by it were the giants who rode the storm it had created. The people were left in mental bewilderment. To their short-ranged vision the young District Attorney who lay prostrate on a bed of illness was a man who had been tried and found wanting. He had either wilfully and corruptly played into the hands of a powerful group of millionaires or had blunderingly done so. In either case the act was a crime.

Slowly but surely the prices of stocks began to mount and the great men who had bought them at the bottom grew greater.

Incidentally a corner in wheat was suddenly developed, and the price of bread rose twenty per cent. Bivens was found to be the mysterious power behind the deal, and before the old-timers in the wheat pit could marshal their forces to crush him, he closed out his holdings at a profit of five millions.

The little financier awoke next morning to find himself the most famous man in America. His picture now appeared everywhere and all sorts of writers began to weave marvellous stories of his achievements. The suicide of his associates, the higher price of bread, and the long trail of blood behind the panic were forgotten by the rabble which began to regard him with the awe due a demi-god.

Nan was insisting again that he make Stuart an offer to become his associate in business.

"But my dear," the financier protested, "I've told you over and over again, in the best of humour and with infinite patience, that I'd jump at the chance, but I can't get on my knees and beg him, can I?"

"I'm sure he will consider your offer now."

"He turned it down once emphatically."

"Times have changed."

"But he hasn't. He promised you the day he was hurt to call at the house. He hasn't done it."

"He has been ill in bed ever since. He will come when he is up again."

"Perhaps," Bivens answered, musingly.

"Besides," she continued, "it's the right moment to approach him. The politicians have turned him down. Both parties have named new men for his office. He resents this action intensely. He don't want the office, but he does want the recognition of his services."

Bivens shook his head.

"It's no use. Jim's a dreamer. He'll smile and wait for the next generation to value his work."

"He won't have to wait that long. When this panic has passed he will be the biggest thing to emerge from it. His personality will be worth millions to you."

The woman's face was tense with pleading.

Bivens looked at her a moment curiously and she turned her eyes away.

"Why do you think he has changed his attitude toward me?"

"From something he said. That mob has written a question mark before his life."

"By George!" he exclaimed, his black eyes sparkling. "It may be possible."

"You'll try?" Nan asked eagerly.

"No."

"Why not?" she cried with anger.

The little man smiled cunningly.

"I'll not try—I'll *do* it."

His wife laughed.

"Yes, I'll do it," Bivens continued with elation. "And I'll make my offer so big and generous I'll take his breath, so big that no man in human shape can resist it. I'll prepare every step so carefully that there can be no possibility of failure."

"How?"

Nan spoke her question with the eagerness of a child, and the shrewd man of the world never dreamed of the sinister motive coiled within the silent depths of her heart.

"I've an enemy somewhere among the fallen," Bivens went on musingly, "who is dying hard. With his last gasp he is trying still to reach my heart. In spite of the fact that I have unlimited resources, this man is constantly circulating reports about the soundness of my finances. He uses the telephone principally and he has started two runs on my bank within the past month. Another is pending. I'm going to ask Jim to preside over an investigation of my resources in the presence of a dozen newspaper reporters."

Nan stooped and kissed him.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAMP OF ALADDIN

When Stuart reached Bivens's new offices in Wall Street he was amazed at their size and magnificence. The first impression was one of dazzling splendour. The huge reception hall was trimmed from floor to dome in onyx and gold. The draperies were a deep scarlet, with massive furniture and oriental rugs to match. A fountain with concealed electric lights adorned the centre.

Stuart nodded to a group of reporters waiting for the chance of a word with the great man.

A reporter ventured to give him some information.

"I'm afraid you're too late, not a chance to see him; look at 'em waiting."

He waved around the room at the crowd lounging about or gazing at the paintings.

"Looks like a full house, doesn't it?" Stuart answered casually.

"They've been here for hours. There's a senator of the United States, three members of the House of Representatives, the Ambassador of a European court, the Governor of a Chinese province, a Japanese Prince and a dozen big politicians from as many states, to say nothing of the small fry."

"Well, I have an appointment with Mr. Bivens at this hour."

"Really!" the reporter gasped. "Then for heaven's sake give me a chance at you five minutes before the other fellows. Remember now, I saw you first!"

He was still pleading when Stuart smilingly drew away and followed one of Bivens's secretaries.

He passed rapidly through a labyrinth of outer offices, each entrance guarded by a detective who eyed him with keen scrutiny as he passed.

Bivens came forward to greet him with outstretched hands.

"I needn't say I'm glad to see you, Jim. How do you like my new quarters?"

"Absolutely stunning. I had no idea you cultivated such ceremonial splendours in your business."

"Yes, I like it," the financier admitted thoughtfully. "I don't mind confessing to you on the sly that it was Nan's idea, at first, but I took to it like a duck to water. And the more I see of it the better I like it."

Bivens stood warming himself before a cheerful blaze of logs while he spoke and Stuart had quietly taken a seat and watched him with growing interest.

In spite of his contempt for the mere possession of money, in spite of his traditional contempt for Bivens's antecedents, character and business methods he found himself unconsciously paying homage to the power the little dark swarthy figure to-day incarnated.

He was struck too with the fact that remarkable changes had taken place in his physical appearance during the past ten years of his reign as a financial potentate. Into his features had grown an undoubted dignity. His mouth had grown harder, colder, and more cruel and more significant of power. His eyes had sunk back deeper into his high forehead and sparkled with fiercer light. He had become more difficult of approach and carried himself with quiet conscious pride.

Stuart was scarcely prepared for the hearty, old-fashioned cordial way in which he went about the business for which he had asked him to come.

"I'm glad you like it, Jim," he added after a pause.

"It's magnificent."

"Glad," he repeated, "because you're going to come in here with me."

The lawyer lifted his brows and suppressed a smile.

"Oh, you needn't smile," Bivens went on good-naturedly. "It's as fixed as fate. You are the only man in New York who can do the work I've laid out and you've got to come. The swine who made up your convention the other day knew what they were about when they turned you down. You were too big a man for the job they gave you."

He paused and drew closer.

"Now, Jim, this is your day, those fellows out there in the reception hall can wait. You and I must have this thing out—man to man, heart to heart. You can talk plainly and I'll answer squarely."

The little man stopped again and looked at the ceiling thoughtfully.

"I've got a proposition to make to you, so big you've got to hear it, so big you can't get away from it, because you're not a fool. You are a man of genius. You have eloquence and magnetism, intellect and will. Among all the men I have met in this town I don't know one who is your equal. There is no height to which you can not climb when once your feet are on the ladder. And I'm going to put them there."

The assurance in Bivens's voice and the contagious enthusiasm with which he spoke impressed Stuart.

Bivens was quick to recognize it and strike at once.

"Before I present my plans I want to show you that I can make good my word. I have caused these reporters to be sent here to-day for the purpose of giving the widest publicity to the facts about my fortune. Another run has been planned to-morrow on one of my banks. I have placed my money and securities in the next room so arranged that you can verify my statements, and at the proper moment I shall ask these reporters into the place and let them see with their own eyes. There can be no more rumours in Wall Street about my financial status. Come in here."

Bivens led the way into the room beyond, which was the meeting place of the directors of his many corporations.

Stuart had scarcely passed the door when he stopped, struck dumb with amazement. In the centre of the great office was a sight that held him spellbound. An immense vermilion wood table six feet wide and fifty feet in length filled the centre. On it the wizard had placed his fortune of ninety millions of dollars. Twenty millions were in gold its heavy weight sustained by extra stanchions. The coin, apparently all new from the National mint, was carefully arranged around the edges of the table in a solid bulwark two feet high.

Behind this gleaming yellow pile of gold he had placed his stocks and bonds—each pile showing on its top layer the rich green, gold or purple colours of its issue, each pile marked with a tag which showed its total amount.

The effect was stunning. The whole scheme of decorations of the immense room lent itself to the effects the financier had sought to produce. The walls were covered with rich brown leather fastened with leather-covered nails and every piece of woodwork in the floor, wainscoting, beams and panels as well as the furniture, was of solid dark red vermilion wood from the heart of a South American forest.

From the panelling on the inside wall huge doors of a safe stood open, showing the entrance to a steel vault from which a noiseless electric elevator led to the storage

vaults five stories below the surface of the ground. The dark panelling, the massive furniture, and the rich leather-covered walls with their heavy ceilings, all accented the weird effects of the millions of gleaming coin and gorgeously tinted stocks and bonds. The huge table seemed to fill and crowd the entire room and the wall of gold to be pushing itself against the ceiling.

Bivens approached the table softly and reverently, as a priest approaches the High Altar, and touched the gold with the tips of his slender little fingers.

"In romances, Jim, remorse always crushes and kills the rich man——"

Bivens paused and smiled.

"But in life, never! He laughs and grows fat. I haven't reached the fat period yet because I've just begun——"

"You've just begun?" Stuart interrupted, laughingly.

"Yes, you'll understand what I mean before I've finished the day's work."

"But why?" the young lawyer asked passionately. "Such a purpose seems to me in view of this stunning revelation the sheerest insanity. Life, the one priceless thing we possess, is too short. And what lies beyond the six feet of earth we don't know."

"That's because you're an unbeliever, Jim."

There could be no mistaking the seriousness with which Bivens spoke. Yet Stuart laughed in spite of his effort to control the impulse.

"On the other hand, Cal," he answered, with mischievous banter, "if your little heaven and your little hell in which you seem to take so much comfort are true, so much the worse. I can see you shovelling coal through all eternity——"

"But I happen to be going to the other place," Bivens broke in, good-naturedly.

Stuart looked at the pile of gold a moment and then at Bivens and said slowly:

"Well, if you do get there, Cal, there's one thing certain, the angels will all have to sleep with their pocket-books under their pillows."

Bivens's eyes sparkled and a smile played about the hard lines of his mouth. In spite of its doubtful nature he enjoyed the tribute to his financial genius beneath the banter of his friend's joke.

With a gesture of conscious dignity he turned to the table and quietly said:

"Count one of those heaps of coin. Each stack of twenty-dollar pieces contains a hundred—exactly two thousand dollars. Between each pile of a million a scarlet thread is drawn. When you have counted one section, you will find twenty exactly like it. Verify my statement and then make a note of those packages of stocks and bonds, all gilt-edged dividend payers. On that side table there in the corner," he waved in that direction, "I have thrown a heap of rubbish, the common stock of various corporations, not yet paying a dividend. Some of it will be very valuable in time. For example, 100,000 shares of U.S. Steel, Common. When that stock reaches par, and it will yet do it, that package alone will be worth ten millions. I haven't counted any of that stuff at all.

"You will find on this table exactly ninety millions. Within an hour you can examine each division of coin, stocks and bonds and bear witness to the truth of my assertions. I'm going to close that door and leave you here for an hour."

"Alone with all that?"

"Oh, there's only one way out," Bivens laughed, "through my little reception room and I'll be there. I'll meet some of the gentlemen who are waiting. When you are satisfied of the accuracy of my account, just tap on my door and I'll join you immediately. Do the inspection carefully. It's of grave importance. I shall call on you as a witness bye and bye before that group of newspaper men."

When Bivens disappeared into the adjoining room, Stuart at once began the task of verifying the financier's statement of his assets. In half an hour he had completed the task with sufficient care to be reasonably sure there could be no mistake—a million dollars more or less was of no importance. Ten millions in gold would make good every liability of Bivens's banks.

When Stuart had satisfied himself of the accuracy of the count, he stood gazing at the queer looking piles of yellow metal and richly tinted paper, stunned by the attempt to realize the enormous power over men which it represented. Even in dead bulk as it lay

there the power it represented was something enormous, an annual banking income of at least four millions, a sum beyond the power of any human being to spend intelligently. But when the huge pile should thrill with life at the touch of the deft fingers of the master who could grasp its stunning force in human affairs, who could tell its possibilities?

He folded his arms and stood there lost in thought. Through his imagination the old stories of the world's treasure-caves came trooping. The Lamp of Aladdin and all the dreams of the Arabian Nights seemed tame and passive before the incredible fact on which he gazed. Back of that marvellous vision he saw the figure of a bare-footed boy of the poor white trash of the South rising to a world empire. The very mention of his name now sent a thrill of hate, of envy or of admiration to the hearts of millions. Surely the age of the warrior, the priest, and the law-giver had passed. The age of materialism had dawned, and the new age knew but one God, whose temple was the market place.

A wave of bitterness swept his spirit, and for the first time he questioned for the briefest moment whether he had missed the way in life. Only for a moment, and then the feeling passed, and in its place slowly rose a sense of angry resentment against Bivens and all his tribe. The audacity and assurance with which he was presenting the offer of a change in the whole bent of his character he felt to be a personal insult. And yet he knew the deep, underlying, affectionate loyalty in the man's heart on which the act was based. He couldn't resent it. But when the little swarthy figure suddenly appeared in the doorway, his soul was in arms for the struggle he knew coming.

"Well, you found I've not made a mistake?"

"No. To put it mildly, you will not be forced to apply to the Charity Bureau for any outside help this year. Of course there's no telling what may happen if hard times strike you."

"But at present I ought to be able to pay my debts and still have enough to shuffle along somehow?"

"I think so. In fact I'll make oath to that effect if you need it to stem the present tide of adversity."

"Well, I don't mind confessing to you, Jim, that I went into the recent panic with only twenty-five millions. You have counted ninety there without looking over the trash on that side table. As I told you a while ago, I've just begun. I've schemes on foot that circle the globe. I've made up my mind to have you with me. We won't discuss terms now—that's a mere detail—the thing is for us to get at the differences between us. Now say the meanest and hardest things you can think. I understand."

Stuart dropped into a seat beneath the pile of millions and a frown darkened his face.

"My opinions, Cal, of your business methods are known to everyone."

"Yes I know you started life with a theory, but sooner or later, Jim, you can't resist the pressure in this town. You started with ideals you can't realize. You have grown older and wiser and don't dream so much. One by one illusions fade. One by one the men who set out to serve the common people always come over to the side of the mighty. Why? Because we alone recognize their worth and reward them accordingly."

Stuart looked at Bivens thoughtfully and then at the millions heaped on the dark blood-red table, while he slowly said:

"They say, Cal, that the warriors of the Dakota Indians used to eat the heart of a fallen foe to increase their courage and the New Zealander swallowed whole the eyes of his enemy that he might see further. Your business methods haven't made much progress beyond this stage, so far as I can see."

Bivens stroked his silken beard with a nervous puzzled movement, rose and walked to the window.

"Come here, Jim."

He gazed for a moment over the city and slowly said:

"Look over this sea of buildings rising like waves of the ocean and stretching away until its lines are lost in the clouds. The swarming thousands who live in them, what is their trade? Their business is by hook or crook, to get hold of the money simple-minded people have produced in other sections of the world. They were born to be the kings and rulers of ignorant masses. This kingship of mind over matter may be a hard law but it *is* the law. There's no other meaning to those great buildings whose argus eyes gleam to-night in the shadows among the stars. I am simply doing what every man in New York or the world would do if he had the chance, the brains and the daring."

"Not every man, Cal," was the steady answer. "There are men in New York who would cut their right arm off rather than do such things."

"Show me one that would cut his right arm off rather than do them and I'll show you ten thousand who would cut off both arms and spare a leg to win the half of my success. I'm simply doing better than they can what they'd give their bodies and souls to do. That's why I'm above the law and people envy and worship me. If I am a devil, I am their creation. That's why I wield a power kings never knew. That's why I need regard no restraint of culture, experience, pride, class or rank. I am the product of the spirit of the age—the envy and despair of them all. I might be torn limb from limb by the black, creeping thing on the pavements below, that clutched at your throat that day, but for the fact that they all love money and lust after it with abject longing.

"The people will only get justice when they learn to love justice. Because they love privilege and lust after money they are plundered by men who are their superiors in intelligence. If I am a wolf it's because so many lambs are always bleating at my heels that I have to eat them to save my self-respect. People will continue to starve so long as they are content with a circus and a bread-line. And such people ought to starve. They get what they deserve. The government is trying to rescue four thousand men who are stranded and starving in Alaska. Are they paupers? No, just average business men who are mad for money, who dare frozen seas or blazing deserts, death or hell to win it. That's why my power *is* power. This passion for money, money for its own sake, right or wrong, is the motive power of the modern world. That's why I laugh at my critics and sneer at threats. I am secure because I've built my career on the biggest fact of the century. You'd as well have common sense and accept the world as it is. As you've just said, we've only a little while to live in it anyhow."

"But I want to really live," Stuart broke in, "not merely exist. You don't live. You are engaged in an endless fight, desperate, cruel, mercenary—for what? The superfluous, ambitions you never exploit, privileges you don't know how to use, caprices without the genius to express them, pleasures when you don't know how to play. Why?"

"The game man, the game!"

"Game? what game? To crush and kill for the mere sake of doing it, as a sheep-killing dog strangles fifty lambs in a night for the fun of hearing them bleat? Isn't there a bigger game? a game of mutual joys and hopes, of sunlight and laughter?"

"But, Jim," the little financier protested, "I don't make men as they are, nor did I make conditions."

"Still is that any reason why a man shouldn't take his place on the right side of the fight? The eternal struggle is always on between Life and Death. A man's in league with one or the other. Which is it? You are a wrecker and not a builder."

"But is that true?" Bivens interrupted eagerly. "I'm organizing the industries of the world. I have furthered the progress of humanity."

"Yes, in a way you have. And if the price of goods continues to rise for another ten years as it has during the past ten under your organizing the human race will be compelled to make still further progress. They will have to move to another planet. Nobody but a millionaire can live on this one. A day of reckoning is bound to come."

Bivens laughed, walked back to the window and gazed down on the narrow streets below.

"A day of reckoning!" he exclaimed. "Look at those crawling lines of men, Jim, and think for a moment of the millions like them on the surface of the earth, each one fighting tooth and nail for his own kennel and the bone that he claims. Think of the centuries of stupid history back of each generation of those crawling things—their selfish habits, as fixed as the colour of hair and eyes, their pride, their little prejudices of race and creed—and talk to me about days of reckoning and revolution! Hurl yourself against the mighty system of business that has slowly built itself through the centuries out of such material and you simply beat your brains out against a granite wall."

"Well, I see something entirely different," Stuart answered, "as I look on that slowly moving line of men down there. To me they symbolize the eternal, the endless stream that sweeps through time to whose life a century is but a moment. You think that you are one of the mighty. By the signs on that table you are. And yet, you could die to-night and that black stream of humanity would flow along that narrow street to-morrow as it does to-day and not one in all the crowd would pause to look up at the flag at half mast on your building. One by one the mighty fall and are forgotten and yet that crowd grows denser, its feet swifter, and the pressure of its united life becomes more and more resistless. A hundred years from now and your name will have vanished from human memory. A millionaire dies every day. Nobody knows. Nobody cares. Is such a life at its best worth living? And yours is never at its best. You can't eat much. You don't

sleep well and you can't live beyond fifty-five."

Bivens's dark face grew suddenly pale and his slender fingers touched one of the piles of gold.

"Don't talk nonsense, Jim, I'll live as long as you."

"And yet you turn pale when I speak of death."

Bivens suddenly drew his watch and spoke with quick nervous energy:

"I must call those reporters and get rid of them as soon as possible."

He gave the order, and in a few moments walked back into the room followed by the newspaper men, a half-dozen young fellows with clean-cut, eager faces.

Not one of them showed a pencil or a note-book, but not a feature of the startling exhibition escaped their intelligence. Every eye flashed with piercing light, every nerve quivered with sensitive impressions. Every sight, sound and smell wrote its story on their imagination—the odour of the flowers on Bivens's desk in the little sitting room, the picture of his wife beside them, the smell of the leather on the walls, the touch of their hands on the silent symbols of power lying in yellow heaps—all found souls that throbbed and lived and spoke in their vivid sensational reports.

They looked at Bivens with peculiar awe. Stuart noted with a smile that not one of them spoke loudly in the presence of ninety millions of dollars. All whispered except a blasé youngster from *The Evening Post*. He dared to articulate his words in modulated tones. He seemed to regard himself as a sort of assistant high priest at this extraordinary function. The other fellows unconsciously paid the tribute of whispered awe to the great god all true New Yorkers worship.

When Bivens led them out at last and returned to the room, he was in high spirits.

"Now, Jim," he began hastily, "if you have said all the bad things you can possibly think about me, we'll get down to business and I'll present the big proposition you can't resist. As I told you a while ago, I've just begun to make money. Come into the next room while my men remove the evil from our midst."

He smiled lovingly at his treasures as if in apology for his momentary levity.

CHAPTER XII

TEMPTATION

When Stuart had seated himself on a luxurious leather-covered chair in the little sitting-room he gazed into the flickering fire with a feeling of strange excitement.

He could hear Bivens giving orders to his employees about the removal of his millions to the vaults below. It would take hours to complete the task. He could hear the deep vibrant ring of the gold, as the men dumped it into bags.

As he listened to the curious sound he began dimly to realize that the foundation of his life and character were being undermined. There could be no mistake about it. He had made some brave talk to Bivens's face as he stared at the daring display of his money. He couldn't realize it then. He was on guard. But now that he was alone and his imagination began to paint pictures and his fancy to weave visions, he saw the beckoning hand of Temptation from a high mountain wave invitingly toward the world below, and the vision was beautiful.

He lifted his eyes from the fire and they rested on an exquisite miniature of Nan which had been painted just after her marriage. The artist had caught the pose of her magnificent neck and head in an inspired moment. He forgot the ten black years of loneliness and struggle. He was standing before her again in all the pride and strength of those last days of passionate longing and bitter rebellion.

His heart gave a throb of fierce protest against the fate that had robbed him of the one thing on earth he had ever really desired. He tried in vain to separate her from the struggle of character and principle he was fighting with Bivens. In spite of every effort his imagination persisted in painting scenes with Nan which must come inevitably from an intimate business association with her husband. The very idea of such treachery roused his soul to fury, but always the picture returned and always Nan's smiling face

came to beckon him on and her voice, soft and full of tenderness, called.

When Bivens entered he found his tall figure bent low in the chair and a scowl on his face.

The little black eyes sparkled with the certainty of victory. He knew the poison was at work and its wine had found the soul.

"Now, Jim, down to business!"

Stuart looked up with a start, recovered himself and replied sharply:

"All right—fire away."

Bivens drew a chair close, rubbed his slender hands and began in quiet tones:

"You can see that I have the cash. What I must have to do the big thing I've dreamed is a right-hand man whom I can trust with my money, my body, and my soul. He must be a man with brains, and far-seeing eyes. A man who will fight to the death and be loyal with every breath, who will work day and night, a man of iron nerve, iron muscle and a heart of steel. Come in with me, Jim, for all you're worth, with all your brain and will and personality, without a single reservation, and I'll give you a partnership of one-fourth interest in my annual income and I'll guarantee that it shall never be less than a million a year."

Stuart sprang to his feet and stared at Bivens, gasping!

"You mean this—are you serious?"

A friendly smile lighted the dark face as he slowly replied:

"Certainly I'm serious. And my proposition is a sound one from a business point of view, otherwise I wouldn't make it, though you are the only man in the world who might tempt me to do a foolish thing for purely sentimental reasons. Still the offer is not made because you fought the battle of a poor white boy one day down South a long time ago. I've made it because I know you're worth it."

Stuart shook his head.

"I expected the offer of a generous salary, Cal, but this is simply stunning."

"I told you I'd make you a proposition so big and generous you couldn't get away from it. But mind you, I've the best reasons for making it. We are entering the last phase of a world-struggle for financial supremacy. This country is to be the real centre of modern power. Out in that harbour lie at anchor ships that fly the flags of every nation, but they are all carrying our goods to the ends of the earth. The balance of trade with Europe alone is more than a million a day in our favour. We are producing gold at the rate of a million and a half a week and we keep it. With our untold resources, our inexhaustible supplies of coal and metal, with the most industrious, intelligent and progressive working men labouring under the best conditions and with the most efficient tools ever known in human history, we must become and will become quickly the economic masters of the world. When that happens somebody is going to be master here."

Bivens rose and paced back and forth a moment.

"Somebody's going to be master here, Jim," he repeated, "and it's not going to be a mob, the stupid, howling, slobbering thing that clutched at your throat that day in front of my bank."

"No."

"Nor will it be a clumsy soulless corporation called a 'Trust,' either, a thing that can be badgered and hounded by every hungry thieving politician who gets into office. The coming master of masters, the king of kings will be a *man*—a man on whose imperial word will hang the fate of empires."

"What do you mean?" Stuart asked with quick emphasis.

"Just what I said. The seat of this nation's government is not at Washington, D.C. It's a silly idea. We have some very fine buildings there and a crowd of fools rattle around in the Capitol and make a lot of noise. But I met the King of America the other day in this panic. He sent for me. You can bet I answered the call. He made me eat dirt and swear that I liked the taste of it. But I'll get even with him yet!"

Two livid spots suddenly appeared on the swarthy cheeks and he choked into silence.

"There was more truth than romance in the story that I deserted my associates in that panic, Jim. I had to do it. I was given my choice. I could do it or walk the plank. Not one

of the men I deserted in that pool would have hesitated a moment to do exactly what I did under the same conditions; but, Jim, it hurt. Somewhere down deep there's something that makes me hold fast to a man who stands with me. And the one ambition of my life now is to crush the man who forced me to lick his feet that day, and I'll do it yet!"

Again his voice sank to a whisper and Stuart watched his convulsed features with increasing fascination.

"The world is waiting," he continued, "for its real master—not a multi-millionaire, but the coming billionaire. The rulers of the old world fawn on our financiers and envy their power. But the king of kings is yet to come. If I had been ready in this panic with the capital I have to-day I could have made a billion. With the power and experience I now have and one such man as you on whom I can depend I'd double my fortune every year. That means that in five years I will be a billionaire, and only forty-two.

"Think for a minute what that means if you can! A billion dollars will double itself in seven years. At forty-two I'd be worth a billion. At forty-nine I'd have two billions. At fifty-eight I'd be worth four billions—and just old enough to really begin to do things. That is on the supposition that my money only increases by its banking power, which is the smallest way to look at it. In seven years I'd start with a billion preparing for the grand coup of the next panic. It always comes within a decade. The man who enters a panic with one billion dollars in cash if he had the nerve, the daring, and the brains can emerge with fifty!

"Give me one billion answerable to my will alone and I can rule this nation. Give me four billions and no king or emperor, president or parliament on this globe will dare to make peace or war without consulting me. The power which Cæsar or Napoleon wielded will be child's play to the power within my grasp. When such a man lives the world will know for the first time in history the might of a real master.

"How long could this republic stand if such a man should see fit to change its form? Even now our petty millionaires buy courts and legislatures, and the control of great cities. But the new king would know no limitations to this power. He would make the laws, shape and dictate public opinion, subsidize the church and the schools, direct the courts, control all industries, direct all banks, fix the wages of labour, the prices of all goods, regulate supply and demand and absorb all profits.

"If Europe now cringes at the feet of our present millionaire-king of Wall Street, emperors beg his favour and princes wait at his door, what could the real ruler of the world do with these puppets when he comes into his kingdom?"

Bivens's voice again sank into low passionate whispers, while his black eyes again became two points of fierce gleaming light.

Stuart watched him with amazement at the revelation of volcanic passions which slumbered beneath his pigmy form. For the moment, too, he was swept from his feet by the rush of emotion. And again his eye rested on the smiling face of Nan looking at him from the ivory miniature on the mantel.

When the crucial moment came for his manhood to answer, the speech of brave denunciation died on his lips. The vision was too wonderful, the heights to which he had been invited too high and thrilling to be dismissed with words. Deep down in every strong man's soul is the consciousness of his own strength, the certainty that if put to the test he is the equal of any other man who walks the earth; that if he were suddenly thrust into the seat of the mighty he could play their roles with credit if not with glory. At the door of this yellow empire, mightier than kings in purple rule, his conscience halted, hesitated and stammered. He found himself, in spite of honour and character, for the moment measuring himself with Bivens in the struggle for supremacy which would sooner or later come between them if he should enter such an alliance.

Bivens saw his hesitation and hastened to add in generous tones:

"You needn't rush your decision, Jim. Take your time. Think it over from every point of view. You're bound to accept in the end."

Stuart flushed and his hand trembled as he drew it nervously across his forehead.

"It's no use in my quibbling, Cal, your offer is a stirring one. It tempts me immensely. I feel the call of the old blood-struggle in me, the inheritance of centuries of the lust of battle, and I'm beginning to see now that the world's battles are no longer fought with sword and gun. During the past months of excitement I've felt it too—the rush of this blood-call to my heart. I've wanted to ride men down in the streets and carry their heads on a pike."

"Take your time, Jim," Bivens broke in, rising. "'There's a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at its flood'—you know the rest. But this tide will not ebb out for you to-

night. I'm going to let it flow about you for days and weeks and months if need be. In the meantime I've got to see more of you. Nan wants it and I want it. You must come up to our house and entertainments. The politicians have turned you down but the big men who count are afraid of you and they'll go out of their way to meet you. Come up to dinner with us to-night. I want you to make my home your home whether you accept my offer or not."

Stuart hesitated.

"Really, Cal, I oughtn't to go to-night."

"Why not?"

"Well you see, old man, I'm afraid I've let you take too much for granted. I've got to fight this thing out alone. It's the biggest thing physically and morally I've ever been up against. I've got to be alone for awhile."

"Oh, nonsense, be alone as much as you like later. Nan insisted on my bringing you to-night, and you've got to come, to save me from trouble if nothing else. I've an engagement down town after dinner. You and Nan can talk over old times. I promise you faithfully that not a word of business shall be spoken."

Stuart felt the foundations of life slipping beneath his feet and yet he couldn't keep back the answer:

"All right, I'll come."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FORBIDDEN LAND

As Stuart dressed for the dinner he thought of Harriet with a pang. He had promised her to try to keep out of danger. But could she know or understand the struggle through which he was passing! He wondered vaguely why he had seen so little of her lately. She had become more and more absorbed in her music and her manner had grown shy and embarrassed. Yet, whenever he had resented it and stopped to lounge and chat and draw her out, she was always her old sweet self.

The doctor, too, had avoided him of late and he noticed that his clothes had begun to look shabby. He hurried down stairs, determined to see him a moment before leaving.

He caught him hurrying from the house and laid his hand affectionately on his arm.

"These are tough times, Doctor, and if you need any help you must let me know."

The older man's voice trembled as he replied:

"Thank you, my boy, that's a very unusual speech to hear these days. It renews my faith in the world."

"You're not in trouble?"

The doctor lifted his head gently.

"My troubles are so much lighter than those of the people I know, I can't think of them. So many of my friends and patients have given up in this panic. So many have died for the lack of bread. I'll let you know if I'm in trouble myself."

He paused and pressed Stuart's hand.

"I'm glad you asked me. The sun will shine brighter to-day. I must hurry."

With a swing of his stalwart form and a generous wave of his hand he was gone.

When Stuart reached the Drive he alighted and walked slowly toward the Bivens palace. He had never been there before. He had always avoided the spot. He smiled now at the childishness of his attitude toward Nan. It seemed incredible that a sane man should taboo one of the most beautiful spots in the city, merely because a woman lived in the neighbourhood who once professed her love to him.

He paused in front of the block on which the millionaire's house stood, amazed at the perfection of its detail, and above all amazed at the impression of homelike comfort and

friendly hospitality which it gave. He had expected an imposing front, whose effects would impress and stun. He had not conceived the possibility of such a huge palace, set so commandingly in the centre of a block amid trees and shrubbery and iron picket fence, that it would suggest comfort and happiness. Yet the impression was unmistakable. The friendly lights seemed to reprove him for a long and foolish absence.

The full moon had just risen and flooded the Drive and park and river with silvery mystery. He studied the effects of the building with wonder and admiration. Evidently Bivens had given his architects a free hand and they had wrought a poem in marble. The fact was they had an easy task to persuade him. He had never boasted his culture or taste or ancestry. He knew and keenly felt the humility of his early origin and his one terror when he became rich was that he might be crude and ridiculous before others. When he found that his architects were men of genius he submitted to their guidance without a word.

So fascinated was Stuart with the beauty and perfection of the great house he walked around the block before entering, viewing it from every angle—always to find some new line shimmering in the moonlight that held his eye and charmed his fancy.

What a strange thing, this medieval palace, standing in stately beauty in the midst of the hideous, ugly uniformity of the most modern, unromantic and materialistic city of the world!

What was its meaning?

And the tall iron fence with the bristling spikes to keep out the mob, and that queer underground entrance on the side. These feudal minarets, battlements and frowning black iron pikes, were they symbolic of a revival of the feudal spirit of the Middle Ages? Or were they merely the day-dreams of an artist with no social meaning beyond the vagaries of his fancy?

Had a new master of the world really been born? And had he begun to build his castles to stun and overawe the rabbles that pass his door? Or was this strange being as yet neither fish nor fowl, neither beast nor human, merely a fungous growth on the diseased tissue of the modern world? Who could tell? Surely his like had never been seen in the history of man—this modern money-maniac, this strange creature of iron muscles, always hurrying, daring, scheming, plotting, with never a moment's relaxation, day or night, eating or drinking, working or sleeping, in his office or in his home, going or coming in his yacht with wireless tower, his private car with telegraph office, his secretary always by his side, a telephone always at his bed, with no time to live, no time to love, with only time to fight and kill and pile the spoils of war on high!

The old baron who lived beneath those graceful minarets and walked behind these pikes felt his high responsibilities. He was the champion of his people against their enemies. He was their protector while he claimed to be their lord. But this strange new creature, who had begun to masquerade in his ancient armour and steal his crests, who is he? Certainly he acknowledges no obligations to any people.

Stuart was roused from his reverie by the passing of a powerfully built man who had been following him since he had first approached the Bivens palace. The keen eyes searched his face with piercing gaze and the lawyer smiled as he recognized in the stranger one of the private guards of which the modern masters of the world have felt the need. In the Middle Ages he stood watch on the ramparts of the baron's castle—now he walks the block and lifts his finger to suspicious persons. In the old days he wore his armour on the outside and carried a spear. Now he wears a hidden coat of mail and carries concealed two automatic guns.

The guard smiled in friendly recognition and Stuart knew that he was expected by the servants of the great man.

