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ROPE

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BY
HOLWORTHY HALL
Author of "THE MAN NOBODY KNEW," etc.



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1922

ROPE

CHAPTER I

As Henry came blithely into the house with a heavy suit-case in one hand and a cumbersome kit-bag in the other, his Aunt Mirabelle marched out like a grenadier from the living-room, and posted herself in the hallway to watch him approach. There was this much to say for Aunt Mirabelle: she was at least consistent, and for twenty years she had worn the same expression whenever she looked at him. During that period the rest of the world and Henry had altered, developed, advanced--but not Aunt Mirabelle. She had changed neither the style of her clothes nor the nature of her convictions; she had disapproved of Henry when he was six, and therefore, she disapproved of him today. To let him know it, she regarded him precisely as though he were still six, and had forgotten to wash his face.

"I suppose," remarked Aunt Mirabelle, in her most abrasive voice, "I suppose you're waiting for me to say I hope you had a good time. Well, I'm not a-going to say it, because it wouldn't be true, and I wouldn't want to have it sitting on my conscience. Of course, *some* people haven't got much of any conscience for anything to sit on, anyway. If they did, they'd be earnest, useful citizens. If they did, then once in a while they'd think about something else besides loud ties and silk socks and golf. And they wouldn't be gallivanting off on house-parties for a week at a time, either; they'd be tending to their business--if they had any. And if they hadn't, they ought to."

Henry put down the bag and the suit-case, removed his straw hat, and grinned, with a fair imitation of cheerfulness. He had never learned how to handle Aunt Mirabelle, and small wonder; for if he listened in silence, he was called sulky; if he disputed her, he was called flippant; if he agreed with her, she accused him of fraud; and if he obeyed his natural instincts, and treated her with tolerant good-humour, she usually went on a conversation strike, and never weakened until after the twelfth apology. Whatever he did was wrong, so that purely on speculation, he grinned, and said what came to his tongue.

"Maybe so," said Henry, "maybe so, but conscience is a plant of slow growth," and immediately after he had said this, he wished that he had chosen a different epigram--something which wasn't so liable to come back at him, later, like a boomerang.

"Humph!" said Aunt Mirabelle. "It is, is it? Well, if I was in your place, I'd be impatient for it to grow faster."

Henry shook his head. "No, I don't believe you would. I've read somewhere that impatience dries the blood more than age or sorrow." He assumed an air of critical satisfaction. "The bird that wrote that had pretty good technique, don't you think?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "All right, Henry. Be pert. But I know what made you so almighty anxious to sneak off on this house-party; and I know whose account it was you went on, too, and I don't see for the *life* of me why your uncle hasn't put his foot down." She sighed, as though in deep mourning. "I did hope you'd grow up different from these other boys, Henry, but you're all of you just alike. When you get old enough, do you pick out some pure, innocent, sensible, young woman that's been trained the way girls were trained in *my* day? No. You go and make fools of yourselves over these short-skirted little hussies all powdered up like a box of marshmallows. And as long as they're spry enough *and* immodest enough to do all these new bunny dances and what not, you think that's a sure sign they'll make good wives and mothers. Humph. Makes me sick."

In spite of himself, Henry lost his artificial grin, and began to turn dull red. "I wouldn't go quite so far as to say that."

"Well," retorted Aunt Mirabelle, "I didn't hardly expect you would. But you'll go far enough to *see* one of 'em, I notice.... Well, your uncle's home this afternoon; long's he's paying your bills, you might have the grace to go in and say howdy-you-do to him." She marched upstairs, and Henry, revolving his hat in his hand, gazed after her until she was out of sight. He stood, irresolute, until the echo of her common-sense shoes died into silence; and as he lingered, he was struck for the ten thousandth time by the amazing mystery of the human family.

First, there was his mother, a small and exquisite woman with music in her heart and in the tips of her fingers; his memory of her was dim, but he knew that she had been the maddest and the merriest of all possible mothers--a creature of joy and sunshine and the sheer happiness of existence. And then her sister Mirabelle, who found life such a serious condition to be in, and loved nothing about it, save the task of reforming it for other people whether the other people liked it or not. And finally, her brother John, bald, fat, and good-natured; a man whose personal interests were bounded by his own physical comfort, and by his desire to see everyone else equally comfortable. Whenever Henry thought of this trio, he reflected that his grandparents must have been very versatile.

He drew a long breath, and glanced up the stairway, as though the spirit of his Aunt Mirabelle were still haunting him; then, with a depressing recollection of what she had said about his conscience, and with hot resentment at what she said about his taste, he walked slowly into the library.

His uncle John Starkweather, who had been writing at a big desk between the windows, sprang

up to shake hands with him. "Hello, boy! Thought Bob Standish must have kidnapped you. Have a good party?"

"Fine, thanks," said Henry, but his tone was so subdued and joyless that his uncle stared at him for a moment, and then went over to close the door. Standing with his back to it, Mr. Starkweather smiled reminiscently and a trifle ruefully, and began to peel the band from a cigar. "What's the matter? Mirabelle say anything to you?"

"Why--nothing special."

His uncle hesitated. "In a good many ways," he said, lowering his voice, "Mirabelle puts me in mind of my father. When he was a boy, out in the country, he'd had to smash the ice in the water-pitcher every mornin', and he was proud of it--thought a boy that hadn't earned some of his godliness with an ice-pick was a dude. Thought what was good enough for his father was good enough for *him*, and sometimes it was *too* good. Didn't believe in modern improvements like telephones and easy chairs and three-tined forks; didn't believe in labour-savin' devices because labour wasn't *meant* to be saved. Bible says for us to work six days a week, and if he ever had any spare time before Sat'day night, he figured he must have forgot somethin'. Business--well, he called advertisin' a rich man's luxury, and said an audit was an insult to his partners. Said he'd welcome a sheriff sooner'n he would an expert accountant--and in the long run, that's exactly what he *did*. Involuntary bankruptcy--found his sanctimonious old cashier'd been sanctimoniously lootin' the till for eighteen years." He paused, and eyed his cigar. "Well, Mirabelle's cut more or less off the same piece. Lord, I wish *she* could go through some kind of bankruptcy, if 't would shake her up like it did father."

"It--shook him up, did it?" inquired Henry, fidgeting.

"Well," said his uncle, "after the crash, I don't recollect he ever mentioned the good old times again except once; and that was to praise the good old habit of takin' defaulters and boilin' 'em in oil. No, sir, he wouldn't so much as add two and two together without an addin' machine, and he used to make an inventory of his shirts and winter flannels pretty near every week. And Mirabelle's the same way; she's still tryin' to live under the 1874 rules." He came back to his desk, and sat down thoughtfully. "Well, she's been talkin' to me ever since you went off on this party and as far's most of it's concerned, I'm not on *her* side, and I'm not on *your* side; I'm sort of betwixt and between." He looked sidewise at Henry, and discovered that Henry was peering off into space, and smiling as though he saw a vision in the clouds. "Just as man to man, just for the information; suppose you passed up everything I've said to you, and went and got married one of these days--did you expect I'd go on supportin' you?"

Henry came down to earth, and his expression showed that he had landed heavily. "Why--what was that?"

His uncle repeated it, with a postscript. "Oh, I've always told you you could have anything you wanted within reason that I could pay for. But from what I been told"--his eyes twinkled--"wives ain't always reasonable. And it does seem to me that when a young man gets to be twenty five or six, and never did a lick of work in his life, and loafes around clubs and plays polo just because he's got a rich uncle, why, it's a sort of a reflection on both of 'em. Seem so to you?"

Henry glanced up nervously and down again. "To tell the truth, I hadn't thought much about it."

"Say," said his uncle, confidentially. "Neither had I. Not 'till Mirabelle told me you went off on this party because Anna Barklay was goin' to be there.... Now I had pretty hard sleddin' when I was your age; I've kind of liked to see you enjoy yourself. But Mirabelle--Now I said before, I ain't on *her* side, and I ain't on *your* side; I had the thing out with you once or twice already, and I guess you know what my angles are. Only if Mirabelle's got any grounds, maybe I ought to say it over again.... You been out of college four years now, and you tried the automobile business for two months and the bond business for two weeks and the real-estate business for two minutes, and there you quit. You spent five, six thousand a year and *that* was all right, but I admit I don't like the idea of your gettin' married on nothin' but prospects, specially when *I'm* all the prospects there is. Sound fair to you?"

Henry nodded, with much repression, "You couldn't be unfair if you tried, Uncle John."

"Well, you was always open to reason, even when you was in kindergarten.... Now, in some ways I don't approve of you any more'n Mirabelle does, but she wants me to go too blamed far. She wants me to turn you loose the way my father did me. She wants me to say if you should ever marry without my consent I'll cut you out of my will. But that's old stuff. That's cold turkey. Mirabelle don't know times have changed--she's so busy with that cussed Reform League of hers, she don't have time to reform any of her own slants about things." He rolled his cigar under his tongue.

"Well, I'm goin' to compromise. Before you get involved too deep, I want you to know what's in my mind. I don't believe it's the best thing for either of us for me to go on bein' a kind of an evergreen money-bush. And a man that's earnin' his own livin' don't have to ask odds of anybody. Don't you think you better bundle up your courage and get to work, Henry?"

Henry was twiddling his watch-chain. "It hasn't been a matter of *courage*, exactly--"

"Oh, I know *that*. I don't believe you're *scared* of work; you're only sort of shy about it. I never saw you really afraid of more'n three things--bein' a spoil-sport, or out of style, or havin' a waiter think you're stingy. No, you ain't *afraid* of work, but you never been properly introduced, so you're kind of standoffish about it. I've always kind of hoped you'd take a tip from Bob

Standish--*there's* one of your own breed that knows where the durable satisfactions of life are. Just as good family's yours; just as much money; just as fond of games;--and workin' like a prize pup in my office and makin' good. *He'll* tell you.... But if you go get married, boy, before you show you *could* take care of yourself, and what money I might leave you--oh, I don't say you got to put over any miracle, but I *do* say you got to learn the value of money first. You'd do that by earnin' some. If you don't, then you and me'd have a quarrel. Sound logical to you?"

Henry was frowning a little, and sitting nearer to the edge of his chair. "Too *darned* logical," he said.

His uncle surveyed him with great indulgence. "What's the idea?" he asked, humourously. "You ain't gone off and got yourself married already, have you?"

Henry stood up, and squared his shoulders, and looked straight into his uncle's eyes. His voice was strained, but at the same time it held a faint note of relief, as if he had contained his secret too long for his own nerves. "Yes, Uncle John...."

And waited, as before the Court of last appeal.

CHAPTER II

The older man sat limp in his chair, and stared until the ash of his cigar tumbled, untidily, over his waistcoat. He brushed at it with uncertain, ineffective motions, but his eyes never left his nephew. He put the cigar once more to his lips, shuddered, and flung it away.

"Boy--" he said, at length, "Boy--is that true?"

Henry cleared his throat. "Yes, Uncle John."

"Who is it? Anna Barklay?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"*When?*"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Does--Judge Barklay know it yet?"

"No, not yet. He's out of town."

His uncle drew a tremendous breath, and pulled himself upright. "Boy," he said, "why in the hell did you ever go and do a thing like that?... Haven't I been pretty decent to you, the best I knew how?... Why'd you ever go, and--*have* I been mistaken in you all this while? Why, boy, I thought you and me were *friends*."

There was another heavy silence. "I don't know. It just happened. The way things do--sometimes. We've always been crazy about each other."

Mr. Starkweather was looking at and through his nephew, who was man-grown and presumably a rational human being; but what Mr. Starkweather actually saw was the vision of a little boy dressed in Lord Fauntleroy velvet, with silver knee-buckles and a lace collar; and much as a drowning man is supposed to review, in a lightning flash, every incident of his whole life, so was Mr. Starkweather reviewing the life of Henry, beginning with the era of black velvet, and ending with the immediate present. That history was a continuous record of dashing impulses, and the gayest irresponsibility; and yet, when the time came for an accounting, Henry had offered only explanations, and never excuses. In his glorious pursuit of the calendar, he had paid his penalties as royally as he had earned them; and even now, when he was confessed of the most impetuous and the most astounding act of all his unballasted youth, he had nothing to say in defence. As a climax, marriage had "happened" to him, and he was braced for whatever might happen next.

Presently, Mr. Starkweather, coming out of his daze, began to wonder if, by this very climax, Henry hadn't prescribed his own medicine, and at the same time taken out insurance on his own salvation. For one thing, he had selected the right girl--a girl with no money, and plenty of character--a girl who would manage him so skilfully that Henry would think himself the manager. For another thing, Mr. Starkweather believed that Henry was profoundly in love with her, even though he tried to conceal his seriousness by spreading it with a generous helping of light manner, and modern vocabulary. These facts, together with Mr. Starkweather's control of the finances, might possibly operate as the twin levers which would pry Henry out of his improvidence. The levers themselves were certainly strong enough; it was a question only of Henry's resistance. Mr. Starkweather winced to realize that by the time the minute-hand of his watch had gone twice again around the dial, he should know definitely and permanently whether Henry was worth his powder, or not.

He leaned his elbows on his desk, judicially. "I'm pretty much knocked edgeways, Henry--but tell me one more thing; this wasn't any bet, was it, or--"

"Bet!" flared Henry, and all the youth went out of his features.

"Yes. Nobody *dared* you to go and get married--it wasn't any kind of a put-up job, was it?"

The younger man was righteously indignant. "Uncle John, I admit I haven't won any medals for--for *some* things,--and maybe you think I *am* the kind of bird that would--do this on a bet, or a dare--and if you *do* think that--I guess we're *both* mistaken in each other!"

His uncle's hand went up. "Hold your horses! You've answered the question. If you hadn't got mad, I'd have thrown you out the window. Why *did* you do it, then?... No--never mind." He looked away. "*I* know. Spring, and impulse and no emergency brakes. *I* know...." He looked back at Henry, and smiled oddly. "And I was just goin' to tell you, before you sprung it on me, that if you cared two cents about that girl,--and me, too,--you'd want to deserve her:--do somethin' besides be a model to hang expensive clothes on."

"Yes," said Henry, also judicial. "I guess I'm entitled to that wallop."

His uncle nodded. "That one and quite a few more. Still, you never heard anybody accuse me of not bein' a good sport, did you?"

"No, Uncle John. I counted on it."

"Who knows this--besides us?"

"Just Bob Standish. We took him along for a witness."

"So! Bob Standish! Hm. I'd have thought Bob'd had sense enough to try to stop it. I'll have words with him."

"He did try."

Mr. Starkweather rose. "Where's Anna?"

"Out in the car. With Bob."

His uncle froze. "Out there? Waitin' there all this time? For Heaven's sake, Henry, she'll be in a conniption fit! You go bring her in here--and tell her to stop worryin'. I'm sore as the devil, and I'm goin' to make an example out of you, but that ain't any reason to act like a grouch, is it? Sound sensible to you? Bring her in here. Not Bob--I'll see him afterwards."

She was small and intensely feminine, but there was nothing fragile about her, and no slightest hint of helplessness. She was pretty enough, too, and her attractions were more than skin-deep; to the qualities which showed in her eyes--sincerity and humour and imagination--there was also to be added sweetness of disposition and sensitiveness, which were proved by the curves of her mouth; and finally, there was quiet determination, stopping just short of stubbornness, which was evident in the moulding of her strong little chin.

She came in slowly, questioningly, not in fear, but merely poised so as to adjust herself to any style of reception. Mr. Starkweather met her eyes and laughed--a fat, spontaneous, understanding laugh--and blushing furiously, she ran to him, with both her hands outstretched.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Starkweather, and interrupted himself long enough to kiss her, "I'll say Henry's got a darned sight better judgment 'n *you* have.... Go on and blush. Make a good job of it. Ashamed of yourself? So 'm I. Sit down there and cringe. You too, Henry." He himself remained on his feet. "Funny thing," he said, after a pause. "Only chance I ever had to get married myself was somethin' like this is--oh, *I* wasn't a gilt loafer, like Henry is; I was workin' sixteen hours a day, but I wasn't makin' money enough. Both our fathers said so. And she'd have run off, but I wouldn't. Thought it wasn't respectable, I guess. Anyhow, it kind of petered out, and I lost my nerve. Wish to thunder I'd taken a chance when I had it. Worth it, sometimes." He whirled on Henry, abruptly. "Well, you took *your* chance. Now let's see if you think it's worth it. If you're figurin' on any help from me, you got to work for it first. If you'd waited, I'd kind of made things easy for you. Now, I'm goin' to hand you the meanest job I can think of. It won't be an insult and it won't be a joke, but maybe you'll take it for both--until you learn better."

"What is it, Uncle John?"

"I'll tell you when you get back from your honeymoon."

The two young people stared at each other, and at Mr. Starkweather. "From our--what?" asked the girl, incredulously.

"Honeymoon. Oh, you made a couple of prize fools of yourselves, and if I did what I ought to, I'd cut Henry off sharp this minute. But--guess I better make a fool of *myself*, so you'll feel more at home." He coughed explosively. "Besides, you're awful young, both of you--and damn it, if you don't cash in on it now, next thing you know you'll be wonderin' where the time's gone, anyway. No sense in robbin' you of the best months of your life, just because you hadn't sense enough to rob *yourselves* of it--is there? Oh, I suppose I'm a kind of a sentimental cuss, but--must be I like the feelin' of it." He jerked his head toward Henry. "This is April. Take her off somewhere--Italy? South of France?--'till next August. Then you report back here, all fixed and ready to eat crow. Sound fair to you?"

The girl rose, and crossed the room to him. "Mr. Starkweather--"

"Name's Uncle John," he corrected. "You married it."

"Uncle John--I--I don't know how to--" She bit her lip, and he saw the depths of her eyes, and saw that they were filling with tears. She gestured imperatively to Henry. "You know him better--*you* tell him."

Henry had sprung across to join them. "Uncle John, you're a peach! I'll break rock on the streets if you say so! You're a peach!"