The sentinel was an Italian. Bivens, the son of a poor white man of the South, whom even negroes once pitied, had recruited his palace guard from the children of the Cæsars. Could any fact more loudly proclaim the passing of the era of political fictions and the dawn of the age of materialism, the passing of the king who ruled by divine right and the coming of the reign of the huckster?

Stuart was shown into the drawing room by a powdered flunky whose costume was designed by one of the court tailors of Europe. While awaiting the arrival of the mistress of the house he looked about the room with increasing amazement. He had expected to find that the authority of the artist-architect would yield at the door to the personal whims of the owner. He expected to find here a vulgar and extravagant taste, a vernal art without mind or genius. Instead he found the perfection of grace, elegance, quiet richness and surprising beauty, everywhere the overwhelming impression of conscious dignity and exhaustless reserve power.

He rubbed his eyes to see if he were dreaming, entranced with his surroundings. In

spite of the tragedy it all meant to his own life he drank in its effects as a poet long exiled from his native land drinks in the beauty and glory of his home-coming. Somewhere in this world or another in the mists of eternity his soul had seen this before. The whole conception of the thing was noble and it had been nobly and beautifully executed. The artist who wrought his vision thus in matter had sung for joy in its creation and the joyous beat of his heart throbbed in the rhythm of every exquisite line.

He began to realize for the first time the triumph of the woman who had bartered him for gold. His eye rested on a life-size portrait of Nan done by the foremost artist of Europe. It filled the entire space above the great mantel reaching to the ceiling and so skilfully had it been set in the massive panel one seemed to be looking through an opening into another room—the figure was not a picture but the living woman about to extend her hand in friendly greeting to her guests.

The artist had caught the secret of her character and expressed it with genius in the poise of the superb form, the incarnation of sensuous soulless beauty dominated by keen intelligence.

This portrait on which he stood gazing as if in a spell was evidently painted the second year of their marriage. He remembered now her diary had given an account of it when the painter came over from the Continent to execute the commission. He tried to recall her appearance the day of the assault. The impression was too blurred by excitement to have much meaning. He wondered if she really showed the ten years added to her age. At least he knew that she had not been happy. There was some consolation in that. Her ceaseless efforts to win back his friendship had left no room for doubt. He sank deep into the great chair and silently waited her coming.

When he suddenly heard the rustle of her dress in the hall his heart began to pound. He rose with a movement of nervous anger. His boasted self-control was a myth, after all.

When Nan's radiant figure appeared in the doorway, her bare arm extended, her lips parted in a tender smile, Stuart knew that his face was red. The fact that he knew it increased his confusion until the whole room became a blur. His feet refused to move, and he stood staring at the approaching vision as if in a trance.

Her hand touched his. The shock was sobering; he remembered himself and smiled.

"What a long, long time, Jim!"

"A thousand years—I think, Nan," he stammered.

"Nine hundred to be exact, sir, but better late than never. I began to think your stubbornness would postpone this call until the next world."

"And we may not land at the same place on the other side?"

"A compliment or an insult?"

"I don't know, do you?"

He was laughing quietly now, his nerves stronger by the tension of the challenge of her evident gaiety.

She smiled a gracious forgiveness of his dubious answer.

"Mr. Bivens was detained down town on business. I am awfully sorry he's not here to join in my welcome."

"Well, I'm not."

He was looking steadily at her with curious concentration.

She answered with a flash from her dark eyes and critically looked him over.

"Well?" he asked.

"I'm awfully disappointed."

"Why?"

"My vanity is hurt. I expected to find you, after nine years, with deep lines of suffering written on your face. You are better looking than ever. The few gray hairs about your temples are extremely becoming. Your honours have given you a new repose, a dignity and reserve power I couldn't conceive when I saw you battered by that mob."

"Allow me to return the compliment by saying that you are even a more startling disappointment to me. I was sure that I should find you broken."

"And you don't?"

Stuart smiled.

"I'd as well confess it frankly. You are far more beautiful than ever."

The woman softly laughed.

"You see no change?"

"The only changes I see merely add to your power: the worldly wisdom which marriage writes on every woman's face, a new strength, a warmth and fascination and a conscious joy at which I wonder and rage."

"Why wonder and rage?"

She drew him gently to a seat by her side, leaned forward and gazed smilingly at him.

Stuart was silent a moment and turned suddenly on her.

"Because Nan, when I look into your face to-night and see its joy, I can't help thinking such happiness is a crime. I saw joy like that once on the face of an Italian I defended and acquitted of murder. I believed him innocent but when he was free he confessed to me his guilt, confessed with such joy that I sprang on him and choked him into silence."

"And you think of me as a murderess, Jim?"

"No, no, my dear little playmate, but when I see you to-night in all this splendour so insolently happy——"

Nan sprang to her feet laughing.

"You are delicious to-night, Jim, and I'm so glad you are here. Come into the art gallery. It will take you days to see it; we'll just peep in to-night."

He followed her into a stately room packed with masterpieces of art; gleaming marbles and sombre bronze in groups of bewildering beauty, with every inch of wall-space crowded with canvases in massive gold frames glowing with the soft radiance of concealed electric lights.

Stuart gazed a moment in rapture.

"You must spend days here, Jim. Now honestly, with all your high-browed ideals, wouldn't you like to own this?"

"I wouldn't dare."

"Dare?"

"No. Not if I had the wealth of Croesus."

"Why not?"

"It's a crime to rob the world of these masterpieces of genius. They should be the free inheritance and inspiration of all the children of men. The humblest child of the street should own them because he is human. The man who has the power to buy them, of all men, should give to the people whose lives and toil gave him his power."

Nan gazed at Stuart in vague bewilderment and then a mischievous smile crept into the corners of her mouth.

"You're trying to throw dust in my eyes, but I can tell you what you are really thinking. Would you like to hear?"

"Very much."

"You are really wondering why the wicked prosper?"

The man remained silent while a look of deep seriousness overspread his face.

"Confess!" Nan insisted. "Am I not right?"

"Absolutely wrong," he replied slowly. "Why the wicked prosper has never worried me in the least. The first big religious idea I ever got hold of was that this is the best possible world God could have created—because it's free. Man must choose, otherwise his deeds have no meaning. A deed of mine is good merely because I have the power to do its opposite if I choose. In this free world step by step I can rise or fall through suffering and choosing."

"Oh, Jim," Nan broke in softly, "I've made you suffer horribly. You have the right to be hard and bitter."

"But I'm not, Nan," was the quiet answer. "I've been made generous and warm and tender by disappointment. Through the gates of pain I've entered into fellowship with my fellow-men, the humblest and the greatest. This sense of kinship has given me a larger vision. I've learned to love all sentient things. I've made friends with all sorts and conditions of men, the rich, the poor, the good, the bad. You have taught me the greatest secret of life."

"I wish I could blot out the memory of the pain."

"Well, I'm glad you can't. Life has become to me a thing so wonderful, so mysterious, so beautiful—just life within itself—I'd live it all over again if I could."

"Every moment of it?"

"Every moment with every light and shadow. It's glorious to live!"

A solemn English butler entered and announced dinner.

Seated by Nan's side alone in the great dining room, while servants in gorgeous liveries hurried with soft light footfall to do her slightest bidding, Stuart could scarcely shake off the impression that he was dreaming. Such pictures he had weaved in his fancy the first wonderful days of their conscious love-life. But it seemed centuries ago now. They had both died and come to life again in a new mysterious world, a world in which he was yet a stranger and Nan at home. The splendours of the stately room pleased his poetic fancy and in spite of his hostile effort he had to confess in his heart that Nan's magnificent figure gave the scene just the touch of queenly dignity which made it perfect. He tried again and again to recall the girl he had known in the old days, but the vision faded before the dazzling light of the present.

He looked at Nan cautiously and began to study her every word and movement and weigh each accent. Did she mean what her words and tones implied? In a hundred little ways more eloquent than speech she had said to him to-night that the old love of the morning of life was still the one living thing. Did she mean it or had she merely planned another triumph for her vanity in his second conquest, knowing that his high sense of honour would hold him silent and yet her slave. With a lawyer's cunning he put her to little tests to try the genuineness of her feeling. He threw off his restraint and led her back to the scenes of their youth. With a frankness that delighted her he told of his own struggles of the past nine years and watched with patient furtive care for every tone of feeling she might betray. When dinner ended, she was leaning close, her eyes misty with tears, and a far-away look in them that told of memories more vivid and alluring than all the splendours of her palace.

Stuart drew a breath of conscious triumph and his figure suddenly grew tense with a desperate resolution. But only for a moment.

He frowned, looked at his watch and rose abruptly.

"I must be going, Nan," he said with sudden coldness.

"Why, Jim," she protested. "It's only ten o'clock. I won't hear of such a thing."

"Yes, I must," he persisted. "I've an important case to-morrow. I must work to-night."

"You shall not go!" Nan cried. "I've waited nine years for this one evening's chat with you. Cal has told me of his offer. It's the most generous thing he ever did in his life. I know the kind of fight going on in your heart. Come into the music room, sit down and brood as long as you like. I've planned to charm you with an old accomplishment of mine to-night."

She led him to a rich couch, piled the pillows high, made him snug, drew a harp near the other end, and began to tune its strings.

Stuart gazed at the mural paintings in the ceiling and in a moment was lost in visions of the future his excited fancy began to weave.

Nan's fingers touched the strings in the first soft notes of an old melody. He woke with a start and looked at her. What a picture she made, with her full lips parted in a warm smile, her magnificent bare arms moving in rhythmic unison with the music! In just that pose he had seen her a hundred times in the days when he called her his own. And now that he had lost—her beauty had just reached the full splendour of perfection.

He closed his eyes to shut out the picture and again the fight began for the mastery of life.

A voice whispered:

"Unless you are a coward, grasp the power that is yours by divine right of nature. Why should you walk while pigmies ride? Why should you lag behind the age in this fierce struggle for supremacy? The woman who sits before you is yours if you only dare to tear her from the man who holds her by the fiction of dying customs!"

He felt his heart throb as another voice within cried:

"Yet why should I, an heir to immortality, whose will can shape a world, why should I live a beast of prey with my hand against every man?"

The answer was the memory of dirty finger nails closing on his throat while a mob of howling fools surged over his body and cursed him for trying to save them from themselves. Again he heard a woman's voice as she held his head close, whispering:

"I've something to say to you, Jim!"

His lips tightened with sudden decision. The golden gates of the forbidden land swung open and his soul entered.

CHAPTER XIV

AN AFTERMATH

The day following Bivens's offer to Stuart was made memorable by a sinister event in Union Square.

A mass meeting of the unemployed had been called to protest against their wrongs and particularly to denounce the men who had advanced the price of bread by creating a corner in wheat.

On his way down town Stuart read with astonishment that Dr. Woodman would preside over this gathering. He determined to go. As he hurried through the routine work of his office, giving his orders for the day, he received a telephone call from Nan, asking him to accompany her to this meeting.

"I don't think you ought to go," he answered emphatically.

"Why?"

"Well, there might be a riot for one thing."

"I'm not afraid."

"And you might hear some very plain talk about your husband."

"That's exactly why I wish to go!"

"I don't think it wise," Stuart protested.

"I'm going, anyhow. Won't you accompany me?"

"If you will go—yes."

"That's a good boy. I'll send one of my cars to the office for you immediately."

An hour later when Stuart, seated by Nan's side, reached Union Square, the automobile was stopped by the police and turned into Seventeenth Street.

Every inch of space in the Square seemed blocked by a solid mass of motionless humanity. Stuart left the car in Seventeenth Street and succeeded finally in forcing a way through the crowd to a position within a hundred feet of the rude platform that had been erected for the orators. The scene about the stand bristled with policemen, most of them apparently picked men, their new uniforms glittering in the sun and their polished clubs flashing defiance as they twirled them in the faces of the people with deliberate provocation.

Besides the special detail of picked men who moved about the stand, occasionally clubbing an inoffensive man, a battalion of three hundred reserves was drawn up in serried lines about a hundred yards to the north on the edge of Fourth Avenue. Between these reserves and the crowd about the stand an open space was kept clear for their possible assault in case of any disturbance.

Near these reserves stood the big red automobile of Hamberger, the police captain of the District. He was reputed to be a millionaire, though his salary had never been more than enough to support his wife and children. The sight of his fat insolent face as the representative of Law and Order gave Stuart the impression of farce so irresistibly that he laughed. Surely some of Bivens's sinister philosophy to which he had listened yesterday had a pretty solid basis in the facts of our everyday life.

When the speaking began Stuart pressed his way as close as possible, drawing Nan with him.

He was astonished at the genuine eloquence and power with which the first speaker, evidently of anarchistic leanings, developed his theme, a passionate plea for freedom and the highest development of the individual man. He sketched the growth of the American Republic from its crude beginning in the unbroken forests, and showed with clear historic grasp how all the thinking and creative deeds which had added anything to the sum of human progress belonged to this period of anarchistic liberties. He traced the growth of tyranny in the development of our system of laws until to-day we were less free than the people of England, who lived under the hereditary king against whom our fathers had rebelled. A tyranny of corrupt and ignorant politicians he denounced as the lowest and vilest yet evolved in history.

His concluding sentences roused his crowd to a pitch of wild enthusiasm.

"In the Old World, from which your fathers and mothers fled in search of freedom, men enslaved their fellow-men by becoming lords, dukes or kings, murdering or poisoning their way to a castle or a throne. The methods of your modern masters are more subtle and successful. You vote to make them your masters, and still imagine that you are free.

"Freedom belongs to him who would be free. And at last the masses of the people are becoming restless, not so much because they lack leisure and luxury, but because they have nothing to live for.

"Millions ask the question: *Is life worth living?*

"Because they have begun to ask it, they will never cease until they have made it worth living.

"A deep, half-confused consciousness of the injustice of life has begun to clutch our throats. We begin to curse both church and state, thank God, at last! Statesmen must hear or die. Property must respond or strengthen its bolts and bars and there's no room on the door for another bolt. The church that has no answer to this cry is dead already."

A cheer like the roar of an angry sea swept the crowd. Again and again it rose and fell, increasing in volume as its contagious spirit set fire to the restless minds of the thousands who had packed the Square but could not hear the man who was voicing their faith.

In the deep roar of their cheers there was no sodden despair. As Stuart looked into the faces of the crowd he saw no trace of the degeneracy and loss of elemental manhood which makes the sight of an European mob loathsome and hopeless. These men were still men, the might of freemen in their souls and good right arms.

Where had such crowds met before? Somewhere he had seen them in body or in spirit. Was it in the streets of Paris before the French Revolution sent those long lines of death carts rumbling over her pavements to the guillotine?

"Who is that fellow, Jim," Nan asked.

"Haven't the remotest idea."

"He's a great orator if he is an anarchist. He made the cold chills run down my back."

"Yes, I'm just wondering how many more such firebrands of eloquence could be found in this swaying forest of nobodies."

He watched the sneering faces of the policemen as they demanded silence of the crowd. They couldn't understand what the fools were cheering about. They had instructions to pull the whole "show" at a nod from the censor. But he had deemed it as harmless as a Sunday-school picnic. The words of the orator had rolled from his uniform like water from a duck's back.

The next speaker devoted his time to a fierce denunciation of the church, and ended with a bitter denial of the existence of God.

When the last echoes of the cheers had died away there was a stir near the stand and Stuart saw the stalwart figure of Dr. Woodman suddenly rise. He lifted his arm over the

crowd, demanding silence.

Stuart could see that his old friend was deeply moved. His big hands were trembling and his voice vibrant with emotion as he stepped to the edge of the platform and faced the crowd. Among the five thousand people who stood within ear shot at least a hundred recognized him and gave a hearty cheer.

The doctor plunged at once into the message with which his heart was quivering:

"Let no man tell you, my friends, that the God of our fathers is a myth. You can't lose faith in God because you have not lost faith in eternal justice. This faith is just coming into conscious existence in the hearts of millions. By this sign we know that a new age is born. Poets and artists no longer gaze into heaven. Their eyes are fixed on earth. Men have ceased to long for another world, therefore their hope is now for this one. To bring Justice and Beauty to pass on this earth in wisdom and fearlessness of Death—this is the new creed of the people!

"My friends, no such people ever lived in history before. This continent has been the great white plain of eternity on which the chains of ages have been broken, freeing the human soul and body at one stroke, placing in men's hands, the mighty weapon of progress and defense—universal suffrage. The workingman of to-day lives better than the kings of the Middle Ages. Have patience, my friends, the workingman of to-morrow will be the heir of all the knowledge, of all the pain and all the glory of the centuries.

"There can be no other meaning to the drama of history, the sweep of whose movement is always upward for the life of millions, always writing in letters of fire across the sky 'THE LAW—THE LAW!'

"I have seen this mighty city grow from comparatively small and mean conditions. And I have watched slowly growing here a new City of the Soul, the gradual development of civilization itself into a joyous religion whose God is Justice and Righteousness. Each year I have seen the streets cleaner, its parks more beautiful, its homes sweeter, its schools finer, its hospitals, asylums and play grounds more magnificent and all its charities more efficient. I have watched the municipality slowly but surely absorb the functions of the ancient church, and for the first time in the history of the world begin to do its work with the divine breadth of God's boundless love.

"We should not be so impatient, we should not be discouraged. The progress of the world has really just begun.

"And so I, who watch the darkness pass and see the eastern sky begin to glow—I cry to you who may still be below: 'Be of good cheer—the day dawns!'"

A feeble cheer rose from the hundred or more who knew the doctor personally. It was the only response the sullen crowd gave to his burst of epic feeling. They were not in sympathy with his optimism. The anguish of the present moment of bread-hunger and cold was too keen. Men with empty stomachs had no historic perspective. They felt instinctively that it was just as black for a man who starved to death in the ideal "City of the Soul" as it was for the wretch who starved in chains in Egypt three thousand years ago.

When the doctor sat down Stuart saw Harriet suddenly lean over, draw his big shaggy head down and kiss him. He hadn't recognized her before.

The next speaker made his attack on the corruption and graft of our system of government with brutal frankness. He assailed the foundations of the Republic and at last the principles which underlie civilized society itself. Undoubtedly he was a madman, driven insane by the fierce struggle for bread, but none the less a dangerous maniac. With scathing, bitter wit he flayed the corruption of our system of democracy.

The big fat sleek captain of police had drawn near, and listened to this part of his speech with secret enjoyment. A triumphant smile played about the corners of his mouth. He knew that the speaker was hitting the bull's eye now with every shot, but he squared his massive form and looked over the cheering crowd of hungry poverty-stricken men and women with an expression of quiet contempt. Clearly he had a very simple and comprehensive answer. It was not necessary for him to speak it. His whole body fairly shouted it:

"Well, what are you going to do about it, you weak-kneed, blear-eyed scum of the earth!"

For the moment Stuart could not determine which one of the men he hated most—the madman who was doing his best to pull the house down which sheltered him or the stupid beast who stood over him clothed with the supreme authority of law.

The speaker closed his tirade with a fierce personal attack on the man who had made five millions in a corner on bread and flaunted his ill-gotten gains in the face of starving

men and women.

Nan's face flashed with sudden rage.

"Take me to my car, Jim. I've an idea—I'm going to execute it at once."

"Wouldn't you like to meet the doctor and his daughter before you go?"

"Thanks, hardly. You know he is on Mr. Bivens's black list."

"I'd forgotten that," he answered regretfully. "I'd like awfully for you to meet Harriet. I'm sure you'd like her."

Nan smiled.

"I could see she likes you. I don't think she took a fancy to me, however."

"Nonsense, Nan." he said, with annoyance. "She couldn't have seen you. I didn't know she was here until she kissed her father."

"Perhaps my eyes are keener than yours."

The captain of the district brushed rudely past and sprang into his automobile. He waved his hand to his chauffeur. His gesture was mistaken by a pair of keen restless eyes for a command to his reserves to disperse the crowd.

A pale, shabby young fellow leaped past the line of police into the open space and rushed straight for the reserves. His long thin arm was lifted high in the air clutching a black thing with a lighted fuse sparkling from its crest.

A murmur rippled the crowd, the police stood still and stared, and the next moment the bomb exploded in the boy's hand and his body lay on the stones a mangled heap of torn flesh and blood-soaked rags.

The police charged the crowd and clubbed them without mercy. The people fled in confusion in every direction, and in five minutes the Square was cleared.

Stuart had hurried Nan to her car, and rushed back to the scene of the tragedy. He readily passed the lines of the police, who recognized him as the district attorney.

The doctor reached the spot and Harriet was holding the dying boy's head in her lap.

Stuart bent over her curiously and slowly asked:

"You were not afraid to rush up here with your father and take that poor mangled thing in your arms?"

"Of course not," she replied simply. "Papa says he's dying—nothing can be done for him. They've sent for an ambulance."

The doctor stood staring at the dying boy and a tear had slowly gathered in his kindly eye.

He pressed Stuart's arm and spoke in low tones:

"I've made some big mistakes in my life, my boy. I'm just beginning to see them. I've read a new message in the flutter of this poor fellow's pulse. I'll not be slow to heed it."

But Stuart stood watching with growing wonder Harriet's deft little hand brush the damp hair back from the poor disfigured face.

CHAPTER XV

CONFESSION

The face of the dying boy haunted the doctor's imagination. With his eyes closed or open, at noon or alone at night the pity and the horror of his lonely death gripped him. A boy of twenty, weak, hungry, ragged, alone, had dared to lift his thin arm above his head and charge the entrenched authority of the civilized world.

Was he, with other theorists, responsible for the mad act?

He began to think that Tolstoy is right in his assertion that human progress is a march

of ideas—and that the day of revolution by bloodshed has passed. He began to fear that his struggle with Bivens in his long-drawn and fiercely contested lawsuit was an act of the same essential quality of blind physical violence. He began to see that the real motive back of his struggle was hatred of the man—this little counter jumper, who had destroyed his business. It was the irony of such a fate that sunk its poisoned dagger into his heart. He faced the fact at last without flinching.

He rose and paced the floor of his library for a half-hour with measured tread. He stopped suddenly and clenched his big fists instinctively.

"I do hate him—with undying, everlasting hatred, and I pray God to give me greater strength to hate him more!"

Again the picture of the pale, torn, blood-stained face, with its mute piteous appeal, rose before him. The anger slowly melted out of his heart and the old thought came back:

"How rich is my life after all compared to his!"

And then he made a mental inventory of his assets, with sad results. He had tried for a long time not to face those facts. But if he gave up the suit he must face them. He had identified this action at last with his faith in the very existence of justice. To realize that the element of personal hatred was the motive power back of it was a shock to the whole structure of his character.

He rose with sudden determination. He would not surrender. He would fight it out with this little swarthy scoundrel, win or lose. His house was mortgaged, the last dollar of his savings he had spent in helping others and the money set aside to finish Harriet's course in music had been lost in the panic. He would fight it out somehow and win. But the one thing that must not fail was the perfection of his girl's voice. The court of appeals would certainly render their decision before her next term's work would begin. She could rest during the summer. It would do her good. If he could be firm with his tenants and collect his room-rents promptly from everyone, the income from his house was still sufficient to pay the interest on the mortgage and give them a little to eat. It would be enough. Food for the soul was more important. He resolved to ask Stuart to collect his rents.

He looked up and Harriet stood smiling at him.

"What an actor you would have made, Papa!" she exclaimed.

"Why?"

"I've been watching you play a great scene, all the characters by yourself."

"A foolish habit, dear!" the father laughed. "Always muttering and talking to myself. I suppose I'll be arrested for a lunatic some day."

He stopped suddenly and looked at Harriet closely.

"Come here, Baby."

She came and stood beside his chair. He pressed her hand tenderly.

"What have you been crying about?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, nothing much," was the low answer. "I really don't know—perhaps the thing that makes the birds out there in the Square chirp while the snow is still on the ground, the feeling that Spring is coming."

"You're keeping something from me, dearest," he whispered, slipping his arm about her waist. "Tell me."

"You really believe in my voice, don't you?" she asked slowly.

"Believe in it? Do I believe in God?"

"Could I go abroad right away and finish my work there?"

She asked the question with such painful intensity, the father looked up with a start.

"What's the matter, dear?"

The girl slipped her arm around his neck with a sob.

He bent and kissed the golden hair, stroking it fondly until she was calmer.

"Why do you wish to go now, child?" he asked at last.

"I've a confession to make, Papa dear."

The little head sank low and the arm tightened its grip about his neck.

"What is it, darling? I'm sure it's nothing of which you're ashamed."

"No, something of which I'm proud. Something so sweet and wonderful in itself, the very joy of it I feel sometimes will kill me. I'm in love, desperately and hopelessly."

Again a sob caught her voice, and the father's arms drew her to his heart and held her.

"But why hopelessly, my baby?" he asked. "Your hair is beaten gold, your eyes are deep and true, your slender little form has all the symmetry and beauty of a sylph. You are young, radiant, glorious, and your voice the angels would envy."

"But the man I love doesn't realize all that yet, Papa dear. He is bound by the memories of the past to a woman he once loved, a woman who is evil at heart, and though she betrayed him for the lust of money, is determined to hold him still her slave. But she shall not. I'll fight for him! And you'll help me, Papa, won't you?"

The father drew her close.

"Won't I—just wait and see!—But you haven't told me his name? I've been very blind, I fear."

"You've never guessed?"

She lifted her face to his in surprise.

"No."

"Jim."

"Our Jim Stuart?"

She nodded. Her voice wouldn't work.

"Oh, I see, I see!" the father mused. "The first love of a child's heart grown slowly into the great passion of life."

Again the little head nodded.

"You understand now why I wish to get away, to finish my work abroad. I'll be nearer to him with the ocean between us. He'll miss me then. I feel it, know it. When I return he will be proud of my voice. I shall go mad if I stay here and see him dangling at that woman's heels. I watched her with him to-day, devouring him with her eyes, her millions won by his betrayal, yet proud, miserable, envious, and determined to wreck his life. But I shall return in time to make him know. He loves music. I shall sing when he hears me as I never sang before, and I shall say to him then all the unspoken things I dare not put in speech. You understand, Papa dear, you'll send me away and help me to win?"

The father kissed the trembling lips and answered firmly.

"Yes, I'll raise the money for you right away."

And then for half an hour she lay in his arms while he whispered beautiful thoughts of her future—things he had promised himself to say often before and had not said, until at last she smiled with joy. When he sent her to bed he had kissed the last tear away.

She looked at him wistfully at the door.

"I'm not going to make this fight for fame and money—it's all for the heart of the man I love."

"I understand, dear!" he answered cheerily as he threw her a last kiss.

When she had gone and he heard her door close, he stood for a moment, lost in thought, and then slowly exclaimed:

"And now I've got to surrender."

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

The bitter reference to Bivens and the crime of his corner in wheat had roused Nan's lighting blood. She would accept the challenge of this rabble and show her contempt for its opinions in a way that could not be mistaken. She determined to give an entertainment whose magnificence would startle the social world and be her defiant answer to the critics of her husband. At the same time it would serve the double purpose of dazzling and charming the imagination of Stuart. She would by a single dash of power end his indecision as to Bivens's offer and bind with stronger cords the tie that held him to her.

Her suggestion was received with enthusiasm by her husband.

"All right," he said excitedly, "beat the record. Give them something to talk about the rest of their lives. I don't mean those poor fools in Union Square. Their raving is pathetic. I mean the big bugs who think they own the earth, the people who think that we are new-comers and that this island was built for their accommodation. Give them a knock-out."

Nan's eyes danced with excitement.

"You really mean that I may plan without counting the cost?"

"That's exactly what I mean. The man is yet to be born whose brain can conceive the plan to spend artistically on one night's entertainment the half I'm willing to blow in just now for such a triumph."

"I'll do my best," she answered quietly.

"Nothing cheap or vulgar about it, you know. I think that party in which the guests were drenched with a hose and the one in which they dressed as vegetables were slightly lacking in originality. True, the hosepipe party had a stirring climax when the pretty hostess appeared in a silk bathing suit and allowed herself to be ducked by her admirers in her own bath tub; still dear, I shouldn't care for that sort of a sensation."

"I think I'd draw the line at that myself. I promise you something better."

"Of course that bathing-suit luncheon at Newport last summer was a stunning affair. The women certainly made a hit. But I can't quite figure my wife appearing in it."

Nan lifted her eyebrows:

"I promise you faithfully not to appear in a bathing suit."

"Just one more pet aversion, dear," Bivens smiled. "You won't have any kind of an animal party, will you?"

"There'll be many kinds of animals present if they could only be accurately catalogued."

"I mean, particularly, monkeys. You know that monkey party got on my nerves. I mix with bulls and bears every day down in Wall Street. And all sorts of reptiles crawl among those big buildings—but when I had to shake hands with that monkey dressed in immaculate evening clothes sitting at a table sipping champagne, I thought they were pushing family history a little too far. Maybe our ancestors were monkeys all right, but the less said about it the better."

"I promise," Nan laughed.

"Then good luck, and remember the sky's the limit."

Bivens waved her a kiss, hurried to his office and concluded a deal for floating five millions in common stock, which cost exactly the paper on which it was printed. His share of this loot would pay more than his wife could spend in a year.

Nan spared no expenditure of time, money and thought to the perfection of her plans. She employed a corps of trained artists, took them to her home, told them what she wished and they worked with enthusiasm to eclipse in splendour New York's record of lavish entertainments—but always with the reservation which she had imposed that nothing be done that might violate the canons of beauty and good taste.

The long-dreamed night came, and her guests had begun to arrive.

One was hurrying there to whom no engraved invitation had been sent, and yet his coming was the one big event of the evening, the one thing that would make the night memorable. No liveried flunky cried his name in the great hall, but a white invisible figure stood ready to draw aside the velvet curtains as he passed.

The confession of love for Stuart which Harriet had sobbed out in her father's arms had been the last straw that broke the backbone of his fight against Bivens. In a burst of generous feeling he made up his mind to eat his pride, drive from his mind every bitter impulse and forget that he had ever hated this man or been wronged by him. He could see now that he had neglected his little girl in the fight he had been making for other people and that her very life might be at stake in the struggle she was making for the man she loved.

Bivens had once offered to buy his business. He had afterward made him a generous offer to compromise his suit. He had never doubted for a moment that a compromise would be accepted the moment he should see fit to give up.

Well, he would give up. Life was too short for strife and bitterness. It was just long enough to love his little girl. He would not waste another precious hour.

He instructed his lawyer to withdraw the appeal before the day fixed for filing the papers. The lawyer raved and pleaded in vain. The doctor was firm. He wrote Bivens a generous personal letter in which he asked that the past be forgotten and that he appoint a meeting at which they could arrange the terms of a final friendly settlement.

The act had lifted a load from his heart. The sum he would receive, if but half Bivens's original offer, would be sufficient to keep him in comfort, complete his daughter's course in music, and give him something with which to continue his daily ministry to the friendless and the lowly. It was all he asked of the world now.

He wondered in his new enthusiasm why he had kept up this bitter feud for the enforcement of his rights by law, when there were so many more urgent and important things in life to do.

He waited four days for an answer to his letter and receiving none, wrote again. In the meantime the day for final action on his appeal had passed and his suit was legally ended. On the last day his lawyer pleaded with him for an hour to file the appeal suit and then compromise at his leisure. The doctor merely smiled quietly and repeated his decision:

"I'm done fighting. I've something else to do."

When Bivens failed to reply to his second letter he made up his mind to see him personally. He was sure the letter had been turned over to a lawyer and the financier had never seen it. He called at Bivens's office three times and always met the same answer:

"Mr. Bivens is engaged for every hour to-day. You must call again."

On the fourth day, when he had stayed until time for closing the office, a secretary informed him that Mr. Bivens was too busy with matters of great importance to take up any new business of any kind for a month, and that he had given the most positive orders to that effect to all his men. If he would return the first of next month he would see what could be done.

The doctor left in disgust. It was evident that the millionaire's business had reached such vast proportions that its details were as intricate and absorbing as the government of an empire and that he had found it necessary to protect his person with a network of red tape.

He determined to break through this ceremonial nonsense, see Bivens face to face, and settle the affair at once.

When he should see him personally it would be but a question of five minutes' friendly talk and the matter would be ended. Now that he recalled little traits of Bivens's character, he didn't seem such a scoundrel after all—just the average money-mad man who could see but one side of life. He would remind him in a friendly way of their early association, and the help he had given him at an hour of his life when he needed it most. He wouldn't cringe or plead. He would state the whole situation frankly and truthfully and with dignity propose a settlement.

It was just at this moment that the doctor learned of the preparations for the dinner and ball at the Bivens palace on Riverside Drive. The solution of the whole problem flashed through his mind in an instant. They would have professional singers without a doubt, the great operatic stars and others. If Harriet could only be placed on the programme for a single song it would be settled! Her voice would sweep Bivens off his feet and charm the brilliant throng of guests. He would have to accompany her there of course. At the right moment he would make himself known; a word with Bivens and it would be settled.

He imagined in vivid flashes the good-natured scene between them, the astonishment of the financier that his little girl had grown into such a wonderful woman and his

pleasure in recalling the days when she used to play hide and seek behind the counter of the old drug store.

He lost no time in finding out the manager of the professional singers for the evening and through Harriet's enthusiastic music teachers arranged for her appearance.

From the moment this was accomplished his natural optimism returned. His success was sure. He gave his time with renewed energy to his work among the poor.

On the day of the ball Harriet was waiting in a fever of impatience for his return from the hospitals to dress. At half past seven their dinner was cold and he had not come. It was eight o'clock before his familiar footstep echoed through the hall.

Harriet kissed him tenderly.

"I'm glad you're safe at home at last—now hurry."

"I'll not delay you much. I can dress in thirty minutes. My! my! but you're glorious to-night, child! I never saw you look so beautiful!"

She pushed him into the dining room, crying:

"Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! This is really the first night in my career. Jim's been gone an hour. Dinner up there begins at eight."

"But my star does not rise to sing before eleven—the ball begins at twelve. I've plenty of time to love you a minute or two."

He drew her near again and kissed her.

"I wouldn't exchange my little girl's crown of gold for all the yellow coin of the millionaires we shall see to-night."

"And I wouldn't give the father with the loving heart and stainless name for the Kingdom of Mammon."

"That's a beautiful saying, my own, I shall not forget it; and now I'll hurry."

He ate a hasty meal, dressed in thirty minutes, and at nine o'clock led Harriet to the side entrance of Bivens's great house on the Drive.

He was in fine spirits. The reaction from the tension of a pitiful tragedy of sin and shame he had witnessed in the afternoon had lifted him to spiritual heights. For the life of him he couldn't look at his own troubles seriously. They seemed trivial in a world of such shadows as that which fell across his path from behind those iron bars. He rejoiced again that he had made up his mind to live the life of faith and good fellowship with all men, including the little swarthy master of the palace he was about to enter.

And so with light heart he stepped through the door which the soft white hand of Death opened. How could he know?

CHAPTER XVII

SOME INSIDE FACTS

As Stuart dressed for Nan's party he brooded over his new relation to his old sweetheart with increasing pleasure. She had begun to tease him with gentle raillery about his tragic exaggeration of the treachery of her betrayal, and laughingly promised to make it all up by introducing him to a group of the richest and most beautiful girls in New York. He could take his choice under her wise guidance. She promised to begin his course of instruction to-night.

Never had Bivens's offer seemed more generous and wonderful. His pulse beat with quickened stroke as he felt the new sense of power with which he would look out on the world as a possible millionaire.

He gazed over the old Square with a feeling of regret at the thought of leaving it. He had grown to love the place in the past years of loneliness. He had become personally acquainted with every tree and shrub and every limb of the nearby trees. He had watched them grow from his window, seen them sway in the storm, bow beneath the ice, and grow into new beauty and life each spring. He was deciding too soon, perhaps. There were some features of Bivens's business he must understand more clearly before

he could give up his freedom and devote himself body and soul to the task of money-making as his associate.

He resolved to make his decision with deliberation. But if he should go in for money, he wouldn't forget his old friends, nor would he leave Washington Square. He would buy that corner plot on Fifth Avenue across the way for his house. There should be two beautiful suites in it for the doctor and Harriet, and from their windows they could always see the old home on the other side. He would buy the two adjoining houses, turn them into a sanitarium, endow it and place the doctor in charge. And he would give him a fund of ten thousand a year for his outside work among the poor.

He woke from his reverie with a start and looked at his watch to find he had been standing there dreaming for half an hour. He hurried across the Square to take a cab at the Brevoort.

His mood was buoyant. He was looking out on life once more through rose-tinted glasses. At Eighth Street he met at right angles the swarming thousands hurrying across town from their work—heavy looking men who tramped with tired step, striking the pavements dully with their nailed shoes, tired anxious women, frouzle-headed little girls, sad-eyed boys half-awake—all hurrying, the fear of want and the horror of charity in their silent faces. And yet the sight touched no responsive chord of sympathy in Stuart's heart as it often had. To-night he saw only the thing that is and felt that it was good.

He pushed his way through the shabby throng, found a cab, sprang in and gave his order to the driver. A row of taxicabs stood by the curb. He took an old-fashioned hansom from choice. It seemed to link the present moment of his life to the memory of some wonderful hours he had spent, with Nan by his side, years ago.

As the cab whirled up Fifth Avenue he leaned back in his seat with a feeling of glowing satisfaction with himself and the world. The shadows of a beautiful spring night slowly deepened as the city drew her shining mantle of light about her proud form. The Avenue flashed with swift silent automobiles and blooded horses. These uptown crowds through whose rushing streams he passed were all well dressed and carried bundles of candy, flowers and toys. The newsboys were already crying extras with glowing advance accounts of the banquet and ball.

Stuart felt the contagious enthusiasm of thousands of prosperous men and women whose lives at the moment flowed about and enveloped his own. This was a pretty fine old world after all, and New York the only town worth living in.

And what was it that made the difference between the squalid atmosphere below Fourth Street and the glowing, flashing, radiant, jewelled world up-town? Money! It meant purple and fine linen, delicacies of food and drink, pulsing machines that could make a mile a minute, high-stepping horses and high-bred dogs, music and dancing, joy and laughter, sport and adventure, the mountain and the sea, freedom from care, fear, drudgery and slavery!

After all in this modern passion for money might there not be something deeper than mere greed; perhaps the regenerating power of the spirit pressing man upward? Certainly he could only see the bright side of it to-night and the wonder grew on him that he had lived for twenty-five years in a fog of sentiment and ignored deliberately the biggest fact of the century, while the simpler mind of the poor white boy in Bivens had grasped the truth at once and built his life squarely on it from the beginning. Well, he had set his mind to it at last in time to reach the highest goal of success, if he so willed. For that he was thankful.

As his cab swung into Riverside Drive from Seventy-second Street the sight which greeted him was one of startling splendour.

Bivens's yacht lay at anchor in the river just in front of his house. She was festooned with electric lights from the water line to the top of her towering steel masts. From every shroud and halyard hung garlands of light, and the flags which flew from her peaks were illumined with waving red, white and blue colours. From the water's edge floated the songs of Venetian gondoliers imported from Italy for the night's festival, moving back and forth from the yacht.

The illumination of the exterior of the Bivens house was remarkable. The stone and iron fence surrounding the block, which had been built at a cost of a hundred thousand dollars, was literally ablaze with lights. Garlands of tiny electric bulbs had been fastened on every iron picket, post and cross bar, and the most wonderful effect of all had been achieved by leading these garlands of light along the lines of cement in the massive granite walls on which the iron stanchions rested. The effect was a triumph of artistic skill, a flashing electric fence built on huge boulders of light.

The house was illumined from its foundations to the top of each towering minaret with

ruby-coloured lights. Each window, door, cornice, column and line of wall glowed in soft red. The palace gleamed in the darkness like a huge oriental ruby set in diamonds.

Stuart passed up the grand stairs through a row of gorgeous flunkies and greeted his hostess.

Nan grasped his hand with a smile of joy.

"You are to lead me in to dinner, Jim, at the stroke of eight."

"I'll not forget," Stuart answered, his face flushing with surprise at the unexpected honour.

"Cal wishes to see you at once. You will find him in the library."

Bivens met him at the door.

"Ah, there you are!" he cried cordially, "Come back down stairs with me. I want you to see some people as they come in to-night. I've a lot of funny things to tell you about them."

The house was crowded with an army of servants, attendants, musicians, singers, entertainers and reporters.

The doctor had been recognized by one of the butlers whom he had befriended on his arrival from the Old World. The grateful fellow had gone out of the way to make him at home, and in his enthusiasm had put an alcove which opened off the ball room at his and Harriet's disposal. The doctor was elated at this evidence of Bivens's good feeling and again congratulated himself on his common sense in coming.

Bivens led Stuart to a position near the grand stairway, from which he could greet his guests as they returned from their formal presentation to the hostess.

He kept up a running fire of biographical comment which amused Stuart beyond measure.

"That fellow, Jim," he whispered, as a tall finely groomed man passed and touched his hand, "that fellow is as slick a political grafter as ever stole the ear-rings from the sleeping form of a fallen angel. He levies blackmail on almost every crime named in the code. But you can't prove it in court and he's worth millions. His influence on legislation is enormous and he can't be ignored. He's one of the kind who like this sort of thing, and he goes everywhere. Money is power. No matter how you get it. Once gotten, it's divine. Call the man a thief and grafter if you will, but the laws of centuries protect him. There are no rights now except property rights. I'd like to kick him out of the house. I'd as lief a toad or a lizard touched my wife's hand, but he's here to-night, well, because I'm afraid of him."

Stuart nodded.

"Yes. I tried to send the gentleman to the penitentiary last year."

"But you didn't even get in speaking distance of him, did you?"

"No, and——"

"You bet you didn't; he's a lawyer himself."

"I thought he smiled when he shook hands."

"You remember that old Latin proverb we used to get off at college? I was punk in Latin, but I never forgot that—'*Harus pex ad harus picem*' when one priest meets another it's to smile! The lawyers are the high priests of the modern world. Only the women support the church."

"At least we can thank God there are only a few such men who force their way into decent society."

"I guess you are right," Bivens answered, "and he couldn't do it by the brute power of his money only. He has brains and culture combined with the daring of the devil. Still, Jim, most of the big bugs who come here to-night live in glass houses and have long ago learned that it don't pay to throw stones."

A titled nobleman passed, and Bivens winked.

"The poor we have with us always!"

Stuart smiled and returned at once to the point.

"Just what did you mean by that last remark about glass houses?"

"Simply this, old man, that all these high-browed society people who turn up their noses behind my back and marvel at my low origin and speak in bated whispers about my questionable financial strokes—all have their little secrets. For my own comfort I've made a special study of great fortunes in America. The funny thing is that apparently every one of them was founded on some questionable trick of trade."

"Not every one, surely."

"In my study of the subject I ran across a brilliant young Socialist by the name of Gustavus who has devoted his life to the study of the origin of these fortunes. He has written a book about them. I have read it in manuscript. It will fill four volumes when completed. Honestly I've laughed over it until I cried. For instance, speaking of the devil, here comes Major Viking. His people are no longer in trade. Such vulgarity is beneath them. He comes here because I'm supposed to be worth a hundred million and belong to the inner circle of the elect. There are less than two dozen of us, you know."

"Delighted to greet you, Major. My old friend and college mate, James Stuart."

The proud head of the house of Viking grasped Stuart's hand and gave it a friendly shake. His manner was simple, unaffected, manly and the bronzed look of his face told its story of life in the open.

"Not our distinguished young district attorney whom the politicians had to get rid of?" he asked in tones of surprise and pleasure.

"The very same," Bivens answered gravely.

The Major gripped Stuart's hand a second time.

"Then I want to shake again and offer you my congratulations on the service you have rendered the Nation. It's an honour to know you, sir."

Stuart was too much amazed at such a speech to reply before the tall figure had disappeared.

Bivens pressed his arm.

"That's why I could afford to pay you a million a year."

"You don't mean to say that *his* fortune is streaked with the stain of fraud?" Stuart asked, in low tones.

"Certainly. Personally, he's a fine fellow. He's a big man and lives in a big world. His fortune is not less than two hundred million, securely salted down in gilt-edged real estate, most of it. But the original fortune was made by fraud and violence in the old days of colonial history. The elder Viking was a furrier. The fur trade was enormously profitable. Why? Because the whole scheme was built on the simple process by which an Indian was made drunk and in one brief hour cheated out of the results of a year's work. His agents never paid money for skins. They first used whiskey to blind their victims and then traded worthless beads and trinkets for priceless treasures of fur. And on such a foundation was the great house founded."

"It's incredible."

"The facts have been published. If they were not true the publisher could be driven out of business. The Vikings maintain a dignified silence. They have to do it, but softly, here is the head of the house of Black Friday. Everybody knows about his father's sins. Yet he was the friend and comrade of the great who were canonized while he was cannonaded. Good fellow, too, all the same breed when you come right down to it, only some of them have the genius for getting away with the goods and saving their reputations at the same time."

"For instance?" Stuart asked.

Bivens craned his neck toward the stairs.

"There's one of them, now, one of the great railroad kings, not one of your Western bounders, but the real Eastern, New York patriotic brand, one of the brave, daring pioneers who risked all to push great transcontinental railroads through the trackless deserts of the West—with millions furnished by the government—which they dumped into their own pockets while the world was shouting their praises for developing the Nation's resources."

"My friend, Mr. James Stuart, Mr. Van Dam."

It was with difficulty that the young lawyer kept his face straight during those introductions.

Van Dam bowed with grave courtesy, and when he was beyond the reach of Bivens's voice the little dark biographer went on:

"Old Van Dam, the founder of the house, whose palaces now crowd Fifth Avenue, was a plain-spoken, hard-swearing, God-fearing, man-hating old scoundrel who put on no airs, but simply went for what he wanted and got it. He was the first big transportation king we developed. His fortune was founded on the twin arts of bribery and blackmail. The lobby he maintained in secret collusion with his alleged rivals in Washington while he was working his subsidy bills through Congress was a wonder, even in its day. He and his rival with two gangs of thieves publicly lobbying against each other met in secret and divided the spoils when the campaign was over. If a real rival succeeded in getting a Government subsidy for a transportation line in which he had no share, his procedure was always the same; he began the construction or equipment of a rival line until they bought him off by a big payment of monthly blackmail. His income from blackmail alone was frequently more than a million a year. His sons are fine fellows and doubled the old man's millions in bigger, cleaner ways, as I've doubled mine. But it gives me a pain when these men begin to nose around; inquiring about my early history."

"Well, Cal," Stuart broke in with a laugh, "the one thing I like about you is that you have never been ashamed of your humble origin."

"Still I'm not without my weak spot, even there, Jim," the little man said, with an accent of pain that startled Stuart.

"What do you mean?"

"You see that bunch of newspaper reporters over there? They are the ghosts that haunt my dreams. Oh, not what they'll say in their dirty papers. We can control that, we own them. But there's a magazine muckraker among them. He has nosed his way in here to-night as a reporter, for some devilish purpose. He has been down in North Carolina, moving heaven and earth to find my poor old father and mother and get under my hide with a biographical sketch. He has written a volume of lies about them already—but list, here's another one of the great ones you must know, old Grantly, the proud possessor of a fortune made in the services of the Nation for the nominal consideration of fifty per cent. profit, a typical Civil War nabob."

Bivens bowed with exaggerated courtesy to the great man, introduced him and said with a quiet sneer:

"The kind that makes me really sick is the patriotic poser. I suppose it was because my dad wasn't a very brave soldier." He laughed quietly. "Remember the day you knocked those brutes down at college for forcing me to make a speech in praise of my father's heroism? I could have died for you that day, Jim."

"Oh, that was nothing," Stuart protested lightly.

"To you, maybe, but to me—well, as I was saying, the great man who just passed is very proud, not only because he is a multi-millionaire but because his house is supposed to be one of the pillars of the Nation. The truth is that during the Civil War he formed a 'Union Defense Committee' and raised funds to carry on the war. Incidentally—quite incidentally, of course—he got contracts for supplies from the Government and made millions by the frauds he practised. One of his tricks was the importation of worthless arms from Europe which he sold the Government at enormous profits. He made more than a half-million selling these worthless guns to the State authorities of the North. The Hall Carbine was his favourite weapon, a gun that would blow the fingers off the soldier who tried to shoot it, but was never known to do any harm to the man who stood in front of it. I never knew what the fellow meant when he said 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,' until I became personally acquainted with that gentleman."

Bivens bent low and whispered:

"The sweetest memory of my life is that I pulled a couple of millions of wool out of his hide in the recent panic. Jim, you love to hunt. You don't know what real sport is until you jump a skunk like that in a panic. You go all the way to Virginia to shoot ducks. When you get to my office in Wall Street I'll take you on a hunt you'll not forget. What's the use to waste your time for a whole day trying to kill a poor little duck when there are hundreds of big, fat, juicy animals like that roaming around loose in New York!"

"I see," Stuart laughed, "that's what you mean by the game."

"Surely, my boy,—it's the only game worth playing, this big red game of life and death with a two-footed human beast the quarry."

Bivens's little swarthy figure suddenly stiffened and his black eyes flashed. He looked up the stairs and a smile lighted his face.

"Now, Jim, here comes one into whose hide I know you'd enjoy putting a harpoon—a

pillar of the church. Look at the cut of those solemn Presbyterian whiskers. It makes me faint to remember how many times I've tried and failed to get my hooks into him. I know you could land the deacon. I'd joyfully give you a million just to see him wriggle in my hands."

Bivens grasped his hand with pious unction.

"A glorious night, deacon. I know you won't stay for the ball, but if you'll do justice to the dinner I'll forgive you."

The deacon murmured his thanks and hurried on.

"It's evident that however much he loves the Lord he don't love you, Cal."

"No, he's just afraid of me. That's why he came to-night. Jim, if you can get even with him for me, I'd give you the half of my kingdom."

"Why don't you like him?"

"Because he has slipped through my hands like an eel every time I thought I had him. His specialty is piety. That makes me tired. I'm a church member myself, but I don't trade on my piety."

"Well, there couldn't have been anything crooked about his fortune?"

Bivens chuckled softly.

"No. It was a masterpiece of fine art! His father was the original founder of the importing trade graft. He was the first man to discover that a colossal fortune could be made over night by swindling the United States Government at the port of New York. His people have been noted for their solid and substantial standing in the business world. The head of the house was known as the premier among the high-toned business men of the old school. His family set up his statue in a public square in New York. I suppose they bribed the city fathers to get a permit. Well, one day before this statue was unveiled a plain little honest fool of a U.S. Treasury agent got onto the old man's curves and the Government brought suit for a part of what he had stolen. Old William Crookes paid into the Treasury the neat sum of one million and compromised the case. Some of his modern imitators with their false weights and scales haven't been so wise."

"The world has never heard of this—that's funny!" Stuart exclaimed.

"Not so funny, Jim, when you think of the power of money to make the world forget. God only knows how many fortunes in America had their origin in thefts from the Nation during the Civil War, and the systematic frauds that have been practised on our Government since. I've turned some pretty sharp tricks, Jim, in stalking my game in this big man-hunt of Wall Street, but at least I've never robbed the wounded or the dead on a battlefield and I've never used a dark lantern to get into the Government vaults at Washington. I'm not asking you to stand for that."

"If you did——"

"Yes, I know the answer, but speak softly, his majesty the king approaches—long live the king!"

Bivens spoke in low, half-joking tones, but the excitement of his voice told Stuart only too plainly that he fully appreciated the royal honour his majesty was paying in this the first social visit he had ever made to his home.

The little financier's eyes danced with pleasure and his delicate hand trembled as he extended it to the great one.

The king gave him a pleasant nod and grasped Stuart's hand with a hearty cordial grip. He was a man of few words, but he always said exactly what he thought.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Stuart. You've done us a good turn in sending some of our crooks to the penitentiary. You've cleared the air and made it possible for an old-fashioned banker to breathe in New York. It's a pleasure to shake hands with you."

The king passed on into the crowd, the focus of a hundred admiring eyes. Bivens could scarcely believe his ears when he listened with open mouth while his majesty spoke to Stuart.

"Great Scott, Jim!" he gasped at last. "That's the longest speech I ever heard him make. I knew you had scored the biggest hit any lawyer has made in this town in a generation, but I never dreamed you'd capture the king's imagination. I'm beginning to think my offer wasn't so generous after all. Look here, you've got to promise me one thing right now. When you do go in to make your pile it shall be with me and no other man."

Nan passed and threw him a gracious smile.

"It will be with you, if I go, Cal, I promise."

"Well, it's settled, then. Your word's as good as a Government bond. His majesty is in a gracious mood to-night. Watch him unbend and chat with the boys."

"At least, Cal," Stuart broke in, jokingly, "there's one exception to your indictment of all great fortunes."

"That's the funniest thing of all," Bivens whispered. "He's not an exception. Understand, I'm loyal to the king. He's a wonder. I like him, I like his big head, his big shaggy eyebrows, his big hands and big feet. I like to hear him growl and snap his answer—'Yes', 'No'—that means life or death to men who kneel at his feet. He's a dead game sport. But he, too, has his little blots in his early copy-books at school if you care to turn the pages."

"No!" Stuart interrupted, incredulously.

Bivens glanced about to make sure he could not be overheard and continued in low tones.

"Yes, sir, he turned the slickest trick on Uncle Sam of all the bunch. He was a youngster and it was his first deal. When the Civil War broke out the Government had no guns for the volunteers. He learned that there were 5,000 old Hall carbines stored away among the junk in one of the national arsenals in New York. He bought these guns (on a credit) for a song—about \$3 apiece—and shipped them to General Fremont, who was in St. Louis howling for arms. Fremont agreed to pay \$22.50 each for the new rifles and closed the deal at once by drawing on the Government for enough to enable the young buccaneer to pay his \$3-contract price to Uncle Sam in New York and lay aside a snug sum for a rainy day besides.

"When Fremont found that the guns were worthless, he advised the Government to stop payment on the balance. It was stopped on the ground of fraud. And then the youngster showed the stuff he was made of. Did he crawl and apologize? Not much. He sued the United States Government for the full amount and pushed that suit to the Supreme Court. In the face of the sneers of his enemies he won, and took the full amount with interest. He's the king to-day because he was born a king. His father was a millionaire before him. He's the greatest financial genius of the century."

Bivens paused and a dreamy look came into the black eyes.

"Jim," he continued with slow emphasis, "I'd rather get my fingers on his throat in a death-struggle than lead the combined armies of the world to victory."

Stuart was silent.

The financier moved uneasily and asked:

"What are you brooding over now?"

"I was just wondering why the devil you've taken the pains to tell me all these incredible stories about the great ones here to-night?"

"And I answer with perfect frankness. When you come in with me it must be with your whole soul, without a single reservation. When it comes to the critical moment of your decision it may turn on a sentimental whim—a question of high-browed honour. I want you to come with your eyes wide open. I want you to know that I'm no better, no worse, than the best of the big ones whose names fill the world with awe. Every word I've told you about them is true and a great deal more that will never be told; and mind you there's not a Jew among the fellows I've sketched. There are two men in New York of old Scotch ancestry who have more money than the whole Hebrew race in America."

"The stuff you've told me seems beyond belief."

"Exactly. That's why I wanted you to know. The truth is, Jim, you'd just as well face it at once. I am asking you to resign your place in the old academic world to enter commerce, the real modern world. Commerce is built on the power to over-reach. Isn't deceit the foundation of all successful trade? The butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker, the banker, the broker—their business is all alike. A trader is a trader, one who clutches and fights his competitor and lays traps for his customers, in short, his victims. A trader is one who by hook or crook beats down the price at which he will buy below its market value and marks it up to the limit of his victim's credulity when he sells. That's the grain of truth beneath the mountain of chaff in the old aristocratic hatred of people who are in trade. The world has outgrown this hatred. The age of the aristocrat is past."

"I'm not so sure of that," Stuart answered, thoughtfully. "The old aristocracy had their weaknesses. They were always gamblers and the devotees of licentiousness. But they despised lying and stealing. And the feudal code of the old patrician bred a high type of man. The new code of the liar has not yet made this demonstration. The grace, elegance, breeding and culture of the past are no longer binding laws on the new masters of the world. I think you may get on a while without the patrician, but the question is how long can you live without his virtues?"

An answer was on Bivens's lips when the soft tones of hidden oriental gongs began to chime the call for dinner. The chimes melted into a beautiful piece of orchestral music which seemed to steal from the sky, so skilfully had the musicians been concealed.

Nan suddenly appeared by Stuart's side, and he was given the honour of leading his hostess into the banquet hall, before even the king, while the great ones of earth slowly followed.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DANCE OF DEATH

A flush of excited pleasure overspread Stuart's face as he led his beautiful hostess to the dining room.

He paused at the entrance with an exclamation of surprise:

"Well, of all the wonders!"

"But you can't stop yet!" whispered Nan, drawing him gently on.

Apparently on entering the banquet hall they were stepping outdoors into an enchanted pine forest. The walls were completely hidden by painted scenery representing the mountains of western North Carolina. The room had been transformed into a forest, trees and shrubbery melting imperceptibly into the scenery on the walls, and mocking birds were singing in cages hidden high among the boughs of the trees.

Stuart gazed at the great panorama painting on the wall, fascinated.

"Why, Nan," he gasped, "that's a view of the river hills at home where you and I used to roam."

"Well, if you hadn't recognized it, I should never have forgiven you."

"How on earth did your artists get it so perfectly?"

"I sent him there, of course. He did it in three weeks. There's something else in that picture I thought you'd see, too."

"Isn't it now!" Stuart laughed, as they reached the head of the central table. "A boy and girl sitting on a fence looking down at the river in the valley below."

"The very spot we found that quail's nest, you remember. You see I've begun to rebuild your dream-life to-night, Jim."

"It's marvellous!" he answered slowly. "And there in the distance loom the three ranges of our old mountains until their dim blue peaks are lost in the clouds. These tables seem spread for a picnic in the woods on the hills."

"Are you pleased with my fantasy?" she asked with quiet emotion.

"Pleased is not the word for it," he replied quickly. "I'm overwhelmed. I never thought you so sentimental."

"Perhaps I'm not, perhaps I've only done this to please a friend. Do you begin to feel at home in this little spot I've brought back by magic to-night from our youth?"

"I'm afraid I'll wake and find I'm dreaming."

Stuart gazed on the magnificently set table with increasing astonishment. Winding in and out among the solid silver candelabra a tiny stream of crystal water flowed among miniature trees and flowers on its banks. The flowers were all blooming orchids of rarest colouring and weirdly fantastic shapes.

"Those hideous little flowers cost a small fortune," Nan exclaimed, "I'm ashamed to tell you how much—I don't like them myself, I'm frank to say so to you. But they are the rage. I prefer those gorgeous bowers of American beauty roses, the canopies to shade my guests from the rays of my artificial sun shining through the trees. You see how skilfully the artist has lighted the place. It looks exactly like a sunset in a pine forest."

Stuart noted that the service was all made for this occasion, silver, cut glass, and china. Each piece had stamped or etched in it the coat of arms of his native state, "Peace and Plenty."

"And you've done all this in six weeks? It's incredible."

"Money can do anything, Jim," she cried under her breath. "It's the fairy queen of our childhood and the God of our ancient faith come down to earth. You really like my banquet hall?"

"More than I can tell you."

Nan looked at him keenly.

"The world will say to-morrow morning that I have given this lavish entertainment for vulgar display. In a sense it's true. I am trying to eclipse in splendour anything New York has seen. But I count the fortune it cost well spent to have seen the smile on your face when you looked at that painting of our old hills. I would have given five times as much at any moment the past ten years to have known that you didn't hate me."

"You know it now."

"Yes," she answered tenderly. "You have said so with your lips before, now you mean it. You are your old handsome self to-night."

Apart from the charm of Nan's presence Stuart found the dinner itself a stupid affair, so solemnly stupid it at last became funny. In all the magnificently dressed crowd he looked in vain for a man or woman of real intellectual distinction. He saw only money, money, money!

There was one exception—the titled degenerates from the Old World, hovering around the richest and silliest women, their eyes glittering with eager avarice for a chance at their millions. It seemed a joke that any sane American mother could conceive the idea of selling her daughter to these wretches in exchange for the empty sham of a worm-eaten dishonoured title. And yet it had become so common that the drain on the national resources from this cause constitutes a menace to our future.

In spite of the low murmurs of Nan's beautifully modulated voice in his ears, he found his anger slowly rising, not against any one in particular, but against the vulgar ostentation in which these people moved and the vapid assumption of superiority with which they evidently looked out upon the world.

But whatever might have been lacking in the wit and genius of the guests who sat at Nan's tables, there could be no question about the quality of the dinner set before them. When the Roman Empire was staggering to its ruin amid the extravagancies of its corrupt emperors, not one of them ever gave a banquet which approximated half the cost of this. The best old Nero ever did with his flowers was to cover the floors of his banquet hall with cut roses that his guests might crush them beneath their feet. But flowers were cheap in sunny Italy. Nan's orchids alone on her tables cost in Roman money a hundred thousand sesterces, while the paintings, trees, shrubbery, water and light effects necessary to transform the room into a miniature forest cost five hundred thousand sesterces, or a total of thirty thousand dollars for the decorations of the banquet hall alone.

When the feast ended at ten thirty the sun had set behind the blue mountains, the moon risen, and hundreds of fire flies were floating from the foliage of trees and shrubs.

Nan led the way to the ball room, where the entertainment by hired dancers, singers, and professional entertainers began on an improvised stage.

During this part of the programme the women and men of the banqueting party who were to appear in the fancy-dress ball at twelve retired to the rooms above to dress for their parts.

Nan left Stuart with a pretty sigh to arrange her costume.

"I'm sorry you never learned to dance, Jim, but there are compensations to-night. I've a surprise for you later."

Before he could reply, with a wave of her bare arm, she was gone, and he stood for a moment wondering what further surprise could be in store after what he had seen.

He noted with some astonishment the peculiar sombre effects of the ball room. He had expected a scene of splendour. Instead the impression was distinctly funereal. The lights were dimmed like the interior of a theatre during the performance and the lofty gilded ceilings with their mural decorations seemed to be draped in filmy black crêpe.

The professional entertainment began on the little stage amid a universal gabble which made it impossible for anything save pantomime to be intelligible beyond the footlights. Star after star, whose services had cost \$1,000 each for one hour, appeared without commanding the slightest attention. At last there was a hush and every eye was fixed on the stage. Stuart looked up quickly to see what miracle had caused the silence.

An oriental dancing girl, barefooted and naked save for the slightest suggestion of covering about her waist and bust, was the centre of attraction. For five minutes she held the crowd spell-bound with a dance so beautifully sensual no theatrical manager would have dared present it. Yet it was received by the only burst of applause which broke the monotony of the occasion.

Stuart turned to the program in his hand and idly read the next number:

"A song by an unknown star."

He was wondering what joke the manager was about to perpetrate on the crowd when his ear caught the first sweet notes of Harriet's voice singing the old song he loved so well, the song she had first sung the day he came from the South.

His heart gave a throb of pain. Who could have prepared this humiliation for his little pal! He pushed his way through the throng of chattering fools until he stood alone straight in front of the slender little singer. She saw him at once, smiled, and sang as he had never heard her sing. Her eyes shone with a strange light and Stuart knew she was in the spirit world. The rabble of ignorant men and women before her did not exist. She was singing to an invisible audience save for the one man who looked up into her eyes, his heart bursting with sympathy and tenderness.

To his further surprise Stuart saw the doctor standing in the shadows at the corner of the stage looking over the gossiping, noisy crowd with a look of anger and horror.

When the last note of the song died away, quivering with a supernatural tenderness and passion, he brushed a tear from his eyes, lifted his hands high above his head and made a motion which said to her: "Tumultuous applause!"

She nodded and smiled and he rushed behind the scenes to ask an explanation.

He grasped both her hands and found them cold and trembling with excitement.

"What on earth, does this mean?"

"Simply that I was engaged to sing to-night—and I wanted to surprise you. Didn't you like my song?"

Stuart held her hands tightly.

"I never heard you sing so divinely!"

"Then I'm very happy."

"How could you sing at all under such conditions?"

"I had one good listener."

"I could have killed them because they wouldn't hear you."

"But you enjoyed it?"

"It lifted me to the gates of heaven, dear."

"Then I don't care whether any one else heard it or not. But I did so much wish that she might have heard it, or her husband, because they are from the South. I thought they would be as charmed with the old song as you have always been and I'd make a hit with them, perhaps."

"But I don't understand, your father hates Bivens so."

A big hand was laid on his shoulder, he turned and faced the doctor smiling.

"But I don't hate him, my boy! I've given up such foolishness. We've buried the hatchet. I'm to see him in a few minutes and we are to be good friends."

"Bivens invited you here to discuss a business proposition to-night!" Stuart exclaimed, blankly.

"No, no, no," the doctor answered. "I came with Harriet, of course. Her music teacher placed her on the programme. But Mr. Bivens and I have had some correspondence and I'm to see him in a little while and talk things over quite informally, of course, but effectively."

"He has agreed to a conference here?" the young lawyer asked, anxiously.

"Why, of course. His butler has just told me he would see me immediately after the ball begins."

Stuart breathed easier.

"Then, it's all right. I was just going to suggest that I speak to Mr. Bivens for you."

"Not at all, my boy, not necessary, I assure you. It will be all right. In five minutes' talk our little differences will all be settled."

"If I can be of any service, you'll let me know?"

"Certainly," the doctor replied with a frown, "but the whole thing is settled already. Still, I appreciate your offer."

Stuart was worried. He could not press the matter further. He was sure from the sensitive tones in which his old friend declined his help that his dignity was hurt by the offer. He was positive there was a misunderstanding somewhere. The doctor's optimism had led him into an embarrassing situation and yet his association with Bivens as his first employer had surely given him some knowledge of his character.

He hesitated, about to speak, changed his mind, and turned to Harriet.

"You look glorious to-night, little pal! Funny that I never saw you in evening dress before. You look so tall and queenly, so grown, so mature. You're beginning to make me feel old, child. I'll be thinking of you as a grown woman next."

"I am twenty-four, you know," she said, simply.

"I have never believed it until to-night. I wouldn't have known you at first but for your voice, I had to rub my eyes then."

A warm blush tinged the pink and white of the sensitive face.

"Oh, Jim, I can't tell you how sweet your Southern blarney is to my heart! I dreamed of a triumph of art. I saw it was impossible before I sang, and now the pretty things you've said have taken all the sting out of defeat and I'm happy."

"Then I'm glad, dear."

He paused, leaned close and whispered:

"Won't you let me know when your father has seen Mr. Bivens? If this conference doesn't go well I may be of some help."

"All right, I'll let you know."

The lights were suddenly turned lower, approaching total darkness. The attendants noiselessly removed the temporary stage and cleared the great room for the dancers.

As the chimes struck the hour of midnight, skeleton heads slowly began to appear peeping from the shadows of the arched ceiling and from every nook and corner of the huge cornice and pillars. Draperies of filmy crêpe flowing gently in the breeze were lighted by sulphurous-hued electric rays from the balconies. Tiny electric lights blinked in every skeleton's sunken eyes and behind each grinning row of teeth.

Again the chatter of fools was suddenly hushed. The orchestra began a weird piece of music that sent the cold chills rippling down Stuart's spine. Harriet's hand gripped his.

"Heavens!" she whispered. "Did you ever dream of such a nightmare!"

Suddenly two white figures drew aside the heavy curtains in the archway and the dancers marched into the sombre room.

The men were dressed as shrouded skeletons, and the women as worms. The men wore a light flimsy gray robe on which skilful artists had painted on four sides in deep colours the picture of a human skeleton.

The women wore a curious light robe of cotton fibre which was drawn over the entire body and gave to each figure the appearance of a huge caterpillar.

From the high perch of a balcony a sepulchral voice cried:

"The Dance of Death and the Worm!"

The strange figures began to move slowly across the polished floor to the strains of a ghost-like waltz.