"Well," said Mr. Starkweather, uncomfortably. "If everybody else's goin' to bawl, I guess it'll have to be contagious.... Only when you get back, you're both goin' to pay the piper. I'm goin' to make Henry earn his salt, whether he's got it in him or not; I'm goin' to make him crawl. That goes as it stands, too; no foolin'.... Look here, don't you want me to break it to the Judge? Guess I better. I can put it up to him in *writin'* twice as good as Henry put it up to me by talkin', anyhow.... And I'll put an announcement in the *Herald* that'll take the cuss off. Anna, you hustle up some engraved notices to get around to all our friends. You know what's in style.... Oh, you're a couple of champion idiots, and Henry's goin' to sweat for it when he comes home, but-- God bless you, my boy, and you too, my dear--only *how* in blazes am I goin' to get it across to Mirabelle? That's what bites me the worst, Henry; that's what bites me the worst!"

CHAPTER III

In a small office on the third floor of the City Bank Building Mr. Theodore Mix, broker and amateur politician, sat moodily intent upon his morning newspaper. For thirty years (he was fifty-five) Mr. Mix had been a prominent and a mildly influential citizen, and by great effort he had managed to keep himself excessively overrated. A few years ago he had even been mentioned as a candidate for Mayor, and the ambition was still alive within him, although fulfilment was never so distant. But despite his appearance, which was dignified, and despite his manner, which would have done for the diplomatic corps, and despite his connection with local charities and churches and civic committees, Mr. Mix was secretly a bit of a bounder; and although the past decade or two he had made a handsome income, he had contrived to get rid of it as fast as he conveniently could, and by methods which wouldn't always have stood analysis.

Lately, for no apparent cause, his best customers had edged away from him; he was gliding rapidly into debt, and he knew that unless he clambered out again within six or eight weeks, he should have considerable difficulty in preserving his reputation, both financial and ethical. And like all men in the same position, Mr. Mix was fiercely jealous of his prestige; by long practice he had warped himself into thinking that it belonged to him; and he was ready to defend it with every conceivable weapon.

For the moment, however, Mr. Mix was querulous rather than defensive. He was trying to place the blame for the past two seasons of misfortune, and when he observed that Pacific Refining was twelve points up from Saturday's close, he sighed wearily and told himself that it was all a matter of luck. He had had an appointment, last Saturday at nine o'clock, with his friend John Starkweather, and he had meant to borrow something from him, if possible, and to risk a few hundred shares of Pacific Refining on margin; but he had overslept, and Mr. Starkweather had left his office at nine fifteen and hadn't come back again that day, so that the profit which might so easily have come to rest in Mr. Mix's pockets was now in other quarters.

Luck! The most intangible of assets and the most unescapable of liabilities. On Saturday, Mr. Mix had arrived too late because he had overslept because his alarm-clock had been tinkered by a watchmaker who had inherited a taste for alcohol from a parent who had been ruined by the Chicago fire--and almost before he knew it, Mr. Mix had trailed the blame to Adam and Eve, and was feeling personally resentful. It was plain to him that his failure wasn't in any sense his own fault.

As he resumed his paper, however, his querulousness yielded to a broad sunny optimism, and he turned to the sporting page and hunted out the news from the Bowie track. He had a friend at Bowie, and the friend owned a horse which he swore was the darkest three-year-old in captivity; he had wired Mr. Mix to hypothecate his shirt, and bet the proceeds on the fourth race, this coming Saturday. The odds would be at least 10 to 1, he said, and he could place all the money that Mr. Mix might send him.

Mr. Mix leaned back and built a stable in the air. Suppose he could borrow a couple of thousand. Twenty thousand clear profit. Then a quick dash into the cotton-market (the price was certainly going to break wide open in another month) and the twenty would unfold, and expand, and become fifty. And if a shrewd, cold-blooded man went down to Wall Street with fifty thousand dollars, and played close to his chest, he ought to double his capital in four months. To be sure, Mr. Mix had been losing steadily for a dozen years, but he was confident that he had it in him to be a great and successful plunger. He felt it. Heretofore, he had been handicapped by operating on a shoestring; but with fifty thousand dollars to put his back against--

His stenographer announced a caller, and on the instant, Mr. Mix, put on his other personality, and prepared to silver his tongue. The caller, however, came straight to Mr. Mix's desk, and flipped out one sheet from a large portfolio. "Say," he remarked brusquely. "What's the matter with this bill? Ziegler and Company. Two ninety two sixty--dated November."

Mr. Mix laughed genially, and offered a cigar. "Why, nothing's the matter with it."

"What's the matter with Ziegler and Company? Aren't they solvent?"

The visitor lighted his cigar, and mellowed. "Well it ain't any of *my* funeral, but Ziegler he says if you don't settle by the fifteenth, he'll give it to his attorney."

For the third time in a week, an attorney had been lugged into the conversation; more than that, Mr. Mix had received four letters from two different collection agencies. "In the words of the Good Book," he said soothingly, "have patience and I will pay thee all."

"What say? Will I come in next week sometime?"

"Now, that," said Mr. Mix, with a rush of approval, "is a first-rate idea. That's first-rate. Come in next week some time."

"Right-o. Only Ziegler, he's pretty hard-boiled, Mr. Mix.... Say, why don't you gimme a check now, and save me from gettin' flat-footed? Two ninety two sixty? Why for *you* that's chicken-feed."

"Bill hasn't been audited yet," said Mr. Mix, with all the grandeur of an industrial chieftain. "Come in next week."

The visitor went out, and Mr. Mix scowled at the bill, threatened to tear it, and finally put it away in a drawer where it had plenty of companionship. To think that after his lifetime as an important citizen--generally supposed to be well-to-do if not actually rich--he couldn't pay a trifling account of less than three hundred dollars because he didn't have three hundred dollars in the bank. Collection agencies and the warning of suits--and impertinence from young ruffians who were hired to dun him! He scowled more heavily, and then gave his shoulders an upward movement of rancour and disgust.

And yet--the lines receded from his forehead--and yet there was always John Starkweather, and the friend at Bowie. Mr. Mix rose, and went out to the corridor, and down it to a door which was lettered with Mr. Starkweather's name, followed by the inscription: Real Estate and Insurance, Mortgage Loans. And as he entered, and remembered that thirty years ago he and John Starkweather had occupied adjoining stools at the same high desk, and broken their back over the same drudgery, and at the same wage, he was filled with an emotion which made his cheeks warm. Side by side, only thirty years ago, and separated now by the Lord knew what, and the Lord knew why. Mr. Mix knew that he was brainier than John Starkweather; he admitted it. Brainier, smoother, quicker of wit, and more polished. But Starkweather's office handled the bulk of local realty transactions; it wrote more insurance than all of its competitors in a mass; it loaned almost as much money, on mortgage, as the Trust and Savings. And Mr. Mix, Broker, was on the verge of bankruptcy. Luck! No question about it.

At the swinging gate there was a girl-clerk who smiled up at him, flirtatiously. "Want to see the boss? He's busy for a coupla minutes."

"All right," said Mr. Mix in an undertone. "I'll stay here and talk to you."

"The nerve of some folks! Think I'm paid to listen to your line of hot air? Not 'till they double my salary. You go sit down and have a thought. Exercise's what you need."

Mr. Mix rolled his eyes heavenward. "So young, and so heartless!" he murmured, and went sedately forward to the reception room.

The door of the private office was not quite closed; so that the voices of two men were faintly audible. Mr. Mix cast about him, made sure that he was unobserved, and dignifiedly changed his seat--nearer that door.

"Yes," said a voice which at first he couldn't recognize. "The deed's recorded. So legally, Henry owns the property now." Mr. Mix nodded triumphantly; the voice belonged to Mr. Archer, a leading lawyer and Mr. Starkweather's closest friend.

"That's the idea." This was in Mr. Starkweather's familiar bass. "Now how'd you fix the will?"

"Why, it was very simple. Your point was that you didn't want everybody to know what was going on. So--"

"No. And if I put a lot o' conditions like that in a will, why just as soon as it was probated, Henry and Mirabelle'd both get an awful lot o' bum publicity. They'd both be sore, and I'd look like a nut.... Naturally, I don't plan to die off as soon as all this, but better be safe. I just want to fix it up so Henry'll get the same deal no matter what happens."

"Very wise, very wise,... Well, here's what I've done. I've changed the will so that the entire residuary estate is left to me in trust for your sister and nephew to be administered according to the trust-deed we're executing today. They can probate that until they're black in the face, but nobody's going to find out any more than we want them to."

"Sounds all right so far, but don't you have to take a trust agreement like that into Court, too?"

"Sooner or later, yes. But you'll notice that I've covered it so that unless Henry or Miss Starkweather says something, nobody's going to know until the year's out, and I make the accounting. Now for the trust agreement itself--if Henry demonstrates to me that within a year--"

"A year from August first. The lease don't expire 'till then, and Henry won't be home 'till then. August to August's what I'm goin' to put up to him."

"Correct. If he demonstrates to me that within the calendar year he's made a net profit of ten thousand dollars from the property--by the way, isn't that rather steep?"

"No. Man's in there now's made three thousand and manhandled it. Just horse-sense and some alterations and advertising'll bring it up to ten."

"You're the doctor. If Henry makes ten out of it, then he receives from me, as trustee, the whole residuary estate, otherwise it goes to your sister. And during that trial year, she gets the whole income from it, anyway."

Mr. Mix was sitting motionless as a cat.

"That's right."

"Well, then, if you'll just read these over and make sure I've got your meaning, and then get a couple of witnesses in here, we can clear the whole thing up and have it out of the way."

Mr. Mix heard the scrape of chair-legs against the floor, and hastily, on tiptoe, he crossed the room to his original seat, and in passing the centre table he helped himself to a magazine which he was reading with much concentration when the door of the private office opened.

"Why, hello, Mix," said Mr. Starkweather. "Been waitin' long? Be with you in half a second."

"Just got here," said Mr. Mix, as though startled. He returned the magazine to the table, and was still standing when his friend came back, in convoy of young Mr. Robert Standish, his chief assistant.

"Come on in, Mix. Want you to witness a will."

"Anything to oblige," said Mr. Mix, with alacrity.

He spoke cordially to young Mr. Standish and in another moment, to the lawyer. With due solemnity he carried out the function which was assigned to him; he would have loved a peep at the body of the documents, but already he was possessed of some very interesting information, and he kept his eyes religiously in the boat. Mr. Mix believed that in business and society, as well as in war, advance information is the basis of victory; and even while he was blotting his second signature, he was wondering how to capitalize what he had overheard. No inspiration came to him; so that methodically he stowed away the facts for reference.

"Stay right here, Mix. That's all, ain't it, Mr. Archer?"

"That's all." The lawyer was packing up his papers. "Good-morning, gentlemen." He bowed himself away; Standish had long since vanished.

Mr. Starkweather mopped his face. "Hot, ain't it?"

"You aren't looking so very fit," said Mr. Mix, critically. "Feel all right, do you?"

Mr. Starkweather pulled himself together. "Sure," he said, but his voice lacked its usual heartiness. "I feel fine. Well, what can I do for you?"

Mr. Mix, delaying only to close the door (and to see that it latched) began with a foreword which was followed by a preface and then by a prelude, but he had hardly reached the main introduction when Mr. Starkweather put up his hand. "To make a long story short, Mix--how much do you want?"

Mr. Mix looked pained. "Why, to tide me over the dull season, John, I need--let's see--" He stole a glance at his friend, and doubled the ante. "About five thousand."

Mr. Starkweather drummed on his desk. "Any security!"

Mr. Mix smiled blandly. "What's security between friends? I'll give you a demand note."

At length, Mr. Starkweather stopped drumming. "Mix, I don't quite get you.... You've had a good business; you must have made considerable money. You oughtn't be borrowin' from me; that's what your bank's for. You oughtn't be borrowin' money any way. You been too big a man to get in a hole like this. What's wrong--business rotten?"

"*Too good*," said Mr. Mix, frankly. "It's taking all my capital to carry my customers. And you know how tight money is."

"Oh, yes. Well--I guess your credit's good for five, all right. When do you have to have it? Now?"

"Any time that suits you, suits me."

Mr. Starkweather shook his head. "No, it don't, either. When a man wants money, he *wants* it. Wants it some particular day. When is it?"

"Why, if you *could* let me have it today, John, I'd appreciate it."

"Make out your note," said Mr. Starkweather, heavily, "Interest at six percent, semi-annually. I'll have the cashier write you out a check."

Ten minutes later Mr. Mix, patting his breast pocket affectionately, bestowed a paternal smile upon the girl at the wicket; and Mr. Starkweather, alone in his office, drew a prodigious breath and slumped down in his chair, and fell to gazing out over the roof-tops.

It was a fortnight, now, since Henry's last letter. He wished that Henry would write oftener. He told himself that one of Henry's impulsive, buoyant letters would furnish the only efficacious antidote to Mirabelle. And he needed an antidote, and a powerful one, for during the past two weeks Mirabelle had been surpassing herself. That is, if one can surpass a superlative.

Judge Barklay, of course, had taken the revelation like a man. Like a philosopher. He was fond of Henry personally; he had objected to him purely for the obvious reasons. He agreed,

however, with Mr. Starkweather--marriage might awaken Henry to complete responsibility. Indeed he had Mr. Starkweather's guaranty of it. To be sure a secret marriage was somewhat sensational, somewhat indecorous--

"Humph!" Mirabelle had interrupted. "I don't know who's insulted most--you or us. Still I suppose you've got *one* consolation--and that's if two young fools marry each other instead of somebody else it only leaves just the two of 'em to repent at leisure instead of four."

Mr. Starkweather recalled, with chagrin, his own and the Judge's futile attempts at tact. Mirabelle was tact-proof; you might as well try subtle diplomacy on a locomotive. He took another deep breath, and gazed abstractedly out over the roof-tops. He wished that Henry would write. Henry had his defects, but the house was not quite livable without him. Mr. Starkweather was swept by an emotion which took him wholly by surprise and almost overcame him; he sat up, and began to wonder where he could find some occupation which would chink up the crevices in his thoughts, and prevent him from introspection. Eventually he hit upon it, and with a conscious effort, he pulled himself out of his chair, and went over to Masonic Hall to meet his sister Mirabelle.

She had been attending a conference of the Ethical Reform League, and as Mr. Starkweather's car drew in to the curb, the reformers were just emerging to the sidewalk. He surveyed them, disparagingly. First, there was a vanguard of middle-aged women, remarkably short of waist and long of skirt, who looked as though they had stepped directly from the files of Godey's Lady's Book; he recognized a few of them, and judged the others accordingly--these were the militants, the infantry, who bore the brunt of the fighting. Next, there was a group of younger women, and of young men--the men, almost without exception, wore spectacles and white washable ties. These were the skirmishers and the reserves. At one side, there was a little delegation in frock-coats and silk hats, and as Mr. Starkweather beheld them, he lifted his eyebrows; some of those older men he hadn't seen in public for a dozen years--he had forgotten that they were alive. But the majority of them were retired or retiring capitalists; men who in their day, had managed important interests, and even now controlled them. Mr. Starkweather reflected that life must have become very insipid to them; and he further reflected that their place in this organization must be as shock-troops. They would seldom go into action, but when they did, they had the power of consequence to give them an added momentum.

His sister caught sight of him, and waved her hand in greeting; and this astonished him all the more, because since Henry's departure, she had behaved towards him as though his character needed a bath.

Mr. Starkweather made room for her. "Thought I'd give you a lift back to the house," he said.

There was an unusual colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were brilliant. "John, do you know what I am?"

Mr. Starkweather didn't dare to hesitate. "No. What?"

"I'm the--president," she said, and her voice was trembling with pride and bewilderment.

"President? Of the League?"

Transfigured, she nodded again and again. "The nominating committee reported this morning. I'm the only candidate...." She stared at him and stiffened. "Of course, I know you aren't interested in anything helpful or progressive, so I don't expect to be congratulated. Of course not."

Mr. Starkweather made a dutiful struggle to be joyous about it, and succeeded only in producing a feeble smirk. "I'll say one thing--you've got some money represented in that crowd. Those old codgers. I didn't realize it.... Well, what's your program?"

She unbent a little, and began to recite her platform, and as she skipped from plank to plank, her own enthusiasm was multiplied, and Mr. Starkweather was correspondingly encased in gloom. As a mere active member of the League, a private in the ranks, Mirabelle had made his house no more cheerful as a mausoleum; and when he considered what she might accomplish as a president, in charge of a sweeping blue-law campaign, his imagination refused to take the hurdle.

Fortunately, he wasn't expected to say anything. His sister was making a speech. She didn't stop when the car stopped, nor when Mr. Starkweather climbed down stiffly, and held open the door for her, nor even when they had reached the portico of the big brick house. He told himself, dumbly, that if the world would ever listen to Mirabelle, it would certainly reform. Not necessarily in contrition, but in self-defence.

And yet when he sat opposite her, at lunch, his expression was as calm and untroubled as though she had fashioned for him an ideal existence. He was seeing a vision of Mirabelle as a soap-box orator; he was seeing humorous stories about her in the newspapers; he was shuddering at all the publicity which he knew would be her portion, and yet he could smile across the table at her, and speak in his normal voice. Physically, he was distressed and joyless, but he found it easier to rise above his body than above his mind. His smile was a tribute to a dual heroism.

"Got a little present for you," said Mr. Starkweather, suddenly. He tossed a slip of paper to her, and watched her as she examined it. "There's a string to it, though--I want you to hold it awhile."

She looked up, sceptically. "Suppose it's good?"

"Oh, it's perfectly good. Mix is all right. Only I don't want you to press him for awhile. Not for three, four months, anyhow." He pushed away his dessert, untasted. "You know why I'm givin' you these little dibs and dabs every now and then, don't you? So if anything ever happens to me, all of a sudden, you'll have somethin' to draw on. Let's see, I've put about forty in the little trust fund I been buildin' up for you, and given you twelve--" He broke off abruptly; his own symptoms puzzled him. As though somebody had tried to throttle him.

His sister had already been sitting bolt upright, but now she achieved an even greater rigidity. "Did you take my advice about your will? I don't suppose you did."

"I made some changes in it this morning," said Mr. Starkweather, uncomfortably.

"Did you do what I told you to--about Henry?"

He was struggling to keep a grip on himself. "Well, no--not exactly."

"Oh, you didn't?" she said tartly. "Well, what *did* you do?"

"Mirabelle," said her brother, "don't you think that's--just a little mite personal?"

"Well--I should hope so. I meant it to be. After the way Henry's acted, he don't deserve one bit of sympathy, or one dollar from anybody. And if I've got anything to say, he won't get it, either."

Mr. Starkweather's round, fat face, wore an expression which his sister hadn't seen before. He stood up, and held the back of his chair for support. "Mirabelle, you haven't got a *word* to say about it. I've made some changes in my will, but it's nobody's damned business outside of mine."

She reached for her handkerchief. "John! To think that you'd *swear--at me--*"

He wet his lips. "I didn't swear at you, but it's a holy wonder I don't. I've stood this just about as long as I'm goin' to. Henry's my own flesh and blood. And furthermore he wouldn't waste my money a minute quicker'n *you* would. He'd do a damn sight better with it. He'd have a good time with it, and make everybody in the neighbourhood happy, and you'd burn it up in one of your confounded reform clubs. Well, all I've got's a sister and a nephew, so I guess the money's goin' to be wasted anyhow. But one way's as good's another, and Henry's goin' to get a fair break, and don't you forget it." He took a glass of water from the table, and spilled half of it. "Don't you forget it."

At last, she had perception. "John, you don't know what you're saying! What's the matter? Are you sick?"

He was swallowing repeatedly. "Yes, I am. Sick of the whole thing." His eyes, and the hue of his cheeks, genuinely alarmed her; she went to him, but he avoided her. "No, I don't want anything except to be let alone.... Is the car out there?"

"But John--*listen* to me--"

He waved her off. "I listened to you the day Henry came home, Mirabelle. That's enough to last me quite some time. I ain't forgot a word you said--not a word. Where's my hat?" He rushed past her, and out of the house, and left her gaping after him.

Half an hour later, young Mr. Standish telephoned to her.

"Miss Starkweather?... Your brother isn't feeling any too well, and I've just sent him home. He looks to me as if he's in pretty bad shape. Wouldn't be a bad idea to have your doctor there, seems to me."

She had the doctor there, and before the night was over, there was another doctor in consultation. There were also two nurses. And to both doctors, both nurses and Mirabelle, Mr. Starkweather, who knew his destiny, whispered the same message at intervals of fifteen minutes. "Don't have Henry come back--don't have Henry come back--no sense his comin' back 'till August. Tell him I said so. Tell him I want him to stay over there--'till August."

And then, in the cool, fresh morning, Mr. Starkweather, who hadn't stirred a muscle for several hours, suddenly tried to sit up.

"Postman!" said Mr. Starkweather, with much difficulty.

He was waiting for a letter from Henry, and when they put it into his hands, he smiled and was content. He hadn't the strength to open it, and he wouldn't let anyone else touch it; he was satisfied to know that Henry had written. And after that, there was nothing worth waiting for.

CHAPTER IV

It never occurred to Henry, when he came home in late July, to take his wife to the big brick house which had been his uncle's. He didn't know whether the house would go to Aunt Mirabelle or to himself, and for the time being, it was immaterial; Aunt Mirabelle was welcome to possession of it, undisturbed. Except for his uncle, there would have been open warfare between them long ago; now that the arbitrator was gone, war was inevitable, but Henry

wouldn't fight on sacred ground. He preferred to accept the hospitality of Judge Barklay. The Judge's house was a third the size, and not the least prepossessing, and there really wasn't room for the young Devereuxs in it, but as soon as you stepped inside the door, you knew that you were welcome.

He was sorry for his aunt, and he went to see her immediately, but even in this new situation, she let him know that she disapproved of him thoroughly and permanently. She wasn't reconciled to his marriage; she didn't care to receive Anna; she implied that regardless of Mr. Starkweather's express wishes, Henry was a stony-hearted ingrate for remaining so long abroad. To be sure, his presence at home would have served no purpose whatsoever, but Mirabelle was firm in her opinion. More than that, she succeeded in making Henry feel that by his conduct he had hurried his uncle into an untimely grave; she didn't say this flatly, nor yet by innuendo, but she managed to convey it through the atmosphere.

"Of course," she said, "you've been to call on Mr. Archer, haven't you?"

Henry flushed indignantly. "I hadn't even thought about it."

"Well, when you do, you'll hear some fine news." Her lip curled. "Your friend Bob Standish's bought the business. Some of it, anyway. Bought it on a shoestring's *my* guess,—but he's bought it."

"I didn't know it, Aunt Mirabelle."

"Well, they only closed the deal a few days ago."

"Good for Bob!" He was thinking that if honest toil were demanded of him, nothing could be more pleasant than an alliance with this same Standish. His uncle had always offered up Standish, subtly, as an illustration of what Henry himself ought to be. And it was a tribute to the mutual affection of all three men that Henry had never been irritated at Mr. Starkweather, nor resentful towards his friend. On the contrary, he admitted that unless he were himself, he would rather be Standish than anyone else. He wondered if his uncle could have planned for him so delightful a penance as a year or two of happy servitude under Bob. He must see Bob and congratulate him. Only twenty-seven, and the head of the most important concern of its type in several counties.

Aunt Mirabelle sniffed. "Good for *nothing*. He's most as scatter-brained as you are."

Henry declined the combat, and after she sensed his intention, she went on, with increasing acidity.

"The rest of the whole estate's tied up for a year in a trust, to see what you're going to do with some piece of property he deeded to you just before he died, but Mr. Archer wouldn't tell me much about it 'till you came home. I *suppose* it's part of the business—some department of it. If you can make ten thousand dollars out of it, you're to have everything. All *I* get's a few thousand outright, and what John gave me in a little separate fund, and a year's income from the whole estate. I suppose you think that's perfectly fair and right and just. Naturally, you would."

In his present mood, Henry was immune to astonishment. "I don't believe it's up to me to criticize Uncle John, whatever he did."

"Not under the circumstances, no. You've got some piece of property—I don't know what it is; he didn't tell me; *I*'m only his sister—and he's fixed things so it's just a gamble for you. You're going to do the gambling; and I sit back and fold my hands and wait a year to see whether you get everything, or I do. Even this house."

"What's that?"

She made a deprecating gesture. "Oh, yes, if you aren't a good enough gambler, then *I* come into everything. It puts me in such a sweet position, doesn't it? So comfortable for me." Her smile was bitter; she was recalling what her brother had said to her at lunch, on that final day—that he wouldn't listen to her, because already he had heard the worst that she had to say. Originally, as she knew, he had intended to bequeath Henry a fourth of his property, and herself the remainder; and she knew that by her too vigorous indictment of Henry she had egged her brother into a state of mind which, regardless of the cause of it, she still considered to be unfathomable. The memory galled her, and so did the possibility of Henry's triumph. "Well," she said, "I wish you every happiness and success, Henry. I suppose you feel in your conscience you deserve it, don't you?"

When he left her, he was aware that the last tie had been severed.

His friend Bob Standish was a young man who in the past ten years had achieved many different kinds of success by the reason that mere acquaintances, as well as strangers, invariably underestimated him. For one thing, his skin was so tender, his eyes so blue and innocent, his mouth so wide and sensitive, his forehead so white and high, that he gave the impression of almost childish simplicity and ingenuousness. For another thing, he dressed with such meticulous regard for the fashion, and he moved about with such indolent amiability, that his clothes and his manners distracted attention from what was underneath.

And so, at college, a full battalion of kindly sophomores had volunteered to teach him poker, and couldn't understand why the profits went not to the teacher, but to the pupil. Immature professors, who liked to score off idlers and fat-brained sons of plutocrats, had selected him as the perfect target, and some of them had required several terms to realize that Standish, always baby-eyed, beau-attired and apparently dreaming of far distant things, was never lower in rank

than the top twenty of his class. Out on the Field, visiting ends and tackles, meeting him for the first time, had nearly laughed in his face, and prepared to slaughter him, only to discover, with alarm and horror which steadily increased from the first whistle to the last, that Standish could explode his muscles with such a burst of dynamic energy that his hundred and sixty pounds felt like two hundred and ten. It was equally discouraging to learn, from breathless experience, that when he was in his stride he was as unpursuable as a coyote; and that he could diagnose the other fellow's tactics even before the other fellow had quite decided what to do next.

In commerce, he had merely continued the same species of career; and by virtue of being thoroughly depreciated, and even pitied, by his customers, he had risen in six years from the grade of city insurance solicitor to that of Mr. Starkweather's principal assistant. And now, as casually as he had ever raked in a jack-pot from the bewildered sophomores, he had bought the Starkweather business, and not on a shoestring, either, as Mirabelle had suspected.

He had roomed with Henry at college; he had been his inseparable companion, out of office hours, ever since; he knew him too well to proffer any trite condolence. But his sympathy was firm and warm in his fingers when he shook hands and Henry got the message.

"Thought probably you'd rather not have me at the train," said Standish, "so I didn't come. Right or wrong?"

"Right, Bob.... Allow smoking in your sanctum?"

"Don't allow anybody *not* to smoke. What are you doing--borrowing or offering?"

Henry glanced at Standish's brand. "Neither one. Every man for himself--and you've got vile taste. Well, I hear you're the big boss around here. Please, mister, gimme a job?"

"Nothing I'd like better," said Standish. "I've got just the thing for you. Sit over on the window-sill and be a lily. Flowers brighten up an office so."

"You basely misjudge me. Didn't you know I'm going to work?"

Standish's eyes were round and guileless. "See any sea-serpents on your way over? I've heard there *are* such things."

"Fact, though, I am. And you know it, too. I'm hoping it's here."

His friend shook his head. "Not here, Henry."

"No?"

"No, and I'm sorry. I'd make you clean inkwells and say 'sir,' and you'd get to be almost as democratic as I am.... Haven't you seen Archer?"

"Not yet."

"Why not?"

"Oh, just squeamish, I suppose. You sort of hate to think of the--cash end of it."

"That's right, too. But as long as you're in the building, you'd better drop in there. From all the talk there is, you've picked up a mystery."

"Mystery? In what way?"

"Not for me to say. Go find out. And say--you and Anna come and dine with me tonight, will you? I just want to have you all to myself. Mind?"

"Not noticeably."

"Good. Seven o'clock. Now get out of here and see Archer. Come back afterwards, if you want to; but do that first."

As if from pressure of business, he projected Henry into the corridor; and then, meditatively, he returned to his desk. Young Mr. Standish had watched his employer very closely, during those last few days, and in witnessing Mr. Starkweather's will, he had sensed, intuitively, that it contained a stick of dynamite for Henry.

Mr. Archer, who had known Henry since the Fauntleroy days, greeted him with the proper mixture of repression and cordiality. "But I'm afraid," owned Mr. Archer, "I'm afraid you're going to be a little disappointed."

Henry shook his head. "Then you've sized me up all wrong," he said, much subdued. "Because no matter what I get, I'm going to be satisfied that Uncle John wanted me to have it. Besides, I've apparently got to hump myself, or I don't get anything at all. Aunt Mirabelle gave me some idea of it--I'd thought it was probably an interest in the business, but Bob Standish says it isn't."

"No, it's a building. 361 Main Street. But it's rather more than a mere building; it *is* a business. It's leased until next Monday; after that it's yours to operate. The deed's recorded now. It's yours outright. Did your aunt tell you what the conditions are?"

"All or nothing!"

"Yes. Oh, he made a separate provision for Miss Starkweather; she'll never go hungry; but the bulk of the estate depends on what you do with the business in the next year. And strictly between ourselves, your uncle expected you to finish with a bit to spare."

"I know this much; if it's anything *he* doped out for me, it's an even bet. It's to make ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes, and without any outside help except straight commercial loans--if you can get 'em. No favours from anybody, and no free keep from your families."

"What building is it, Mr. Archer?"

The lawyer paused to wipe his glasses. "It's one your uncle took over on a mortgage last winter.... You see, Henry, he'd figured out what he was going to do with you, and it would have been this same thing even if he'd lived. He picked out what he thought would do you the most good--get you in touch with different people--break down some of your (excuse me for being blunt) class prejudice--teach you how many dimes there are in a dollar. And for that reason he expressly stipulated that you've got to keep your own books. That'll give you more of a respect for money than anything else would, I guess."

"Keep my own books?"

"That's the way Mr. Starkweather began--only in his case, he kept somebody else's. But I warned you to expect something out of the ordinary."

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "I was all set for *some* kind of a low-brow job. What is it--a garage?"

"I'm afraid you'll think a garage is fashionable, compared with it."

Henry looked serious. "361 Main? I don't seem to--What on earth *is* it, Mr. Archer?"

"Go down and look at it. Only don't be shocked, Henry; because it's exactly what he'd have given you to do, anyway. And then let me know what your plans are, will you? By the way--have you any money of your own?"

Henry looked pained. "I'm down to a couple of hundred. Why?"

"Then you'd better not waste any time. Go on down and look it over this morning, and let me know."

"Why--let you know *what*?"

"Whether you're going to take the dare."

Henry's lips twitched. "Nobody ever beat me by default yet, Mr. Archer."

"Just the same, I wish you'd let me know definitely--won't you? Of course, if you shouldn't feel inclined to go ahead on your uncle's plan--and that *would* disappoint me--you could simply sell out. I hope you won't, though. I hope very much indeed that you won't. But--go look at it. And one last thing, Henry; your uncle put the thing in this shape so that too many people wouldn't be gossiping about it. I mean, if you and your aunt don't tell--nobody will. That's all--but let me know."

Obediently, Henry proceeded down Main Street to the 300 block. His curiosity was active, but he was warning himself to be on guard, for his uncle's sentences, although invariably fair and invariably appropriate, were also founded on a solid base of humour and surprise. Henry remembered what Mr. Starkweather had said about coming home to eat crow, and what Mr. Archer had said about the comparative aristocracy of a garage, and he prepared himself for a thunderstroke, and got a laugh ready. That book-keeping provision was really clever; Uncle John had palpably framed it up to keep Henry on the job. But Henry would outwit the provision. A few lessons in a commercial-school, a modern card-system, and he could handle the books of any small business in no time at all, as per the magazine advertisements. Of course, the crow and the garage were merely symbols; but whatever the business might be, and however distasteful, there was only a year of it, and after that (so confident was Henry) there was a lifetime of luxury. He was rather glad that his penance came first; it would serve to make the enjoyment of his wealth so much more zestful. He should always feel as though he had worked for it, instead of having it handed out to him on a platter, regardless of his personal deserts. Yes, he would work faithfully, and because the task would be within his capabilities, (for Mr. Starkweather was sane and practical, and Mr. Archer had prophesied a finish with something to spare) he would end his probation in a blaze of glory, and Anna would be proud of him, Judge Barklay would approve of him, and Aunt Mirabelle would have to revise her estimate of him. Altogether, it was a fine arrangement, provided that his business, whatever it was, wouldn't entirely prevent him from keeping up with the procession, socially, and playing enough golf to hold his present form.

He had passed 331 and 341 and 351 and his heart began to beat more rapidly. This was almost as exciting as a Christmas stocking in the Fauntleroy days. His eyes were searching among the numbers; there was a four-story office building (335) and an automobile agency (339) ... and next to that--.... Henry halted, and the laugh dried up in his throat. He had been prepared for anything but the reality. The ark of his fortunes was a shabby little motion-picture theatre.

Gasping, he looked up again at the number, and when he realized that he had made no mistake, his knees turned to gelatine, and he stood staring, fascinated, numbed. His eyes wandered blankly from the crumbling ticket-booth to the unkempt lobby and back to the lurid billing--the current attraction was a seven-reel thriller entitled "What He Least Expected," but Henry missed the parallel. With trembling fingers he produced a cigarette, but in his daze he blew out two matches in succession. He crushed the cigarette in his palm, and moved a few steps towards the lobby. Great Heaven, was it possible that John Starkweather had condemned Henry the fashionable, Henry the clubable, Henry the exclusive to a year of *this*? Was *this* his punishment for the past? Was *this* the price of his future? This picayune sordidness, and vulgarity and decay? Evidently, it was so intended, and so ordered.

His power of reason was almost atrophied. He struggled to understand his uncle's purpose; his uncle's logic. To break down his class prejudice, and teach him the dimes in a dollar, and put him on the level of a workingman? All that could have been accomplished by far less drastic methods. It could have been accomplished by a tour of duty with Bob. To be sure, Mr. Starkweather had promised him the meanest job in the directory, but Henry had put it down as a figure of speech. Now, he was faced with the literal interpretation of it, and ahead of him there was a year of trial, and then all or nothing.

He succeeded in lighting a fresh cigarette, but he couldn't taste it. Previously he had paid his forfeits with the best of good-nature, but his previous forfeits hadn't obliged him to declass himself. They hadn't involved his wife. He hadn't married Anna to drag her down to this. It would stand them in a social pillory, targets for those who had either admired them or envied them. It would make them the most conspicuous pair in the whole community: older people would point to them as an illustration of justice visited on blind youth, and would chuckle to observe Henry in the process of receiving his come-uppance: the younger set would quake with merriment and poor jokes and sly allusions to Henry's ancient grandeur. Even Bob Standish would have to hide his amusement; why, Bob himself had made society and success his fetiches. And Anna--Anna who was so ambitious for him--how could *she* endure the status of a cheap showman's wife?

And even if she had been willing to ally himself with such a business, how could he conceivably make ten thousand dollars out of it in a single year? Ten? It would take a genius to make five. An inexperienced man, with luck, might make two or three. He couldn't afford to hire a trained man to manage it for him: the place was too small to support such a man, and still to net any appreciable profit. Mr. Starkweather had undoubtedly foreseen this very fact--foreseen that Henry couldn't sit back as a magnate, and pile responsibility on a paid employé. To reach his quota, Henry would have to get in all over, and act as his own manager, and take the resulting publicity and the social isolation. But the business was impossible, the quota was impossible, the entire project from first to last was unthinkable. His uncle, whether by accident or design, had virtually disowned him. There was no other answer.

His laugh came back to him, but there was no hilarity in it. It was merely an expression of his helplessness; it was tragedy turned inside out. Yet he felt no resentment towards his uncle, but rather an overwhelming pity. He felt no resentment towards his friend Standish, who had bought out the perfectly respectable business which Mr. Starkweather might so easily have left to Henry. Mr. Starkweather had schemed to bring about a certain reaction, and he had overplayed his hand. Instead of firing Henry with a new ardour for success, he had convinced him of the futility of endeavour. He had set a standard so high, and chosen a medium so low, that he had defeated his own object.