From the corners of the high balconies strange lights flashed, developing in hideous outlines the phosphorescent colors of the skeletons and long, fuzzy, exaggerated lines of the accompanying worms. The effect was thrilling. Every sound save the soft swish of the ghostly robes and the delicate footfall of ghostly feet ceased. Not a whisper from a sap-headed youth or a yap from an aged degenerate or a giggle from a silly woman broke the death-like stillness.

Suddenly the music stopped with a crash. Each ghostly couple, skeleton and worm, stood motionless. The silvery note of a trumpet called from the sky. The blinking eyes of the death-heads in the ceiling and on the walls faded slowly. The figures of the dancers moved uneasily in the darkness. The trumpet pealed a second signal—the darkness fled, and the great room suddenly blazed with ten thousand electric lights. The orchestra struck the first notes of a thrilling waltz, and presto!—in an instant the women appeared in all the splendour of the most gorgeous gowns, their bare arms and necks flashing with priceless jewels and each man, but a moment ago a hideous skeleton, bowed before her in immaculate evening clothes.

Just at the moment each caterpillar threw to her attendant her disguise, from the four corners of the vast room were released thousands of gorgeously tinted butterflies, imported from the tropics for the occasion. As the dancers glided through the dazzling scene these wonderfully coloured creatures fluttered about them in myriads, darting and circling in every direction among the flowers and lights until the room seemed a veritable fairyland.

A burst of applause swept the crowd, as Nan's radiant figure passed, encircled by the arm of the leader.

Stuart nodded and clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

A more marvellous transformation scene could scarcely be imagined.

When Nan had passed he turned to speak to Harriet and she had gone. He felt a moment's pain at the disappointment, but before he could find her the music ceased, the dancers paused and the swaying of the crowd made his search vain.

A soft hand was suddenly laid on his arm, and he turned to confront Nan, her eyes flashing with triumph, her cheeks flushed, and her lips parted in a tender smile.

"Well?" she asked in low tones.

"You're a magician, Nan," he answered with enthusiasm.

"Come, I'm going to honour you by sitting out the next two dances, and if you're very good, perhaps more."

When she had seated herself by his side under a bower of roses he was very still for a moment. She looked up with a quizzical expression and said:

"A penny for your thoughts? Am I so very wicked after all?"

Stuart crossed his long legs and looked at her admiringly.

"I'll be honest," he said with deliberation. "I don't think I have ever seen anything more dazzlingly beautiful than your banquet and ball, except——"

"Except what!" she interrupted sharply.

"Except the woman who conceived and executed it."

"That's better, but you must give the credit to the artists I hired."

"In a measure, yes; but their plans were submitted for your approval. I was just wondering whether your imagination was vivid enough to have dreamed half the splendours of such a life when you turned from the little cottage I built for you."

A look of pain clouded the fair face and she lifted her jewelled hand.

"Please, Jim, I'd like to forget some things."

"And you haven't forgotten?"

She looked straight into his eyes and answered in even tones.

"No."

He studied the magnificent pearl necklace that circled her throat. Its purchase had made a sensation in New York. The papers were full of it at the time Bivens had bought it at an auction in Paris, bidding successfully against the agents of the Tzar of Russia. Never had he seen Nan so ravishing. Magnificent gowns, soft laces, and jewelry were made to be worn by such women. There was an eternal fitness in the whole scheme of things in which this glorious creature of the senses lived and moved and had her being.

"I suppose," he began musingly, "I ought, as a patriotic citizen of the Republic, to condemn the enormous waste of wealth you have made here to-night."

"Yes," she answered quietly.

"I ought to tell you how many tears you could wipe away with it, how much suffering you could soften, how many young lives you could save from misery and shame, how many of life's sunsets you could have turned from darkness into the glory of quiet joy; and yet, somehow, I can find nothing in my heart to say except that I've been living in a fairyland of beauty and enchantment. What curious contradictions these hearts of ours lead us into sometimes—don't they?"

Nan looked up quickly and repeated his question in cynical tones.

"Yes, don't they?"

"I know that I ought to condemn this appalling extravagance, and I find myself enjoying it."

Both were silent for a long while and then they began to talk in low tones of the life they had lived as boy and girl in the old South, and forgot the flight of time.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST ILLUSION

As the moment drew nearer for the doctor to make known his presence to Bivens his heart began to fail. With an effort he took fresh courage.

"Of course I'll succeed!" he exclaimed. "There's no such thing as defeat for him who refuses to acknowledge it."

As he watched the magnificent ball his eyes grew dim at the thought of the social tragedy which it symbolized, of his own poverty and of the deeper wretchedness of scores to whom he had been trying to minister. He was fighting to keep his courage up, but the longer he watched the barbaric, sensual display of wealth sweeping before him, the deeper his spirit sank.

The butler touched his arm and he turned with a sudden start, a look of anguish on his rugged face.

"Mr. Bivens will be pleased to see you in the little library, sir, if you will come at once!"

The man bowed with stately deference.

He followed the servant with quick firm step, a hundred happy ideas floating through his mind.

"Of course, it's all right. My fears were absurd!" he mused. "My instinct was right. He will be pleased to see me. He's in a good humour with all the world to-night."

When the doctor was ushered into the library, Bivens, who was awaiting him alone, sprang to his feet with a look of blank amazement, and then a smile began to play about his hard mouth. He thrust his delicate hands into his pockets and deliberately looked the doctor's big figure over from head to foot as he approached with embarrassment.

"My servant announced that a gentleman wished to speak to me a moment. Will you be good enough to tell me what you are doing in this house to-night?"

The doctor paused and hesitated, his face scarlet from the deliberate insult.

"I must really ask your pardon, Mr. Bivens, for my apparent intrusion. It is only

apparent. I came with my daughter."

"Your daughter?"

"She sang to-night on your programme."

"Oh, I see, with the other hired singers; well, what do you want?"

"Only a few minutes of your time on a matter of grave importance."

"I don't care to discuss business here to-night, Woodman," Bivens broke in abruptly. "Come to my office."

"I have been there three or four times," the doctor went on hurriedly, "and wrote to you twice. I felt sure that my letters had not reached you. I hoped for the chance of a moment to-night to lay my case before you."

Bivens smiled and sat down.

"All right, I'll give you five minutes."

"I felt sure you had not seen my letters."

"I'll ease your mind on that question. I did see them both. You got my answer?"

"That's just it. I didn't. And I couldn't understand it."

"Oh, I see!" Bivens's mouth quivered with the slightest sneer. "Perhaps it was lost in transit!"

The sneer was lost on the doctor. He was too intent on his purpose.

"I know. It was a mistake. I see it now, and I'm perfectly willing to pay for that mistake by accepting even half of your last proposition."

Bivens laughed cynically.

"This might be serious, Woodman, if it wasn't funny. But you had as well know, once and for all, that I owe you nothing. Your suit has been lost. Your appeal has been forfeited. My answer is brief but to the point—*not one cent*—my generosity is for my friends and followers, not my enemies."

"But we are not enemies, personally," the doctor explained, good-naturedly. "I have put all bitterness out of my heart and come to-night to ask that bygones be bygones. You know the history of our relations and of my business. I need not repeat it. And you know that in God's great book of accounts you are my debtor."

Bivens's eyes danced with anger, and his words had the ring of cold steel.

"I owe you nothing."

In every accent of the financier's voice the man before him felt the deadly merciless hatred whose fires had been smouldering for years.

For a moment he was helpless under the spell of his fierce gaze. He began to feel dimly something of the little man's powerful personality, the power that had crushed his enemies.

The doctor's voice was full of tenderness when he replied at last:

"My boy," he began quietly—"for you are still a boy when you stand beside my gray hairs—men may fight one another for a great principle without being personal enemies. We are men still, with common hopes, fears, ills, griefs and joys. When I was a soldier I fought the Southern army, shot and shot to kill. I was fighting for a principle. When the firing ceased I helped the wounded men on the field as I came to them. Many a wounded man in blue I've seen drag himself over the rough ground to pass his canteen to the lips of a boy in gray who was lying on his back, crying for water. If I am your enemy, it is over a question of principle. The fight has ended, and I have fallen across your path to-night, dying of thirst while rivers of water flow about me."

Bivens turned away and the doctor pressed closer.

"Suppose we have fought each other in the heat of the day in the ranks of two hostile armies? The battle has ceased. For me the night has fallen, I——"

His voice quivered and broke for an instant.

"You have won. You can afford to be generous. That you can deny me in this the hour of my desolation is unthinkable. I'm not pleading for myself. I can live on a rat's

allowance. I'm begging for my little girl. I need two thousand dollars immediately to complete her musical studies. You know what her love means to me. I have put myself in your power. Suppose I've wronged you? Now is your chance to do a divine thing. Deep down in your heart of hearts you know that the act would be one of justice between man and man."

Bivens looked up sharply.

"As a charity, Woodman, I might give you the paltry fifty thousand dollars you ask."—

"I'll take it as a charity!" he cried eagerly, "take it with joy and gratitude, and thank God for his salvation sent in the hour of my need."

Bivens smiled coldly.

"But in reality you demand justice of me?"

"I have put myself in your power. I have refused and still refuse to believe that you can treat me with such bitter cruelty as to refuse to recognize my claim. I have waked at last to find myself helpless. The shock of it has crushed me. I've always felt rich in the love of my country, in the consciousness that I did my part to save the Union. Its growing wealth I have rejoiced in as my own. There has never been a moment in my life up to this hour that I have envied any man the possession of his millions. In the fight I have made on you, I have been trying to strike for the freedom of the individual man against what seemed to me to be the crushing slavery of soulless machinery."

The little financier lifted his shapely hand with a commanding gesture and the speaker paused.

"Come to the point, Woodman, what is in your mind when you say that I am your debtor?"

"Simply that I have always known that your formula for that drink was a prescription which I compounded years ago and which you often filled for me when I was busy. As a physician I could not patent such a thing. You had as much right to patent it as any one else."

"In other words," Bivens interrupted coldly, "you inform me that you have always known that I stole from your prescription counter the formula which gave me my first fortune, and for that reason every dollar I possess to-day is branded with the finger print of a thief; and you, the upright physician, held by the old code of honour which makes your profession a fraternity of ancient chivalry, come now with your hat in hand and ask me for a share of this tainted money."

"Bivens," the doctor protested with dignity, "you know that I have made no such wild accusation against you. In our contest I have never stooped to personalities. I have always felt that the inherent justice of my cause was based on principle. But I'm an old man to-night. The sands of life are running low. I'm down and out. The one being I love supremely is in peril. I can't fight."

Bivens turned with sudden fury and faced his visitor, every mask of restraint thrown to the winds. His little bead-eyes flashed with the venom of a snake coiled to strike. He stood close to the doctor and looked up at his tall massive figure, stretching his own diminutive form in a desperate effort to stand on a level with his enemy.

The doctor's face grew suddenly pale and his form rigid as the two men stood holding each other's gaze for a moment without words.

The financier began to speak with slow venomous energy:

"I've let you ramble on in your maudlin talk, Woodman, because it amused me. For years I've waited for your coming. Your unexpected advent is the sweetest triumph of this festival night. The offer I made you was at the suggestion of my wife. I did it solely to please her. I think you will take my word for it to-night." He paused and a sinister smile played about his mouth. "The last time I saw you I promised myself that I'd make you come to me the next time, and when you did, that you'd come on your hands and knees."

The doctor's big fists suddenly closed and Bivens took a step back toward his desk when his slender hand gripped and fumbled a heavy cut glass ink stand. The older observed his trembling hand with a smile of contempt.

"And I swore," Bivens went on in a voice quivering with unrestrained passion, "that when you looked up into my face grovelling and whining for mercy as you have to-night, I'd call my servants and order them to kick you down my door step."

He loosed his hold on the ink stand and leaned across the massive flat-top desk to touch

an electric button.

The doctor's fist suddenly gripped the outstretched hand and his eyes glared into the face of the financier with the dangerous look of a madman.

"You had better not ring that bell, yet," he said, with forced quiet in his tones.

Bivens hesitated and his muscles relaxed in the grip on his wrist.

"You wish to prolong the agony for another moral discussion?" the financier asked with a sneer. "All right, if you enjoy it."

"Just long enough to say one thing to you, Bivens. There's a limit beyond which you and your kind had better not press the men you have wronged. You have made a brave show of your power to-night. Well, you are mistaken if you believe you can longer awe the imagination of the world with its tinsel. You have begun to stir deeper thoughts. Look to your skin. I've always said this is God's world, and it must come out right in the end. I've begun to think to-night there's something wrong. God can't look down and see what's going on here—the God I've tried to serve and worship, whose praise I have sung beneath the stars on fields of battle with the blood streaming from wounds I got fighting for what I believed to be right. If the devil rules the universe, and dog-eat-dog is the law, there'll be a big hand feeling for your throat, feeling blindly in the dark, perhaps, but it will get there! When I look into your brazen face to-night, and hear the strains of that music, there's something inside of me that wants to kill."

"But you won't, Woodman!" Bivens interrupted with a sneer.

"When it comes to the test your liver is white. I know your breed of men, but I like you better in that mood. It gives me pleasure to torture you, and I'm not going to kick you out."

"I shouldn't advise you to try it," was the grim response.

"No. Your tirade gives me an idea. I want you to stay until the festivities end, and enjoy yourself. Observe that I'm pouring out my wealth here to-night in a river of generosity, and that you are starving for a drop which I refuse to give. Take a look over my house. It cost two millions to build it, and requires half a million a year to keep it up. I have a country estate of a hundred thousand acres in the mountains of North Carolina, with a French chateau that cost a million. I only weigh a hundred and fifteen pounds, but I require these palaces to properly house me for a year. Think this over while you stroll among my laughing guests. My art gallery will interest you. I've a single painting there which cost three hundred thousand dollars—the entire collection two millions. The butterflies those dancers are crushing beneath their feet in my ball room, I imported from Central America at a cost of five thousand dollars. The favours in jewelry I shall give to my rich guests who have no use for them will be worth twenty-five thousand dollars. You'll see my wife among the dancers. Her dresses cost a hundred thousand a year. For the string of pearls around her neck I paid a half million. The slippers on her feet cost two thousand—all you need for your daughter's education. Take a good look at it, Woodman, and as the day dawns and my guests depart, some of them drunk on wine that cost twenty-five dollars a bottle—remember that I spent three hundred and fifty thousand on this banquet which lasted eight hours and that I will see you and your daughter dead and in the bottomless pit before I will give you one penny. Enjoy yourself, it's a fine evening."

The crushed man stared at Bivens in a stupor of pain. The brazen audacity of his assault was more than he could foresee. When the full import of its cruelty found his soul, he spoke in faltering tones:

"Only he who is willing to die, Bivens, is the master of life. Well, I go now to meet Death and celebrate defeat."

"And I the sweetest victory of my life—good evening!"

Before the doctor could answer, the financier turned with a laugh and left the room.

For a long time the dazed man stood motionless. He passed his big hand over his forehead in a vague instinctive physical effort to lift the fog of horror and despair that was slowly strangling him.

"My God!" he gasped at last.

The orchestra began a new waltz while the hum of voices, and the laughter of half-drunken revellers floated up the grand stairs and struck upon his ears with a strange new accent. He seemed to have lived a thousand years, and come to life a new man with strange new impulses. The light of faith that once illumined his soul had suddenly gone out and a new sense of brutal power quivered in every nerve and muscle.

He felt at last his kinship to the torn bleeding bundle of despair he saw dying on the pavement in Union Square.

The music, soft, sweet and sensuous, seemed to fill every nook and corner of the great palace with its low penetrating notes. He felt that he was suffocating. He tore his collar apart to give himself room to breathe. He thrust his hand into the hip pocket of his dress suit where he usually carried a handkerchief and felt something hard and cold.

It was a revolver he had been accustomed to carry of late in his rounds through the dangerous quarters of the city. Without thinking when he dressed, he had transferred it to his evening suit. His hand closed over the ivory handle with a sudden fierce joy. And in a moment the beast that sleeps beneath the skin of religion and culture was in the saddle.

"Yes, I'll kill him in his magnificent ball room—to the strains of his own music!" he said half aloud. "I'll give a fit climax to his dance of Death and the Worm."

He drew the revolver from his pocket, broke it, examined the shells, snapped them in place and thrust the deadly thing in the inner pocket of his coat. He could draw it from there without attracting the attention of his victim.

He quickly descended the stairs and saw Bivens talking to his wife. He didn't wish to kill him in her presence and as he passed a look of hatred flashed from the little black eyes of the millionaire.

The doctor answered with a smile that roused the master of the house to a pitch of uncontrollable fury. He left his wife's side, stepped quickly in front of Woodman, hesitated as he was about to utter an oath, changed his mind and resumed his rôle of host:

"If I can show you any of the treasures of the house, I'll be glad to act as your guide, Woodman!" he said with an effort at laughter.

"Thank you. I've just seen some very interesting pictures."

"Surely you have not finished with my masterpieces so soon?" he said, with mocking protest.

The doctor had made up his mind to kill him at the moment the dance was at the highest pitch of gaiety and he wanted to get him as near the great arch as possible.

His answer was given so politely and evenly the financier was puzzled.

"No, Bivens," he said in a matter-of-fact voice, "the pictures I saw were purely mental. I haven't been to your art gallery yet."

"See it by all means!" he urged with exaggerated politeness. "It's a rare privilege, you know. It's not often the rabble is inside these walls. It's the chance of your life."

"Thank you, I'll find enough to amuse me before I go."

Again the doctor smiled.

Bivens turned on his heels with a muttered oath and disappeared in the crowd. He was plainly disconcerted by his enemy's manner. To see a man of his temperament rise suddenly from the depths of despair into smiling serenity was something uncanny. He left him deliberating whether to call his servants and throw him into the street.

As the doctor waited for the music to begin, he watched the women pass, resplendent in their jewels and magnificent in their nakedness. To-night he saw it without the excuses of conventional social usage.

"And this," he exclaimed bitterly, "is the highest development of American life; this splendid, sordid, criminal degrading pageant with its sensual appeal; and yet if the house should fall and crush them all, the world would lose nothing of value except the jewelry that might be mixed with its débris!"

He felt for the moment a messenger of divine vengeance. His pistol shot would at least give them something to think about.

The music began, and the dancers once more whirled into the centre of the room and the crowd filled the space under the grand arch which led into the hall. Bivens was the centre of an admiring group of sycophants and worshipful snobs. The doctor's heart gave a mad throb of joy. His hour had come.

With quick strides he covered the space which separated them and without a moment's hesitation thrust his hand into his breast for his revolver. Not a muscle or nerve quivered. His finger touched the trigger softly and he gave Bivens a look which he

meant he should take with him into eternity, when just beyond him he saw Harriet. She stood motionless with a look of mute agony on her fair young face, watching Stuart talk to Bivens's wife.

His finger slipped from the trigger and his hand loosed its deadly grip.

"Have I forgotten my baby!" he cried in sudden anguish. And then another vision flashed through his excited brain. A court room, a prisoner, his own bowed figure the centre of a thousand eyes while the jury brought in their verdict. A moment of awful silence and the foreman said:

"Guilty of murder in the first degree."

And the long piercing scream from the broken heart of his little girl.

"No, no, not that!" he groaned in sudden terror, his face white with pain. "I can't kill her, too. No, I must save her, that's why I want to kill him because he has imperilled her life, and I am about to crush her at a single blow. God save and help me!—God! Where is God? He helps those who help themselves in this madman's world. Well, then I'll look out for my own, too!"

His breath came in laboured gasps as one mad thought succeeded another.

"Yes!" he said hoarsely, "I must save her. I must be cunning. I must succeed, not fail. I must get what I came here for. I must save my baby. My own fate is of no importance. She is everything."



"I must save her. I must be cunning"

He watched the dancers, greedily catching the flash of their diamonds, gleaming tiaras, rings, necklaces, bracelets, each worth a king's ransom. Suddenly the idea flashed through his mind:

Bivens had taken from him, by fraud, his formula, destroyed his business and robbed him of all he possessed. The law gave him power to hold it. He, too, would appeal to the same power and take what belonged to him. No matter how, he would take it, and he would take it to-night.

Bivens had boasted that his favours in jewelry given in sheer wantonness of pride to rich guests would be worth twenty-five thousand dollars. His plan was instantly formed.

He turned quickly and began to search the house until he found the half-drunken servant arranging these packages under the direction of a secretary. These favours had been made for the occasion by a famous jeweller; a diamond pin of peculiar design, a gold death's head with diamond teeth and eyes surmounted by a butterfly and a caterpillar. The stones in each piece were worth a hundred dollars. They lay on a table

in little open jewel boxes, fifty in a box, and each box contained five thousand dollars' worth of gold and precious stones.

The doctor inspected the boxes with exclamations of wonder and admiration.

The secretary who had lingered long over his champagne was busy trying to write the names of the guests on separate cards. The doctor bent low over the table for an instant, and when he left one of the jewel cases rested securely in his pocket.

He was amazed at his own skill and a thrill of fierce triumph filled his being as he realized that he had succeeded and that his little girl would go to Europe and complete her work. He spoke pleasantly to the secretary, and congratulating him on his good fortune in securing such a master, turned and strolled leisurely back to the ball room.

Not for a moment did he doubt the safety of his act. He was a chemist and knew the secrets of the laboratory. He would melt the gold into a single bar and sell the diamonds as he needed them. His only regret was that he could not have taken the full amount he had demanded of the little scoundrel.

He found Harriet and they started at once for home.

The dancers who were not staying for the second dinner, about to be announced at four o'clock, had begun to leave. Friends were helping the ladies to their cars and carriages, and other friends were labouring hopefully with those who were not yet convinced of the incapacity to take care of themselves.

Everywhere the floors were stained with the crushed forms of butterflies. The wonderful flashing creatures had darted through the rooms at first with swift whirling circling wings. But in the hot fetid air one by one they had fallen to the floor crushed into shapeless masses. Hundreds of them had clung to the leaves of the lilacs, roses and ferns until they dropped exhausted. Some of them still hung in long graceful swaying streamers of dazzling colour from the ceilings.

The doctor pointed to them.

"Look, dear, their poor little hearts are counting the seconds that yet separate them from the mangled bodies of their mates on the floor. So the hearts of millions of people have been crushed out for the sport of this evening. It's a funny world, isn't it?"

Harriet looked up quickly into his face with puzzled inquiry.

"Why, Papa, I never heard you talk so strangely. What's the matter?"

The father laughed in the best of spirits.

"Only the fancy of a moment, child. I never felt better. Did you have a good time?"

The girl's face grew serious as she drew on her wrap and glanced back toward the great doorway of the ball room.

"Yes, when I could forget the pain in my heart."

She paused and seized his arm with sudden energy.

"You succeeded? It's all right? I'm going abroad at once to study?"

The doctor laughed aloud in a burst of fierce joy.

"Certainly, my dear! Didn't I tell you it would be so?"

The tears sprang into the gentle eyes as she answered gratefully.

"You can't know how happy you've made me."

Bivens, who had heard the doctor's laughter, passed and said with exaggerated courtesy:

"I trust you have enjoyed the evening, Woodman?"

The doctor laughed again in his face.

"More than I can possibly tell you!"

Bivens followed to the door and watched him slowly walk down the steps.

CHAPTER XX

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

The two weeks which followed the Bivens ball, were the happiest Harriet Woodman had known since Nan's shadow had fallen across her life. Every moment was crowded with the work of preparing for her trip, except the hours she could not refuse Stuart, who had suddenly waked to the fact that something beautiful was going out of his life. Every day he asked her to play and sing for him or go for one of their rambles over the hills. They talked but little. He simply loved to be alone with her.

Harriet watched him with keen joy, and deep in her heart a secret hope began to slowly grow.

The day she sailed he refused to go with her to the pier.

"Why Jim, you must come with me!" she protested.

"No, I can't, little pal. Sit down at your piano now and sing my favourite song and I'll say goodbye here."

"But why?" she pleaded.

"I'm not quite sure how I would behave in public."

Without a word she took off her gloves, sat down at the piano and sung in low tones of melting tenderness. When the last note died away, he rose quietly, came to her side, and took her hand.

"I never knew, little girl, how my life has grown into yours until I'm about to lose you."

"But you're not going to lose me. Remember I'm coming back to sing for you before thousands. And I'm going to make you proud of me."

"I couldn't know how deeply and tenderly I love you, child, until this moment when I'm about to say goodbye."

The little figure was very still. Her eyes drooped and her lips trembled pathetically. She knew that he had said too much to mean a great deal. He had spoken of his love for her as a "child," when long ago the child had grown into the tragic figure of a woman who had learned to wait and suffer in silence.

She tried to speak and her voice failed. Her hand began to tremble in his.

She turned and faced him with a smile, pressing his hand. The cab was at the door and her father calling from below.

"Goodbye, Jim," she said tenderly.

"Goodbye to the dearest little chum God ever sent to cheer a lonely unhappy man's soul."

A sob stilled his voice and she turned her face away to hide her tears.

He still clung to her hand.

"It's been a long time," he said hesitatingly, "since you've kissed me, girlie; just one for remembrance!"

With a quick movement she drew her hand away and started with a laugh toward the door.

"No, Jim, I'm afraid I'm getting too old for that now."

He made no reply but stepped to her side and grasped her hand.

"Then again, goodbye."

"Goodbye."

He pressed her hand to his lips.

The slender body quivered and her face flushed scarlet. She hurried down the steps to the cab, turned and threw him a kiss.

He watched the cab roll down Fourth Street toward the pier while a great wave of loneliness overwhelmed him.

He slowly climbed the stairs toward his room, and passed the door of Harriet's on the way. It was open and he looked in expecting her to appear suddenly before him with a smile on her serene little face. He noted how neat and tidy she had left her nest; not a sign of confusion, the floor swept clean, everything in its place and the bed made with scrupulous care. The whole place breathed the perfume of her sunny character.

On the mantel he saw a love letter she had written to her father.

"How thoughtful of the little darling," he exclaimed. "God knows he'll need it to-night."

He hurried to his own room with the hope that she might have left one for him. He searched his mantel and bureau in vain and had just given up with a sigh when his eye rested on a card fastened over the old-fashioned grate in the fire place. His hand trembled as he read it:

"DEAR JIM:

"I shall miss you dreadfully, in the strange world beyond the seas. When you sit here and look into your fire I hope you'll see the face of your little pal in the picture sometimes.

"HARRIET."

He kissed the card and placed it in his pocket-book.

At night the doctor was not at home. He rapped on his door next morning and got no answer.

The girl said he had spent the night out—she didn't know where.

As Stuart was about to leave for his office the doctor entered. His bloodshot eyes were sunken deep behind his brows, his face haggard and his shoulders drooped. Stuart knew he had tramped the streets all night in a stupor of hopeless misery.

He stared at the young lawyer as if he didn't recognize him and then said feebly:

"Don't go yet, my boy, wait a few moments. I just want to know that you're here."

Stuart took his outstretched hand, and led him into the library. "I know why you tramped the streets; the old house is very lonely."

The father placed his hand on his head, exclaiming:

"I never knew what loneliness meant before!" The big hand fell in a gesture of despair. "It's dark and cold, I'm slipping down into a bottomless pit. There's not a soul in heaven or earth or hell to whom I can cry for help or pity."

Stuart pressed his hand.

"I understand. I'm younger than you, Doctor, but I, too, have walked that way, the *via dolorosa* alone."

The older man glared at him with a wild look in his eyes.

"But you don't understand; that's what's the matter, and I can't tell you. I'm alone, I tell you, alone in a world of cold and darkness."

"No, no," Stuart interrupted soothingly. "You're just all in; you must go to bed and sleep. Go at once, and you'll find something to cheer you in the little girl's room, a love letter for you."

"Yes," he asked, the light slowly returning to his eyes, "a love letter from my baby?"

"I saw it there after she left. Read it and go to sleep. I'll see you to-night."

"Yes, yes, of course, my boy, that's what's the matter with me. I'm just all in for the lack of sleep. I've been raving half the time, I think. I'll go to bed at once."

When Stuart returned early from his work in the afternoon he found a group of forlorn women and children standing beside the stoop. A pale, elfish-looking boy of ten, whose face appeared to be five years older, sat on the lower step crying.

"What's the matter, kiddie?" he asked kindly.

"I wants de doctor—me mudder's sick. She'll croak before mornin' ef he don't come—dey all want him." He waved his little dirty hand toward the others. "He ain't come around no more for a week. The goil says we can't see him, he's asleep."

"I'll tell him you're here. The doctor's been ill himself."

The boy rose quickly and doffed his ragged cap.

"Tank ye, boss."

He urged the doctor to go at once to see his patients. The work he loved would restore his spirits. He was dumfounded at the answer he received.

"Tell them to go away," he said with a frown. "I can't see them to-day. I may never be able to see them again."

"Come, come, Doctor, pull yourself together and go. I'll go with you. It's the best medicine you can take."

He answered angrily:

"No, no! I'm in no mood to work. I couldn't help them. I'd poison and kill them all, feeling as I do to-day. A physician can't heal the sick unless there's healing in his own soul. I'd bring death not life into their homes. Tell them to go away!"

Stuart emptied his pockets of all the money he had in a desperate effort to break their disappointment.

"The doctor's too ill to see you, now," he explained. "He sent this money for you and hopes it will help you over the worst until he can come."

He divided the money among them and they looked at it with dull disappointment. They were glad to get it, but what they needed more than the money was the hope and strength of their friend's presence. They left with dragging feet and Stuart returned to the doctor's room determined not to leave until he knew the secret of his collapse.

From the haggard face and feverish eyes he knew he hadn't slept yet. He had gotten up at one o'clock and dressed. The lunch which the maid had brought to his room was on the table by his bed, untouched.

The young lawyer softly closed the door and sat down. The older man gazed at him in a dull stupor.

"Doctor," Stuart began gently. "I've known you for about fifteen years. You're the only father I've had in this big town, and you've been a good one. You've been acting strangely for the past two weeks. You're in trouble."

"The greatest trouble that can come to any human soul," was the bitter answer.

"Haven't I won the right to your confidence and friendship in such an hour?"

"My trouble, boy, is beyond the help of friends."

"Nonsense," Stuart answered cheerfully. "Shake off the blues. What's wrong? Do you need money?"

The doctor broke into a discordant laugh.

"No. I've just sent Harriet abroad. I've some money laid away that will last a year or two until she is earning a good salary. What gave you the idea?"

The last question he asked with sudden sharp energy.

"Actions that indicate a strain greater than you can bear."

"No, you're mistaken," he answered roughly. "I can bear it all right." He paused and his eyes stared at the ceiling as he groaned: "I've got to bear it; what's the use to whine?"

Stuart stepped close and slipped his arm about the stalwart figure. His voice was tender with a man's deep feeling.

"Come, Doctor, you're not fooling me. I've known you too long. There's only one man on earth for whom I'd do as much as I would for you—my own gray-haired father down South. You've been everything to me one man could be to another during the past fifteen years. You have given me a home, the love of a big tender heart, and the wise counsel of tried friendship. If there's anything that I have and you need, it's yours before you ask it, to the last dollar I possess. Come now—tell me what's the trouble?"

Stuart could feel the big form sway and tremble under the stress of overwhelming emotion, and his arm pressed a little closer. And then the tension suddenly broke.

The doctor sank into a chair and looked up with a helpless stare.

"Yes, Jim, I will—I'll—tell—you."

He gasped and choked, paused, pulled himself together and cried:

"I must tell somebody or jump out of that window and dash my brains out!"

When the paroxysm of emotion had spent itself, he drew a deep sigh and began to speak in broken accents.

"I was in trouble for money, my boy, in the deepest trouble."

"And you didn't let me know!" Stuart interrupted reproachfully.

"How could I? I was proud and sensitive. I had taught you high ideals. How could the teacher come to his pupil and say, 'I've failed.' My theories were beautiful, but they don't work in life. And so I struggled on until I waked one day to find that I was getting old, that I had gone to war to fight other men's battles and had left my loved one at home to perish. The first hideous sense of failure crept over me and paralyzed soul and body with fear. I was becoming a pauper. You see I had always believed that a man who poured out his life for others could not fail. And then I—who had given, given, given, always given my time, my money, my soul, and body—waked to find that I was sucked dry, that I was played out, that I was bankrupt in money, bankrupt in life! The great love I had borne the world suddenly grew faint under the sense of loneliness and failure. And I gave up. I withdrew my suit and determined to throw myself on the generosity of the man who owed his wealth and power to the start I had given him, the man who destroyed my business and wrecked my fortune. He had made me two offers that seemed generous when I recalled them. I judged his character by my own and I went to his house the night of that ball without invitation."

The doctor's voice broke and he paused. And then with the tears streaming down his cheeks unchecked, his accents broken with unrestrained sobs he told the story of his meeting with Bivens, of his abject pleading when he had thrown pride to the winds, of the cruel and brutal taunts, and the last beastly insult when the millionaire boasted of his squandering of millions and rejoiced that he could flaunt this in the face of his suffering and humiliation.

"And then, boy," the broken man moaned, "he left me with a sneer and told me to stroll over his palace and enjoy the evening. That I would find his wife wearing a pearl necklace which cost a half million and jewelled slippers worth enough to finish my baby's education, but that he would see us both to the bottom of hell before I could have one penny."

Again the doctor's voice sank into a strangling sob. When he lifted his head his eyes were glittering with a strange light.

"And then," he went on with quivering voice, "I began to see things red. The lust of blood was beating in every stroke of my heart. In vivid flashes of blasphemous fury I saw life from a new point of view. I began to ask where God lived that such things could be in his world. I saw the bruised bodies of my fellow beings flung before such men as Bivens and ground to dust. I saw the lies that pass for truth, the low fights for gain at the cost of blood and tears, the deeds that laugh at shame and honour, and gloating over it all the brutal glory of success. I determined to kill the little wretch as I would stamp on a snake. And then I saw my baby standing near. My hand grew limp. I felt that I must save her first and then die if need be. I felt for the first time the cunning of the elemental man, the force that gave him food and shelter for himself and babies before the laws of property had come to rule the world. I reached out my hand and took by cunning what belonged to me by right."

Again he paused and looked into Stuart's face with a hopeless stare.

"I—stole—a—case—of—jewels!"

Stuart sprang to his feet with an exclamation of horror.

"You—did—what!"

"Yes," the doctor went on hoarsely. "I stole a case of his jewels, and sent my girl abroad. I'm going to plead guilty now and go to prison. I shall never again lift my head in the haunts of men."

Stuart sobbed in anguish.

"You see, boy, I failed when put to the test. It doesn't make any difference about my reputation. Character only counts, and I'm a thief."

"Shut up!" Stuart cried fiercely, seizing his arm. "Don't say that again and don't talk so loudly. Whatever you did, you were insane when you did it."

"No, I had just failed," the older man insisted in dull tones, "failed in all save one thing. I've done that, at least. And I didn't forget my honour. I used it for my purpose. I did as old Palissy the great mad potter. To get the heat required to perfect his greatest work of art, you know he broke the last piece of furniture in his house and thrust it into his furnace. So I threw my honour into the flames of hell to save my little girl's voice. Maybe it was a mistake. I don't know. I couldn't think then. I only know now that life is impossible any more, and I'm ready to go. You can send me to prison at once, Jim, I'd rather you would do it, for I know that you love me and at least no unkind word will fall from your lips before I receive my sentence. I'll make no fight. I'm glad I don't have to say all this to a stranger. You can send me up the river at once. I'm glad you are the district attorney."

"But I'm not. I resigned my office this morning."

"Resigned?" The doctor asked in dazed surprise.

"Yes, to go into business for myself. I had only another month to serve. You're not going to prison if I can help it."

"But I don't want you to help it. It's the only place to go now—you see, boy, I can't live with myself any more! Besides I'm old and played out; the world don't need me any longer."

"Well, I need you," Stuart broke in, "and you're not going to give up this fight as long as I'm here."

"I'm a failure; it's no use."

"But you've forgotten some things," the younger man said tenderly. "You've helped to make my life what it is—you haven't failed in that. You gave your blood to your country when she needed it—you didn't fail in that. You have forgotten the thousands you have helped, the hope and cheer and inspiration that passed into their lives through yours. Failure sometimes means success. The greatest failure of all the ages perhaps was Jesus Christ. Deserted and denied by his own disciples, scoffed at, spit on and beaten by his enemies, crucified between two thieves, crying in anguish and despair to the God who had forsaken him; yet this friendless crucified peasant who failed, has conquered the world at last."

Stuart paused and looked at the older man sharply.

"Are you listening, Doctor?" he asked, seizing his arm. "Did you hear what I just said to you?"

He turned his head stupidly.

"Hear what? No, I can't hear anything. Jim, except a devil that follows me everywhere, day and night, and whispers in my ear—'thief! thief!' It's no use. I'm done."

"Well I'm not done. I've just begun. You are not going to give up and you're not going to prison. We'll go to Bivens's house to-night. We'll tell him the truth. We'll return the value of his jewels. I'll get the money to make good what you owe him——" his voice broke.

"Oh, why, why, why didn't you let me know; but what's the use to ask, it's done now!"

"Yes, it's done and it can't be undone," the older man interrupted hopelessly.

"But it can and it will be undone. I've influence with Bivens. He'll drop the matter and no one on earth will know save we three. You can go on with your work among the poor and I'll help you."

"But you don't understand, Jim," the broken man protested, feebly. "I tell you I've given up. I can't take your money, I can't pay. I tell you I've given up. I can't take your money. I can't pay it back."

"You can pay it back, too, if you like. Harriet will be earning thousands of dollars in a few years. Her success is sure."

A faint smile lighted the father's face.

"Her success *is* sure, isn't it?" he asked with the eagerness of a child. And then the smile slowly faded.

"But I shall not be here to see it."

"Yes you will. I'm running your affairs now, and you've got to do what I say. Get ready. We are going to see Bivens."

"I'll do it if you say so, boy," the doctor answered feebly, "but it's no use. He'll prosecute me to the limit of the law."

"He'll do nothing of the kind."

"He will—I know him."

Bivens refused point blank at first to see Woodman and ordered his servant to put him out of the house and ask Stuart to remain for a conference.

Stuart drew from his case a card and wrote a message to Nan.

"Imperative that I see Cal at once in the presence of my friend on a matter of grave importance. Please send him down. He is stubborn."

He handed it to the servant and said:

"Take that to Mrs. Bivens."

Bivens came in a few minutes, shook hands cordially with Stuart and ignored Woodman.

"I want to see you alone with the doctor," the young lawyer began, "where we can not possibly be overheard."

The financier's keen eyes looked piercingly from one to the other, and he said curtly:

"I have nothing to say to this man, but for your sake, all right. Come up to the library."

Once in the room and the door closed the doctor sank listlessly into a chair, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. His deep, sunken, bloodshot eyes were turned within. The outer world no longer made any impression.

Stuart plunged at once into his mission.

"Cal, you and I have been friends since boyhood. I'm going to ask my first favour of you to-night."

"For yourself, all right; you've got the answer before you ask it."

"We can't separate our lives from our friends, and I owe much in mine to the man for whom I'm going to speak."

"If you've come to ask me to settle with old Woodman for any imaginary claim he has, you're wasting your breath. I won't hear it. So cut it!"

Bivens spoke with quick fierce energy. His words fell sharp and metallic.

"I'm not asking you to settle any old imaginary claim," the young lawyer went on rapidly, "but a new one that can only appeal to the best that's in you."

"A new one?" Bivens cried in surprise.

"Yes. I needn't recall what passed between you and the doctor the night of the ball."

"No, I've quite a clear recollection of it," Bivens answered grimly.

"Let it be enough to say that the torture you inflicted and the sights he saw in your house drove him insane. Hungry, wretched, in despair over his misfortunes and the promise he had given his daughter, whom he loved better than life, in a moment of madness he took a case of your jewels."

"He took that case of jewels?" Bivens cried with excitement.

"Yes."

The little financier broke into a peal of laughter, walked over to the chair where the doctor sat, thrust his hands into his pockets and continued to laugh.

"So, that's what you meant by laughing and sneering in my face as you left that night, you d—d old hypocrite!"

Stuart suddenly gripped Bivens and spun him around in his tracks.

"That will do now! The doctor is my friend. He's an old broken man to-night and he's

under my protection. He came here at my suggestion and against his protest. I won't stand for this."

"I'll say what I please to a thief."

"Not this one."

Stuart faced the little dark man with a dangerous gleam in his eye. The two men glared at each other for a moment and Bivens threw up his hands in a gesture of disgust.

"Well, what did you come for? To ask me to give him a pension for robbing me of a case of jewels? I've accused every drunken servant in the house of the act. Shall I send one of them to the penitentiary and give the real thief a medal for his skill?"

"I only ask that you allow me to return the value of your jewels and drop the whole affair."

Bivens's eyes narrowed and his mouth tightened viciously.

"Can the District Attorney of the County of New York compound a felony?"

"I resigned my office this morning."

Bivens tried to seize Stuart's hand, forgetting for a moment the jewels in the bigger announcement which meant the acceptance of his offer.

He spoke in low excited tones.

"Congratulations!"

Stuart waved aside the extended hand with a gesture of annoyance.

"You'll drop this case, of course, at my request?"

Bivens looked at the bowed figure crouching in forlorn indifference before him with a smile and replied quickly:

"I will not."

"I told you I'd make good the amount to-morrow morning."

"What the devil do you suppose I want with your money? Five thousand dollars is no more to me than five cents to the average man."

He paused, laughed and again stared at the bowed figure.

"I've waited a long time, old man, but I've got you where I want you now."

The doctor never lifted his head or moved a muscle. His eyes were fixed in a senseless stare. Only the body was present. The soul was gone.

"I say I've got you now!" Bivens repeated angrily. "Did you hear me?"

Stuart spoke in low tones:

"My God, Cal, can't you see."

"Five thousand!" Bivens cried exultantly—"It's too easy! The day I see him in a suit of stripes—I've never done such a thing—but I'm going to take a day off and get drunk."

"You are not going to prosecute him?"—Stuart asked incredulously.

"As soon as I can telephone for an officer."

"You don't mean it?"

"Don't I?" The little man spoke fiercely, his black eyes glowing, his hands trembling as they opened and closed as an eagle's claws.

"Look here, Cal."

"It's no use Jim, this is my affair."

"You've asked me to share your affairs."

"Not this one."

"Then to hell with you and all your affairs! I'll fight you to the last ditch"—Stuart's words rang with fierce decision.

Bivens looked at him in amazement.

"What! For this old fool you'd reject my offer?"

"Yes."

"It's a joke! I see you doing it. Defend him if you like. I'll have good lawyers. I'll enjoy the little scrap. A fight between us in public just now will be all the better for my first big plans. I'll send him to Sing Sing if it costs me a million!"

Stuart lifted the doctor from his seat and faced Bivens with a look of defiance. "You needn't trouble for a warrant. He pleads guilty. Your lawyers can fix the day for his sentence and I want you to be there."

"I'll be there, don't you worry!"

"And, Bivens, as you're a good church member, you might read over that passage of scripture: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord?'"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I'm going to show you that you're not Almighty God though you are the possessor of a hundred million dollars."

"I'll be present at the demonstration, Jim. Good night!"

CHAPTER XXI

A PLEA FOR JUSTICE

Stuart was not surprised to receive notice from Bivens's lawyers that they would demand sentence on Woodman within two days.

The financier was present with two great lawyers who smilingly assured him that he need have no fear as to the result. Yet the little man was uneasy. He fidgeted in his seat and watched Stuart's calm serious face with dread.

"Don't worry," the senior counsel assured him with confidence. "The old Recorder is a terror to every criminal in New York. Stuart's plea can only be a formal request for mercy, which he will not get."

In spite of all assurance, Bivens's nervousness increased as the hour drew near for the case to be called. He looked at his watch, fuming over the fact that Nan was late. He wished her to see Stuart and find out what he had up his sleeve. A woman could do such tricks better than a man. He looked out the window anxiously, and saw the flash of his big French limousine rounding the corner. He hurried to the steps to meet his wife.

"Nan, for heaven's sake see Jim before this case is called and find out what he's going to say to that judge."

"I'll do my best. I'll send my card in and ask him to see me at once."

"Good. When he returns to the court room wait, and I'll come out."

Bivens went back to his seat beside his lawyers and watched the court officer speak to Stuart.

He frowned and hesitated, rose and slowly followed the man through the door.

Nan seized his hand.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so worried. Cal says you are going to make a desperate fight against him this morning in this disgusting affair. Is it so?"

"I'm going to make the usual plea for mercy for an old broken man—my friend."

"But will it be the usual plea?"

"I'm not going to mince words. I'm going to fight for his life as I would for my own."

The woman drew close, so close he could feel her breath on his cheek as she whispered, earnestly:

"Please, don't do or say anything to-day to cause a break. I couldn't endure it. You don't know how much your friendship means to me."

"You can never lose that again, Nan," he answered, simply.

"But I must see you. Your visits are the brightest spots in my life. A break with him now would plunge me into abject misery. What are you going to say? Are you going to attack Cal? You don't have to do that, Jim! Promise me you won't, for my sake, if you care nothing for the brilliant future that is just opening before you. You do care something for me in spite of all the wrong I have done you in the past."

The young lawyer remained silent.

"Promise me," she pleaded tenderly, a tear stealing into her dark eyes.

"I'm going to do my level best for my old friend, Nan," he answered with dogged determination. "You needn't worry about your husband. He has the hide of a rhinoceros and nothing I can say will get under his skin."

"But that's just the trouble, Jim, it will. If any other man said it, no; but from you it will cut deeper than you can realize. You are the one man who can hurt him beyond forgiveness, because you're the one man on earth for whom he really cares."

"It will be all right, Nan. Men know how to give and take hard knocks and still be friends. We challenged each other to this duel when there was no other way."

"I never saw him so bent on any one thing in my life. His hatred of Woodman is a mania."

"I'm sorry—I'm fighting for my old friend's life. He wouldn't live in a prison a year. And I'm fighting for the life of his little girl who loves and believes in him as she believes in the goodness of God. If her father is branded a felon, it will kill her."

Nan tried to speak again and her voice failed. At last she said:

"Well, I'm going to sit where I can look straight into your face and if you say or do one thing that will destroy our friendship or ruin your future I shall scream—I know it!"

Stuart smiled and pressed her hand.

"You've too much good sense and self-control for that. I'll risk it. Now I must hurry. Our case will be called in a few minutes."

He turned abruptly and left her.

In a moment Bivens came out and led his wife to a seat which had been reserved near his.

One of the things which had increased Bivens's nervousness was the fact that the judge ignored his presence in the court room. He had been accustomed to deference from judges. Here was a new thing under the sun—a judge in an insignificant city court who coolly sat on the bench before him for an hour, sentencing criminals, and never even glanced in his direction. Evidently the man didn't know him. It was amazing, this ignorance of the average New Yorker.

The truth, of course, was the old-fashioned Recorder had not been trained as a corporation lawyer. He had fought his own way up in politics from the ranks of the common people. He was a man with red blood in his veins, a man of intense personal likes and dislikes and a fearless dispenser of what he believed to be even-handed justice under the law.

Stuart had based his plan of battle squarely on his knowledge of this judge's character.

As Bivens listened to the sharp ring of his voice pronouncing sentence on evil-doers and saw the officer snap his handcuffs on their wrists his spirits revived. His lawyers were right, after all. Nothing Stuart could say would affect the mind of such a man.

The young lawyer sat in silence beside the bowed form, awaiting his case which the judge, at his request, had placed last. As the moment drew near for the plea his nerve-tension grew intense. Waves of passionate emotion swept his heart. His imagination began to blaze with fires of eloquence that had been his birthright from two generations of great lawyers in the South. Somehow this morning the scene before him stirred his spirit with unusual power. Every crime apparently on the calendar had its origin in the lust for money. Every felon sentenced could have traced his ruin to this curse—thieves, embezzlers, burglars, a man who had killed his partner in a dispute over money, grafters, highwaymen, and last of all, two fallen women who had been amassing a fortune out of the ruin of their sisters.

The figures in the court room grew dim and faded, and out of the mists of the spirit world his excited fancy saw a crooked Red Shape rise over all, stretch forth a long bony hand dripping with blood and filth and begin to throw gold into a black bag. The face was hideous, but a crowd of worshipful admirers followed eagerly in the footsteps of the Red Shape, scrambling and fighting for the coins that slipped through the dripping fingers.

He waked from his day dream with a start, to hear the clerk read in quick tones:

"The People against Henry Woodman."

The judge looked at the dazed prisoner and said:

"What have you to say, Henry Woodman, why sentence should not be imposed upon you for the crime of which you stand convicted by your own plea?"

With a quick movement of his tall figure Stuart was on his feet, every nerve and muscle strung to the highest tension. His long sinewy hands were trembling so violently he could scarcely hold the slip of paper containing the notes he had scrawled for guidance in his address. And yet when he spoke it was with apparent calmness. Only the deep tremulous notes of his voice betrayed his emotion.

"May it please your honour," he slowly began, "I wish to establish to the court before I say anything in behalf of my client, the important fact that he offered to make full restitution of the property taken, that he did this voluntarily before he was even suspected of the crime, and that his offer was refused."

The judge turned to Bivens's lawyers.

"Is this admitted, gentlemen?"

"Without question, your honour," was the instant answer.

The old Recorder lifted his gray eyebrows in surprise, and settled back into his seat with a low grunt.

"I make the fair inference therefore in the beginning," Stuart went on evenly, "that the prosecutor in the case, who appears in this court to-day with an array of distinguished lawyers, whose presence is unnecessary to serve the ends of justice, is here actuated solely by a desire for personal vengeance."

Stuart paused and Bivens moved uneasily in his seat.

"I speak to-day, your honour, in behalf of the man who crouches by my side overwhelmed with shame and grief and conscious dishonour because he took a paltry package of jewellery from a man who has never added one penny to the wealth of the world and yet has somehow gotten possession of one hundred million dollars from those who could not defend themselves from his strength and cunning. This man stands before you now with no shame in his soul, no tears on his cheeks, and with brazen effrontery demands vengeance on a weaker brother.

"Two men are on trial, not one. The majesty of the law has already been vindicated in the tear-stained plea that has been entered. Between these two men the court must decide.

"I am not here to defend the crime of theft. The law of property has long been omnipotent. But I dare to plead with your honour to-day for the beginning of a new, nobler, higher law of humanity—the law that shall place man above his chattel. I shall not ask for the mercy of a light sentence. I am going to appeal to this court for something bigger, more divine. I am going to ask for justice under the higher law of man, whose divine code is yet unwritten, but whose day is surely dawning."

The judge leaned forward with one hand on his cheek, listening intently to the young lawyer's quivering words. Bivens's face had grown livid with excitement, and he sat staring helplessly at the speaker.

"Crime, your honour, is in the heart of man, not in the act he performs. If I shoot at a target, and kill a bystander, the act is not murder. But if I aim at my enemy and kill my friend I have committed murder. Out of the heart are the issues of life. Under the laws of to-day the act of this man is called a crime. Yet who can say that when we shall have slowly emerged from the era of property into the era of man, his act may not be called heroic? Morals are relative things. They are based on the experiences and faith of the generations which express them. Men were once hanged for daring to express an opinion contrary to that held by their parish priest. Such men are to-day the leaders of the world. The proud and cruel silence of ancient Europe has been succeeded by the universal cry for equal justice. And this rising chorus of the world is fast swelling into the deep soul conviction which cries: 'I will not make money out of my brother who is

hungry. I refuse to be happy while my sister weeps in shame. I will not caress my own child while that of my neighbour starves!

"I am not excusing crime. I am crying for the equality of man before the law. The English people beheaded their king because he imposed taxes without the consent of their parliament.

"The millionaire who demands vengeance against this broken man to-day has an income greater than the combined crowned heads of Europe and wields a sceptre mightier than czar or emperor.

"Why?

"He levies each year millions of taxes without consulting this court, the legislature or any man who walks the earth. He does this by a machine for printing paper-tokens of value called stocks. The essence of theft is to take the property of another without giving a return. A green goods man sells printed paper for money. This mighty man also sells printed paper for money. What is the difference? Neither the green goods, nor the bogus capital called watered stock represents a dollar in real value. Yet we send the green goods man to the penitentiary and bow down before the other as a captain of industry!

"A burglar breaks into a store and robs the safe. A mighty man of money breaks into the management of a corporation which owns an iron mill employing thousands. He shuts down the plant, throws one hundred thousand people into want, passes the dividend, drives the stock down to a few cents on the dollar, buys it for a song from the ruined holders, starts up the mill again and *makes* five millions! That is to say, he broke into a mill and robbed the safe of five millions. We send the burglar to the penitentiary and hail the manipulator of this stock as a Napoleon of Finance. I am not justifying crime. I demand the enforcement of equal justice among men.

"An enraged Italian stabs his enemy to death. The act is murder. This man corners wheat. Puts up the price of bread a cent a loaf and kills ten thousand children already half-starved from insufficient food. We electrocute the Italian and print pictures of the wheat speculator in our magazines as an example of Success.

"In other words, the theft of five thousand dollars is grand larceny. The theft of five millions, stained with human blood, is a triumph of business genius.

"But one answer is heard, 'am I my brother's keeper?'

"The man who asks that question will always kill his brother if the temptation comes at the right moment.

"A loaf of bread in England costs two and one-half cents. The same loaf here costs five cents. Who voted to levy a tax of one hundred per cent. on every man's loaf of bread? Kings were beheaded for less than this. Why has the cost of living increased to the point of crushing the average consumer? Because the irresponsible rulers of the people have piled their bogus debts of printed paper on their backs. The lowest estimate of this bogus capital of green goods stock is five times the sum of the National debt. And yet not one of these great thieves has ever been punished.

"Our brutal ancestors lived by raiding their neighbours. Their armed bands of hired retainers ravaged, burned, pillaged—the strong against the weak, the shrewd against the simple, the powerful against the defenseless. The power of those savages was purely physical. The power we give to their modern prototype is both physical and moral. They kill the body and poison the souls of the living. The older savage made raids for the necessities of life. We permit the raiders to play their murderous game for the sheer sport of the exercise.

"The man who lives to serve his fellow-man, the artist who creates beauty, the philosopher who inspires the mind, the statesman who adds a new law to our social structure, the inventor who conquers nature, the workingman who incarnates the dreams of thinkers into spiritualized matter—these men all add to the wealth of the world; but this modern marauder whom we have enthroned as our ruler everywhere, from everyone, seizes, tears, and despoils the fruits of toil, and has never added a penny to the wealth of humanity.

"And what do we find him doing? In the midst of poverty that means hunger and nakedness, disease and death, we have the shameless flaunting of insane luxury. And to what purpose? To challenge the envy of the vain and the foolish, to dazzle the minds of the poor and inflame the lusts of the criminal.

"Do we believe that such things are the decrees of a just and loving God who created this world? Slavery, Polygamy, Famine, and Plague were once universal scourges and accepted as the mysterious ways of God. We have outgrown them all and created a new and nobler God. We find that these things are not the results of his law, but the results

of the violation of law."

The speaker paused, drew close to the judge and then in low impassioned tones told as if he were talking to a father the story of Woodman's life and the events which drove him to madness on the fatal night of his crime. In flashes of vivid eloquence he described the magnificent ball and drew in sombre heart-breaking contrast the desolation and despair of a proud and sensitive man made desperate by want and ruin, the man who had given his blood to his country and his daily life in an unselfish ministry to the homeless and friendless.

"I do not ask of your honour," he cried in ringing tones, "the repeal of the law against theft—thou shalt not steal! This law, old as the human race, will be as good a thousand years from to-day as it was a thousand years ago. I only ask the suspension of its penalty on this heart-broken man until we can extend it to his oppressors as well, until its thunder shall also echo through the palaces of the rich—*thou* shalt not steal!

"The prosecution is enforcing the law, I grant. I appeal to this court to-day for more than man's law. I ask for divine justice. I ask for a bigger thing than the law itself—the equality of all men before the law!

"The possession of millions may not constitute true wealth, but it always means power over men. The thing which seems to be wealth may be, 'tis true, 'but the gilded index of far-reaching ruin, a wrecker's handful of coin gleaned from a beach whose false light has beguiled an argosy, a camp follower's bundle of rags from the breast of goodly soldier dead, the purchase price of potter's fields', but it still means the power of life and death over men!

"The man who has fallen was weak and poor. The man who demands his life is rich and powerful. You are the judge between them. The man who fell stood alone grappling Death and Hell, fought and lost his battle once. I appeal, your honour, to the higher law of the soul within you, within me, within this prisoner, within the breast even of his enemy—through struggle alone we triumph at last! I ask for a heartbroken man another chance. I ask this court to suspend all sentence against the poor bruised and bleeding spirit that lies in tears at our feet to-day."

Stuart suddenly sat down amid a silence that was painful. A woman's sob at last broke the stillness.

The judge wheeled in his armchair, cleared his throat and looked out of the window to hide from the crowd a tear that had stolen down his furrowed cheek.

He turned at length to Bivens's lawyers and quietly asked:

"The State insists on the enforcement of sentence without mercy?"

"Absolutely," was the sharp answer.

"This is your desire, Mr. Bivens?" the judge asked with some severity.

"Yes," the financier fiercely replied.

"And yet you say that you are a Christian—well, see to it—your Master says:

"'He that saith I love God and hateth his brother is a liar.' Henry Woodman, stand up!"

"The judgment of this court is that sentence in your case be suspended so long as you obey the law."

A murmur of applause rippled the crowd, and a muttered oath fell from Bivens's livid lips.

"And I may say to you, Henry Woodman, that my faith is profound that you will never appear in this court again. And if you ever need the help of a friend you'll find one if you come to me. You are a free man."

Stuart hurried the doctor out of the crowd. He had important work yet to do. He determined that no story of the scene should ever be printed in a New York paper. He would save Harriet that, too.

As the court adjourned Bivens cursed his lawyers in a paroxysm of helpless rage.

"Why didn't you appeal?" he stormed.

"There is no appeal. The case is ended."

"Ended!" The financier gasped.

"Ended."

Bivens suddenly threw his hand to his forehead, staggered and sank to the floor.

A doctor who was near rushed to his side and lifted his head into his wife's arms.

"What is it? Has he fainted, doctor?" she whispered, glancing toward the door through which Stuart had just passed.

"He has had a stroke of paralysis, Madam, I fear," was the serious answer.

Book 3 – The Flower

CHAPTER I

THE DEVIL SMILES

Stuart's appeal to the New York papers in behalf of Harriet was successful. For a week he bought every morning and evening edition and read them eagerly. Not a line appeared to darken the life of his little pal.

Bivens's illness shook the financial world. The men who had professed his friendship most loudly to his face now sharpened their knives for his wounded body. Every stock with which his name was linked was the target of the most savage attacks. The tumbling of values in his securities carried down the whole market from five to six points in a single day.

The great palace that had a few nights before blazed with lights and echoed with music, laughter, song and dance and clinking glasses, stood dark and silent behind its bristling iron fence.

Of all the fawning crowd that had thronged its portals to drink the wine and toast the greatness of its master, not one was his friend to-day. Each sycophant of yesterday was now a wolf prowling in the shadows, awaiting the chance to tear his wounded body.

Within the darkened palace the doctors were supreme. In his great library they held consultation after consultation and secretly smiled when they thought of the figures they would write on his bills. They disagreed in details, but all agreed on the main conclusion—that the only hope was that he should quit work and play for several years.

When they made this solemn announcement to Bivens, he smiled for the first time. It was too good a joke. How could he play? He knew but one game, the big game of the man-hunt! He told his doctors politely but firmly that they might go to hell, he would go to Europe and see if there were doctors over there who knew anything.

The shaking miserable little figure staggered up the gang plank of a steamer. He made a brave show of strength to the reporters who swarmed about him for an interview and collapsed in the arms of his wife on reaching his staterooms.

He had forgotten his resentment on account of Woodman in the presence of the Great Terror, whose shadow had suddenly darkened the world, and clung with pathetic eagerness to Stuart's friendship.

The young lawyer had said good-bye to Nan with a sense of profound relief. From the bottom of his soul he thanked God she was going. It had been impossible to keep away from her, and each day he had felt the sheer physical magnetism of her presence more and more resistless.

He returned with renewed energy and enthusiasm to the practice of law. The wide fame he had achieved as district attorney brought him the best clients and from them he was able to choose only the cases which involved principles worth fighting for.

His spare time he gave in a loving effort to restore the doctor to his old cheerful frame of mind. He had returned Bivens's money in spite of his protest and made his old friend a loan sufficient for his needs, taking his personal note for security.

He had no difficulty in learning the progress of Bivens in his search of Europe for health.

A troop of reporters followed him daily. His doings were chronicled with more minute details than the movements of kings. If he sneezed, it was cabled to America. In every capital of the Old World he was received with what amounted to royal honours. His opinions were eagerly sought by reigning sovereigns. The daily cabled reports to New York always gave his condition as better.

But Stuart knew the truth. He received two or three letters a week from Nan. She had told him in full detail the little man's suffering, and at last of his homesickness, fast developing into a mania.

He was not surprised at the end of three months to hear her familiar voice over his telephone.

"Yes, we've returned, Jim—sailed incognito to escape the reporters. He is very feeble. We haven't been in the house three hours, but he has asked for you a dozen times. Can you come up at once?"

Stuart hesitated and she went on rapidly.

"Please come without delay. I promised him not to leave the 'phone until I got you. You will come?"

"Yes, I'll come," he answered slowly.

He hung up the receiver with a groan.

"It's Fate!" he said bitterly. "Every time I feel that I'm fighting my way to a place of safety, the devil bobs up serenely with an excuse so perfect it can't be denied. It won't do; I'll tear my tongue out sooner than speak."

He repeated these resolutions over and over before reaching the Bivens mansion only to find that he had lost all sense of danger in the warmth and tenderness of Nan's greeting. He not only forgot his fears but reproached himself for his low estimate of her character in supposing that she would allow herself or permit him to cross the line of danger. Her solicitude for Bivens seemed deep and genuine.

"For Heaven's sake, Jim," she begged, "try to cheer him up. He has grown to feel that you are the only real friend he has ever known."

"I'll do my best," he answered, soberly.

Bivens's joy at meeting Stuart was pathetic, and moved him deeply. He was surprised to find him so strong, apparently, in body and yet so broken in spirit.

"Lord, it's good to look into your face again, Jim! You know I haven't seen you really since that day in court when you gave me such a cussin'. But it was all in your day's work. It hurt for the minute, but I didn't blame you when I thought it over. Now I'm up against the biggest thing I've ever struck." His voice sank to a half sob. "Death! I can feel his hand on my throat, but I'm going to fight; I've got to get well."

The little shrunken hand clung to his friend's.

"You know I felt the thing creeping on me for the past two years, but I couldn't let up. That's why I tried so hard to put some of the load on your shoulders. At least you can help me to get well. To the devil with the doctors! I'm tired, too, of all the sycophants, liars and fools who hang around. I didn't mind 'em when I was well. But they get on my nerves now. The doctors kept dinning into my ears that I've got to rest and play and finally one old duffer over in France put an idea into my head that brought me back home to see you. He told me to get on a small boat with a single nurse and a congenial friend, get away from land, cut every telephone and telegraph line, get no mail, and shoot ducks all winter and he'd guarantee I'd be a new man next spring. I took to the idea. He charged me two dollars for the visit. I paid him a hundred for his advice. He nearly dropped dead in surprise. I thought it was from gratitude, but found afterward it was from chagrin over not knowing I was an American millionaire. He had missed the opportunity of his life. He would undoubtedly have charged me five hundred had he known who I was."

Stuart laughed.

"Well, the upshot of it is, I'm here, and I've sent for you to accept the invitation you gave me to shoot ducks with you down in Virginia."

"What invitation?" Stuart asked in surprise.

"Why, the one you used to reproach me for not accepting. Will you go with me now?"

Stuart shook his head.

"I can't go," he said slowly.

He was looking vaguely into the fire in the grate, but Nan's figure was within the line of his vision as she stood silently by the window gazing out on the river. Bivens hadn't said that she must go on that trip, but in a flash of warning intuition he knew it. The danger of such a situation on a yacht would be real and only a fool would rush into it. He wondered if she had played any part in hatching the scheme. He couldn't believe it possible. It had come about naturally, just as if the devil had made it to order.

"Can't go? Why?" the financier asked in tones of genuine distress.

"I've important legal business."

"I'll make good all the damages, if you'll let me."

"But I won't let you."

"If I ask it as a special favour?" he pleaded.

"There's no use in my going, Cal," Stuart said persuasively, "I can tell you exactly where to go, the guides to get, and the kind of boats you'll need. You'll get along better without than with me."

"I won't go without you," the financier said peevishly.

"But why?"

"Dozens of reasons. You know the place, you know all about the birds, you can teach me the ins and outs of the business and I can trust you. I know that you won't try to worm out of me any information my enemies would like to know. Besides, Jim, you're a friend. It would rest and help me to be with you on such a trip. I can't offer you money, you won't let me. All right. I appeal to the boy I used to know at college, the fellow who fought for me one day. I need you worse now, old man."

Stuart hesitated and looked at Nan who had stood motionless while Bivens spoke.

"Well, if that's the way you put it, I'll take a vacation and go with you for a month."

Bivens seized his hand and pressed it gratefully.

"Best medicine I've had in weeks."

Nan walked slowly across the room, looked into his eyes and said, with emotion:

"Thank you, Jim."

And the devil who was standing in the shadows smiled in anticipation of interesting events on board that yacht.

CHAPTER II

BESIDE BEAUTIFUL WATERS

In five days the party had completed all preparations and Bivens's big steamer, the *Buccaneer*, slipped quietly through the Narrows and headed for the Virginia coast, towing a trim little schooner built for cruising in the shoal waters of the South.

They had scarcely put to sea when Stuart began to curse himself for being led into such a situation.

Bivens had insisted with amateurish enthusiasm that they begin the cruise on the little schooner—with her limited crew and close quarters—at once, and use the *Buccaneer* as her tender. The moment they struck the swell outside Sandy Hook the financier went to bed and the doctor never left his side until the trip ended.

Nan was in magnificent spirits, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling with the joy of a child. Stuart watched her with growing wonder at her eternal youth. She was more

beautiful in her stylish yachting costume than the day she landed in New York, at nineteen. There was not a line in the smooth surface of her rounded neck and shoulders.

The night was one of extraordinary springlike air though it was the fifteenth of December. A gentle breeze was blowing from the south and the full moon flooded the smooth sea with soft silvery radiance. Nan insisted that Stuart sit on deck with her. There was no help for it. Bivens would allow no one except the doctor in his room, and so he resigned himself to the beauty of the glorious scene. Not a sound broke the stillness save the soft ripple of the water about the bow of the swan-like yacht.

Nan sat humming a song, when she suddenly stopped and leaned toward Stuart.

"Jim!" she said, softly.

He looked up with a start.

"I honestly believe you were asleep!" she laughed with a touch of petulance.

"No," he protested seriously. "I was just drinking in the joy of this wonderful night."

"Forgetting that I exist?"

Stuart looked at her intently a moment and said, gravely:

"As if any man who ever knew you, could forget!"

"I don't like your attitude, Jim, and I think we'd better fight it out here and now in the beginning of this trip."

"And what is my offense?"

"Not offense, but defense."

"Why Nan!"

"It's useless to deny it," she said banteringly. "You hesitated to come on deck with me in the moonlight this evening. You've kept trotting to Cal's stateroom, when he only begs to be let alone."

"Honestly——"

"It's no use to shuffle. I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. Your assumption of such chilling virtue is insulting. I wish an apology and a promise never to do so again."

"Have I really made you feel this?" he asked, contritely.

"You have, and feel it keenly. Let's come to an understanding. You and I both live in glass houses set on a very high hill. No matter what may be the secrets of my heart, I'm not a fool and you can trust my good sense."

Stuart pressed her hand, and said gently:

"I'm awfully sorry if I've made such an ass of myself that you have received this impression."

"You repent?"

"In sackcloth and ashes."

"Then I forgive you," she cried, with a laugh, releasing her hand and rising, "but on one condition."

"Name it."

"That from this hour you be your old self, without restraint, and let me be mine."

"I promise faithfully."

"Then, you can help me down that steep companion-way and I'll go to bed."