The next step--why, it was to chart his life all over again. It was to dispose of this ridiculous property, and begin to make a living for Anna. And there was no time to lose, either, for Henry's checking balance was about to slide past the vanishing point.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to meet the gravely sympathetic eyes of Mr. Theodore Mix.

Mr. Mix was fresh from an interview with Miss Mirabelle Starkweather. Her acquaintance with him was slight, but from a distance she had always esteemed him, partly for his mature good-looks, and partly for the distinguished manner which had always been a large fraction of his stock-in-trade, and was now to be listed among his principal assets. Her esteem, however, applied to him merely as an individual, and not as a debtor.

"I wanted to see you about a note," she said, primly. "A five thousand dollar demand note you gave my brother four months ago. He endorsed it over to me, and I wanted to see you about it."

Mr. Mix allowed his mouth to widen in a smile which was disarmingly benevolent. The horse at Bowie had proved dark indeed--so dark that it had still been merged with the background when the winner passed the judge's stand--and this colour-test had cost Mr. Mix precisely two thousand dollars. Beyond that, he had paid off a few of his most pressing creditors, and he had spent a peculiarly carefree week in New York (where he had also taken a trifling flyer in cotton, and made a disastrous forced landing) so that there was practically nothing but his smile between himself and bankruptcy. Yet Mr. Mix beamed, with almost ecclesiastical poise, upon the holder of his demand note, and tried her with honey.

"Ordinarily, I'm embarrassed to talk business with a woman," said Mr. Mix. "I'm so conscious of the--what shall I say?--of a woman's disadvantage in a business interview. But in your case, Miss Starkweather, when your executive ability is so well known and so universally praised--"

She nodded, and took it without discount, but she wasn't distracted from her purpose. "I hope it's convenient for you to pay it, Mr. Mix."

"If it weren't convenient," said Mr. Mix, soothingly, "I should *make* it convenient. When the sister of my oldest friend--a man who once sat at the same desk with me, when we were young clerks together--when his sister is in need of funds, I--"

"T isn't that," she said, quickly. "I want this money for some special reason."

He inclined his head slightly. "One of your favourite charities, I have no doubt. But whatever the reason, the obligation is the same. Now, let's see--I'll have to sell some securities--when must you have it?"

"Next Tuesday."

Inwardly, Mr. Mix was startled, but outwardly he looked grieved. "Tuesday? Now--that *is*--wait a minute." He created the impression that he was juggling vast affairs, in order to gratify a whim of his old friend's sister. As a matter of fact, he was wondering what plausible excuse he could give without revealing any hint of the truth. "Is Tuesday imperative?"

"Tuesday by ten o'clock in the morning."

His face cleared, "You've shared a secret with me," said Mr. Mix, and although he spoke aloud, his attitude was as though he were whispering. "Because I happen to know that every Tuesday at ten o'clock there's a meeting of a--a certain organization of which you're the illustrious president. Needless to say, I refer to the Ethical Reform League." He lowered his voice. "I ask your pardon for the intrusion of anything of such a delicately personal nature, Miss Starkweather, but I *must* tell you that when a person, such as yourself, even in the midst of inconsolable sorrow, can't forget that great principles and great institutions can never perish, but are immortal, and go on forever--that's true nobility of character, Miss Starkweather, and I honour you for it."

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief. "Thank you, Mr. Mix. Yes, I intend to make a contribution to our League--in memory of my brother. You're--familiar with our League?"

He gestured effectively. "Familiar with it? You might as well ask me if I'm familiar with the Emancipation Proclamation--the Magna Charta." And this was accurate; his knowledge of all three was based on hearsay evidence.

"And are you at all in sympathy with it?"

"My dear lady! I was one of the pioneer supporters of suffrage in this region. I--"

"Yes, I know that, and I know your work in the Associated Charities, and in your church, but--how did you vote on prohibition?"

He side-stepped with great agility. "How would any man of my calibre vote?"

"True, true." She was becoming animated.

"But we've tremendous problems yet to solve.... Do you believe in enforcing the laws, Mr. Mix? The Sunday laws especially?"

Mr. Mix picked up his cue, and gave thanks for the diversion. "Dear lady, I am a citizen. As a citizen, I help to *make* the laws; they're made by all of us for our own good. Show me a man who *doesn't* believe in enforcing the laws, and I won't argue with him--I couldn't count on his sincerity."

"It's a pleasure to talk to a man like you," she said. "I wonder if you agree with our other ideals. Er--what do you think about dancing?"

He had a good phrase which he had been saving up for six weeks. "Dancing," he said, "is popular because it's so conspicuously innocent, and so warmly satisfactory to the guilty."

"Good! *Good!* How about tobacco?"

This, too, he side-stepped. "It's a poison, so the doctors say. Who am I to put any opinion against theirs?"

She was regarding him earnestly, and a little perplexedly.

"How is it, when in spirit you're one of us, you've never joined the League?"

"I-I've never been invited," said Mr. Mix, somewhat taken aback.

"Then *I* invite you," she said, promptly. "And I know you'll accept. It's men like you we need--men with some backbone; prominent, useful citizens. You sit right there. I've got an application blank in my desk. Read it over when you get home, and sign it and mail it to me."

"I appreciate the distinction of your asking me," said Mr. Mix, with supreme deference. "And if you have time, I wish you'd tell me what your aims are. I am very deeply interested."

He stayed another half hour, and the conversation never swerved from the entertaining subject of reform. Mr. Mix was insufferably bored, and cumulatively restless, but he was convinced that he was making headway, so that he kept his mind relentlessly on the topic, and dispensed honey by the shovelful. When he prepared to leave, he tested out his conviction, and reminded her gently: "Now, in regard to that note--"

Mirabelle was blinded by her own visionings, and deafened by her own eloquence. "Well, we'll have to take that up again--But you come to the meeting Tuesday, anyhow. And here's one of our pamphlets for you to look at in the meantime."

As he went down the steps, she was watching him, from the ambush of lace window-curtains, and she was saying to herself: "Such a nice man--so influential, too.... Now if I could get *him* persuaded over--"

Mr. Mix, strolling nonchalantly downtown, was also talking to himself, and his conclusions would have astonished her. "What I've got to do," said Mr. Mix, thoughtfully, "is to string the old dame along until I can raise five thousand bucks. But where's it coming from?"

Then, squarely in front of the Orpheum Theatre, he met Henry Devereux.

"Good-morning, Henry," said Mr. Mix, soberly. "First time I've had a chance to speak to you

since....” He coughed discreetly. “I don’t believe I need to say that if there’s anything I can do for you at any time, all you’ve got to do is to say so.”

Privately, Henry had always considered Mr. Mix as a genial poseur, but he knew that Mr. Mix belonged to the Citizens Club, which was the local standard, and that for thirty years he had been on rather intimate business relations with Mr. Starkweather. This was sufficient recommendation for Henry, in the swirl of his agitation, to loose his tongue.

“All right,” he said. “Tell me how soon I can sell this overgrown magic-lantern outfit--and what I can get for it--and where I can put the money to bring in the biggest income--and where I can get a good job.”

Now all this was intended to be purely in the nature of a rhetorical question: for naturally, if Henry decided to sell, he would want Bob Standish to handle the transaction for him, and to get the commission: and also, if Henry had to find employment, he would go to his friend, and be sure of a cordial reception. But Mr. Mix took it literally.

Mr. Mix started, and his memory began to unfold. It was on the tip of his tongue to blurt out: “And lose your shot at the estate?” but he restrained himself. He wasn’t supposed to know the circumstances, and as a matter of fact, as he realized with a thrill of relish, he was probably the only outsider who *did* know the circumstances. “Why,” said Mr. Mix. “Do you own the Orpheum? Well, I should say offhand it’s worth a good deal. Twenty thousand. The land, you know: the building’s no good.”

Henry nodded impatiently. “Yes, but who’d buy it?”

“Well, now, about *that*--of course, I’m not a real estate man--but you could certainly *trade* it.”

“What for?”

Mr. Mix caught the note of sincerity in Henry’s voice, and Mr. Mix thought rapidly. He appeared to deliberate, to waver, to burn his bridges. “Well--say for a third interest in Theodore Mix and Company.”

Henry stared. “Are you serious?”

Mr. Mix almost fell over backwards. “Why, yes. It’s sudden, but ... why, yes. I could use more capital, and I want a crack salesman. I’ll trade--if you’re quick on the trigger. I’ve got two or three people interested so far, but when it’s *you*--”

Henry took him by the arm. “Come on over to the Citizens Club, then, and we’ll talk about it.”

CHAPTER V

When Henry went home to his wife and his father-in-law, he was confident that he had a very fine bargain; when he told them what he had heard from his aunt and Mr. Archer, what he had seen with his own eyes, and what he had done with Mr. Mix, he expected first, sympathy, and afterwards, unqualified approval. Within the next five minutes, however, Henry was sitting limp and baffled; and wishing that he had Bob Standish to support him. Bob, at least, would understand.

“Holy Smoke!” he said, weakly. “I didn’t suppose you’d take it like that! Why, I--I feel as if I’d been run over by a steam-roller with Taft at the wheel!”

Judge Barklay had long since forgiven his daughter, but he hadn’t quite forgiven Henry. “Do you want my honest opinion? I should say you’re suffering from two extreme causes--exaggerated ego and cold feet.”

Henry flushed. He had the most profound respect for Judge Barklay--a man who had preferred to be a city magistrate, and to be known throughout the whole state for his wisdom and humanity, instead of keeping up his law practice, at five times the income--and Henry, like every one else, valued the Judge’s opinions. “You don’t mean you think I’d *run* the miserable little peanut-stand, do you? And keep books on it as if it had been the Federal Reserve Bank?”

“It strikes me,” said the Judge, “that both of us would rather have you run a peanut-stand than--I’m using your own analogy--than spend your whole life eating peanuts. Why, Henry, your uncle *wanted* you to be shocked--wanted you to be mad enough to stand up on your hind legs and fight.”

Henry looked at his wife. “What are *you* going to suggest? Hire a snake-charmer and a wild-man-from-Borneo and an infant pachyderm and a royal ring-tailed gyasticutus, and pull off a side-show after the main tent’s closed?”

“Oh, *Henry!* Can’t you *see* what a lark it would be?”

“Lark?” he repeated, hazily. “Lark? You’ve got the wrong bird. It’s crow.”

“No, but Henry dear, you aren’t going to be a quitter, are you?”

“Wife of my bosom, do you realize what you’re talking about? It would cost a thousand dollars

just to make the place *clean*. It'll cost three or four more to make it attractive enough to get anybody inside of it. And I haven't got the price."

"What's the matter with a mortgage?" demanded the Judge. "And you've got a car, haven't you? You've got a saddle-horse. You've got all kinds of junk you can turn into money."

"On a wild gamble? Why, Anna, we couldn't stay on here with the Judge--that would be getting help I'm not allowed to have--we'd have to go live in some cheap apartment; we couldn't even have a maid for awhile; we couldn't entertain anybody; we couldn't have any outside pleasures; I'd have to work like a dog; you *know* what the crowd on the hill would say--and then I'm beaten before I start anyway. Quitter! You wouldn't call a man a quitter if he stayed out of a hurdle race because he'd broken a leg, would you?"

"Well," said Anna, "I'm willing to live in such a cheap apartment that the landlord calls it a *flat*. And you can't get any servants these days; there *aren't* any. And who cares about entertaining? And for outside pleasures, why couldn't we go to the Orpheum?" They all laughed, but Anna was the first to stop. "I'll work just as hard as you will, Henry. I'll peel potatoes and wash the sink--" She glanced, ruefully, at her hands--"and if it'll help you, I--I'd sell tickets or be an usher or play the piano. Why, Henry, it would be a *circus*--and we wouldn't need any snake-charmers, either."

"And an education," said Judge Barklay.

"And a gold-mine for us--in just one little year. We could do it; I *know* we could."

"And if the stupid fool who's had it this last year could make money out of it," added the Judge, "and you used any intelligence on it, you'd come out ahead. John made up his figures very carefully. That's the kind of man he was."

Henry stared at them alternately. "But if I *did* fall down--"

"Henry!" The Judge was using a professional gesture. "What do you suppose your time is worth, at its present market value? Don't you think you can afford to risk a year of it against half a million dollars?"

"But when I've practically closed with Mix--"

"Sign any agreement?"

"No, he's having one typed."

The judge breathed in relief. "You're lucky. You'd lose money if you took a third interest for a gift, and if you took *all* of it as a gift you'd lose three times as much. Because you'd have to assume your share of his liabilities. People think he's got money, but he hasn't; he's broke. He must have picked you for a life preserver."

Henry's jaw dropped. "What makes you think so?"

"I don't think so; I *know* so. Oh, he's pretty shifty on his feet, and he's got a good many people hoodwinked--your uncle always gave him too much credit, incidentally--but his New York correspondents happened to be clients of mine when I was practising law, and they've both asked me about him and told me about him, inside of the last six weeks."

Henry sat unblinking "Is that--a fact!"

"And if you wanted to sell out," continued the Judge, with a trifle of asperity, "why on earth didn't you go to Bob Standish? Why didn't you go to an expert? And why didn't you have an audit made of Mix's company--why didn't you get a little information--why didn't you know what you were buying? Oh, it isn't too late, if you haven't signed anything, but--Henry, it looks to me as if you need a guardian!"

At the sight of his face, Anna went over to him, and perched on the arm of his chair. "That's enough, Dad.... I'm his guardian; aren't I, dear? And he's just upset and dizzy and I don't blame him a bit. We won't say another word about it; we've told him what we think; and tonight he can have a long talk with Bob. You'd want to do that, wouldn't you, Henry? Of course you would. You wish you'd done it before. You're feeling awfully ashamed of yourself for being so hasty. *And* snobbish. I know you."

Henry looked across at the Judge. "Might as well have my brains where my hair is, mightn't I? She sees it just as easy.... All right; we'll let the whole thing ride 'till I've seen Bob."

His friend Standish, gazing with childlike solemnity out of his big blue eyes, listened to both sides of the story, and to Henry's miscalculation, at no time during the recital did he laugh uproariously, or exclaim compassionately, or indicate that he shared any of Henry's conclusions:

"Oh, yes," he said, "people might giggle a bit. But they always giggle at a man's first shot at business, anyway. Like his first pair of long trousers. It's done. But how many times will they do it? A thousand? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand? At maybe seven dollars a giggle? For less than that, I'd be a comedian. I'd be a contortionist. I'd be a pie-thrower. Henry, old rubbish, you do what they tell you to."

"Would you do it if you were in my place?"

"Would I lie down like a yellow dog, and let people say I hadn't sand enough to stop a wristwatch?"

"I know, but Bob--the Orpheum!"

"I know, but Henry--don't you sort of owe it to Mr. Starkweather? You wouldn't have put on this milk-fed expression if he'd soaked it to you himself, would you?"

At this precise instant, Henry was required on the telephone. It was his Aunt Mirabelle; and even if he had been dining with royalty, she would still have called him--if she could have got the address.

"Henry," she said acidly. "I've just found out what kind of a building it was your uncle deeded you. Theodore Mix told me. I didn't know your uncle was ever messed up in that kind of a thing. He never told me. Good reason he didn't, too. I certainly hope you aren't going to spread this news around town, Henry--it's scandalous enough to have it in the family, even. Of all the hellish influences we've got to contend with in this day and generation--"

"Well," said Henry, "it isn't any of it *my* fault, is it?"

"That remains to be seen. Are you going to *run* that--dive?"

"Why--I don't know. If I didn't--"

"Oh, yes, you're probably thinking how selfish I am. You wouldn't recognize a pure motive if you met one in the street. But to think of a Devereux--almost the same thing as a Starkweather--"

"What's your idea? To have me be a jolly little martyr?"

"There's this much to say, Henry--at least I'd put John's money to a nobler use than you ever would."

Henry grimaced. "Your League?"

"Yes, what else?"

He was an impulsive young man, and sometimes he made up his mind by contraries. "I wouldn't count too much on it," he said cheerfully. "I might astonish you."

"You--Henry Devereux! Am I going to see my own sister's son in a polluted enterprise like--"

"You're going to see your own grandfather's great-grandson make P. T. Barnum look a Kickapoo medicine man--if necessary," said Henry. "Only don't you worry about any pollution. That's where I draw the line. I'm not going to stage one single pollute."

"You *are* going to operate that place?"

"Why certainly," said Henry. "And speaking of operations, I've got a hunch the patient's going to recover. I've just been holding a clinic.... Well--good-bye, Aunt Mirabelle." He turned back to his wife and his friend Standish. "So *that's* settled," said Henry, and grinned, a trifle apprehensively. "We're off in a cloud of dust.... Waiter, where's those two portions of crow I ordered four months ago? The service in this place is getting something rotten."

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Theodore Mix, sprawled in his desk chair, gazed with funereal gloom at the typewritten agreement which lay before him, unsigned. It was barely twenty minutes ago that Mr. Mix had risen to welcome the man who was to save his credit and his reputation; but during those twenty minutes Mr. Mix, who had felt that he was sitting on top of the world, had been unceremoniously shot off into space.

His creditors surrounded him, (and because they were small creditors they were inclined to be nasty), he owed money to his New York correspondents, whose letters were becoming peremptory, and his brokerage business was pounding against the rocks. Quietly, overnight he had located a purchaser for the Orpheum, and as soon as Henry's name had been safe on the dotted line, Mr. Mix would have been financed for many months ahead. And then came Henry--and Henry, who had been cast for the part of the lamb, had suddenly become as obstinate as a donkey. Mr. Mix, gazing at that agreement, was swept by impotent rage at Henry, and he took the document and ripped it savagely across and across, and crumpled it in both his hands, and jammed it into his scrap-basket.

For the moment, he subordinated his personal problems to his wrath at Henry. He charged Henry with full responsibility for this present crisis; for if Henry had simply scribbled his signature, Mr. Mix would have made a good deal of money. It never occurred to him that in the same transaction, Henry would have changed places with Mr. Mix. That was Henry's look-out. And damn him, he had *looked!*

"I'm going to get him for that," said Mr. Mix, half-aloud. "I'm going to get him, and get him good. Jockeying me into a pocket! Conceited young ass! And I'd have been square with the world, and paid off that infernal note, and had *four ... thousand ... dollars* left over." His lips made a straight line. "And he'd have brought fifty thousand dollars' worth of business into this office--he'd have *had* to--he'd have had to hold up his friends--to protect his ante. Yes, sir, I'm going to get him *good.*"

Mr. Mix sat up, and emitted a short, mirthless laugh. He frowned thoughtfully: and then, after a little search, he examined the pamphlet which Mirabelle had given him, and skimmed through the pages until he came to the paragraph he had in mind. Enforcement of the Sunday ordinances ... hm!... present ordinance seems to prohibit Sunday theatrical performances of all kinds, but city administrations have always been lax. Want the law on the books, don't dare to repeal it, but don't care to enforce it.

Mr. Mix sat back and pondered. He knew enough about the motion-picture business to realize that the Sunday performances made up the backbone of the week. He knew enough about the Orpheum to know that Henry's quota, which under normal conditions would require only diligence, and initiative, and originality to reach, would be literally impossible if Sundays were taken from the schedule. The League's blue-law campaign, if it proved successful, would make Henry Devereux even bluer than Mr. Mix. "Three rousing cheers for reform!" said Mr. Mix, and grinned at the pamphlet.

Another brilliant thought infected him. He had long since passed the stage in which women were a mystery to him: he had long since realized that unless a man's passions intervene, there is nothing more mysterious about women than about men. It was all humbug--all this mummerly about intuitions and unerring perception and inscrutability. Women are all alike--all human--all susceptible to sheer, blatant flattery. The only difference in women is in the particular brand of flattery to which, as individuals, they react.

Take Miss Starkweather: he had seen that if he fed her vanity unsparingly--not her physical vanity, but her pride in her own soul, and in her League presidency--she blazed up into a flame which consumed even her purpose in causing the interview. Once already, by no remarkable effort, he had been able to divert her attention; and it was now imperative for him to keep it diverted until he had raised five thousand dollars. And if she were so susceptible, why shouldn't Mr. Mix venture a trifle further? He knew that she regarded him as an important man; why shouldn't he let himself be won over, slowly and by her influence alone, to higher things? Stopping, of course, just short of actually becoming a League partisan? Why shouldn't he feed her fat with ethics and adulation, until she were more anxious for his cooperation than for his money? If he couldn't play hide-and-seek for six months,--if he couldn't turn her head so far that she couldn't bear to press him for payment--he wasn't the strategist he believed himself to be. But in the meantime, where was he to get the money to live on? Still, Mirabelle came first.

On Sunday, he fortified himself from his meagre supply of contraband, ate two large cloves, and went formally to call on her. He remained an hour, and by exercise of the most finished diplomacy, he succeeded in building up the situation exactly as he had planned it. The note hadn't been mentioned; the League hadn't been given a breathing-space; and Mirabelle was pleading with him to see the light, and join the crusade. Finally, she leaned forward and put her hand on his arm.

"Two weeks ago," she said, "I told the League I was going to give it a real surprise this next Tuesday. What I meant was money. The money for that note. But I'd hate to have you sell any securities when they're down so low. And besides, *anybody* can give money--just money. What we need most is men. Let me do something different. You're one of the big men here. You count for a good deal. We want you. I said I'd give 'em a surprise--let me make the League a present of *you*." She bestowed upon him a smile which was a startling combination of sharpness and appeal. "I'm certainly going to keep my promise, Mr. Mix. I'm going to give 'em one or the other--you or the five thousand. Only I tell you in all sincerity, I'd rather it would be you."

Mr. Mix sat up with a jerk. The climax had been reached six months too soon. "Dear lady--"

"You can't refuse," she went on with an emphasis which sobered him. "We want you for an officer, and a director. I've taken it up with the committee. And you *can't* refuse. You believe everything we believe. Mr. Mix, look me in the eye, and tell me--if you're true to yourself, how *can* you refuse?"

"That isn't it," he said, truthfully enough. "I--I wouldn't be as valuable to you as you think."

"We'll judge of that."

He knew that he was in a corner, and he hunted desperately for an opening. "And--in *any* event, I couldn't become an officer, or even a director. I--"

"Why not, pray?"

"I haven't the time, for one thing, nor the experience in--"

She swept away his objections with a stiff gesture. "You're modest, and it's becoming. But either you're with us or against us: there's no half-way about morals. If you're with us, you ought to show your colours. And if you *are* with us, you'll lead us, because you're a born leader. You inspire. You instill. And for the sake of the common welfare--" She paused: he was staring at her as if hypnotized. "For the sake of the city and the state and the nation--" His eyes were wide, and filled with a light which deceived her. "For the sake of civic honour and decency and self-respect--"

Mr. Mix cleared his throat. "Yes, but--"

Again, she leaned out and touched his arm. "For *my* sake?"

Mr. Mix recoiled slightly. "For *your* sake!" he muttered.

"Yes, for mine. The sister of your oldest friend."

He owed her five thousand dollars, and if she demanded payment, he was a bankrupt. "Why does it mean so much to you?" he asked, sparring for time.

"It would be an epoch in the history of the League, Mr. Mix."

"You spoke about leadership. No one can hope to replace yourself."

"Thank you--I know you mean it. But *no* woman can lead a campaign such as the one we're just starting. It takes a strong, dominant man who knows politics. Of course, when we go after dancing and cards and dress-reform, I guess I can do all right, but in *this* campaign--"

"What campaign is this, Miss Starkweather?"

"Sunday enforcement."

Mr. Mix pursed his lips. "Really?"

She nodded. "We're going to concentrate on one thing at a time. That's first."

"Close all the theatres and everything?"

"Tight!" she said, and the word was like the lash of a whip. "Tight as a drum."

Mr. Mix controlled himself rigidly. "You'll have to pardon my seeming indelicacy, but--" He coughed behind his hand. "That might bring about a very unhappy relationship between my family and yours. Had you thought of it?"

"Henry? Humph! Yes. I'm sorry, but I don't propose to let my family or anybody else's stand in the way of my principles. Do *you*? No. If Henry stands in the way, he's going to get run over. Mark my words."

His expression was wooden, but it concealed a thought which had flashed up, spontaneously, to dazzle him. In spite of his age and experience, Mr. Mix threatened to blush. The downfall of Henry meant the elevation of Mirabelle. Mr. Mix himself could assist in swinging the balance. And he couldn't quite destroy a picture of Mirabelle, walking down the aisle out of step to the wedding march. Her arms were loaded with exotic flowers, of which each petal was a crisp yellow bank-bill. He wanted to laugh, he wanted to snort in deprecation, and he did neither. He was too busy with the consciousness that at last he was in a position to capitalize his information. He knew what nobody else did, outside of Henry and his wife, Mirabelle, Mr. Archer and probably Judge Barklay and if he flung himself into the League's campaign, what might he now accomplish?

He looked at Mirabelle. Her eyes betrayed her admiration. Mr. Mix drew a very long breath, and in the space of ten seconds thought ahead for a year. The League was ridiculously radical, but if Mr. Mix were appointed to direct it, he was confident that he could keep Mirabelle contented, without making himself too much of a ludicrous figure. All it needed was tact, and foresight. "If I could only spare the time to help you--but you see, this is my dull season--I have to work twice as hard as usual to make an honest dollar--"

"Would you accept an honorarium?"

"Beg pardon?"

"If you took charge of the drive, would you accept a salary? And give us most of your time? Say, four days a week?"

Once more, his thoughts raced through the year. "Now," he said, presently, "you *are* making it hard for me to refuse."

"Only that? Haven't I made it impossible?"

To Mr. Mix, her tone was almost more of a challenge than an invitation. He looked at her again; and at last he nodded. "I think--you have."

She held out her hand. "I've always respected you as a man. Now I greet you as a comrade. We'll make this city a place where a pure-minded man or woman won't be ashamed to live. I tell you, I won't be satisfied until we reach the *ideal*! And prohibition was only one tiny move in advance, and we've miles to go. I'm glad we're going the rest of the way together. And it wouldn't surprise me in the least if you came out of it Mayor. That's *my* idea."

Mr. Mix, with the faint aroma of cloves in his nostrils, backed away.

"Oh, no, I don't dream of *that* ..." he said. "But I feel as if I'd taken one of the most significant steps of my whole life. I--I think I'd better say good afternoon, Miss Starkweather. I want to be alone--and meditate. You understand?"

"Like Galahad," she murmured.

Mr. Mix looked puzzled; he thought she had a cold. But he said no more; he went home to his bachelor apartment, and after he had helped himself to three full fingers of meditation, together with a little seltzer, he smiled faintly, and told himself that there was no use in debating the point--a man with brains is predestined to make progress. But he couldn't help reflecting that now, more than ever, if any echo of his New York escapades, or any rumour of his guarded habits got to Mirabelle's ears--or, for that matter, to anybody's ears at all--his dreams would float away in vapour. Perhaps it would be wise to explain to Mirabelle that he had once been a sinner. She would probably forgive him, and appreciate him all the more. Women do.... It was curious that she had mentioned him as a possible Mayor. It had been his dearest ambition. He wondered if, with his present reputation, and then with the League behind him, there were a

CHAPTER VII

There was probably no power on the face of the earth which could have driven Henry Devereux to the operation of a picture theatre, strictly as a business venture; but when he once got it into his head that the Orpheum wasn't so much a business as a sporting proposition, he couldn't have been stopped by anything short of an injunction. Immediately, his attitude was normal, and from the moment that he resolved to take possession of his property, and operate it, he was indifferent to the public estimate of him. The thing was a game, a game with a great stake, and set rules, and Henry took it as he once had taken his golf and his billiards and his polo--joyously, resiliently, determinedly, and without the slightest self-consciousness, and with never an eye for the gallery.

He was inspirited, moreover, by the attitude of his friends. To be sure, they laughed, but in their laughter there was no trace of the ridicule he had feared. They took the situation as a very good joke on Henry, but at the same time, because gossip had already begun to build up a theory to explain that situation, there were several of them who wished that a similar joke, with a similar nubbin, might be played on themselves. They told this to Henry, they urged him to go ahead and become a strictly moral Wallingford, they slapped him on the back and assured him that if there was justice in the Sunday-school books, he was certain to finish in the money; and Henry, who had provided himself with several air-tight alibis, found them dead stock on his hands. He had known, of course, that he could count on Bob Standish, and a few of his other intimates, but the hearty fellowship of the whole circle overwhelmed him. He knew that even when they waxed facetious, they were rooting for him; and this knowledge multiplied his confidence, and gave him fresh courage.

And yet, with all the consciousness of his loyal backing, he was considerably upset to read in the *Herald*, on the very morning that he took control of his property, a seven column streamer headline which leaped out to threaten him.

"SUNDAY THEATRES AND AMUSEMENTS MUST GO!"--MIX

Prominent Business Man Turns Reformer

THEODORE MIX CHOSEN TO MANAGE CAMPAIGN OF LEAGUE

Pledges Enforcement of City Ordinances to the Letter

His first reaction was one of bewilderment, and after that, one of consternation. His friend Bob Standish tried to laugh it off for him, but Henry hadn't a smile in his system.

"All right, then," said Bob Standish. "Go see the judge. He'll tell you the same thing. Mix's nothing but a bag of wind. He's an old blowhard."

"Maybe he is," conceded Henry, soberly. "But I'd be just as satisfied about it if he blew in some other direction."

Henry took the paper to Judge Barklay, who had already seen it, and made his own deductions. "Oh, no," he said, "I'm not astonished. When a man's in hot enough water, he'll cut up almost any kind of caper to get out. There's only two kinds of people who ever go into these radical movements--great successes and great failures. Never any *average* folks. I'd say it's a pretty good refuge for him, and you drove him to it."

"Well--does he mean what he says there?"

"Not too much of it. How could he? If he does half he says he will, he'll lose his job. The town would be as pure as Utopia, and there wouldn't be any League."

"How about the ordinance he quotes, though?"

"Oh, *that* ... it's Ordinance 147. It's so old it's toothless. The City Council doesn't quite dare to repeal it--nobody's sure enough, these days, to get up and take a chance--but they don't want it enforced, and they haven't for ages."

Henry frowned. "That's all right. But suppose they did arrest somebody under that Ordinance? What would you do?"

"Fine 'em, of course. I'd have to. But I've never had such a case that I can remember. There haven't been any arrests. It's an understood thing."

"Yes, that's fine--as long as everybody understands it the same way. But maybe Mix doesn't--or Aunt Mirabelle either."

"Oh, I shouldn't worry much."

Henry continued serious. "Oh, I guess I can sleep nights all right without any paregoric, but what right have *they* got to butt into the only day of recreation the working people have? If their immortal souls hurt 'em as much as all that, why don't they go off and suffer where they can do it in peace and not bother *us*?"

The Judge laughed quietly. "Whence all this sudden affection for the working man, Henry?"

Henry reddened. "Strictly between the two of us, I don't like the idea of Sunday business, anyway. But unfortunately, that's the big day.... But, if *you* had to work indoors, eight hours a day, six days a week, maybe you'd be satisfied to spend Sundays picking sweet violets out by the barge canal, but what would you do when it rained?"

"Of course," admitted the Judge, "it's a poor policy to have a law on the books, and ignore it. Both of us must admit that. A good law ought to be kept; a bad one ought to be repealed; but any law that *is* valid oughtn't to be winked at. And if pressure *should* be brought on the Mayor to enforce that ordinance, and any arrests are made, why I'll have to do my duty."

"Yes--and here I'm raising a mortgage and spending the money on improvements that'll hold us up for more than two weeks--and here Anna and I are going to live in a couple of box-stalls (every time you take a long breath in that flat you create a vacuum!)--and here I've been going to the City Commercial School every afternoon for two solid hours, and studying like a dog every night--and here I've resigned from the Golf Club, and everything else but the Citizens--and if they *do* put the kibosh on Sunday shows, why I'll be elected to the Hohenzollern Club. And the cream of *that* joke is that Aunt Mirabelle's outfit'd get itself endowed for putting me out of commission!"

"They won't do it, Henry. These organizations always make the same mistake. They go too far. They aren't talking reform; they're talking revolution, and people won't stand for it. These reform crowds always start out to be a band-wagon, and if they kept their senses, they could do some real good--and then they march so fast that pretty soon they find they've winded everybody else, and there isn't any parade. All they need is rope. Give 'em enough of it, and they always hang themselves. That speech of Mix's has done more harm to the League than it has good. You go right ahead with your improvements."

In view of the Judge's official position, this was in the nature of an opinion from headquarters; and yet Henry delayed for a day or two before he signed his contract for the alterations. In the meantime, he saw Mr. Archer and got an interpretation of the will; Mr. Archer was sorry, but if Sundays were ruled out, there was no provision for reducing the quota, and Henry would have to stand or fall on the exact phraseology. He had another session with the Judge, and three a day with Anna, and one with the largest exhibitor in town (who pooh-poohed the League, and offered to back up his pooh-poohs with a cash bet that nothing would ever come of it) and eventually he was persuaded to execute the contract.

Through Bob Standish, he negotiated a mortgage which would cover the cost of the work, and leave a comfortable balance. "We're not going to be as poor as I thought we were," he said cheerfully to Anna who had put in two hectic weeks on the apartment she had chosen because it was the cheapest in the market. "We've got something in the bank for emergencies, and ten thousand a year is two hundred a week besides."

Anna was horrified. "You didn't think we'd *spend* what we make, did you?"

"Why not? Uncle John didn't say we had to show them ten thousand in coin at the end of the year; he said I had to *make* it--on the books. We can spend every kopeck of it, if we want to. And I was about to say that with six thousand dollars left over from the mortgage money, we'll have a maid after all. Yea, verily, even a cook."

Anna glanced at her hands--slim, beautiful hands they were--and shook her head obstinately. "No, dear. Because what we save now *might* be our only capital later."

"But we're going to *win*. We're going to exert our resistless wills to the utmost. What's the use of being tightwads?"

"But if we *shouldn't* win, look where we'd be! No, dear, we're going to save our pennies. That's why I picked out this apartment; that's why I'm doing as much as I can with it myself. It's the only safe way. And just look around--haven't I done wonders with almost nothing at all?"

Henry looked around, not that his memory was at fault, but because he was perpetually dumbfounded by her genius. Originally, this living-room had been a dolorous cave with varnished yellow-pine woodwork, gas-logs, yellow wall-paper to induce toothache, and a stark chandelier with two anemic legs kicking out at vacancy. She had caused the Orpheum electrician to remove the chandelier; with her own hands, she had painted the woodwork a deep, rich cream-colour; she had ripped out the gas-logs and found what no one had ever suspected--a practicable flue; and she had put in a basket grate which in the later season would glow with cheerful coals. Over the wall-paper she had laid a tint which was a somewhat deeper cream than the woodwork. She had made that cave attractive with a soft, dull-blue rug, and wicker furniture, with hangings of cretonne in sunny gold and an echo of the blue rug, with brass bowls which held the bulbs she had tended on the kitchen window-sill, with bookshelves, and pictures from her own home. Especially by candle-light, it was charming; and her greatest joy, and Henry's unending marvel, was that it had cost so little, and that so much of it was her own handiwork.

"Yes, but pause and reflect a minute," said Henry. "I've sold the big car and bought a tin-plated runabout. I've sold my horse. I've sold ten tons of old clothes and priceless jewels. Financially

speaking, I'm as liquid as a pellucid pool in a primeval forest. And there's another grand thing to consider; I'm keeping my own books, so nobody's going to crack the till, the way they did with grandfather. Can't we even have a *cook*?"

"No, dear. Nobody but me. We've got to play safe. It's all part of the game. Don't you see it is?"

Eventually, he agreed with her, and went back to the Orpheum, where a score of workmen were busy remodelling the interior, and patching up the façade. He stood for a moment to watch the loading of a truck with broken-seats, jig-saw decorations, and the remains of a battered old projector; he looked up, presently to the huge sign over the entrance: "Closed During Alterations, Grand Opening Sunday Afternoon, August 20th. Souvenirs." There was no disputing the fact that all his eggs were in one basket, and that if the Reform League started to throw stones at it, they would find it a broad mark. But Henry had plenty of assurances that he didn't need to worry, and so he sponged away the last of his doubts, and set to work to learn his business with all possible speed.

It was his first experience with the building trades, and he was innocent enough to believe in schedules and estimates. In less than a fortnight, however, he came home to his wife in a mood which she was quick to detect, no matter how carefully he disguised it.