He held her hand with firm grasp as she picked her way down the steps. Her eyes looked straight into the depths of his as her face almost touched him. He was sure that she had felt the mad impulse to take her in his arms that quivered in every nerve and muscle of his body, for his hand trembled and she smiled.

At her stateroom door she paused, smiled again and said:

"Good night."

His answer was very low.

"Good night."

But he didn't spend a good night. The longer he thought of it the more sinister and dangerous he felt his position. At last he squarely faced the fact that his desire for Nan had increased a hundred-fold by the fact that he had lost her, and that it might become a dangerous mania under the conditions of physical nearness which this little schooner made inevitable.

As he sat in the darkness in his stateroom he could hear every sound in the adjoining one which she occupied as plainly as if the thin panelling of wood were not between them.

He was a fool to be caught in such a trap! His love had been too big and serious a tragedy to end in a vulgar intrigue. There was something painful and stupefying in the spell which she threw over his senses. He realized, too, that she had put him practically at her mercy by the promise he had given. And what made it all the more dangerous was that she was sincere, and apparently sure of herself.

He made up his mind to cut his trip short on some pretext, and in the meantime he would devote himself faithfully to an attempt to start Bivens on the road to a recovery of his shattered health.

At eight o'clock the next morning the black nose of the *Buccaneer* slowly felt her way into Hog Island Inlet on the shores of old Virginia and dropped her anchor in the deep waters of the channel back of the sand spit on which the U.S. Life Saving station is built.

As Stuart stepped on deck a great flock of thousands of brant swept in from sea and pitched on the bar beyond the channel. A cloud of black ducks circled gracefully overhead and slowly spread out on their feeding grounds beyond the brant.

His heart gave a throb of primitive joy. He was a boy again, and the world was young.

"Confound them!" he cried. "I'll show these ducks a trick or two before this trip is over."

He was glad he came. To the devil with worry and women and all the problems of the universe! He watched the flight of the birds for half an hour, entranced with the memories they evoked. He made up his mind to stay the whole month out and get even with them for a hundred bitter disappointments they had given him in the past.

The long gleaming sweep of the Broadwater Bay, stretching from the tip of the Cape Charles peninsula to the mouth of the Delaware, was literally alive with ducks.

Bivens had put him in command of the little schooner and he gave orders at once to lower a tender and tow her to an old anchorage he knew in a little cove behind Gull Marsh.

And then his trouble began with Bivens.

Stuart rushed to his stateroom and described the prospects of a great day in the blinds with boyish enthusiasm. It didn't move Bivens, except to rage.

"Let 'em fly if they want to, I'm not going to budge. Go yourself, Jim."

Stuart was furious, and began to talk to Bivens as if he were a schoolboy.

"Go myself!" he cried with rage. "What do you suppose I gave up my work and came down here a month for?"

"To shoot ducks, of course," the financier answered, politely.

"I came to try to teach you how to live, you fool, and I'm not going without you. Get into your togs! The guides are here and ready. The tide waits for no man, not even a millionaire; it's ebbing now."

"Well, let it ebb, I don't want to stop it!" the sick man snarled.

Nan came in, pressed Stuart's hand as she passed, nodded good morning and joined her voice to Stuart's.

"Come, you must go, Cal. It's a glorious day."

The doctor slipped in a word, too.

"By all means, Mr. Bivens, get your hand in the first day."

Bivens lifted himself to a half-sitting posture, glared at his physician and yelled with

fury:

"Get out—all of you—and let me alone!"

The doctor and Nan left on tip-toe, but Stuart folded his arms and looked at Bivens.

"I'd just like to choke you," he quietly said at last.

Bivens turned on him with rage.

"How dare you speak to me in that manner?"

Stuart broke into a laugh and sat down on the edge of the bed, deliberately fixing him with a contemptuous look.

"Well, of all the gall I've ever encountered—did you say *dare* to me? What do you take me for, one of your servants? If you weren't sick I'd slap you."

"You'd better not try it," the little man growled.

"Oh, come now. Bivens, this is too ridiculous, a quarrel the first day of our shooting. But you'll have to get one thing fixed in your head once for all; you don't run the entire world. The telephone, telegraph and mail service have been suspended. The *Buccaneer* has put to sea for New York. You're on a little eighty-foot schooner, anchored in a bay ten miles wide and a hundred-miles long and I'm in command. I won't stand any nonsense from you. Come down off your perch, quick!"

Bivens started to swear, caught the expression of Stuart's face and suddenly extended his hand.

"I'm sorry, Jim; you must not mind my foolishness. I've had the temper of the devil the last few months, and I'm used to making everybody hop when I get mad. I guess I'm spoiled. Forget it, old boy, go ahead and have a good time by yourself to-day. I'm out of sorts from that sea-sickness. You don't mind what I said?"

"No," Stuart slowly answered, "but don't do it again."

"I won't. It was awfully nice of you to come. I'll stay in to-day, but you go and get some ducks for dinner, like a good boy, and say—take Nan along and teach her to shoot. It's getting to be the rage among the high-flyers for the women to shoot."

"Please do, Jim!" Nan cried from the door. She had listened outside to the duel in the stateroom.

"All right," he answered, gaily, "quick about it. You've got a rig?"

"Yes, a half dozen," she cried, with childish glee. "Come into my stateroom and show me which one to put on to-day."

"Oh, you have one for each day of the week?"

"Yes, of course; why not?"

Stuart stepped gingerly inside and inspected the suits she laid out on her bed.

He turned them over and laughed.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"They're all wrong. These things were made to hunt butterflies in the tropics, not ducks in Virginia."

"Can't I wear either of them?" she asked in dismay.

"If you could get all six of them on, one on top of the other and wear your flannels."

"But I don't wear flannels."

"All right, put on two of these gossamer webs, two heavy sweaters and wrap yourself in oil skins and maybe you won't freeze."

"Must I?" she sighed; "I'll look like a fright."

"What's the difference? You've got to hide from the ducks, anyhow. No one else will stroll down these wide avenues to-day."

"You'll be there."

He dropped his voice instinctively.

"Well, you'll always look the same to me whether you are dressed in silk or cotton bagging."

She looked up quickly with a startled expression, began to say something, changed her mind and spoke in a matter-of-fact voice:

"Then get out and I'll be ready in fifteen minutes."

When she appeared on deck, Stuart sat down and laughed heartily. She had managed to dress herself warmly and yet look pretty as a picture. Her jaunty little hunting hat was tipped with an eagle's feather. She wore a brown sweater of the finest heavy wool over her jacket. The corduroy skirt came to the knees, and she had on the most remarkable pair of wading boots he had ever seen. They were made of brown cloth-covered rubber and cut to the shape of the leg like the old-fashioned leather boots of ancient knights.

Stuart helped her down the gangway and took his seat by her side in the tender. In five minutes they were towed to the blind the old guide had selected for the day's shooting.

The blinds are made of cedar bushes stuck into the mud in such a way that the little gunning boat just fits inside. When the tide ebbs enough for the ducks to reach bottom they come in to feed on their favourite wild celery.

The guide took the tender to keep the ducks moving and left them alone.

He had scarcely gone when a pair of black ducks started for the decoys. Just as they were about to settle, in spite of Stuart's warning, Nan popped her head over the bushes to see where they were.

Quick as a flash they leaped a hundred feet into the air and left for parts unknown at the rate of a hundred miles an hour.

"That's great!" Stuart cried, in disgust.

"I'm sorry, Jim," she said, contritely. "I won't do it again. But, you know, I'm glad they got away after all."

"Yes?"

"Because they were mates; didn't you see the beautiful colours on the drake's head? And what a yell he gave to his girl when he saw me? Aren't you really glad they got away?"

"I am not!" he answered, emphatically. "Don't you dare to do that again."

"I won't, honest. I'll kill the next one myself. Tell me just when to get up; I'll shoot him just like I do a clay pigeon at the trap, without sighting, just by instinct."

"Exactly, but please remember you are not shooting clay pigeons. A duck has an eye that can see the movement of your hand three miles away, remember that—keep your head down, there comes one now!"

"Where?"

"Sh! keep down, I tell you!"

"I am—but where, which side, where is he?"

Again Nan's big dark eyes slowly peered over the top of the blind and the eagle's feather in her hat moved.

With a sharp cry the duck swung out of range and was gone.

"Oh, Jim, I didn't do that. I declare I didn't move! He squawked just for nothing and flew away."

"Yes, of course, he dreamed he saw an eagle after him. Ducks often go to sleep flying and have nightmares."

"I won't do it again, please don't get cross now." She laid her hand on his. He smiled and said nothing.

"You're not angry, Jim?" she asked, peeping around shyly. She was sitting in the front of the boat with her back toward him.

"How could any man get angry at such a wonderful shot. You never cripple them, they just drop at the crack of your gun. I think, however, they die of fright. We will know tonight when we eat them for dinner whether the shot killed them or you just scared them to death."

"Don't be nasty, Jim, I'll let you shoot the very next one. I won't move."

She had scarcely spoken when Stuart seized her arm with a sudden fierce grip.

"Sh—now, as still as death!" he whispered. "Don't you dare move or speak or whisper, or breathe aloud."

"I won't!" Nan groaned, crouching low.

"He's circling the blind, but he's coming in sure," he whispered.

Just then the live decoy goose raised his head, saw his friend in the air, and broke into a shrill cry that rang like a trumpet over the smooth waters of the bay.

Nan sprang to her feet crying:

"It's a goose!"

"Yes, two of them; one right here in the blind!" Stuart laughed.

"No, no! There he goes, Jim! Look, isn't he a big one?"

"A very fine goose, but not nearly so plump and nice as the one we have here."

Nan looked puzzled a moment, blushed and sat down.

"Jim, I think you're awfully mean. He was going the other way when I saw him. I didn't scare him. You know I didn't."

"Certainly not!" was the scornful answer. "He just turned around and went back to pick up a feather he dropped. He'll call again some day."

Nan peeped around to see if he were angry, deliberately rose, turned and sat down on the bow of the boat facing Stuart, smiling at him, mischievously.

"Let's not shoot to-day, Jim!" she pleaded.

"We won't," he answered, dryly.

"You know I think this blind is such a cute little house, with the blue sky above and the still, beautiful waters stretching away into the mists around us; isn't it?"

"Dangerously beautiful to mere mortals, I'm afraid, Nan!" he answered soberly.

"Not if they are sensible, as you and I. Come, you can't be angry to-day. I'm too happy. You don't really care about ducks anyhow, do you? I want to talk. I'm in fairyland alone with the old sweetheart of my girlish dreams! And you're ten times better looking than you were then, Jim."

Stuart broke into a boyish laugh, and gave up to the charm of her chatter.

For hours they sat laughing and joking. The years rolled back, the fevered life of the great city faded, and they were boy and girl again.

As the sun was sinking in a sea of scarlet they were startled by the approach of the tender.

The guide took up the decoys, and made fast their boat to tow them back to the yacht.

His comment on the day's work was brief:

"Great sport!"

He winked at Stuart, grasped the tiller of the tender and signalled to the man at the engine to let her go.

The old man was unusually quiet in the crew's quarters that night. It was nine o'clock before he startled the cook with a sudden remark:

"Gee, but she's a beauty!"

"Who's a beauty?"

"Sometimes he called her 'Nan,' sometimes he called her 'Dianner.'"

"Oh!"

"You know what I'd like to do?"

"No, what?"

"She's so purty, I feel that I want to put out one finger—just like that—and tech her ter see ef she'd fly!"

"Oh, hell!" the cook sneered. "Her wings ain't sprouted yet; wait till you see her riled."

For five days Bivens stuck to his bed with dogged determination, and each day Stuart went out with Nan.

Never had she been more resistlessly charming. With tireless fancy he watched the wind blow the ringlets of black hair across her rosy cheeks, while her deep eyes sparkled with joy. Sometimes he imagined her the daughter of Venus suddenly risen from the sea, the dim roar of whose surf he could hear behind the white sands of the beach. Each day she grew more and more dependent on him, until her whole life seemed to move only at his command. Each day their association grew in tender intimacy and every fear that had stirred his heart at first was lulled at last to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPTER'S VOICE

On the sixth day Bivens rose early and declared that he would try the ducks. The day before had been, in the local vernacular, a "weather breeder"—a day of breathless seas, a soft haze hanging from the sky, a lazy, sensuous, dreamy, alluring tenderness in the air.

The barometer was falling now and dark, snowy-looking clouds were piling up on the western horizon. A breeze came stealing out of the cloud-banks with the chill of snow in its breath.

Bivens insisted on going out at once, against the advice of Stuart and the protest of the guide. He not only insisted on going after the ducks but, what was worse, swore that he was going to get his mail and telegrams from the shore.

Stuart protested vigorously.

"I've told you that the guide is the only man who can run that tender over the crooked course to the mainland, and if he goes away we'll have no one to take us out."

"What do you need a guide for? It's not a half-mile to those blinds. I've seen you every day go back and forth in plain view of the yacht. Nan could row out there and back by herself. Send him ashore. Don't you know how to put out your own decoys?"

He spoke with the stubbornness of a spoiled child.

"If a bad blow comes we'll need two strong men to handle the boat."

"Rot!" Bivens cried. "We've got two tenders. Send your guide ashore with one of the sailors to run his engine. The other man can tow us out and back."

Against his judgment he allowed Bivens to have his way.

The little man clambered on deck and bustled about, giving orders to the sailor who was stowing the lunch and ammunition.

When Stuart stopped the tender at the first blind, about five hundred yards away, Bivens protested.

"Here, here! I'm no mollycoddle if I have been sick. I can throw a stone to this blind. This isn't the one I want. There it is down yonder toward the end of that marsh. I saw thousands of ducks circling around it yesterday."

"But they'll come here to-day," Stuart urged. "The wind has shifted and they shift their course with the wind. This blind is all right."

"I won't have it!" Bivens stormed. "Go to the other!"

"This is all right to-day, I tell you," Stuart replied.

Bivens's face flushed with rage.

"Look here, Jim, I've given in to you every day we've been down here. I'm going to have my way this time."

He turned to the sailor who was running the tender's engine and spoke sharply.

"Go to that other blind!"

The sailor sprang to the wheel and the tender shot ahead. Stuart settled back in his seat with angry disgust, and Bivens laughed.

"Cheer up, it's no use to give orders for a funeral yet. If we can't get back to that yacht in fifteen minutes against any wind that blows to-day, I'll eat my hat. I'm feeling better than I have for months. I'm in for a good time. Don't be a piker."

Stuart determined to make the best of it.

"All right," he answered cheerfully.

"I'll be responsible for any trouble that comes, so don't you worry."

"You're not in New York now, Cal," Stuart said with a grunt. "You may own the earth, but the sea still has a way of its own."

"Good Lord, man, I could walk back to the yacht at low water, it all goes bare."

"Yes, unless the wind hauls in to the northeast and rolls in a big tide through that inlet."

"All right, let her roll. The tender will come back and pull us in."

By the time the decoys were out it began to spit snow, and the wind had freshened.

As the sailor was about to start back, Stuart spoke sharply:

"Listen to me now, Niels."

The Norwegian tipped his cap and stood at attention.

"Yes, sir!"

"Keep a sharp watch on this weather. If you see the wind haul to the north, put a compass in your tender, take your bearing from the yacht to this blind, in case it should shut in thick, and come after us in double-quick time. You understand?"

"Yes sir."

"If it looks bad, don't wait too long."

"I'll watch it, sir," was the prompt response, as he stooped to start his wheel.

"And Niels!" Stuart called again. "If it should be blowing a gale you'd better bring the cook along to steer while you watch your engine. Have him fix a light supper before he starts."

"Aye, aye, sir!" he cried, as the little craft shot away, leaving a streak of white foam in her wake.

Bivens was vastly amused at Stuart's orders.

"Jim, you're as fussy as an old maid. You ought to marry and join the human race."

Stuart scanned the horizon, watching a flock of ducks working their way northward. The sign was ominous. Birds know which way the wind is going to blow before it comes, and if a gale is on the way they always work into the teeth of it. They are all equipped with barometers somewhere inside their little brain-cells.

It was useless to tell this to Bivens. He didn't have sense enough to understand it. But he quietly made up his mind to take up the decoys and row in as soon as the tide ebbed down to two feet of water.

In the meantime he would make the best of the situation. The ducks began to come in and decoy like chickens. He killed half a dozen and in the excitement began to forget the foolhardiness of the trip.

Bivens shot a dozen times, missed, got disgusted and began to fret and complain.

At first Stuart made no answer to his nagging suggestions until Bivens got to the one thing that had evidently been rankling in his heart.

"Jim, you're the biggest puzzle I ever struck. Every time I look at you I have to rub my

eyes to see if I'm awake. Would you mind telling me the mental process by which you rejected my offer?"

"What's the use to discuss it, I've made up my mind—and that's the end of it."

"But I want to know," Bivens persisted. "Your silence on the subject makes me furious every time I think of it. How any human being outside of an insane asylum could be so foolish is beyond my ken."

"I know it is, so let's drop it," Stuart interrupted.

"I won't drop it. You rile me. You're the only man I've struck on this earth that didn't have his price."

"Perhaps we have different ways of fixing values. To me value is a thing which gives life. If it brings death is it valuable? You are not yet fifty years old and a wreck. What's the use? What can you do with your money now?"

"It brings luxury, ease, indulgence, power, admiration, wonder, and the envy of the world."

"What's the good of luxury if you can't enjoy it; ease if you never take it; indulgence when you have lost the capacity to play; power if you're too busy getting more to stop and wield it?"

"Jim, you're the biggest fool I ever knew, without a single exception," Bivens said, petulantly.

Stuart glanced anxiously toward the yacht. It was three o'clock. The tide had ebbed half out and there was barely enough water on the flats now for the tender to cross. It was snowing harder and the wind had begun to inch in toward the north.

"No more ducks to-day, Cal," Stuart said briskly, returning to his tone of friendly comradeship. "We've got to get away from here. It's getting colder every minute. It will be freezing before night."

"Well, let it freeze," Bivens cried, peevishly. "What do we care? It's just ten minutes' run when the tender comes."

To Stuart's joy he saw the men start the tender.

"It's all right, they're coming now!" he exclaimed. "We'll have another crack or two before they get here."

He crouched low in the blind for five minutes without getting a shot, rose and looked for the tender. To his horror he saw her drifting helpless before the wind, her engine stopped and both men waving frantically their signals of distress.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "The tender's engine is broken down."

Bivens rose and looked in the direction Stuart pointed.

"Why don't the fools use the oars?"

"They can't move her against this wind!"

"Will they go to sea?" Bivens asked, with some anxiety.

"No, they'll bring up somewhere on a mud flat or marsh in the bay on this low water, but God help them if they can't fight their way back before flood tide."

"Why?" Bivens asked, incredulously.

"They'd freeze to death in an open boat to-night."

"Norwegian sailors? Bosh! Not on your life! They were born on icebergs."

Stuart rose and looked anxiously at the receding tide. He determined to try to reach the yacht at once. He put the guns into their cases, snapped the lids of the ammunition boxes, stowed the ducks he had killed under the stern of the boat, and stepped out into the shallow, swiftly moving water. He decided to ignore Bivens and regard him as so much junk. He pulled the boat out of the blind, shoved it among the decoys, and took them up quickly while the little financier sat muttering peevish, foolish complaints.

"Now if you will lie down on the stern deck, I'll see if I can shove her."

"Why can't I sit up?" Bivens growled.

"You can, of course, but I can't move this boat against the wind if you do."

"All right, but it's a rotten position to be in and I'm getting cold."

Stuart made no reply, but began to shove the little boat as rapidly as possible across the shallow water.

The snow had ceased to fall and the cold was increasing every moment. He scanned the horizon anxiously, but could see no sign of the disabled tender.

He had gone perhaps two hundred yards when the boat grounded on the flats. He saw at once that it was impossible to make the yacht until flood tide. The safest thing to do was to get out and push to the island marsh, two or three hundred yards away. There they could take exercise enough to keep warm until the tide came in again. It would be a wait of two hours in bitter cold and pitch darkness, but there was no help for it.

Bivens sat up and growled:

"What the devil's the matter? Can't you hurry up, I'm freezing to death!"

"We can't make it on this tide. We'll have to go to the marsh."

"Can't we walk over the flats and let the boat go?"

"I could walk it, but you couldn't."

"Why not?" Bivens asked, angrily.

"Because you haven't the strength. This mud is six inches deep and tough as tar. You'd give out before you'd gone two hundred yards."

"Nothing of the sort!" Bivens protested, viciously. "I'll show you!"

He stepped out of the boat and started wading through the mud. He had made about ten steps when his boot stuck fast, he reeled and fell. The water was less than six inches deep but his arms were wet to the skin as far as the elbows, and the icy water got into his boots and drenched his feet.

Stuart picked him up without comment and led him back to the boat. Bivens was about to climb in when the lawyer spoke quickly:

"You can't sit down now. You've got to keep your body in motion or you'll freeze. Take hold of the stern of the boat and shove her."

Muttering incoherent curses the little man obeyed while his friend walked in front, pulling on the bow line.

In fifteen minutes they reached the marsh and began the dreary tramp of two hours until the tide should rise high enough to float their boat again.

"Why can't we walk along this marsh all the way to where the yacht lies?" Bivens asked, fretfully. "We can fire a gun and the doctor can help us on board."

"We can't go without the boat. The marsh is a string of islands cut by three creeks. The doctor has no way to get to us. Both tenders are gone."

Stuart kept Bivens moving just fast enough to maintain the warmth of his body without dangerous exhaustion.

The wait was shorter than expected. The tide suddenly ceased to run ebb and began to come in. The reason was an ominous one. The wind had hauled squarely into the north and increased its velocity to forty miles an hour and each moment the cold grew more terrible. Stuart found the little boat afloat on the flood tide, jumped in without delay and began his desperate battle against wind and tide.

It was absolutely necessary for Bivens to keep his body in motion, so Stuart gave him an oar, and ordered him to get on his knees and help shove her ahead. He knew it was impossible for him to keep his feet.

Bivens tried to do as he was told and made a mess of it. He merely succeeded in shoving the boat around in a circle, preventing Stuart from making any headway.

"What's the matter?" Bivens yelled above the howl of the wind. "You're pushing against me, just spinning around. Why don't you keep her straight?"

Stuart saw they could never make headway by that method, turned and shot back into the marsh.

"Get out!" he shouted sternly. "You can walk along the edge—I can shove her alone."

Bivens grumbled, but did as he was ordered.

"Don't you leave the edge of that marsh ten feet!" Stuart shouted, cheerfully. "I think we'll make it now."

"All right," was the sullen answer.

It was a question whether one man had the strength to shove the little boat through the icy, roaring waters and keep her off the shore. He did it successfully for a hundred yards and the wind and sea became so fierce he was driven in and could make no headway. He called Bivens, gave him an oar and made him walk in the edge of the water and hold the boat off while he placed his oar on the mud bottom and pushed with might and main to drive her ahead.

Again and again he was on the point of giving up the struggle. It seemed utterly hopeless.

It took two hours of desperate battling to make half a mile through the white, blinding, freezing, roaring waters.

The yacht now lay but three hundred feet away from the edge of the marsh. Stuart could see her snow-white side glistening in the phosphorescent waves as they swept by her. The lights were gleaming from her windows and he could see Nan's figure pass in the cabin.

As he stood resting a moment before he made the most difficult effort of all to row the last hundred yards dead to the windward, he caught the faint notes of the piano. She was playing, utterly unconscious of the tragic situation in which the two men stood but a hundred yards away. The little schooner was still aground resting easily on her flat bottom in the mud, where the tide had left her as it ebbed. Unless she went on deck, it was impossible for Nan to realize the pressure of the wind.

She was playing one of the dreamy waltzes to which she had danced amid the splendours of her great ball.

The music came over the icy waters accompanied by the moan and shriek of the wind through the rigging with unearthly weird effect.

"Say, why do we stop so much?" Bivens growled. "I'm freezing to death. Let's get to that yacht!"

"We'll do our best," Stuart answered gravely, "and if you know how to pray now's your time."

"Oh, Tommyrot!" Bivens said, contemptuously, "I can throw a stone to her from here."

"Get in!" Stuart commanded, "And lie down again flat on your back."

Bivens obeyed and the desperate fight began.

He made the first few strokes with his oars successfully and cleared the shore, only to be driven back against it with a crash. A wave swept over the little craft dashing its freezing waters into their faces.

Stuart drew his hand across his forehead and found to his horror the water was freezing before he could wipe it off.

He grasped Bivens's hands and found a cake of ice on his wrist. He shoved the boat's nose again into the wind and pulled on his oars with a steady, desperate stroke, and she shot ahead. For five minutes he held her head into the sea and gained a few yards. He set his feet firmly against the oak timbers in the boat's side and began to lengthen his quick, powerful stroke. He found to his joy he was making headway. He looked over his shoulder and saw that he was half way. He couldn't be more than a hundred and fifty feet and yet he didn't seem to be getting any nearer. It was now or never. He bent to his oars with the last ounce of reserve power in his tall sinewy frame, and the next moment an oar snapped, the boat spun round like a top and in a minute was hurled back helpless on the marsh.

As the sea dashed over her again Bivens looked up stupidly and growled:

"Why the devil don't you keep her straight?"

Stuart sprang out and pulled the numbed man to his feet, half dragged and lifted him ashore.

"Here, here, wake up!" he shouted in his ear. "Get a move on you, or you're a goner." He began to rub Bivens's ice-clad wrists and hands, and the little man snatched them away angrily.

"Stop it!" he snarled. "My hands are not cold now."

"No, they're freezing," he answered as he started across the marsh in a dog trot, pulling Bivens after him. The little man stood it for a hundred yards, suddenly tore himself loose and angrily faced his companion.

"Say, suppose you attend to your own hide—I can take care of myself."

"I tell you, you're freezing. You're getting numb. As soon as I can get your blood a little warm we've got to wade through that water for a hundred yards and make the yacht."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," Bivens said, with dogged determination. "I'll stay here till the next tide and walk out when the water's ebbed off."

Stuart shook him violently and shouted above the shriek of the wind.

"Do you know when that will be, you fool?"

"No, and I don't care. I'm not going to plunge into that icy water now."

"The tide won't be out again before four o'clock to-morrow morning."

"All right we'll walk around here until four."

"You'll freeze to death, I tell you! Your hands and feet are half frozen now."

"I'm not half as cold as I was," Bivens whined, fretfully.

"You're losing the power to feel. You've got to plunge into that water with me now and we can fight our way to safety in five minutes. The water is only three feet deep, and I can lift you over the big waves. We'll be there in a jiffy. Come on!"

He seized his arm again and dragged him to the edge of the water. Bivens stopped short, tore himself from Stuart's grip and kicked his shins like a vicious, enraged schoolboy.

"I'll see you to the bottomless pit before I'll move another inch!" he yelled savagely. "Go to the devil and let me alone. I'll take care of myself, if you'll attend to your own business."

Stuart folded his arms and looked at him a moment, debating the question as to whether he would wring his neck or just leave him to freeze.

Bivens rushed up to the lawyer and tried to shake his half-frozen fist in his face.

"I want you to understand, that I've taken all I'm going to from you to-day, Jim Stuart!" he fairly screamed. "Put your hand on me again and I'll kill you if I can get hold of one of these guns. I want you to remember that I'm the master of millions."

"Yesterday in New York," Stuart answered with contempt, "you were the master of millions. Here to-night, on this marsh, in this desert of freezing waters, you're an insect, you're a microbe!"

"I'm man enough to take no more orders from a one-horse lawyer," Bivens answered, savagely.

"All right, to hell with you!" Stuart said, contemptuously, as he turned and left him.

He began to walk briskly along the marsh to keep warm.

Nan was playing the soft strains of an old-fashioned song. He stopped and listened a moment in awe at the strange effects. The sob and moan of the wind through the yacht's shrouds and halyards came like the throb of a hidden orchestra, accompanying the singer in the cabin. The old song stirred his soul. The woman who was singing it was his by every law of nature. The little shrivelled, whining fool, who would die if he left him there, had taken her from him; not by the power of manhood, but by the lure of gold that he had taken from the men who had earned it.

All he had to do to-night was to apply the law of self-interest by which this man had lived and waxed mighty, and to-morrow he could take the woman he loved in his arms, move into his palace its master and hers. There could be no mistake about Nan's feelings. He had read the yearning of her heart with unerring insight. Visions of a life of splendour, beauty and power with her by his side swept his imagination. A sense of fierce, exultant triumph filled his soul. But most alluring of all whispered joys was the dream of their love-life. The years of suffering and denial, of grief and pain, of bitterness and disappointment would make its final realization all the more wonderful. She was just reaching the maturity of womanhood, barely thirty-one, and had yet to know the meaning of love's real glory.

"She's mine and I'll take her!" he cried at last. "Let the little, scheming, oily, cunning

scoundrel die to-night by his own law of self-interest—I've done my part."

Again the music swept over the white foaming waters. His heart was suddenly flooded with memories of his boyhood, its dreams of heroic deeds; his mother's serene face; his father's high sense of honour; and the traditions of his boyhood that make character noble and worth while, traditions that created a race of free-men before a dollar became the measure of American manhood.

"Have I done my part?" he asked himself, with a sudden start. "If he has his way he will die. Peevish, fretful, spoiled by the flattery of fools, he is incapable of taking care of himself under the conditions in which he finds himself. If I consent to his death am I not guilty of murder? Out of the heart are the issues of life! Have I the right to apply his own law? Could I save him in spite of himself if I made up my mind to do it? Pride and ceremony, high words and courtesy cut no figure in this crucial question. Could I save him if I would? If I can, and don't, I'm a murderer."

He turned quickly and retraced his steps. Bivens was crouching on his knees with his back to the fierce, icy wind, feebly striking his hands together.

"Are you going to fight your way with me back to that yacht, Cal?" he asked sternly.

"I am not," was the short answer. "I am going to walk the marsh till four o'clock."

"You haven't the strength. You can't walk fast enough to keep from freezing. You'll have to keep it up eight hours. You're cold and wet and exhausted. It's certain death if you stay. That water is rising fast. In ten minutes more it will be dangerous to try it. Will you come with me?"

"I've told you I'll take my chances here and I want you——"

He never finished the sentence, Stuart suddenly gripped his throat, threw him flat on his back, and while he kicked and squirmed and swore, drew a cord from his pocket and tied his hands and feet securely.

Paying no further attention to his groans and curses, he threw his little, helpless form across his shoulders, plunged into the water and began his struggle to reach the yacht. It was a difficult and dangerous task. The weight of Bivens's inert form drove his boots deep into the mud, and the wind's gusts of increasing fury threatened at almost every step to hurl them down. Again and again the waves broke on his face and submerged them both. Bivens had ceased to move or make a sound. Stuart couldn't tell whether he had been strangled by the freezing water or choked into silence by his helpless rage.

At last he struggled up the gangway, tore the cabin door open, staggered down the steps into the warm, bright saloon, and fell in a faint at Nan's feet.

The doctor came in answer to her scream and lifted Bivens to his stateroom, while Nan bent low over the prostrate form, holding his hand to her breast in a close, agonising clasp, while she whispered:

"Jim, speak to me! You can't die yet, we haven't lived!"

He sighed and gasped:

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, in his stateroom there, cursing you with every breath."

The young lawyer closed his eyes, blinded with tears, murmuring over and over again:

"Thank God!—Thank God!"

CHAPTER IV

THE MOCKERY OF THE SUN

Stuart refused to talk to Nan, went abruptly to his stateroom, and spent a night of feverish dreams. His exhaustion was so acute, restful sleep was impossible. Through the night his mind went over and over the horror of the moment on that marsh when he had looked into the depths of his own soul and seen the flames of hell.

Between the times of dozing unconsciousness, which came at intervals, he wondered what had become of the two men in that disabled tender. He waited with dread the

revelation the dawn would bring. He rose with the sun and looked out of his stateroom window. The bay was a solid sheet of glistening ice. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky and the great white field sparkled and flashed like a sea of diamonds.

What a mockery that sunshine! Somewhere out on one of those lonely marshes it was shining perhaps on the stark bodies of the two men who were eating and drinking and laughing the day before. What did Nature care for man's joys or sorrows, hopes or fears? Beneath that treacherous ice the tide was ebbing and flowing to the throb of her even, pulsing heart. To-morrow the south wind would come and sweep it all into the sea again.

He wondered dimly if the God, from whose hands this planet and all the shining worlds in space had fallen, knew or cared? And then a flood of gratitude filled his soul at the thought of his deliverance from the shadow of crime. Instinctively his eyes closed and his lips moved in prayer:

"Thank God, for the sunlight that shines in my soul this morning and for the life that is still clean; help me to keep it so!"

Nothing now could disturb the serenity of his temper. He dressed hurriedly, went into the galley, made a fire and called Nan.

He rapped gently on the panelled partition which separated their staterooms. He could hear her low, softly spoken answer as if there were nothing between them.

"Yes, Jim, what is it? Are you ill?"

"No, hungry. You will have to help me get some breakfast."

"The cook hasn't come?" she asked in surprise.

There was a moment's hesitation and his voice sounded queer when he quietly answered:

"No."

She felt the shock of the thought back of his answer and he heard her spring out of bed and begin to dress hurriedly.

In ten minutes she appeared at the door of the galley, her hair hanging in glorious confusion about her face and the dark eyes sparkling with excitement.

"What on earth does it mean, Jim?" she asked breathlessly. "Cal could tell me nothing last night except that he had gotten wet and chilled and you had carried him on board against his protest. When the doctor put him to sleep with a lot of whiskey he was muttering incoherently about a quarrel he had with you. I thought you sent both tenders to the shore for mail and provisions. Why hasn't the cook returned?"

"He may never come, Nan."

"Why—Jim!" she gasped.

"They started to tow us in, the engine broke down. I think the carbureter probably froze and they were driven before the wind, helpless. There's a chance in a thousand that they reached an oyster shanty and found shelter. We'll hope for the best. In the meantime you and I will have to learn to cook again, for a few days."

"A few days!" Nan exclaimed.

"Yes. The bay is frozen. Our old guide is a good cook, but he's safe in harbor ashore. He had too much sense to venture out last night. He can't get here now until the ice breaks up."