"Oh, I'm just peevish," said Henry. "The contractor says it'll take four weeks instead of three, and cost six thousand instead of forty-five hundred. But there's no use wearing a long face about it. If I did, I didn't mean to."

Anna slipped out of her big apron, and rearranged her hair. "Of course you didn't. I just knew."

"As a matter of fact," he said, "my face feels long enough to fit in a churn. Only I was under the impression that I'd put on a mask of gaiety that was absolutely impenetrable.... Well, what's happened in the ancestral home today?"

She had burned a steak and both thumbs; there was a leak in the plumbing, and the family overhead had four children and a phonograph. Henry kissed the thumbs, cursed the kitchen range, and forgot his troubles.

"You're going to ruin your hands," he said, sympathetically. "Darn it, we *can* afford a cook, Anna. Come on; be reasonable."

She shook her head. "Oh! And I meant to tell you the wall-paper's peeling off in the dining room, and the most *awful* smell of fried onions keeps coming up the dumb-waiter shaft."

Henry gathered her into his arms. "Dearest, in a year you can have a dipperful of attar of roses for every fried onion. And we'll be so rich you can mingle practically on equal terms with the plumber's wife.... Now let's go put on the feed-bag. And by the way, I prefer my steak slightly burned--it's more antiseptic."

He never suspected that ninety-nine percent of her difficulties were imaginary, and that she had invented them as soon as she saw his face.

A week later, the contractor brought in still another schedule, and another estimate; Henry became Chesterfieldian in his politeness, and wanted to know if a contract were a contract, or merely a piece of light literature. The contractor was apologetic, but wages were going up--materials were high--labour was scarce--transportation was uncertain--shipments were slow--

Henry was angry and disillusioned, but he knew that belligerence would gain him nothing. "In other words," he said, genially, "there's something the matter with everything but the Orpheum, and everybody but me. I congratulate myself. Well, when I do get the job finished, and what does it cost--not to a minute and a fraction of a cent, of course, but a general idea--what year, and--"

"Mr. Devereux!"

"And a guess that's within say, a couple of thousand dollars of the real price."

"I hope you don't think I'm making any big profit out of this. To tell the truth--"

"Oh, I know," said Henry. "You're losing money. Don't deny it, you eleemosynary rascal, don't deny it."

The man felt himself insulted, but Henry was smiling, and of course that strange word might be something technical. "Well, to tell the truth, we--"

"Come on, now. I know you're an altruist, but be a sport. You're losing money, and the children are moaning with hunger in their little trundle-beds, but when do I get the job done?"

"The second week in September."

"*This* September? And the bill?"

"Shaved down so close there's hardly any--"

"Shave it every morning; it's being done. But what's your figure?"

"Seventy-six fifty."

There was nothing for Henry to do but to have a new date painted on the sign, and to draw on his reserve fund, but at bottom he was vastly perturbed. He had counted on a running start, and every week of delay was a vicious handicap. If he had remotely imagined how elastic a contractor's agreement could be, he would certainly have thought twice about ordering so many changes--he would have steered a middle course, and been satisfied with half the

improvement--but as it was, he had put himself in a trap. Now that the work was partly done, it would have to be completed. There was no way out of it. And from day to day, as the arrears of labour heaped up, and cost was piled on cost, Henry began to lose a trifle of his fine buoyancy and optimism.

Also, it was amazing to discover that Anna was much less self-reliant than he had thought her. Almost every night she displayed some unsuspected trait of helplessness, so that he simply had to shelve his worries, and baby her out of her own. He adored her, and therefore he never questioned her ingenuousness; he didn't see that by monopolizing his thoughts, and turning them entirely upon herself, she prevented him from wasting his energy in futile brooding, even if he had inclined to it.

He planned to open in mid-September, but a strike among the carpenters added a few days to the time, and, by virtue of a compromise, a few dollars to the account. The building inspector wouldn't pass the wiring, and the electricians took a holiday before they condescended to return. When the last nail was driven, the last brushful of paint applied, the final item added to the long statement, the day was the last Friday in the month, and the total bill amounted to more than nine thousand dollars.

"Anna," said Henry, reflectively, "it's a lucky thing for us this world was all built before we were born. Know that? Because if they'd ever started it under *modern* conditions, there wouldn't be anything to it yet but the Garden of Eden and Atlantic City and maybe Gopher Prairie.... Well, I wonder what's next?"

"There won't *be* any next, dear. Nothing can happen now. And aren't you glad I've made us economize? Aren't you? Say your prayers! Say--'bless Anna'!"

"Not Anna--*Pollyanna*. Glad we economized! Why don't you say you're glad it took two months to do two weeks' work because that gave me so much more time to study the game, and find out how to run the theatre? No, it goes back farther than that. I'm glad you caught me while I was so young."

"Henry!"

"What? Don't you remember how you pursued me, and vamped me, and took away my volition, so I was helpless as a babe--"

"Oh, *Henry!*"

"Sure you did. Funny you don't remember that. Or else--was it the other way around?"

"Well--"

"Well, anyhow," he said, in a slightly lower key. "I'm glad it happened.... And you stick to me, and you'll wear diamonds yet. Great hunks of grit, strung all over you. I'll make you look as vulgar as a real society woman. That's the kind of man I am. A good provider--that is, of course, *providing*."

And on Saturday morning, the *Herald* told them that a committee from the Reform League had waited on the Mayor for the third time, and delivered an ultimatum.

"Oh, bother!" said Anna. "There's been something in the paper every two or three days. It doesn't amount to a row of pins. Dad says so."

Henry inhaled deeply. "Did you see who's on that committee? Mix and Aunt Mirabelle, of course, and if they've got it in for anybody special, I'm it. Bob says Mix is a grand little hater; he's seen him in action, and he says to keep an eye on him: says Mix had lined up a buyer for the Orpheum, so naturally he's sore at me.... And then a flock of old men just under par--I'd say they average about ninety-seven and a half--but they're a pretty solid lot; too solid to be booted out of *any* Mayor's office. And if they *should* get the Mayor stirred up, why, we wouldn't have the chance of a celluloid rat in a furnace.... I wish the Judge were where I could get at him. He'd know what's going on."

"Couldn't you ask the Exhibitors Association?"

"*They* don't know. The Judge is on the inside. Do you know when he's coming back from his vacation?"

"Not for two or three weeks yet. But I've an intuition, dear--"

"Sure. So have I. A year from now we'll be eating our golden pheasants off our golden plates with our gold teeth. But in the meantime, you better keep your eye on the butcher's bill.... They tell me hash is a great nerve-food."

CHAPTER VIII

In years the Mayor was no chicken, but in politics he had hardly chipped his shell, so that he was still susceptible to delegations, and sets of resolutions, and references to his solemn oath of office. Furthermore, he had been secretly awed by Mr. Mix's eloquence; for Mr. Mix, as

spokesman of the committee, had delivered a speech which was a brief history of both common and statutory law from the time of Solon and Draco up to the most recent meeting of the City Council. Then, in addition, the Mayor had been mightily impressed by the personnel of that committee--chiefly old men, to be sure, but men of immense dignity and considerable weight in local finance; and also, for a counterpoise, there was Miss Starkweather. He hadn't liked the way Miss Starkweather looked at him. She had looked at him with the same rigid intensity with which his wife looked at a fly in the dining-room.

As the door closed behind the last of the committee, the Mayor drew a prodigious breath, and walked over to the window, where for several minutes he remained in deep thought. He tried to remember Mr. Mix's peroration:

"Thousands of years ago, Mr. Mayor, when the race of man was still dressed in skins, and domiciled in caves, and settling its differences with clubs and brickbats, there was no institution of law,--there was no written language. But as civilization advanced, men found the necessity of communicating their ideas; so that they devised a form of speech which would enable them to exchange these ideas--such as they were--about life, and law. And later on, it was plain that in order to perpetuate these ideas and pass them to posterity, it was necessary to write them down; and so there was developed a written language, and by this method civilized men through all the ages have written down the laws under which they are willing to live. It would be impractical for all of us to meet together to pass our laws, and therefore we elect representatives who make our laws for us. These laws are binding upon all of us until they are set aside by still other legislators, still acting for the whole people, who have chosen them as their legislative representatives. The duty of the executive branch of our government is to enforce those laws, whether made yesterday, or made fifty years ago, or five hundred years ago, and written down in our law-books.... This is our third conference with you, Mr. Mayor, in regard to one of those laws. I therefore have to inform you, in behalf of our committee and our League, and our whole city (whose representatives in City Council passed that law for our common good) that you stand today at the parting of the ways. You must choose whether to uphold your sacred oath of office, or to disregard it. And within forty-eight hours you will have made that choice, and we shall know where our duty lies.... I thank you for your patience."

The Mayor was one of those who, without the first atom of sustaining evidence, had long been vaguely suspicious that Mr. Mix wasn't always as pious as he appeared in church. He had noted, too, that although Mr. Mix's name was frequently listed on committees, yet it never bobbed up in connection with an obscure cause, however worthy, or among the names of unimportant citizens. He was convinced that Mr. Mix had an ulterior motive--political, social, financial--but the worst of it was that Mr. Mix had come with support which couldn't be sidetracked.

The Mayor shook himself, and went over to his telephone; a few minutes later the Chief of Police strolled in, and grinned at the disordered semi-circle of chairs. "Been holdin' a prayer-meetin', Mr. Rowland?"

The Mayor was biting his moustache. "Sit down, Chief. I want some advice.... Lord, I wish Barklay wasn't off on his vacation.... Why, I've just had a threat from this Reform League."

"Threat? What kind of a threat?"

The Mayor didn't reply immediately; he continued to chew his moustache. "You know that fool Sunday law--was passed 'way back in the year One?"

"Sure. 147. Dead letter."

"They say it's got to be enforced."

The Chief laughed boisterously. "That's a big order."

"I know it is. The mass of the people don't want it--never did. But in these days there isn't a Councillor I know'd put a motion to repeal it, or amend it. Prohibition's scared 'em. They don't know *what* the people want, so they're laying mighty low.... Same time, this League's getting pretty strong. Mix, and John Starkweather's sister, and ex-Senator Kaplan, Richards of the First National, Dr. Smillie of the Church crowd, old man Fredericks of National Metal--know what they handed me today?"

"Let her come."

The Mayor snorted with disgust. "Hinted if I didn't begin enforcement day after tomorrow they'd appeal to the Governor.... Lord, I wish Barklay was here."

The Chief grinned again. "I know what Barklay'd say."

"What?"

"Give 'em rope."

"We-ll ... that's easy enough to *say*."

"Easy to do, too."

"I can't see it. But if they go up to the Governor, with a petition to investigate--and the state law's pretty rough--and start impeachment proceedings--"

The Chief spat contemptuously. "Shucks, give 'em rope."

"Well--*how*?"

"Why, *enforce* the damn' law--just once. Spike Mix's guns--he's only doin' this on a bluff. Guess

he wants the reform vote for Council, or somethin'. Keep it under our bonnets, and send out a squad of patrolman Sunday afternoon to raid every theatre in town. Bat 'em over the head before they know it. I wouldn't even tell my own men 'till I lined 'em up and give 'em their orders. Then listen for the public to holler."

The Mayor had broken into a high-pitched laugh; he stopped abruptly. "How many people'd there be in all the houses put together?"

"Six thousand. Five of 'em at the movies."

"They'd start a riot!"

"Oh, I wouldn't pinch the audiences; just the managers, and bust up the shows. *Then* you'd find out if the people want that law or not. We say they don't, but how do we know? Let's find out."

The Mayor sat down at his desk, and began to chuckle. "Chief, that's a bully idea--but what'd happen on Monday?"

"Happen? When, five, six thousand voters got put out in the street and their Sunday afternoon spoiled? Fellows with girls--Pa takin' the family out for a treat--factory hands? They'd be a howlin' mob in the Council chamber on Monday mornin'; that's what'd happen. And *one* damn fool law'd be fixed so's the Police Department'd know how to handle it."

"It's passing the buck!" murmured the Mayor, ecstatically. "It's passing the buck right to the people, by George!"

"Sure. Do we go ahead with it? Want anybody tipped off?"

The Mayor was hugging his knees ecstatically. "No, we'll make a clean sweep. No favourites. The bigger haul the better. All the boys'll understand. Keep it dead under your hat. We'll talk over the details tomorrow." Chuckling, he leaned back and opened his arms wide, his fists closed. "Rope!" he said. "Rope! Chief, we'll give 'em a hawser!"

On Saturday evening, Henry gave a special invitation performance, to which only his personal friends and Anna's were bidden, and if he had cherished any lingering doubt of his place in society, it must have been removed that night. His friends didn't know the details of the Starkweather trust fund, but they knew that Henry's future was lashed to his success with the Orpheum, and they came to help tie the knot. Naturally, since the auditorium was filled with young people who had grown up together, and with a few older people who had helped to bring them up, there was plenty of informality--indeed, a large part of it had been scheduled and rehearsed in advance. Henry didn't have to ask any questions; he knew that Bob Standish was responsible.

With Anna beside him, he had stood for thirty minutes in the foyer, to receive his guests, and as smile after smile encouraged him, and he heard the steady stream of sincere good-wishes, Henry began to grow curiously warm in the region of his heart, and curiously weak in the knees. Anna moved closer to him.

"I told you so," she whispered. "I told you so. Everybody loves you."

"It isn't me," he whispered back, with ungrammatical fervour. "It's you."

They stood together, then, at the rear of the house, to watch the high-jinks going on in front. Standish had ousted the three-piece orchestra, and taken over the piano; two other volunteers had flanked him, and the revelry began with a favourite ditty to proclaim that all reports to the contrary notwithstanding, Henry was style all the while, all the while.

Then, suddenly, there were loud shouts for Henry and Anna, and they were seized and dragged to the top of the centre aisle. Standish swung into the Mendelssohn Wedding March, and through a haze of rose-leaf confetti and paper streamers, the two Devereuxs were forced down to the orchestra-pit. The house was on its feet to them, and Anna, half-laughing, half-crying with happiness, was sorting confetti out of her hair when Standish clambered up on the stage, and waved for silence.

"Listen, everybody.... Old Hank Devereux and wife tried to save the price of a caterer, last spring, and they got away with it. Alas, Hank's a jealous bird, and he was afraid somebody'd kiss the bride. Furthermore, Anna didn't want to get any wedding presents, because they clutter up the house so. And when most of your friends live in the same town, it's hard to get rid of the stuff you don't want. So they buncoed us out of a party. Well, so far we've given 'em Mendelssohn and confetti. Any lady or gent who now desires to kiss the bride, please rise and come forward.... Hey, there! This isn't any Sinn Fein sociable! Ceremony's postponed!... And finally, dearly beloved brethren and sistren, we come to the subject of wedding gifts." He turned to look down at the Devereuxs, and some of the levity went out of his voice. "We thought we'd bring you a little something for good-luck, old man. It's from all of us. Hope you like it. If you don't, you can swap it for a few tons of coal.... There she comes!"

It was a magnificent silver tea-service, borne down the aisle by the two men who, next to Standish, were Henry's best friends.

Anna was utterly speechless, and Henry was coughing diligently. The service was placed on the piano; Henry touched the cool smoothness of a cream-jug, and tried to crystallize his thought into coherence.

The applause had died away; the house was quiet, expectant. From the rear, a man's voice said: "It isn't like a golf championship trophy, old man--you don't have to win it three times--it's all

yours."

In the shriek of laughter which followed, Henry, with Anna in tow, fled to shelter. "Lights!" said Henry. Abruptly, the auditorium was dim. And with Anna holding tight to his fingers, he sat down in the furthest corner, and trembled.

For the next two hours, Standish, who was on one of his periodical fits of comedy, stuck to his piano, and dominated the evening. He played grotesquely inappropriate melodies, he commanded singing, once he stopped the show and with the assistance of a dozen recruits put on the burlesque of an amateur night at a music-hall. He made the occasion a historical event, and when at last it was over, and the guests were filing out to the lobby, he came to Henry and held out his hand.

"Big-time, Henry, big-time," he said. "See? They're all with you."

Henry cleared his throat. "You're a peach, Bob. You got it up."

"Oh, it wasn't anything." Standish's cloak of comedy had fallen away; he looked as lazy, and as innocent and childlike as ever. "Before I go--I had a letter today from one of the big movie circuit crowd. They'll pay you thirty-seven thousand five hundred cash for the Orpheum. I've got a certified check for a thousand to bind the bargain. Want it?"

Henry didn't even glance at it. "Put it back in your pocket, Bob. I wouldn't sell it for ten times that--not after tonight."

His friend smiled very faintly. "It's a good price, if you care to get out from under. Between you and me, I think it's more than the Orpheum's worth."

"Don't want it," said Henry gruffly.

Standish gazed with vast innocence at Anna. "Third and last chance, Henry. Otherwise, I'll mail it back tonight. Just a few hours from now this place, right where we're standing, 'll look like a sardine-can come to life, and you'll be taking in money hand over fist, and you'll be branded forever as--"

"Oh, shut up," said Henry, affectionately.

Through the jostling, good-natured crowd which blocked the sidewalk in front of the Orpheum Theatre, that Sunday at two o'clock, a policeman in uniform pushed his way to the ticket-booth. "Where's the manager?"

The ticket-seller bobbed her head backwards. "First door on the left."

The policeman stalked through the lobby, and found the door; knocked belligerently, and stepped inside. "You the manager? Well, there ain't goin' to be no show today, see?"

Henry jumped to his feet. "What's that?"

"You heard what I said. No show. Close up your theatre and call it a day."

Henry turned, for moral support, to his wife: she had already hurried to his side. "What's all this, Mr. Officer?" she asked, unsteadily.

"It's police orders; that's what it is, young lady."

She seized Henry's hand. "But--but when we've--why, you don't really *mean* it, do you?"

He dug into his pocket, and produced a tattered, dog-eared pamphlet, folded open at one of the early pages. He read aloud, slowly: "'Whosoever shall fail in the strict observance o' the Lord's Day by any unseemly act, speech, or carriage, or whosoever shall engage in any manner o' diversion or profane occupation for profit--'"

Anna, holding tight to Henry's hand, knew that argument was futile, but she was a woman, and she had a husband to defend. Her heart was leaden, but her voice was stout with indignation.

"But Mr. Policeman! Do you know who I am? I'm Judge Barklay's daughter. *I* know all about that ordinance. Nobody's ever--"

He held up his hand in warning. "That's *all* right, young lady. If you're his daughter, you oughter keep on the right side o' the law. It won't do you no good to bicker about it neither--you go in there an' tell your audience to get their money back, an' go on home."

Henry picked up his cigarette. He had no craving to smoke, but he didn't want Anna to see that his lips were trembling. "Well," he said, "there goes the old ball-game. And we've sold every seat in the house, and thrown away three hundred dollar's worth of souvenirs, and the sidewalk's full of people waiting for the second show.... Knockout Mix beats Battling Devereux in the first round." He did his best to smile, but the results were poor. "And when we held off three days just so we could start on Sunday with a grand smash!"

"Get a move on, young feller. If the show begins, you're pinched, see? You go in there and do what I told you."

From within there was a sudden rattle of applause. Anna gripped her husband's arm. "It's ... it's begun already," she said, breathlessly.

The policeman stepped forward. "You heard me tell you to stop it, didn't you? What are you tryin' to do--play horse with me? Now you go in there an' *stop* it, and then you come along with me an' explain it to the Judge. See? Now, get a wiggle on."

CHAPTER IX

From the moment that he went out upon the little stage of his theatre until he came wearily into his own apartment at five o'clock, Henry lived upon a mental plane so far removed from his usual existence that he was hardly aware of any bodily sensations at all. A brand-new group of emotions had picked him out for their play-ground, and Henry had no time to be self-conscious.

In the first place, he was too stunned to remember that he hated to be conspicuous, and that he had never made a public speech in all his life. He was paralyzed by the contrast between last night and today. Consequently, he made a very good speech indeed, and it had some acrid humour in it, too, and the audience actually cheered him--although later, when he reviewed the incident in his mind, he had to admit that the cheers were loudest just after he had told the audience to keep the souvenirs.

Then, when in the custody of the patrolman, he went out to the street, his mood was still so concentrated, his anger and depression so acute, that he was transported out of the very circumstances which caused him to be angry and depressed. He realized, with a hazy sort of perception, that a tail of small boys had attached itself to the lodestar of the policeman's uniform; but even at this indignity, his reaction was curiously impersonal. It was as though the spiritual part of him and the material part had got a divorce; and the spiritual part, which was the plaintiff, stood coldly aloof, watching the material part tramping down Main Street, with a flat-footed policeman beside it, a voluntary escort behind, and rumour flying on ahead to all the newspapers. He was actually too humiliated to suffer from the humiliation.

To be sure, this wasn't by any means his first entanglement with the law, but heretofore his occasions had been marked by a very different ritual. He recalled, phlegmatically, that whenever, in the old days, a member of the motorcycle squad had shot past him, and signalled to him to stop, the man had always treated him more or less fraternally, in recognition of the fellowship of high speed. The traffic officers had cheerfully delivered a summons with one hand, and accepted a cigar with the other. There was a sort of sporting code about it; and even in Court, a gentleman who had been arrested for speeding was given the consideration which belonged to his rank, and the fine was usually doubled on the assumption that a gentleman could afford it. But this was different. A Devereux--which was almost the same thing as a Starkweather--was haled along the highway like a common prisoner. And if the Devereux hadn't been engaged in that two-for-a-cent, low-class, revolting business,--and if Aunt Mirabelle hadn't been Aunt Mirabelle--it couldn't have happened. The spiritual part of him looked down at the material part, and wondered how Henry Devereux could be so white-hot with passion, and yet so calm.

What would his friends say now? What would Bob Standish say, and Mr. Archer and Judge Barklay? And what would Aunt Mirabelle *not* say? This was a grim reflection.

During the journey he spoke only once, and that was to say, brusquely, to his captor: "Court isn't open today, is it?"

"Nope. But we're goin' to a Justice o' the Peace. Might save you a night in the hoosegow. Can't tell. Orders, anyway."

The Justice of the Peace (or, as he took some pains to inform Henry, the Most Honourable Court of Special Sessions) was a grizzled dyspeptic who held forth in the back room of a shoemaker's shop, while the rabble waited outside, flattening their noses against the window-glass. The dyspeptic had evidently been coached for the proceeding; on his desk he had a copy of the ordinance, and as soon as he had heard the charge, he delivered a lecture which he seemed to have by heart, and fined Henry twenty-five dollars and costs. Henry paid the fine, and turning to go, stumbled against two more policemen, each with his quarry. "Just out of curiosity," said Henry, speaking to no one in particular, and in a voice which came so faintly to his ears that he barely heard it, "Just out of idle curiosity, when the justice gets half the fine, isn't this court open on Sunday for godless profit, too?" And in the same, enduring haze of unreality, he paid an additional twenty dollars for contempt, and went out to the sidewalk.

He emerged as the focus of interest for a large, exuberant crowd of loiterers. A camera clicked, and Henry saw that the man at the shutter was one of the *Herald's* staff photographers. A youthful reporter caught up with him, and asked him what he had to say for publication. "Say for publication?" repeated Henry, dully. "Why, you can say--" He walked half a block before he completed the sentence. "You can say if I said it, you couldn't print it anyway."

And although the reporter paced him for a quarter of a mile, Henry never opened his mouth again. He was curiously obsessed, as men under heavy mental pressure are so often obsessed, by a ridiculously trivial detail. How was he going to enter that forty-five dollars on his books?

He had intended to go straight home to Anna, but automatically his steps led him to the Orpheum, where he went into his tiny office and sat down at his desk. There were two envelopes on his blotter; he slit them, diffidently, and found a bill from the novelty house which had supplied the souvenirs, and a supplementary statement from the decorator.

He opened a fat ledger, took up a pencil, and began to jot down figures on the back of one of the envelopes. Already, by remodelling the theatre, he had lost two month's headway, and spent three times too much money, and if Sunday performances were to be eliminated.... He threw down the pencil, and sat back spiritless. The good-wishes of all his friends, last night, had turned sour in his possession. To reach his goal, he should have to contrive, somehow, to fill nearly every seat at nearly every performance for the balance of the year. It was all well enough to have self-confidence, and courage, but it was better to look facts in the face. He had come to an impasse. Not only that, but overnight his property, by virtue of this Sunday enforcement and its effect upon the trade, had seriously depreciated in value. If it had been worth thirty-seven thousand five hundred yesterday, it wasn't worth a penny more than twenty today. And he could have had Standish's certified check, and got out from under. And he had thrown away in improvements almost every cent that he had borrowed against the original value. He was hardly better off, today, than if he had carried through his first bargain with Mr. Mix.

He would have to go home to Anna, and confess that he was beaten by default. He would have to explain to her, as gently as he could, that the road which led to the end of the rainbow was closed to traffic. He would have to admit to her that as far as he could see, he was destined to go on living indefinitely in a jerry-built apartment, with the odour of fried onions below, and the four children and the phonograph overhead. And Anna would have to go on pinch-hitting for cook, and waitress, and chambermaid, and bottle-washer--she would have to go on with the desecration of her beautiful hands in dish-water, and the ruin of her complexion over the kitchen-stove. The clothes that he had planned to buy for her, the jewels, the splendid car--the cohort of servants he had planned for her--the social prestige! And instead of that, he was nothing but a fragment of commercial driftwood, and he couldn't afford, now, to buy her so much as a new hat, without a corresponding sacrifice.

And yet--involuntarily, he stiffened--and yet he'd be hanged if he went back and acted like a whipped pup. No, he was supposed to be a man, and his friends and Anna believed in him, and he'd be hanged if he went back and confessed anything at all, admitted anything. It was all well enough to look facts in the face, but it was better still to keep on fighting until the gong rang. And when he was fighting against the cant purity and goodness of Mr. Mix, and the cold astigmatism of Aunt Mirabelle, he'd be hanged if he quit in the first round. No, even if Henry himself knew that he was beaten, nobody else was going to know it, and Anna least of all.

At five o'clock, he came blithely into his living-room: and as he saw Anna's expression, his own changed suddenly. He had thought to find her in tears; but she was coming to him with her usual welcome, her usual smile.

Henry didn't quite understand himself, but he was just the least bit offended, regardless of his relief. You simply couldn't tell from one minute to the next what a woman was going to do. By all precedent, Anna should have been enjoying hysterics, which Henry had come prepared to treat.

"Well," he said, "you'd better cancel that order for golden pheasants, old dear." She stopped short, and stared at him curiously, as though the remark had come from a stranger.

"We've got lamb chops tonight," said Anna, with whimsical relevance, "and fresh strawberry ice-cream. And pheasants are awfully indigestible, anyway."

Henry returned her stare. "What have you been doing all the afternoon--reading Marcus Aurelius?"

"No, I haven't been reading anything at all. I tidied up the kitchen. What happened to *you*?"

There were two different ways of presenting the narrative, and Henry chose the second. He made it a travesty: and all the time that he was talking, Anna continued to gaze at him in that same curious, thoughtful fashion, as if she were noting, for the first time, a subtle variation in his character.

"And--aren't you even *mad*?" she demanded. "I thought you'd be furious. I thought you'd be tearing your hair and--and *everything*."

Henry laughed explosively. "Impatience, as I've pointed out so often to Aunt Mirabelle, dries the blood more than age or sorrow. Yes, I'm mad, but I've put it on ice. I'm trying to work out some scheme to keep us in the running, and not give Mix too good an excuse to hoot at us. No--they say it's darkest just before the dawn, so I'm trying to fix it so we'll be sitting on the front steps to see the sunrise. Only so far I haven't had a mortal thought."

"As a matter of fact," she confided, "I loathed the idea of our running the Orpheum on Sundays. Didn't you?"

"Naturally. Also on Thursdays, Saturdays, Mondays, Fridays, Wednesdays and Tuesdays. But Sundays did sort of burrow a little further under my tough hide. And you know that's quite an admission for anybody that was brought up by Aunt Mirabelle." He smiled in reminiscence. "She used to make virtue so darned scaly and repulsive that it's a wonder I've got a moral left. As it is, my conscience may be all corrugated like a raisin, but I'm almost glad we *can't* run Sundays. That is, I would be if my last remaining moral weren't going to be so expensive."

"Don't you think they'll probably change that ordinance now, though? Don't you think people will insist on it? After today?"

"Guess work," said Henry. "Pure guesswork. But *my* guess is that we're ditched."

"Well, why don't you join the Exhibitors Association, and fight?"

He shook his head. "No, because that's just what Mix and Aunt Mirabelle expect me to do. This campaign of theirs is impersonal towards everybody else, but it's slightly personal towards me. I mean, Aunt Mirabelle's sore on general principles, and Mix is sore because I wouldn't come up and eat out of his hand and get myself sheared. We won't fight. We'll outwit 'em."

"But *how*?"

"Now that question," he said reproachfully, "was mighty tactless. I don't know how. But I know I'm not going to stick my head over the ramparts for 'em to shoot at. I'm no African Dodger--I'm an impresario. Maybe they'll hit me in the eye, all right, but I'm not going to give 'em a good cigar for it."

"I know, dear, but how are we going to make up all that tremendous loss?"

"Sheer brilliance," said Henry, easily. "Which is what I haven't got nothing but, of. So I'm banking on you.... And in the meantime, let's go ahead with the orgy of lamb chops you were talking about. I'm hungry."

They spent the evening in a cheerful discussion of ways and means, during which she was continually impressed by Henry's attitude. From earlier circumstances she had gathered that when he was under fire, his rash impulsiveness would remain constant, and that only his jocular manner would disappear; furthermore, she knew that in spite of that manner, he was a borrower of trouble. And yet Henry, who had a pretty legitimate reason to be bristling with rancour, sat and talked away as assuredly as though this hadn't been his doomsday.

She left him, once, to answer the telephone, and when she came back, she caught him off guard, and saw his face in repose. Henry wasn't aware of it; and when he heard her footsteps, he looked up with an instantaneous re-arrangement of his features. But Anna had seen, and Anna had understood; she sensed that Henry, for a generous purpose, had merely adopted a pose. Secretly, he was quite as tormented, quite as desperate, as she had expected him to be.

Her heart contracted, but for Henry's sake, she closed her eyes to the revelation, and resumed the discourse in the same key which Henry had set for it. Far into the night they exchanged ideas, and half-blown inspirations, but when Henry finally arose, with the remark that it was time to wind the clock and put out the cat, they had come to no conclusion except that something would certainly have to be done about it. "Oh, well," said Henry, indulgently, "a pleasant evening was reported as having been had by all, and nothing was settled--so it was just as valuable as a Cabinet Meeting."

The sight of the silver tea-service, however, sent him to bed with renewed determination.

In the morning, he dreaded to open his newspaper, but when he had read through the story twice, he conceded that it wasn't half as yellow as he feared. No, it was really rather conservative, and the photograph of him wasn't printed at all; he read, with grim satisfaction, that another culprit, somewhat more impetuous, had smashed the camera, and attempted to stage a revival of his success upon the photographer.

He had been fully prepared to find himself singled out for publicity, and he was greatly relieved. To be sure, there was a somewhat flippant mention of his relationship to Mirabelle, but it wasn't over-emphasized, and altogether, he had no justification for resentment--that is, at the *Herald*. The *Herald* had merely printed the news; what Henry resented was the fact.

He turned to the editorial page and found, as he had imagined, a solid column of opinion; but to his amazement, it made no protest of yesterday's event--on the contrary, it echoed Judge Barklay. It said half a dozen times, in half a dozen different ways, that a bad law ought to be repealed, a good law ought to be preserved, and that all laws, good or bad, as long as they were written on the books, ought to be enforced. Henry was mystified; for the *Herald* had always professed to be in utter sympathy with the workingman.

Later in the day, however, he saw the leading exhibitor in town, who winked at him. "Clever stuff, Devereux, clever stuff. 'Course, if we put up a roar, they'll say it's because we've got an ax to grind. Sure we have. But the *Herald* wants the *people*--the people that come to our shows--to get up and blat. Then it wouldn't be the League against the Association--it'd be the people against the League, and the laugh'd be on the other foot."

"What's the betting?"

"Search *me*. But Mayor Rowland told me if we got up a monster petition with a thousand or two names on it, he'll bring it up to the Council. We're puttin' up posters in the lobby."

Henry's heart jumped. "But suppose the people don't sign?"

"Well then we'd be out o' luck. But there's other ways o' goin' at that damn League, and we're goin' to use *all* of 'em. And that reminds me, Devereux--ain't it about time for you to join the Association?"

"I'm afraid not. I ought to, but--you see, you're going to make things as hot as you can for the League--personalities, and all that, and when my aunt is president of it--"

"But great guns! What's she done to *you*?"

"I know, but I can't help that. You go ahead and rip things up any way you want to, but I'd better stay out. It may be foolish, but that's how I feel about it."

"It's your own affair. I think you're too blamed easy, but you suit yourself.... And about the big noise, why I guess all we can do is wait and see what happens."

Miss Starkweather, who met him on the street that morning, told him the same thing. "Some people," she remarked, altitudinously, "are always getting their toes stepped on, aren't they? Well, there's another way to look at it--the toes oughtn't to have been there."

"Oh, give us time," said Henry, pleasantly. "Even the worm turns, you know."

"Humph!" said Aunt Mirabelle. "Let a dozen worms do a *dozen* turns! I never thought I'd see the day when a Devereux--almost the same thing as a Starkweather--'d figure in a disgrace such as yours. You've heaped muck on your uncle's parlour-carpet. But some day you'll see the writing on the wall, Henry."

He was tempted to remind her of another city ordinance against bill-posting, but he refrained, and saved it up for Anna.

"I'll watch for it," he said.

"Well, you better. All I've got to say is this: you just wait and see what happens."

And then, to complete the record, he got identically the same suggestion from Bob Standish.

"I suppose," said Standish, "maybe you're wishing you'd taken that check."

"Not that, exactly--but I've thought about it."

"Strikes me that you're in the best position of anybody in town, Henry. You've got a following that'll see you through, if it's humanly possible."

"Sounds like passing the hat, doesn't it?"

"Oh, no. And the side that scores first doesn't always win the game, either--I dare say you've noticed it. It'll come out all right--you just wait and see what happens."

Henry waited, and he saw. And to Henry's dismay, and to the Mayor's chagrin, and to Miss Mirabelle Starkweather's exceeding complacency, nothing happened at all.

The public petition, which had been advertised as "monstrous," caught hardly five hundred names, and two thirds of them were Mr. A. Mutt, Mr. O. Howe Wise, Mr. O. U. Kidd, and similar patronymics, scribbled by giggling small boys. The blue-law was universally unpopular, and no doubt of it, but the citizenry hesitated to attack it; the recent landslide for prohibition showed an apparent sentiment which nobody wanted to oppose--Why, if a man admitted that he was in favour of Sunday tolerance, his friends (who of course were going through exactly the same mental rapids) might put him down in the same class with those who still mourned for saloons. Each man waited for his neighbour to sign first, and the small boys giggled, and filled up the lists. Besides, there was a large amusement park just beyond the city line, and the honest workingman proceeded to pay his ten-cent fare, and double the profit of the park.

The Exhibitors Association put up its fists to the Mayor, and the Mayor proposed a public hearing, with the Council in attendance. At this juncture the Reform League sent a questionnaire to each Councillor, and to each member of the Association. The phraseology was Socratic (it was the product of Mr. Mix's genius) and if any one answered Yes, he was snared: if he said No, he was ambushed, and if he said nothing he was cooked. It reminded the Mayor of the man who claimed that in a debate, he would answer every question of his adversary with a simple No or Yes--and the first question was: "Have you stopped beating your wife?"

The Exhibitors held a meeting behind closed doors, and gave out the statement that nothing was to be gained by a public hearing. But they launched a flank attack on the Council only to discover that the Council was wide awake, and knew that its bread was buttered on one side only.

"We are listening," said the Chairman, with statesmanlike dignity, "for the voice of the people, and so far we haven't heard a peep. It looks as if they don't *want* you fellows to run Sunday's, don't it?"

The spokesman of the Exhibitors cleared his throat. "Statistics prove that every Sunday, an average of six thousand people--"

"That's all right. We've seen your petition. And Mr. Mutt and Mr. Kid and most of the rest of your patrons don't seem to be registered voters. How about it?"

The Council burst into a loud laugh, and the spokesman retreated in discomfiture.