Nan accepted the situation with girlish enthusiasm, became Stuart's assistant and did her work with a smile. It was a picnic. She laughed at the comical picture his tall figure made in a cook's apron and he made her wear a waitress' cap which he improvised from a Japanese paper napkin.

The doctor pronounced the meals better than he had tasted on the trip. Bivens was still in an ugly mood and refused to leave his stateroom or allow any one but the doctor to enter. He was suffering intense pain from his frost-bitten fingers and toes and ears, and still cherished his grudge against Stuart. He refused to believe there was the slightest necessity for such high-handed measures as he had dared to use. He had carefully concealed from both the doctor and Nan just what had occurred between them on the trip that day.

On the second morning after the freeze a light dawned on the little man's sulking spirits. During the night the ice softened and a strong southerly breeze had swept every

piece of it to sea.

Again the bay was a blue, shimmering mirror, reflecting the white flying clouds, and the marshes rang with the resounding cries of chattering wild fowl.

It was just nine o'clock, and Nan was busy humming a song and setting the table for breakfast, when Stuart heard the distant drum-beat of a tender's engine. The guide was returning from the shore, or the lost tender had come. If it were the guide he would probably bring news of the other men. His course lay over their trail. He threw off his cook's apron, put on his coat, sprang out of the galley, and called below:

"A tender is coming, Nan. Don't come on deck until I tell you."

The smile died from her beautiful face as she answered slowly:

"All right, Jim."

In a moment he came back down the companion-way and spoke in quiet tones:

"It's just as I expected. They are both dead. The guide found them on the marsh over there, frozen."

"The marsh you and Cal were on?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. Both of them were kneeling. They died with their hands clasped in prayer."

"And you saved Cal from that?" she gasped, and turning, fled into her stateroom.

He went in to change his clothes and help lift the bodies on deck. Through the panelled wall he heard Nan softly sobbing.

Bivens refused at first to believe the doctor's startling announcement. He hurriedly dressed, came on deck, and for five minutes stood staring into the white, dead faces.

Without a word he went below and asked the doctor to call Stuart.

When his old friend entered, he took his hand quietly and for once in his life the little, black, piercing eyes were swimming in tears as he spoke.

"You're a great man, Jim, and what's bigger, you're a good one. If God will forgive me for the foolish things I said and did yesterday, I'll try to make it up to you, old boy. Is it all right?"

Stuart's answer was a nod, a smile and a pressure of the hand.

CHAPTER V

A TRUMP CARD

The stirring scenes of Virginia brought Stuart more and more into intimate personal relations with Bivens and he had taken advantage of the fact to draw away from his wife. The fierce temptation through which he had fought had left its scar, sobered his imagination, and brought him up sharply against the realization of danger. He had ceased to see Nan alone. Bivens's increasing devotion had made this easy and on Harriet's return from Europe with an engagement as understudy in grand opera his life settled down once more to the steady development of his ideal of service to the common people.

Scarcely a day passed without bringing to the young lawyer some reminder of Bivens's friendship. Two great lawsuits involving the principles on which the structure of the modern business world rested were begun in the Federal courts. At the financier's secret suggestion the more important of these was placed in Stuart's hands. Bivens hoped to beat the Government in this suit, but in case the people should win he wanted the personal satisfaction of knowing that he had helped to make the fame of his best friend.

Stuart could scarcely credit his ears when Bivens said to him with a chuckle:

"How's your big suit to dissolve the American Chemical Company coming on, Jim?"

"We're going to win, beyond the shadow of a doubt!" was the enthusiastic reply.

"If you do, I want you to know, old boy, that I threw that job into your hands."

"What?"

"I caused the proper man to suggest your name at the right moment, to the right people."

"The American Chemical Company is your original pet, and you put me up against it?"

Stuart paused and looked at Bivens with a scowl.

"Look here, Cal," he went on angrily, "you didn't think that you could use our friendship to weaken this suit at a critical moment, did you?"

"Jim," the little man cried, in distress, "you can't believe that I thought you were that sort of a dog, after all that has passed between us?"

"It does seem incredible," Stuart agreed.

"No, my boy," Bivens went on, after a pause, "I don't have to do dirty little things like that. These big issues have been raised. They are bound to come to trial before the Supreme Court of the United States—our one great tribunal beyond reproach or suspicion. They will be decided on their merits. The issues involved are too big and far-reaching for pettifogging methods. I suggested your name to help you in your career. I couldn't do it any other way. The stock I now own in the American Chemical Company is a mere trifle. I'll have a good joke on our crowd if you do win. I'll celebrate with a state dinner and make them all drink to your health. They'll pull ugly faces but they'll do it and fall over one another to do you honour besides."

Stuart broke into a hearty laugh.

"What a funny mixture of the devil and the human you are, after all, Cal! The more I see of you, the less I know you. How any man can make a colossal fortune as you have, and yet do such things as you've done for me, is incredible. In business you are an oppressor of the weak, cruel and unjust, and yet you are a good husband, a loyal friend, and a member of the church. It beats the devil!"

Bivens smiled cynically.

"Nothing mysterious about it. I came into a world where I found robbery and murder the foundation of our commercial system. I grappled with my enemies, learned the rules of the game and beat them at their own sport. I'm simply the product of the age—no better, no worse than the principles of modern society by which I live."

"And you expect to win in the end?"

"I have won!"

The young lawyer shook his head thoughtfully.

"There's a text our old preacher at home used to ring the changes on that's been burning into my life of late:

'SIN WHEN IT IS FULL GROWN BRINGETH FORTH DEATH.'

"Whatever sin may be, theologically, it is certainly the violation of law. Before any man can, in the end, reap good from the seeds of evil, the tides must forget to come in, grass and bud fail to come at the call of spring, and every law of the universe be reversed; because it is the Law—the law of Science, Philosophy, Love, Life, Nature, God."

"I'm afraid you're getting beyond my depth now," Bivens answered, dryly. "I'm not a philosopher or a theologian, only a man of business who takes the world as he finds it and tries to beat it and win out in the scuffle. I suggested your name in this suit, Jim, because I like you and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, if you'd let me."

As the two men drew thus closer and closer together, Stuart's bearing toward Nan became guarded, and at last their relations strained.

She met his new attitude with deep resentment and growing wonder. Her firm conviction was that he had become interested in another woman. She pretended to take no notice of the change in his manner or to observe the fact that they were never alone together. With infinite patience she studied his whims and watched for the rival she was sure had crossed his life. From the first she had suspected Harriet Woodman, and had inevitably linked her coming with Stuart's change of feeling. He had never referred to the Woodmans once since the day of the financier's collapse. This was, of course, natural, and she grew each day more certain that the influence of this quiet demure girl was the secret of the hostile influence that had come between them.

With the liberal use of money she made the acquaintance of a member of the chorus of the grand opera company who agreed to report to her every movement in Harriet's life.

At the beginning of the season the usual quarrelling of the stars gave to the young singer the opportunity of her life, and Nan's friend reported that the little golden-haired understudy was suddenly booked to sing the leading rôle in Faust on account of the illness of the star.

"Of course, the cat's not ill at all," the chorus lady volunteered to inform Nan over the telephone. "She's only pretending, to bring the manager to his knees. He's called her bluff and the little one's going on in her part, and she's in the seventh heaven of delight."

"Will she succeed?" Nan broke in, eagerly.

"What? as *Marguerite* in Faust, that poor little kid? She will—nit! I'm sorry for her. She'll need a friend to take her home to-night. It's a dog mean trick of the manager to make a monkey of her. She's a good little thing; everybody likes her."

"All right, that will do, thank you," Nan interrupted shortly, as she hung up the receiver.

She was not surprised when Stuart accepted her invitation to spend the evening in her box at the opera—the first time he had allowed himself to be alone with her since their return from the cruise.

"Yes, Nan," he answered quickly, "I'll go with pleasure. A little friend of mine is to sing a great rôle to-night. I'm so glad you're going. I want you to hear her and help me applaud."

Now she knew it! For the first time in her life she began to realize what Stuart meant to her; what his refusal to love another woman had meant. For the first time she knew that she had built the foundations of her happiness on the certainty that he could never love another woman and that he would die her devoted, if unsatisfied, slave.

For the first time she felt the tigress instinct to defend what she held to be her own, right or wrong. She could tear this woman into pieces—the little poverty-stricken nobody, an understudy in an opera troupe! And yet if she should succeed to-night—the thought was suffocating—to-morrow her name would be on the lips of thousands and a new star would be shining in the musical world.

Stuart took Harriet to the stage door on his way for Nan. As the cab wheeled up Broadway he was in a fever of excitement over the outcome of the night's work.

"It's horribly unfair, little pal, for them to thrust you into such a position with only a few hours' rehearsal."

"I'm only too thankful for the chance, Jim," she answered serenely.

"Let me see if your hand is trembling."

Ho took her hand in his and held it a moment, looking tenderly into her expressive eyes.

"I never saw anything like it in my life!" he exclaimed. "You're as cool and unconcerned as if you were going to hear me sing instead of making your first appearance in one of the great rôles of an immortal opera. You haven't the slightest fear of failure?"

She smiled with joyous eagerness as she replied:

"I know that I can sing to-night, I may not make a deep impression or create the slightest excitement, but I can't fail."

"If you should, dearie," he said, with deep tenderness, "promise me not to take it to heart. Such a trial is not fair to you. Even the greatest star could not do her best under such conditions."

"No, they couldn't be induced to sing under such conditions. But I am divinely happy over it. I promise you that not a tear shall stain my face if I fail. I shall only laugh and try again."

Her faith was so serene, Stuart was reassured.

At the stage door he held her hand in parting and whispered:

"My soul and body will be yours to-night, dearie, remember that! I've permission from

the manager to meet you behind the scenes after the last curtain. Be sure to wait a moment before you go to your dressing room."

"No, I'll see you in my room. I shall be so proud of it—the star's room for one night at least! The maid will show you the way."

"I will be in the Bivens's box, the second from the stage on the right. Don't forget to glance that way, now and then."

A look of pain clouded the fair face, but he could not see it in the shadows, and with a last warm pressure of her hand he was gone.

Harriet found to her joyous surprise her dressing room transformed into a bower of roses. A great bouquet of three dozen American beauties on her table bore her father's name and all the rest were from Stuart. She had a vague surmise that he paid for her father's, too. Every tint of rose that blooms he had sent, hiring an artist to arrange them so that their colouring made a veritable song of joy as she entered. There was no card to indicate who had sent these wonderful flowers, but she knew. There was only one man on earth who loved her well enough. Her heart gave a throb of daring joy at the thought! Surely such a token meant more than merely the big brotherly tenderness which he assumed so naturally. And then her heart sank with the certainty that he didn't mean it in the deep sense she wished. He called her 'dear,' and 'dearie,' and 'little pal' too glibly. He had always told her that he loved her too easily. What she wished was the speech that stammered and halted and uttered itself in broken, half-articulate syllables because there were no words in the human language to express its meaning.

She buried her golden head in a huge bunch of white roses the artist had placed in the centre of the room, drinking their perfume for a moment, closing her eyes and breathing deeply.

"I wonder if he does think of me still as a child?" she mused. "I wonder if he never suspects the storm within? Well——"

She smiled triumphantly.

"I'll tell him something to-night in my song!"

Nan was not in an amiable mood when Stuart led her to the box in the millionaire's playhouse which New York society built to exhibit its gowns, jewellery and beautiful women.

He had insisted on coming early.

Nan had always entered late and no woman in the magic circle of gilded splendour had ever attracted more attention or received it with more queenly indifference. It was acknowledged on every hand that she was the most beautiful woman in New York's exclusive set.

Northern men had exhausted their vocabulary of flattery in paying homage to the perfection of her stately Southern type. Those big Northern business fellows had often shown a preference for Southern women. Many of them had married poor girls of the South and they had become the leaders of their set. Nan's opportunity for intrigue and flirtation had been boundless, but so far not a whisper about her had ever found its way into the gossip of the scandalmongers of high life.

To-night she was bent on creating a mild sensation by entering late and placing Stuart in a position so conspicuous, the presence of her tall distinguished escort would at once command attention, and provoke inquiry. He had quite innocently frustrated this little plan by insisting on the unusual and vulgar procedure of entering the box in time to hear the opera.

"But Jim," Nan protested bitterly, "it's so cheap and amateurish."

"Come Nan," he answered; "you're too beautiful, too rich, too powerful, and too much envied to be afraid of the opinion of small folks. It's the privilege of the great to do as they please. Only the little people must do as others. As a special favour I ask you to be there at the rise of the curtain. I must see my little friend's entrance and hear the first note she sings."

She had yielded gracefully on the outside. Inwardly she was boiling with rage.

They were the first to enter a box. Stuart eagerly scanned his programme. The manager had inserted a slip of paper on which he said:

"Owing to the sudden illness of the prima donna, the audience will have the unexpected privilege this evening of hearing an accomplished American girl, a native of New York

City, sing for the first time in Grand Opera. Miss Harriet Woodman will appear in the rôle of Marguerite."

The real audience had gathered unusually early to hear the great European prima donna. Every seat in the orchestra and balconies was packed before the rise of the curtain.

Nan had placed Stuart in front of her on purpose to watch closely his expression.

As the moment for Harriet's appearance drew near, his nervous tension became a positive agony. Yet he distinctly felt from the subtle impression, which the intelligent single mind can always receive from the collective mind of a crowd, that the people were in a friendly mood of expectancy. The fact that she was an American girl and from New York was greatly in her favour.

The audience greeted her appearance with a burst of applause and waited for the first note of her opening song.

Stuart was charmed with the effect of her personality in the character, before she moved. The long, beautiful golden hair, the innocent young face and her simple girlish costume made an instantaneous impression in her favour.

With the first sweet note from her throat every fear vanished. She sang simply, quietly, exquisitely, without effort, as a bird sings because the song bubbles from within.

A ripple of surprised comment swept the audience and burst into vigorous applause at the close of her song.

She looked into Stuart's face and smiled sweetly.

"Isn't she glorious!" he cried, turning his flushed face toward Nan.

"Fine," was the quiet answer, "but please, Jim, don't climb over the rail and try to get on the stage."

Stuart settled back in his seat with a resolution to be more careful. But in a few moments his resolution was forgotten. From start to finish Harriet received a continuous ovation. In the great songs of the last act her voice swelled into a climax of thrilling spiritual power. The audience rose in their seats and greeted her with such a tribute of enthusiasm New York had rarely seen. Wave after wave of applause swept the house. Her fellow-singers were compelled to lead her out a half-dozen times before the tumult ceased.

The manager, in ecstasies, fell on his knees, and kisses the tips of her fingers.

When Stuart had fought his way through the crowd and reached the stage, he found her alone with her father in her room. Her head was resting on his breast and he was stroking the fair young forehead with tender caressing touch. His eyes were dim with tears and his voice could find no words.

He turned away from the scene and left them alone for a few moments.

He found Nan and asked her to wait for him at the stage door in her automobile until he could give Harriet his congratulations.

She consented with a frown, and begged him to hurry.

He heard the muffled throb of the big limousine draw up at the stage door as he made his way to Harriet's room. Her father was still there and a crowd of musicians, singers, and critics were waiting in a group outside to offer their congratulations.

She was holding them back until his arrival.

When Stuart entered she dropped her father's hand, started toward him with her lips parted in a joyous smile and extended both hands.

Instead of taking them he slipped his arm about her slender waist, drew her quickly to his heart and kissed her. The girl's extended white arms by an instinctive impulse found their way around his neck, and her head sank on his breast.

"My glorious little pal!" he whispered, his voice choking with emotion. "I'm the proudest man in the world to-night."

"It's all your work Jim," she said simply. "You suggested and willed it and I've made good under your inspiration. I'd rather see the happiness on your face and hear your words of approval than all the applause of that crowd."

"And you are perfectly happy?" he asked with enthusiasm.

"Certainly not!" she cried, emphatically. "No real woman ever does this for the thing itself. It's done only to please her hero that is, or is to be. I shall never be perfectly happy until I've a little nest of my own and the man I love is always by my side."

"He'll be a lucky man, little girl. And he must be a good one to get my consent. You can't marry without it you know."

"I shall not!" she answered with a laugh.

When Harriet drew herself quietly from Stuart's arms he turned and saw Nan standing in the doorway, with a curious smile on her flushed face.

"May I, too, offer my congratulations, Miss Woodman?" she asked. "I hope you have forgotten the lack of appreciation you met at the hands of my crowd of thoughtless banqueters in the ovation you have had this evening."

Harriet's little figure suddenly stiffened at the sight of Nan, but at the sound of her friendly voice, relaxed, and moved to meet the extended hand.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bivens," she replied cordially. "I couldn't hold a grudge against any one in that audience to-night."

And then Stuart did something that sent a shock through every fibre of Nan's being.

As easily and naturally as a big brother, he slipped one of his long arms around Harriet and looked down with frank admiration into her eyes.

"You see, Nan, she's mine. I raised her from a wee little mite. And this was such a cruel and dangerous experiment—she had no chance. It was impossible—but, God bless her, she did it!"

Nan apologized for hurrying away and Stuart was compelled to follow.

As he settled back among the soft cushions of the car by her side and the big machine glided swiftly up Broadway toward the Bivens palace, his enthusiasm burst out anew:

"Honestly, Nan, don't you think her a wonderful little girl? And just to think she's my kid——"

"Rather a remarkably developed kid, Jim!" was the laughing answer. "She's splendid. The depth and range, power and sweetness of her voice are marvellous. Her fame will fill the world."

"Then you can't wonder that I'm proud of her."

"No," she answered, dreamily. She could afford to be generous. Warned in time and she had made up her mind instantly to act on a plan that had been vaguely forming and tempting her for the past months. It was her trump card; she had hesitated to play it, but she would do it now without delay.

CHAPTER VI

THROUGH PURPLE CURTAINS

When Nan made up her mind, she acted with lightning rapidity. She would force Stuart to an avowal of love that would fix their relation beyond disturbance by the little singer. She had too fine a sense of values to permit herself to become entangled in an intrigue.

She could wait, and gain in power for the waiting. Her physician had told her that Bivens's days were numbered. Stuart had waited twelve years in silence; he could wait the few months more of her husband's flickering life.

But on one thing she was determined. Now that another woman had appeared on the scene she would not live in suspense, she must know that he loved her still, loved her passionately, madly as she believed he did. But he must say it. She must hear his voice quiver with its old fiery intensity. She wished this as she had never longed for anything on earth, and for twelve years she had lived in a magic world where she had only to breathe a desire to have it fulfilled.

Stuart had baffled and eluded her on every point when she had thought he was about to betray his passion. Here was something mere money had no power to command. Well, she had other powers. She would use them to the limit. She would no longer risk the

danger of delay.

She had no difficulty in persuading Bivens to urge Stuart to visit their country estate in the mountains of North Carolina. The doctor had ordered him there to live in the open air.

The young lawyer refused to go at first, but Bivens urged with such pathetic eagerness he was compelled to accept.

It was a warm beautiful morning the last week in March when he alighted on the platform of the little railroad station on the estate, and took his seat beside Nan in her big touring car. The fruit trees were in full bloom, and their perfume filled the air. The hum of bees and the song of birds he had known in his boyhood thrilled his heart. He drew a deep breath of joy, and without a struggle resigned himself to the charm of it all.

"It's glorious, Nan!" he exclaimed.

"Your coming makes it perfect, Jim," she answered, tenderly, and turning to the chauffeur said:

"Drive for an hour before going to the house, Collins."

The chauffeur tipped his cap and the throbbing machine shot around a curve and swept along the river's edge down the green carpeted valley which stretches out for miles below the ramparts of the great chateau on the mountain-side above.

"There's the house, Jim!" Nan cried, pointing to the heights on the left.

Stuart could not suppress an exclamation of delight.

"Magnificent!" he said, with enthusiasm.

As the river made a graceful curve the great building swept into full view—a stunning pile of marble three hundred feet long, its tower piercing the turquoise sky in solemn grandeur. The stone parapet, on which its front wall was built, rose in massive strength a hundred feet from the ledge in the granite cliff before touching the first line of the white stones of the house itself.

At the end a formal garden had been built on the foundations of masonry which cost a hundred thousand dollars.

"What a background that row of live oaks make behind the garden!" he exclaimed.

"Don't they?" she answered. "You would hardly believe it, but we planted every one of those trees."

"Nonsense! They must be two feet in diameter."

"More; not one of them is less than three. We moved a hundred of them from the woods, without breaking the dirt from their roots—built special machinery to do it. I think Cal is prouder of those trees than he is of the house."

For an hour the car swept like a spirit over the miles of smooth macadam private roads Bivens had built. At each graceful turn his wonder increased at the luxurious outlay of millions which the little man had spent to gratify a whim.

From each hilltop, as the huge gleaming castle came into view from a new angle, revealing its marvellous beauty, he thought with a touch of pity of the shambling figure of the stricken man limping through its halls helpless, lonely, miserable. What strange pranks Fate plays with the mighty as well as the lowly! So frail was the broken body now he did not dare risk a cold by taking a ride with his wife.

The machine turned suddenly up a hill and glided through two iron gates opening on the lawn and the great white chateau loomed before them in a flash of blinding beauty. Stuart caught his breath.

Turning to Nan he shook his head slowly:

"Don't you like it?" she laughed.

"I was just wondering."

"At what?"

"Whether this is the Republic for which our struggling fathers fought and died? America you know, Nan, is the tall rude youth who saw a vision, made his way into the wilderness, slept on the ground, fought with hunger and wild beasts and grew strong

by the labour of his right arm. It would be a strange thing if all he has learned is to crawl back to where he started and build a castle exactly like the one from which the tyrants drove him in the Old World."

"What a strange fellow you are, Jim." Her answer carried with it a touch of resentment. "This house is mine, mine—not America's—please remember that. Let the future American take of himself!"

"Certainly, I understand," he answered quickly, as the car stopped under the vaulted porte-cochère. "You wouldn't be a woman if you didn't feel that way. All right; I'm in your hands. To the devil with the future American!"

"That's better!" she laughed.

Stuart shook hands with Bivens and was shocked to find him so weak.

The little man held his hand with a lingering wistfulness as he looked into his friend's strong face.

"You don't know how rich you are, Jim," he said, feebly, "with this hand that grips like iron. I'd give millions to feel my heart beat like yours to-day."

"You'll get better down here," Stuart answered, cheerfully.

"I'm trying it anyhow," he said listlessly. "Make yourself at home, old boy. This house is my pride. I want Nan to show you every nook and corner in it. I wish I could trot around with you, but I can't."

"As soon as you've changed your clothes," Nan said, familiarly, "come down to the library and I'll show you around."

Stuart followed the man assigned as his valet to the electric elevator and in a minute stepped out on the fourth floor. He observed with a smile that his room number was 157.

"The idea of living in a huge hotel and calling it a home!" he mused, with grim humour. "Room 157; great Scott!"

His hostess showed him first the library. The magnificent room contained more than forty thousand volumes, bound in hand-tooled morocco.

"The funny thing, of course," Nan whispered, "is that Cal has never read one of these exquisitely bound books."

"Why on earth did he make this room the most stately and beautiful one in the house?"

"Maybe he didn't!" she laughed. "I'm going to give you a privilege no mere man has ever enjoyed in this house before—I am going to show you my own rooms. Will you appreciate the honour?"

The man answered with a bantering smile.

"If I live to tell the story!"

When the tour of inspection had been completed she led him to her own suite, which was located in the south-western corner, overlooking the magnificent formal gardens with their artificial lake, fountains, statuary and a wilderness of flowers, and farther on over the beautiful valleys of the Swannanoa and the French Broad rivers. Beyond the river valleys rose range after range of mountains until the last dim peaks were lost in the clouds.

The magnificence of her bed-room was stunning. Stuart rubbed his eyes in amazement.

The bedstead seemed a thing of life—so elaborate and wonderful was its art. Built of massive ebony with the most remarkable ivory carvings set in its gleaming black surface, artists, as many as could touch the material, had worked two years on the carving alone. The allegorical pictures cut into the broad band of ivory which ran around the frame had required the time of four art-workmen for eighteen months.

Stuart stood fascinated.

"You see that magnificent piece of ivory on the head, Jim?" she asked, with sparkling eyes.

"The most massive solid piece I ever saw!" he exclaimed. "I never dreamed the elephant had ever lived with such a tusk."

"We found him at last!" Nan cried, with pride. "It took the time of fourteen hunters in

Africa for seven months."

"I can easily believe it," Stuart answered. "Ludwig of Bavaria surely never dreamed anything like this."

"The walls you see are panelled in Louis XV style, permitting the most elaborate carvings which I had heavily gilded on backgrounds of white enamel, but the thing I love best about this panelling, is not the panel at all—it's the rich purple and gold Genoese velvet. I had it made by a noted firm in Lyons. Don't you think it exquisite?"

"If I ever get rich I'll have a piece of it for the collar of my coat."

"I got my painters from Paris to do the ceilings. They worked very quickly, but they knew how to charge. The window curtains, you see, are of the same material as the purple and gold velvet in the panels, while the under curtains are hand-woven of Brussels net and interwoven with silk. The wardrobe, little washstand and dressing table are of ebony and ivory, the chairs, of solid ivory inlaid with gold and ebony, were all made to match the bedstead."

Stuart looked at his hostess curiously.

"I thought I knew you, Nan, but this is a revelation. I could never have guessed by the wildest leap of my imagination. It's beyond belief."

"Don't you like it?" she asked, with a hurt expression.

"I'm stunned. The most wonderful thing to me in the room, though, is not the bedstead, but the woman standing beside it."

A flash of light came from the dark eyes and the magnificent figure grew tense for a moment as she smiled with a look of inquiry.

"I'm lost in wonder at the riotous glory of your capacity for sensuous joy. I could imagine Juno on the heights of Olympus executing such a dream of mad luxury, but I could never have conceived of this, here, if I had not seen it. And yet, now that I see you in the setting, I'm sure you were made for it. The whole scheme is harmonious—it scares me——"

"Scares you?" she repeated with quick displeasure.

"Yes," he went on, jokingly. "It almost reconciles me to being a bachelor."

A look of pain swept the expressive face and he was sorry he had said it. The joke seemed out of harmony with her mood. She had taken herself seriously in the creation of this room, and had spent on it a round million. The effect it had produced on the man's mind was anything but flippant. He dared not tell how deeply he was moved, how every desire had awakened into fierce, cruel longing as the subtle scheme of sensuous dreaming had unfolded itself before his eyes. He began to wonder whether there were really any complexity or any mystery at all about her, whether she were not very simple and very elemental.

The picture she made standing in this wonderful room was one that never faded from his memory. The poise of her superb form; the fires that smouldered in the depths of her eyes; the tenderness with which her senses seemed to drink in the daring luxury; the smile that played about her lips, joyous, sensuous, cruel!

In vivid flashes he saw in her shining face the record of it all—the naked African hunters, crawling through forest jungles, stalking and bringing down in pools of blood the huge beasts who paid their tribute to her beauty; the army of toiling artists who bent their aching backs for days and weeks and months and years, carving the pictures in those white shining surfaces to please her fancy; the bowed figures of the weavers in Lyons and Brussels, these deft fingers working into matchless form the costly fabrics to please her eye and soothe the touch of her fingers as she drew back her curtains of purple and gold to let in the morning sunlight!

He wondered vaguely what such a woman, clothed with such power, would do if suddenly thwarted in a wish on which her heart was set?

And then it swept over him that she was no strange Egyptian princess, no sorceress of the Nile, no fairy of poet's fancy, but just the girl he had loved and lost and yet who had come back into his life in the dazzling splendour of her own day-dreams—one of the rulers of the world. He looked at her a moment and she seemed a being of another planet. He looked again and saw the laughing school-girl, his playmate on the red hills of his native state.

"Why so pensive, Jim?" she asked.

"It seems all a dream, Nan," he answered. "I'll rub my eyes and wake up directly. I

thought your New York house a miracle. This is fairyland."

"Perhaps it would be," she said, looking at him a moment through half closed eyes, "if only the prince——"

A look of pain unconsciously clouded his face and the sentence was not finished.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAND OF THE SKY

On the fourth day Nan planned a coaching party to ascend Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in the Land of the Sky, the highest point of ground this side the Rockies. She had taken this trip with Stuart sixteen years before. She was then but fifteen, and he had just begun to dangle at her heels. She did not tell him their destination, but left him to discover for himself that they were travelling over the same old quiet road.

The party consisted of half a dozen boys and girls whom Nan was chaperoning, Stuart, the footman and coachman. The start was made at sunrise. The morning was glorious, the air rich with the full breath of a southern spring. The footman lifted the bugle to his lips, and its music rang over the hills and broke into a thousand echoes as its notes bounded upward from cliff to cliff. The whip cracked over the back of four sleek horses and they were off, amid screams of laughter from the youngsters.

Stuart felt his heart leap with the joy of youth. The rivers and mountains, birds and fields of his native heath were calling once more, and his soul answered with a cry!

At the foot of the first hill the coach suddenly stopped beside the banks of the Swannanoa River.

Nan leaped to the ground, drew Stuart with her to the rear of the coach, and raised her arms.

"Lift me up," she cried, laughing.

He placed his hands under her arms and with a leap and a cry of laughter she was in the empty baggage rack.

"Now up with you!" she cried.

In a moment Stuart was seated snugly by her side and the big red coach was rolling along the old road beside the banks of the laughing river.

"Now, sir," Nan whispered, "do you know where you are going?"

Stuart nodded.

"Where?" she asked, mischievously, as she laid her warm hand with a sudden grip on his.

"To a certain peak among the clouds, where you and I once went a thousand years ago."

Nan nestled a little closer—or perhaps it was the swaying of the coach that made him think she did—and softly said:

"You remember this road?"

"I've seen it a hundred times in my dreams since that wonderful day. It winds along the banks of the Swannanoa for twenty miles, always climbing higher and higher until the river becomes a limpid trout stream. We stop at the old road-house, stay all night, and next morning take the bridle path with the funny pack-horses and climb to the first mountain top, still following the little stream. We stoop to drink from the spring which is the river's source—a deep bold spring hung with long festoons of green moss and set with ferns and rhododendron——"

"Fine, Jimmy, fine!" she cried with girlish mockery. "Your geography lesson was perfect! You can walk home with me after school."

Stuart looked at her and broke into a laugh. Again they were boy and girl, and the only change he could see was that she was more splendidly beautiful at thirty-one than she had ever promised to be at fifteen.

The spirit of joy was resistless. He flung to the winds the last shred of conventional dignity as the coach rolled lazily over the rocky road, throwing them from side to side.

"You remember how shocked you were in this same seat, Jim, that day in the sweet long ago when the old coach threw me into your arms?"

"Yes, I felt that I was taking a mean advantage of you."

"I blushed furiously, didn't I?"

"Yes, and I wonder now what your real thoughts were; you don't remember, I suppose?"

"As distinctly as though it were yesterday," Nan answered, dreamily.

"What did you think of my embarrassment?"

"I thought you were an awful fool not to accept more gracefully and thankfully the providence which threw a pretty girl your way."

The coach gave a sudden lurch and threw her into Stuart's arms again.

"And now?" he cried, laughingly, as he held her firmly for a moment, to prevent her falling.

She blushed furiously, threw the ringlets of dark hair from her face and drew back to her position.

"Now, of course, it's unlawful," she answered with sober playfulness.

The man watched her slyly for the next half-mile. She was very, very quiet. Was he mistaken in the idea that her body had trembled with unusual violence for the moment he had held her? Or was it the quiver of the coach over the gravel in the road and the swaying of their seat? The sense of danger which the little incident roused was only momentary. The scenes through which they were passing were resistless. He caught the odour of crushed violets from the fence corner and the smell of the young grass broken beneath the hoof of a horse; the ploughman was turning at the end of the row. The low music of the river and the panorama of white fleeting clouds across the blue of matchless southern skies, awoke a thousand memories. Again he was a Southern boy. He heard the laughter of big-mouthed, jolly negroes eating watermelons in the shade of great trees and the song of mocking birds in the stillness of summer nights!

A rabbit ran across the road and he smiled at the recollection of his first hunt. A quail whistled from the tangle of blackberry briars by the roadside. He looked quickly and saw the bob white sitting on the top rail of the old worn fence.

He seized Nan's arm.

"Look, Nan!"

She looked and smiled and the tears came unbidden. She turned away a moment and he didn't see.

They spent the night at the same old road-house and slept on feather beds. He hadn't felt the touch of a feather bed in years. He dreamed that he was at school again, a man of thirty-five, playing marbles with a crowd of towheaded boys and they were beating him at the game while Nan was standing near, her long plait of black hair hanging down her back, laughing at him because he was barefooted! He woke with a groan, shook off the nightmare, and slept soundly until morning.

They started next day at eight o'clock with the pack-horses to make the trip along the dim bridle trail, fourteen miles up the sides of frowning cliffs and over the tops of balsam-crowned peaks to the summit of Mount Mitchell.

Nan led the way, mounted on a sure-footed young stallion, and Stuart followed her on a little black mule he had selected from the barn for his exact likeness to one he had raised as a pet when a boy. The youngsters came struggling after them, mounted on an assortment of shaggy, scrubby looking animals that knew the mountain path as a rabbit knows his trail in the jungle.

They stopped for luncheon at the spring which forms the source of the Swannanoa and Stuart drank again from its cold limpid waters, while Nan's laughter rang in his ears.

At one o'clock they passed through the first series of clouds and out into the sunlight beyond. The next line of clouds was dark and threatening and suddenly poured rain. Slowly but surely the horses picked their way up the mountain-side through the storm and suddenly walked out into the sunlight again; they looked down on the smooth flat surface of the clouds through which they had passed.

"Glorious!" Stuart cried.

"We didn't see this when we came before, you remember," she answered. "It rained all the way up."

"Yes, it rains up here almost every day in the year, but the guide says we're going to get a view of six states to-morrow."

It was dusk when the party reached the summit. The horses were loosened to graze in the open field and the guides hurried to build a fire in front of the cave made by a projecting ledge of rock beneath which the party was to sleep.

The bed of balsam boughs was too sharp a contrast to Nan's million-dollar-room to permit Stuart much sleep. Besides the youngsters were giggling and laughing and joking most of the night. Only a big log marked the partition wall between the men's and women's side of the cave. The space was so limited it was necessary to sleep close together. The girls and boys never grew tired cracking silly jokes about the magnificence of their sleeping quarters. In vain Nan begged for quiet. It was three o'clock before they were still at last and she fell into a deep sleep.

Stuart rose, sat before the log fire and watched the regular rise and fall of her bosom as she slept like a child. On a distant mountain-side he heard the howl of a lonely wolf. Sixteen years ago the mountains were full of them and they came quite close. He was reminded of the narrowing strip of the savage world, fast disappearing before the march of civilization.

"I wonder if we'll ever conquer the last jungle—the heart of man?" he mused. "Somehow I have my doubts, and yet the faith never dies."

Again he looked at the sleeping woman and a wave of fierce mad rebellion swept his heart. Somewhere inside of him he heard the lonely cry of another wolf.

"She's mine—mine! Nature gave her to me in the morning of life—I was a fool. I should have taken her by force, if need be, and she would have thanked me in after years. She has complied with the conventions of Society and trampled the highest law of Life. Why not smash convention now at the call of that law?"

Again the wolf howled in the distant darkness and it seemed the echo of his own mad cry. He waked from his reverie with an angry start. He shuddered that he could have harboured the thought for a moment.

The eastern horizon was beginning to glow with the dawn. He rose, walked to the summit, and sat down on the pile of stones that marked the grave of Professor Mitchell. He watched in silence until he saw the sun's red rim suddenly leap above the blue-black peaks of the east and drive the last shadow of the night from the valleys below. With their fading mists he felt the darkness lift from his own heart and the sunlight of reason stream in. A new joy welled up from the depths of his spirit. He was alive to his finger tips and his imagination glowed with the consciousness that life was strong and clean, and worth while.

"With the help of God I'll keep it so, too!" he cried. "I'm ready for the fight now. Let it come."

He knew instinctively that it was coming. He felt it in every word that had fallen from Nan's lips since they left on this trip. He felt it most keenly of all when she was silent, read it in the tremour of her mouth, the shadowy tenderness of her eyes, the low, deep tones of her voice. What he couldn't know was how hard that fight was going to be!

Both Nan and the youngsters slept like children until nine o'clock. He helped the guides prepare breakfast without waking the sleepers and called them at nine.

By ten o'clock breakfast was over, the guides had formed two exploring parties and set out with the young people chattering and laughing. "We'll keep house, Jim, here in God's palace among the clouds, until they return."

"Yes," he answered, cheerily, "and it will be fun to keep it alone, won't it, with no restraints or studied pretense, no crowd of fools or liveried flunkies near at hand; only these big dark balsams for sentinels."

They sat down on the ledge of rock which formed their cave-house and gazed over the marvellous panorama of a world transformed into blue billowy mountains, flying clouds and turquoise skies. Over it all brooded the deep solemn silence of eternity. Not a sound reached the ear from earth or air. Far up in the sky an eagle poised and looked below in silence. Not a house could be seen as far as the eye could reach; only here and there a white patch on the dark blue mountain-side showed like a farmer's scar that hadn't healed. These were the fields of farmers on the lower ranges, but their houses were hidden among the trees.

Nan was leaning back on her elbow on the blanket Stuart had spread for her, watching his face change its mood with each flying cloud.

"Our luck is wonderful to-day, Nan," he said at last. "The guides say this is one of the rarest days a traveller ever finds on this peak. We might come a hundred times and never strike it again."

"Why?" she asked lazily.

"The air's so crisp and clear. A mountain fifty miles away seems a stone's throw. We've but to sweep the horizon with a single turn of the head and see six states of the Union. Eastward stretches North Carolina, to the coast, to the north there in that bristling line of lower hills stands old Virginia. To the west loom the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky and southward rise the crags of western Georgia and South Carolina—but it don't seem so wonderful to you, I suppose."

"Why not?"

"You must see most of it from your windows every day."

"But not with your eyes, Jim!" she cried. "I have everything and I have nothing. There is no meaning to anything we do or see or possess if the one thing we desire is withheld."

"I might have made that speech, Nan," he said thoughtfully. "It sounds strange on your lips."

"With my houses in town and country, with every whim of body and soul apparently gratified, perhaps it does sound strange. But suppose that all this madness of luxury, at which you wonder, is but the vain effort of a hungry heart?"

The man was silent. The question was too dangerous to try to answer, too dangerous to leave unanswered.

"You haven't answered," she insisted.

"No. Answers to such questions don't come so glibly here in these silent places, Nan," he responded seriously.

"That's why I brought you here," she confessed. "Besides, I knew you loved this wild spot. The memory of your rapture that day, sixteen years ago, has never left me."

"You used to love such places, too," he said looking away over the blue billows. "What deep-toned eternal things they spoke! How small and contemptible the struggle of the insects in those valleys below!"

"Come back to my question," the woman insisted, with quiet determination. "You are not a coward. The time has come in our lives when we should begin to see things as they are."

"I've been trying to do that for a long time," he answered sorrowfully.

"And haven't succeeded," she added promptly. "The trouble is, Jim, that life is a tissue of lies. We are born in lies, grow up in lies, live and move and have our being in lies. Our highest wisdom is the law of hypocrisy which we call diplomacy. I've found that society is one living lie. We say 'good morning' and wish we could murder the man we greet. We say 'call again' and wish it may be never. We live two lives or we don't live at all—one outward and visible, the other secret. We must be true to one and laugh at the other. I'm growing sick of lies!"

Stuart looked at her flushed face with a deepening thrill of the drama of the soul its quick changing expression shadowed.

"Well?"

"I've grown to feel of late," she went on rapidly, "that it's a shame to dodge. The only law my husband has ever known is to take what he wants. I've the right to live my own life. We must each of us choose our world, the one of conventions and shams or the big one that's beyond—the world of reality, where free men and women live and work in freedom while youth and daring lead the way."

She paused and Stuart's lips parted in amazement. Never had he heard such eloquence from the woman before him. Words leaped from her heart, quivering with emotion, her whole being stirred to its depths.

"Jim," she went on falteringly, "I'm lonely and heartsick. I'm trying to tell you that I want your love; that I can't live any longer without it."

Her head sank, low and a sob caught her voice.

"There I've told you—I've no pride left. Tell me that you love me. I want to hear it a thousand times. I want it, right or wrong!"

She paused a moment and looked through a tear into his pale, serious face.

"I know that you love me," she went on. "It's only your stubborn pride that keeps you silent now. My God! Speak! Say something, if only to curse me!"

"You should have thought of this, Nan, before these gray hairs began to creep into my hair."

"I did, Jim!" she cried, eagerly bending, near. "God knows I fought! You never knew it, but I did. For whole nights I wrestled with the fiend that tempted me and fought for my love. It took days and weeks to strangle its hold on my heart and force me to betray myself. If I had seen you on the day of my marriage I would have leaped from the carriage, rushed to your side, and fainted in your arms. With the despair of a lost soul I searched the faces of the staring crowd, hoping against hope that I might see you. Oh, Jim, it's not too late to live! Look at me, dearest, and say it's not. For God's sake tell me that you love me still! Am I old? Am I faded?"

The man had felt sure of himself when she began, but the tenderness, the passion, the yearning appeal of her voice were more than he could resist. A wave of desperate longing convulsed his being. He seized her hand with cruel force.

"Look into my eyes, Nan!" he cried, "and let me see the bottom of your soul!"

She lifted her dark lustrous eyes, devouring him with love.

"You'll find only your image there, Jim."

He looked at her sternly.

"Before I take you into my arms and smother you with kisses," he whispered fiercely, "there mustn't be any mistake this time. I've got to know that your love for me is the biggest thing in your life—the only thing in your life!"

"I swear it!" she gasped.

"You've got to prove it; I'm going to put you to the test."

"Any test!" she broke in quickly.

"I warn you," he went on, with increasing seriousness, "the test will be a real one. You and I, Nan, could never be happy with the shadow of Bivens's fortune over us."

"But, its shadow can't be over us! It's going to be yours. He has given it to me—his death is only a question of a year or two—and I'm going to give it all to you."

The strong jaws closed with sudden energy.

"There's not a dollar of his millions that isn't smirched. I'd sooner wear the rags of a leper than soil my hands with it."

"Then I'll have to hold it in trust for you," she laughed.

"There's where the test comes—you can't do it. If you love me you will have to give up these millions."

"Jim, you're not serious?"

"Never more serious in my life."

Nan gazed at him in astonishment and broke into a low laugh.

"Of course, you're teasing me. You can't be in earnest in such an absurd dime-novel idea! Give away this enormous fortune, this power equal to the sway of kings which you can wield with a strength and dignity the man who made it never knew? You can't be in earnest?"

"I am," was the firm answer.

The woman placed her hand tenderly in his and nestled close to his side.

"Come, Jim, dear, this is a practical world, you have some common sense even if you are a man of genius; you're not insane!"

"I think not," he answered, soberly.

"You can not make this absurd demand on me," she repeated slowly, "knowing the

awful price I paid for these millions?"

"It's because I know it that I make the demand," he went on, passionately. "We are face to face now, you and I, with all the little subterfuges and lies of life torn from our eyes. The fact that the price at which he bought you was high—say a hundred millions—does not change the fact. I refuse to share with the woman I love the price for which she sold herself, whether the sum be a hundred dollars or a hundred millions! I can forgive and have forgiven the wrong you've done me, but I could never share its conscious degradation."

A flush of anger overspread Nan's face.

"Jim, this is stupid pride, the stupidest of all pride, the vainest and the meanest, the pride of the poor man. It's detestable. I thought you were greater. There's some excuse for the pride of wealth, but there's none for the pride of poverty!"

"It's a question of character," was the firm answer. "It cuts to the deepest issues of life between us. There can be no compromise."

Nan looked at him in despair, her eyes suddenly clouding with tears.



"Nan looked at him in despair"

"What do you mean when you say give up these millions?"

"Just what I say," he answered quickly.

"But I couldn't throw them into the street, what would I do with them?"

"You can give them back to the people, the public, from whom they were taken; the people whose labour created their value. That's what an honest man does when he finds he has wronged his neighbour. The things we possess come at last to possess us. In a very deep and real sense they give to us their character. An ermine robe that covers a leper does not make him a king, but the royal robe at last breathes leprosy. You can't separate money from the process of its making. It has no value in itself. It is only a symbol, and always takes a soul from the hand of its creator. There's not a stone in your palaces whose cement was not mixed in human tears. The stain of blood is in every scarlet thread of your carpets, rugs, and curtains. Your magnificent paintings, your gorgeous furniture, your beds of ebony and carved ivory—do you think these things possess no soul? Do you think they could not laugh at me?"

"Surely, you are not such a weakling!" Nan cried, with a flush of contempt.

"If to hold honour dearer than life is the creed of a weakling, I am one."

"But you are talking like a mad anarchist. His money was made as all great fortunes are

made."

"So much the worse for our financiers. Civilization must rest at least on justice or it can't endure."

"But, Jim, no matter what your theories of life or your ambitions, these millions will make them more powerful."

"It's not true. Not a single great man whose words have moulded the world was rich. The combined fortunes of Darwin, Mozart, Shakespeare, Raphael, Aristotle, Socrates, Mohammed, and Buddha weren't equal to the possessions of even the smallest and most insignificant member of our mob of six thousand millionaires—six thousand nobodies! Don't think, dear, that you haven't tempted me in the past. You have. The glitter of your millions once blinded me and I was on the point of surrender, but I've won out. I've entered at last—to stay—into the Kingdom of Mind, that lies beyond the rule of greed, where beauty, heroism, and genius have built their altar-fires and keep them burning. You'll have to come with me, Nan, into this enchanted land. Your estate is large only if you don't lift up your head and look farther. You own a hundred thousand acres in the mountains, and yet, after all, it's but a tiny speck on the horizon of one little corner of a state. Beyond is the great world with its beautiful rivers, its valleys, its shining shores and emerald seas. This big world is mine—the Alps and the Mountains of the Moon and your little blue hills also are on my estate. I've come to know at last that the man is richest who breathes deepest, sees farthest, hears best, and has the widest and most helpful influence on his fellow-man. Lord Beaconsfield died with a paltry estate of two hundred thousand dollars. He had the chance, while prime minister, to take for himself a personal fortune whose annual income would have been \$25,000,000. Instead he gave it all to the people of England and died poor. I'd rather do such a deed for my country than hold the combined fortunes of all our six thousand little millionaires.

"You think, dear, that you are in Society. But the real aristocracy has always been one of brains and ethics. The people in your little world live for money. They do not possess it, they are possessed by it. They are slaves. You will have to come with me, into the great free world—if you love me."

"If I love you?" Nan cried, with trembling lips. "Don't speak that way. If you only knew! My love for you has kept me alive through all that I've endured. It's the only thing that's worth the struggle; but I can't think. Your demand is so sudden, so stunning, so terrifying, I don't know what to say. My life and all I have is too short to make atonement to you and I can't afford to make a mistake. I want to be sure. A year from now you might see things differently."

"We can never be anything to each other," he answered firmly, "on any other terms than the renunciation of all that Bivens leaves. I don't care what you do with it, just so you wash your hands of it. You and I must begin life just where we left off when the shadow of his money darkened the world for us both. You must give it up."

"It's hard, dearest," she said with a sob, "for your sake it's hard. I've dreamed so many wonderful things that would come to pass when I made you the master of these millions."

"You must choose between his money and my love; you can't have both."

She gazed at him with a desperate yearning.

"I'll do anything you wish, only love me, dearest," she sobbed. "I am yours, body and soul, all that I am and all that I have. You can do with it as you please! All I ask is to be loved—loved—loved—and that you never leave me!"

But even as she spoke, her mind was made up. She would reserve at least half her fortune secretly. When they were married she could persuade him to be reasonable.

"All right, then it's settled, but it must be everything with me or nothing. I won't shake hands with my friend and make love to his wife. You must cease to be his wife now."

"But how—what do you mean?" she asked, white with sudden fear.

"Leave your husband, your palaces, your millions and join me to-morrow night on the Limited for New York. Bring only a change of clothes in a single trunk and a hand-bag. My money must be sufficient. I'll wire for passage on an outgoing steamer. We'll spend two years in Europe and return to America when we please. Are you ready?"

"Oh, Jim, dear," she faltered—"you know that would be madness!"

"Certainly it's madness, the madness of a great love! Come, why do you hesitate?"

The lines of her body relaxed and she began to softly sob. The man waited in silence for

her to speak.

"I've done you harm enough, dearest," she said at last. "I can't do this."

"And your thought is only of me, Nan?" he asked with piercing intensity.

"And of myself," she acknowledged brokenly. "I couldn't do such an insane, vulgar thing."

"I didn't think you could," was the bitter response.

"All I ask," she pleaded, "is to hear you say that you love me now—just as I am with all my faults. Can't we be patient and yet honest with one another in the secret world in which our real lives are lived? In that world I am yours, and you are mine, but a woman's heart starves at last for the words of love, she must have them or die."

"Well, I shall not speak," he answered savagely. "Your husband is the master of millions, but I am the master of something bigger—I am the master of myself."

He paused, lowered his head and looked at her through his heavy eyebrows drawn down for the moment a veil over his soul.

"You must remember," he went on slowly, "that there's something inside a real man that claims one woman all his own. No man ever surrenders this ideal without the death of his self-respect. I will not play a second fiddle to your little husband. There's something that seals my lips, the soul of my soul, the thing that says 'I will' and 'I will not,' the power that links me to the infinite and eternal."

The strong face glowed with emotion. The utter sincerity of his deep vibrant tones were at last convincing. The dark head dropped lower. When she lifted it at last two despairing tears were shining in her eyes.

"I understand, Jim," she said simply, "We will go on as we have. I'll wait in silence."

He rose and lifted her to her feet. The voices of the youngsters rang up the mountain's side.

"No, we can't go on like this now, Nan," he said with quiet strength. "The silence has been broken between us. Your husband is my friend, and from to-day our lives must lie apart. It's the only way."

She extended her hand and he pressed it tenderly. Her voice was the merest sobbing whisper when she spoke: "Yes, Jim, I suppose it's the only way."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHITE MESSENGER

In spite of Bivens's protest Stuart returned to New York on the first train the morning after the coaching party reached the house.

"Stay a week longer," the little man urged, "and I'll go with you; we'll go together, all of us, in my car. I'm getting worse here every day. I've got to get back to my doctors in New York."

"I'm sorry, Cal," he answered quickly, "but I must leave at once."

Nan allowed him to go without an effort to change his decision. A strange calm had come over her. She drove to the station with him in silence. He began to wonder what it meant.

As he stepped from the machine she extended her hand, with a tender smile, and said in low tones:

"Until we meet again."

He pressed it gently and was gone.

He reached New York thoroughly exhausted and blue. The struggles through which he had passed had left him bruised. He spent a sleepless night on the train fighting its scenes over and over. He had told her their relations on any terms must cease, and yet he knew instinctively that another struggle was possible on her return. He made up his

mind at once to avoid this meeting.

The sight of Harriet seated on the stoop of the old home by the Square watching a crowd of children play brought a smile back to his haggard face.

He waved to her a block away and she sprang to her feet answering with a cry of joy. The startling contrast between the women struck him again. She met him at the corner with outstretched hands.

"What a jolly scene, little pal!" he cried. "What's the kid's convention about?"

"They've come to honour me with their good wishes on my voyage."

"What voyage?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, you didn't know—I've an engagement to sing on the Continent this summer—the news came the day you left. Isn't that fine? I sail next week."

A sudden idea struck him. He dropped the bag he was carrying and exclaimed:

"By George, it is just the thing!"

"What?" she asked with a puzzled look.

"Let me go with you, girlie?"

"Oh, Jim, if you only would, I'd be in heaven! You have never been across. I'd chaperone you and show you everything you ought to see. Please go! Say you will! You've said you would, and you can't say no—you're going, you're going!"

"I will!" he said with decision. "You've booked your passage?"

"Yes, but I'll change it to suit you. Oh, goodie, goodie! You're going, you're going! I'm perfectly happy!"

He found business which required a week and booked his passage with Harriet's on a Cunarder which sailed in ten days.

A week later Nan and Bivens returned to their New York house. The papers were full of stories of his failing health. A sensational evening sheet issued an extra announcing that he was dying. The other papers denied the report as a fake. All reporters were denied admission to the Riverside home, and in consequence the press devoted five times the space to his illness they otherwise would have given.

Two days after her arrival Nan telephoned to Stuart.

"You must come up to see Cal to-night," she said earnestly, "he is asking for you."

"Is he really dangerously ill?" Stuart interrupted.

"It's far more serious than the papers suspect. He has had another attack of his old trouble. The doctors say he has a fighting chance—that's all. You'll come?"

"Yes, early to-morrow morning. I've an important engagement to-night that will keep me until twelve o'clock. I'm sailing for Europe day after to-morrow."

A sudden click at the other end and he was cut off. His experienced ear told him it was not an accident. The sound could only have been made by the person to whom he was talking quickly hanging up the receiver. He waited a moment and called Nan back to the telephone.

"You understand, Nan?"

"Yes, we were cut off."

"Tell him I'll be up early in the morning, by ten o'clock, surely. Good night."

The answer was the merest whisper:

"Good night."

It was just dawn when Stuart's telephone rang and he leaped from bed startled at the unusual call.

He seized the receiver and could hear no voice. Apparently some one was fumbling at the other end and he felt the impression of a woman's sleeve or dress brushing the instrument.

"Well, well," he cried in quick, impatient tones, "what is it? What's the matter?"

"Is that you?" came the faint echo of a woman's voice.

"Who is this, please?"

"Jim, don't you know my voice! It's Nan!"

"I didn't recognize it. You spoke so queerly. What is it, Nan?"

"For heaven's sake come at once. Cal was taken dangerously ill at two o'clock. The doctors have been with him every moment. He doesn't get any better. He keeps calling for you. He insisted on my telephoning. I'm frightened. I want to see you. Please come?"

"At once, of course, I'll be there in half an hour—three quarters at the most."

"Thank you," she gasped, and hung up her receiver.

Stuart's cab whirled up town through rivers of humanity pouring down to begin again the round of another day. At Fourteenth, Forty-second, Fifty-ninth, Sixty-sixth and Seventy-second the crash and roar of the subterranean rivers caught his ear as the black torrents of men and women swirled and eddied and poured into the depths below. In all the hurrying thousands not one knew or cared a straw whether the man of millions in his silent palace on the Drive lived or died. To-morrow morning it would be the same, no matter what his fate, and the next day and the next.

"A strange old world!" he mused as his cab swung into the Drive and dashed up to the great house. A liveried servant opened the iron gates wide. He was evidently expected. The chauffeur threw the little cab up the steep turn with a rush. He sprang out and entered the hall with quick silent tread.

The house was evidently in hopeless confusion. Servants wandered in every direction without order. Doctor after doctor passed in and out and the sickening odour of medicines filled the air. A group of newspaper reporters stood at the foot of the grand stairway, discussing in subdued whispers his chances of life and the probable effect of his death on the market. The last barrier was down and through the confusion and panic Stuart could feel the chill of the silently approaching presence. Slowly, remorselessly, the white messenger of Eternity was drawing near.

Nan stood shivering at the head of the stairs, pale, dishevelled, her dark eyes wide and staring with a new expression of terror in their depths.

"How is he, Nan?"

She stared at him a moment without seeming to understand until Stuart repeated his question.

"Worse," she stammered through chattering teeth. "The doctors say he can't possibly live. He has been calling for me for the last hour. I—can't—go!"

"Why?"

"I'm afraid!"

He took her hand. It was cold and he felt a tremour run through her body at his touch.

"Come, come, Nan, you're not a silly child, but a woman who has passed through scenes in life that held tragedies darker than death!"

"I can't help it; I'm afraid," she cried, shivering and drawing closer.

"Come, drive out of your thoughts the old foolish shadows that make the end of life a horror. To me dying has come to mean the breaking of bars. You taught me this the day you killed my soul."

"Hush, Jim!"

"It's true, don't be foolish," he whispered. "The day you killed me, long ago, I was lonely and afraid at first, and then I saw that death is only the gray mystery of the dawn. Come, I'm ashamed of you. If Cal is calling, go to him at once. You must see him."

"I can't! Tell him that I'm ill."

"I won't lie to him in such an hour."

Shivering in silence she led Stuart to the door of Bivens's room and fled to her own.

On another magnificent bed of gleaming ebony inlaid with rows of opals, thousands of opals, Stuart found the little shrivelled form. The swarthy face was white and drawn, the hard thin lips fallen back from two rows of smooth teeth in pitiful, fevered weakness. He was trying to talk to the pastor of his church, while the fashionable

clergymen bent over him with an expression of helpless misery, now and then wiping the perspiration from his sleek, well-fed neck.

"I want you to go into that next room and pray," the little man gasped. "I haven't done anything very good or great yet, but I have plans, great plans! Tell them to God, ask Him to give me a chance. Ten years more—or five—or one—and I'll do these things."

The shifting eyes caught sight of Stuart. He released the minister's hand and raised his own to his friend.

"Jim!"

The preacher moved aside with a sigh of relief and softly tiptoed out of the room as Stuart took the outstretched hand.

"It's awfully good of you to come up here so soon," he began feebly. "I've some plans I want you to carry out for me right away. You see I never thought before of the world as a place where there were so many men and women sick and suffering—thousands and tens and hundreds of thousands. These doctors say that every night in New York alone there are half a million people sick or bending over the beds of loved ones who are suffering, and two hundred die every day."

He paused for breath, and the black eyes stared at his friend.

"Jim, I can't die! I haven't lived! I've got to get up from here and do some things I've meant to do—all those sick people—I've got to do something for them. I'm going to build palaces for the lame, the halt, the sick, the blind. I'm going to gather the great men of science from the ends of the earth and set them to work to lift this shadow from the world."

A sudden pain seized and convulsed his frail body and Stuart called the doctors from the next room.

They stood by in helpless sympathy.

"Can't you stop this pain?" the financier gasped in anger. "What are you here for? Am I not able to buy enough morphine to stop this hellish agony?"

His family doctor bent and said:

"Your heart action is too low just now, Mr. Bivens, you can't stand it."

"Well, I can't stand this! Give it to me, I tell you!"

The doctor took a hypodermic syringe, filled it with water and injected it into his arm.

While Stuart watched the pitiful trick, his eye wandered over the magnificent trappings of the room.

"What irony of Fate!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "Not a clod hopper in the field, nor a blacksmith at his anvil who would change places with him now—the poorest negro who sings at his plow is richer."

The sufferer stared and beckoned to Stuart.

Handing him a key which he drew from beneath his pillow he cried:

"Unlock the right-hand top-drawer of that safe, Jim—the door is open. Hand me those bundles of stocks and bonds and ask those doctors to come in here."

Stuart complied with his request, and Bivens spread the brilliant coloured papers on the white covering of his bed, while the doctors drew near.

"Listen now, gentlemen," he began, still gasping with pain. "You're our greatest living doctors, I'm told. Well, I'm not willing to die, I won't die—do you hear? I'm only forty-nine years old. You see here thirty millions in gilt-edged stocks and bonds. Well, there are three of you, I'll give you ten millions each to take this stone off of my breast that's smothering me and give me five years more of life. My friend Stuart here is witness to this deed of gift—my word is pledged before him and before God—I'll make good. Do you understand? Ten millions each! Can you grasp the meaning, the sweep and power and grandeur of such an offer? Now, gentlemen, do your best for me. Just five years more—well, we won't haggle over terms—give me one year more and I'll not complain!"

The three men of science stood with folded helpless arms and made no effort to keep back the tears. They had seen many men die. It was nothing new—and yet the pity and pathos of this strange appeal found its way to the soul of each. They never envied a millionaire again.

They retired for another consultation. Stuart replaced the papers and put the key in Bivens's outstretched hand.

It was plain that he was sinking rapidly.

"Ask Nan to come here a minute," he said feebly.

Stuart walked to the door and whispered to a servant. When he returned to the bedside, the dying man looked up into his face gratefully.

"You don't know how it helps me to have you near, Jim, old boy. I'm lonely! Nan I guess is ill and broken down. I've lavished millions on her. I've given her all I possess in my will, but somehow we never found happiness. If I could only have been sure of the deep, sweet, unselfish love of one human soul on this earth! If I could only have won a girl's heart when I was poor; but I was rich, and I've always wondered whether she really loved me for my own sake. At least I've always thanked God for you. You've been a real friend. Our hearts were young together and you stood by me when—I—was—a—poor—lonely—friendless—dog——"

His voice sank low and he gasped painfully for breath. Stuart knew the end had come. He bent low and whispered:

"Give me your hand, Cal, old boy, we must say goodbye. I must go in a minute."

To his surprise the hand was not extended.

An hour later when the covering was turned back from the dead body he saw that the smooth little cold hand had gripped the key to his treasures in a last instinctive grasp.

Stuart drew the curtains of scarlet and gold, touched a spring and raised the massive broad window. The death-chamber was flooded with fresh balmy air and dazzling sunlight. All that was left of him who boasted his mastery of the world lay on the magnificent bed, a lump of white cold flesh and projecting bones. The little body looked stark and hideous in the sunlight.

The reporters down stairs were prying into his affairs like so many ferrets to find out how much he left. One of them asked Stuart his opinion.

The lawyer gazed at the young reporter, thoughtfully, while he slowly answered:

"There's only one thing sure, young man, he left it all!"

Through the open window Stuart caught the perfume of flowers on the lawn. The Italian gardeners were working on the flower beds the little man loved. The great swan-like form of a Hudson River steamer swept by, piling the white foam of the clear waters on her bow, bearing high on the side the gilded name of a man who was once Bivens's associate in great ventures, but who was now wearing a suit of convict's stripes behind the walls of a distant prison.

A long line of barges loaded with brick for new houses came floating down the stream behind a busy little tug. On the soft morning breezes the young Southerner's keen ear caught the twang of a banjo and the joyous music of negro brickmen singing an old-fashioned melody of his native state; while over all, like an eternal chorus, came the dim muffled roar of the city's life.

He looked again at the lump of cold clay, and wondered what was passing in the soul of the woman who was now the heir of all his millions.

Why had she shown such strange and abject terror over his death—an event she had foreseen and desired? He recalled the hoarse unnatural voice and the blind fumbling at her telephone.

A horrible suspicion suddenly flushed through his mind!

He determined to know at once. A few skilful questions would reveal the truth. She might be able to conceal it from the world, but not from him. He called a servant and asked to see Mrs. Bivens immediately.

CHAPTER IX

THE EYES OF PITY

As he had feared, Nan refused point blank to enter the death chamber and asked him to come to her boudoir.

He found her standing by a window, apparently calm. Stuart looked at her a moment with a curious detached interest. Suddenly aware of his presence she turned, her eyes shining with tears, the first he had seen since entering the house.

"At last—at last!" she said in low broken accents. "Oh dear God, how long I've waited and despaired! At last we may belong to each other forever—body and soul! Nothing else matters now, does it? We shall forget all the blank hideous years; you'll forget it, won't you, dearest? You'll forgive me—now—say that you will?"

"I've long ago forgiven, Nan, but tell me about this sudden fatal attack. You were with him when he was stricken?"

"Yes, I took the nurse's place at midnight; I couldn't sleep."

Stuart lowered his eyes to conceal his excitement.

"How long did you stay with him?"

"Until I called you."

"And you gave him the medicine in the absence of the nurse?"

"Only one," she answered, hesitatingly, "a particular kind the doctor had not prescribed, but which he persisted in taking to relieve his pain."

"He asked for it?"

"Yes. He was suffering horribly. He begged me to give it to him. I couldn't resist his pleading."

"You didn't love him, Nan?" he went on evenly.

"You know that, Jim."

"You had wished him dead a thousand times?"

"Why do you talk so queerly? Why do you ask me such questions. Surely you——"

"And you were jealous of Harriet Woodman?"

"No! No! What could put such a thing into your head?"

"You saw in the Sunday papers, the day before his death, the sketch of Harriet's life and the fact that she was going to sing abroad?"

"Yes, yes, but what of it?"

"You saw her in my arms the night of her triumph and you knew that I was going to sail on the same ship?"

"For God's sake, are you accusing me?" she cried, in anguish.

"He asked you for medicine, Nan?" he went on remorselessly.

"Yes, a powder——"

"A poisonous powder—and you gave him one?"

"Yes."

"But he begged for two?"

"Yes."

"And you're sure you gave him but one?"

"He was begging for two—I might have given them both—it's possible, of course."

He gazed at her with a look of pity.

"I know that you did. Nan, know it as certainly as if I stood by your side and saw you press it to his lips."

"You know, Jim?" she cried feebly, her head drooping low.

"And you have no consciousness of crime in the act?"

"I only did what he wished. I couldn't know that it would be fatal."

"And you feel no remorse?"

"Why should I? His death seemed only a question of days——"

The woman began to sob.

"My only crime has been my love!"

"From the bottom of my heart I pity you!" Stuart broke in, softly. "Not merely because I know that you have committed murder, but because you lack the moral power to realize that it is a crime. The state will never reach your act with the law. But the big thing is you have no consciousness of guilt, and feel no remorse because you have no soul. You have only desires and impulses. You must have these desires fulfilled each moment. That's why you couldn't wait for me to earn my fortune honestly, and so betrayed me for gold. I can see it all now. Your beauty has blinded me. The touch of your hand, the perfume of your breath, the sweet memories of our young life together have held me in a spell."

"For God's sake, Jim!" she cried fiercely—"don't—don't talk like that! I can't endure it! You don't mean, you can't mean that you are going to turn from me now! Just when I've found your love. Tell me that you hate me, if you will, strike me, tell me I was a murderess when I stabbed your heart twelve years ago, but you must love me or I'll die! We love because we love. I'd love you if you had killed a hundred men!"

Stuart looked at her through a mist of tears.

"The spell is broken, Nan, dear, our romance is ended. I don't say it in pride or anger, I say it in sorrow—a great deep, pitying sorrow, that cuts and hurts!"

Nan suddenly threw her arms around his neck and held him convulsively.

"My darling, you can't leave me! I'm pleading for life! Had I been the shallow, soulless creature which you believe surely I might have been content with my gilded toys. But I was not. I was just a woman with a heart that could break. Suppose I have committed a crime? I dared it for love—a love so great, so wonderful, that I, who am weak and timid, afraid to be alone in the dark, faced death and hell for you."

"No, dear, I offered you my life and love, at least without the stain of crime. I offered to go with you to the ends of the earth. You didn't do this thing for love."

He slowly drew the rounded arms from his neck, and looked long and tenderly into the depths of her eyes.

The pleading voice ceased. The woman saw and understood. She had at last passed out of his world. Only the memory of a girl he had once loved and idealized remained, and that memory was now unapproachable. The living woman was no longer the figure in the mental picture. The struggle was over.

He extended his hand, clasped hers, bowed and kissed it, turned and walked quickly toward the door.

With a half smothered cry she followed.

"Jim!"

He paused and turned again, facing her with a look of infinite sadness.

"Remember," she said brokenly, "I never expect to see you again—we can not meet after this. I am looking into your dear face now with the anguish of a broken heart strangling me. You can not leave like this, we have been too much to each other."

He took her in his arms and held her close.

"Forgive me, dear," he whispered, reverently kissing her as he would have pressed the lips of the dead. "I didn't mean to be cruel—goodbye."

The door of the great house softly closed, and he was gone. A few moments later the servants found her limp form lying in a swoon on the floor.

AN EPILOGUE

Strangers no longer live in the cottage Stuart built on the hills. A jaunty sailboat nods at the buoy near the water's edge. The drone of bees from the fruit trees in full bloom on the terraces promise a luscious harvest in the summer and fall. The lawn is a wilderness of flowers and shimmering green. The climbing roses on the southeastern side of the house have covered it to the very eaves of the roof. Stuart has just cut them away from Harriet's window because they interfered with her view of the bay and sea and towering hills they love so well. And the crooning of a little mother over a baby's cradle fills the home with music sweeter to its builder than any note ever heard in grand opera.

THE END

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N.Y.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROOT OF EVIL ***

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