For several days, Henry was fairly besieged by his friends, who joked him about his arrest, and then, out of genuine concern, wanted to know if his prospects were seriously damaged. To each interrogatory, Henry waved his hand with absolute nonchalance. As far as he knew, only six people were in the secret--himself, his wife, Judge Barklay, Standish, Mr. Archer and Aunt Mirabelle--and he wasn't anxious to increase the number. His aunt might not have believed it, but this was more on her account than on his own.

"Lord, no," said Henry, casually. "Don't worry about *me*. I'm only glad there's some news for the *Herald*. It was getting so dry you had to put cold cream on it or it'd crack."

By the time that Judge Barklay returned from his vacation, the subject had even slipped away from the front page of the newspapers. The flurry was over. And out of a population of fifty thousand, ninety-nine per cent of whom were normal-minded citizens, neither ultra-conservative nor ultra-revolutionary, that tiny fraction which composed the Ethical Reform League had stowed its propaganda down the throats of the overwhelming majority.

The Judge shrugged his shoulders. "Organization," he said. "They've got a leader, and speakers,

and a publicity bureau. That's all. I hear they're going to use it to boom Mix for a political job. But you wait--wait, and keep on paying out the rope."

"That's all I've got left to pay out," said Henry, amiably.

"Aren't you doing pretty well, considering?"

Henry nodded. "We're doing great business--I mean, anybody else would think so. About a hundred and fifty a week net, for the first three weeks. And Anna's salting away a hundred and ten of it. Every morning I draw a clean handkerchief, and a dime for dissipation, and she keeps a clutch on the rest."

"Hm! A hundred and fifty. That's good money, Henry."

"Well, that's the only kind we take. But you can see for yourself what this thing's done to us. We ought to be averaging two twenty-five. And we'd have done it, too."

The Judge appeared contrite. "I'm afraid you're blaming me for bad advice, Henry."

"No, sir. If I blamed anybody, I'd just blame myself for taking it. But I don't. You see, even if I fall down on the first prize, I've got a pretty good business under way. Eight thousand a year."

"Would you keep on with it?"

"I'd think it over. It isn't particularly joyous, but it sure does pay the rent. Oh, I suppose I'd try to sell it, if I could get a price for it, but Bob says I couldn't expect a big one, because so much of the trade sort of belongs to *us*--and wouldn't necessarily patronize the chap that bought me out. He tells me it was worth twenty when I took it, and thirty now, and if it weren't for this law, it would be worth fifty. That's all due to the improvements, and you advised me to put 'em in, and you engineered the mortgage. So I'm not huffy at you. Hardly."

"Still, you want the big prize if you can get it.... Notice what Mix is giving out to the papers? He'll hang himself yet, and if he does, you won't be too far behind to catch up. That's a prophecy. But by George, I can't help feeling that Mix isn't in that outfit for his health. It just don't smell right, somehow."

The Reform League had jubilantly explained to Mr. Mix that he was a liberator and a saviour of humanity from itself, and Mr. Mix had deftly caught whatever bouquets were batted up to him. He had allowed the fragrance of them to waft even as far as the *Herald* office, to which he sent a bulletin every forty-eight hours. Mr. Mix's salary was comforting, his expense accounts were paid as soon as vouchers were submitted, he was steadily advancing in Miss Starkweather's good books, and he considered himself to be a very clever man indeed.

At the very least, he was clever enough to realize that his position was now strategically favourable, and that as long as he moved neither forward nor backward, he was in no danger from any source. He had a living salary, and he was saving enough out of it to reduce his indebtedness; in a year he could snap his fingers at the world. Furthermore, he could see no possibility of legislating himself out of his job before that time--certainly not if he played his cards craftily, and didn't push his success too far. And by the end of the year, he could select a future to fit the circumstances.

For the time being, however, it seemed advisable to Mr. Mix to make haste slowly; he had turned an impending personal catastrophe into a personal triumph, but the triumph could be spoiled unless he kept it carefully on ice. The failure of the public to rise up and flay the League had lifted Mr. Mix into a position of much prominence, and conveyed the very reasonable supposition that he was individually powerful. When a man is supposed to possess power, he can travel a long distance on the effect of a flashing eye, and an expanded chest; also, it is a foolhardy man who, regardless of his reputation, engages to meet all-comers in their own bailiwick.

He had committed himself to the preparation of an amendment to the ordinance, which should be more definite, and more cerulean, than the original, but he knew that if he pressed it too soon, it might topple back and crush him. The people could be led, but they couldn't be driven. And therefore Mr. Mix, who had naturally made himself solid with the reactionaries and the church-going element (except those liberals who regarded him as an officious meddler), and who had actually succeeded in being mentioned as the type of man who would make a good Mayor, or President of Council, followed out a path which, unless his geography of common-sense was wrong, could hardly end at a precipice.

He became, overnight, a terror to the boys and young men who rolled dice in the city parks, and on the alley sidewalks in the business district; and this was held commendable even by the church-goers who played bridge at the Citizens Club for penny points. He headed a violent onslaught upon the tobacconists who sold cigarettes to minors, and this again was applauded by those who in their youth had avoided tobacco--because it was too expensive--and smoked sweet-fern and cornsilk behind the barn. He nagged the School Board until there went forth an edict prohibiting certain styles of dress; and the mothers of several unattractive maidens wrote letters to him, and called him a Christian. The parents of other girls also wrote to him, but he didn't save the letters. He made a great stir about the Sanitary Code, and the Pure Food regulations, and although the marketmen began to murmur discontentedly--and why, indeed, should the grocery cat not sleep in a bed of her own choosing; and why should not the busy, curious, thirsty fly have equal right of access with any other insect?--yet Mr. Mix contrived to hold himself up to the public as a live reformer, but not a radical, and to the League as a radical but not a rusher-in where angels fear to tread. It required the equilibrium of a tight-rope

walker, but Mr. Mix had it. Indeed, he felt as pleased with himself as though he had invented it. And he observed, with boundless satisfaction, that the membership of the League was steadily increasing, and that the Mayoralty was mentioned more frequently. He was aware, of course, that a reform candidate is always politically anemic, but he was hoping that by the injection of good-government virus, he might be strong enough to catch a regular nomination, to boot, and to run on a fusion ticket. From present indications, it wasn't impossible. And Mr. Mix smirked in his mirror.

Mirabelle said, with a rolling-up of her mental shirt-sleeves: "Well, now let's get after something *drastic*. I've heard lots of people say you ought to get elected to office; well, show 'em what you can do. Of course, what we've been doing is all *right*, but it's kind of small potatoes."

Mr. Mix looked executive. "Mustn't go too fast, Miss Starkweather. Can't afford to make people nervous."

"Humph! People that don't feel guilty, don't feel nervous. I say it's about time to launch something drastic. Next thing for us to do is to make the League a state-wide organization, and put through a Sunday law with teeth in it. That amusement park's got to go. Maybe we'd better run over to the capital and talk to the Governor."

Mr. Mix was decisively opposed, but he couldn't withstand her. He had a number of plausible arguments, but she talked them into jelly, and eventually dragged him to an interview with the Governor. When it was over, she beamed victoriously.

"There! Didn't I tell you so? He's with us."

Mr. Mix repressed a smile. "Yes, he said if we draft a bill, and get it introduced and passed, he'll sign it."

"Well, what more could he say?"

He wanted to ask, in turn, what less could be said, but he contained himself. "You know," he warned her, "as soon as we put out any really violent propoganda, we're going to lose some of our new members, and some of our prestige."

"Good! Weed out the dead-wood."

"That's all right, but after what we've done with the food laws and stopping the sale of cigarettes to boys, and so on, people are looking at us as a switch to chastise the city. But we don't want them to look at us as a cudgel. And this state law you've got in mind hits too many people."

"Let it hit 'em."

"Well, anyway," he pleaded, "there's no sense in going out and waving the club so everybody's scared off. We ought to take six months or a year, and do it gradually. And we ought to pass a model ordinance here first, before we talk about statutes. I'd suggest a series of public lectures, and a lot of educational pamphlets for a start. I'll write them myself."

She was impatient, but she finally yielded. "Well, we'll see how it works. Go ahead and do it."

"I will--I'll have the whole thing done by late this spring."

"Not 'till *then*?" she protested, vigorously.

Mr. Mix shook his head. "Perfect the organization first, and begin to fight when we've got all our ammunition. It'll take me three months to get that ready. So far, all we've had is a battle, but now we're planning a war. I want to be prepared in every detail before we fire a single more shot."

She regarded him admiringly. "Sounds reasonable at that. You do it your own way."

He was feeling a warm sense of power, and yet he had his moments of uncertainty, did Mr. Mix, for even with his genius for hypocrisy, he sometimes found it difficult to be a hypocrite on both sides of the same proposition. His status was satisfactory, at the moment, but he mustn't let Mirabelle get the bit in her teeth, and run away with him. As soon as ever she got him on record as favouring the sort of legislation which she herself wanted, Mr. Mix's power was going to dwindle. And Mr. Mix adored his power, and he hated to think of losing it by too extravagant propoganda.

There were moments when he wished that Henry were more belligerent, so that special measures could be taken against him, or that Mirabelle were more seductive, so that Mr. Mix could be more spontaneous. He knew that he was personally responsible for the present enforcement; he believed that because of it, Henry Devereux didn't have a Chinaman's chance; he knew that if Mirabelle got her legacy, she would have Mr. Mix to thank for it. But Henry was too cheerful, and Mirabelle was too coy, and the two facts didn't co-ordinate.

Certainly there was no finesse in hailing Mirabelle as an heiress until Henry's failure was more definitely placarded. To be sure, she had plenty of money now, and she was spending it like water, but he knew that it included the income from the whole Starkweather estate. She probably had--oh, a hundred thousand or more of her own. And that wasn't enough. Yes, it was time for Mr. Mix to think ahead; he had identified himself so thoroughly with the League that he couldn't easily withdraw, and Mirabelle still held his note. Of course, if the League could furnish him with a stepping-stone to the Mayoralty, or the presidency of Council, Mr. Mix didn't care to withdraw from it anyway; nor would he falter in his allegiance as long as he had a chance at an heiress. He wished that Henry would show fight, but Henry hadn't even joined the Exhibitors

Association. It was so much easier to fight when the other fellow offered resistance. Henry merely smiled; you couldn't tell whether he were despondent or not. But if he wouldn't fight, there was always the thin possibility that he might be satisfied with his progress. And that would be unfortunate for Mr. Mix.

There was something else; suppose Mirabelle got her legacy, and Mr. Mix volunteered to share it with her. He was reasonably confident that she would consent; her symptoms were already on the surface. But how, in such event, could Mr. Mix regulate the habits which were so precious to him? How could he hide his fondness for his cigar, and his night-cap, his predilection for burlesque shows and boxing bouts and blonde stenographers? It was difficult enough, even now, and he had eaten enough trochees and coffee beans to sink a frigate, and he had been able only once to get away to New York--"to clean up his affairs." How could he manage his alternative self when Mirabelle had him under constant and intimate supervision?

Still, all that could be arranged. For twenty years he had gone to New York, regularly, on irregular business and not a soul in town was any the wiser; it was simply necessary to discover what "business" could summon him if he were married, independent, and a professional reformer. Mr. Mix, who was always a few lengths ahead of the calendar, procured the addresses of a metropolitan anti-cigarette conference, and a watch-and-ward society, and humbly applied by mail for membership. An alibi is exactly the opposite of an egg; the older it is, the better.

CHAPTER X

When Henry told his wife that he was counting on her for brilliant ideas, he meant the compliment rather broadly; for he couldn't imagine how a girl brought up as Anna had been brought up could supply any practical schemes for increasing the patronage of a motion-picture theatre. Indeed, when she brought him her first suggestion he laughed, and kissed her, and petted her, and while he privately appraised her as a dear little dreamer, he told her that he was ever so much obliged, but he was afraid that her plan wouldn't work.

"You see," he said, "you haven't had very much experience in this business--"

"Methuselah!" she retorted, and Henry laughed again.

"That's no way for a wife to talk. When I mention business you're supposed to look at me with ill-concealed awe. But to get down to brass tacks, I've watched the audiences for four or five weeks, and I *am* beginning to size them up. And I don't believe you can put over any grand-opera stuff on 'em."

"It doesn't make the least bit of difference whether it's grand-opera or the movies, my lord. It'll work."

He shook his head dubiously. "Well, even suppose it would, I still don't like it. You don't make friends simply to use 'em for your own purposes."

"Why, of *course* not. But after you've made 'em, you're silly not to let 'em help you if they can. And if they want to. And if they don't then they aren't really your friends, are they? It's a good way to find out."

Henry frowned a little. "What makes you think it would work?"

"Human nature.... Now you just think it all over from the beginning. All our friends come to the Orpheum *some* night, don't they? They'd go to *some* picture, anyway, but they come to the Orpheum for two reasons--one's because it's a nice house now, and the other's because it's ours. And sometimes they're in time to get good seats, and sometimes they aren't. Well, we aren't asking any special favour of them; we're just making sure that if they all come the same night, they'll have the same seats, time after time. And they'll like it, Henry."

"But to be brutally frank, I still don't see where *we* get off any better."

"You wait.... So we sell for just one particular performance--say the 8.45 one, one night a week--season tickets. Boxes, loges, and some of the orchestra seats. And it would be like opera; if they couldn't always come, they couldn't return their tickets, but they could give them to somebody else. And that night we'd have special music, and--"

"Confirming today's conversation, including brutal frankness as per statement, I still don't see--"

"Why, you silly. It'll be *Society Night!* And I don't care whether it's movies or opera, if you make a thing fashionable, then it gets *everybody*--the fashionable ones, and then the ones who *want* to be fashionable, and finally the ones who know they haven't a ghost of a chance, and just want to go and look at the others!"

Henry laboured with his thoughts. "Well, granted that we could herd the hill crowd in there, and all that, I *still* don't--"

"Why, Henry darling! Because we'd make it *Monday* night--that's our worst night in the whole week, ordinarily--and have *all* reserved seats that night, and then of course we'd raise the

prices!"

"Oh!" said Henry. "Now I get it. I thought it was just swank."

"And it's true--it's *true* that if you get people to thinking there's something exclusive about a shop, or a hotel, or a club, or even a theatre, they'll pay *any* amount to get in. And *our* friends don't care when they come, and they'll *love* all sitting together in the boxes, or even in the orchestra."

"Who was Methuselah's wife?" asked Henry, irrelevantly.

"Why, he had several, didn't he?"

"Cleopatra, Portia, Minerva, Nemesis, and the Queen of Sheba," said Henry, "and you're all five in one package. I retract everything I said. And if I may be permitted to kiss the hem of your garment, to show I'm properly humbled, why--in plain English, that idea has a full set of molars!"

He left the mechanics of it to Anna, who merely conferred with Bob Standish, and then with one of her girl-friends, and sent out a little circular among the high elect; but even Anna was amazed at the prompt response. The response was due partly to friendship, and partly to convenience, but whatever the reason, Anna brought in checks for a hundred season-tickets, and turned the worst night of the week into the best. As she had sensed, because the insiders of society were willing to commit themselves to Monday, the outsiders would have paid four times, instead of merely double, to be there, too. It was socially imperative.

"That boosts us up another fifty a week," said Henry appreciatively. "And we must have a thousand in the bank, haven't we?... Say, Anna, this bread and cheese racket is all right when you can't afford anything else, but honestly, won't you just get a cook? I don't care if she's rotten, but to think of you giving those dishes a sitz-bath twice a day--"

"Not yet, dear. We aren't *nearly* out of the woods. Society Night's helped a lot, but we aren't averaging over two hundred and twenty yet, are we? That's eighty a week short. So if we don't think up some more schemes, why, what we're saving now'll have to be our capital *next* year."

"But when a man has this much income--"

"Yes, and you owe ten thousand on a mortgage, and the tax bills haven't come in yet, and you'll have an income tax to pay.... We'll save awhile longer."

It was greater heroism than he realized, for she had never lost, for a single instant, her abhorrence of the kitchen; nor was she willing to cater to her prejudice, and work with only the tips of her fingers. She had two principal defences--she wore rubber gloves, and she sang--but whenever she had to put her hands into greasy water, whenever she scrubbed a kettle, whenever she cleaned the sink, a series of cold chills played up and down her spine as fitfully as a flame plays on the surface of alcohol. She detested every item which had to do with that kitchen; and yet, to save Henry the price of a cook--now seventy dollars a month--she sacrificed her squeamishness. There were nights when she simply couldn't eat--she couldn't draw a cloud over her imagination, and forget what the steak had looked like, and felt like, uncooked. There were six days in seven when the mere sight of blackened pots and pans put her nerves on edge. But she always remembered that Henry was supposed to be irresponsible, and that a penny in hand is worth two in prospect; so that she sang away, and tried to dispel her thoughts of the kitchen by thinking about the Orpheum.

It was in early December that she conceived the Bargain Matinee, which wasn't the ordinary cut-price performance, but the adaptation of an old trick of the department stores. The Tuesday and Friday matinees were the poorest attended, so that Anna suggested--and Henry ordered--that beginning at half past four on Tuesdays and Fridays, the fifty-cent seats were reduced at the rate of a cent a minute. In other words, the Orpheum challenged the public to buy its entertainment by the clock; a person who came a quarter hour late saved fifteen cents, and the bargain-hunter who could find a vacant seat at twenty minutes past five could see the last two reels for nothing. It didn't bring in a tremendous revenue, but it caught the popular fancy, and it was worth another thirty dollars a week.

And Anna discovered, too, that the unfinished second story of the theatre had possibilities. She had it plastered and gaily papered, she put up a frieze of animals from Noah's ark; she bought toys and games and a huge sand-box--and for a nominal fee, a mother could leave her angel child or squalling brat, as the case might be, in charge of a kindergarten assistant, and watch the feature film without nervousness or bad conscience. There was no profit in it, as a department, but it was good advertising, and helped the cause.

In the meantime Henry, who at this season of the year would ordinarily have gone to Lake Placid for the winter sports or to Pinehurst for golf, was watching the rise and fall of the box-office receipts as eagerly as he would have watched the give and take of match-play in tournament finals. He kept his records as perfectly, and studied them with as much zest, as once he had kept and studied the records of the First Ten in the tennis ranking, and of all teams and individuals in first-class polo. To Henry, the Orpheum had long ceased to be a kitchen; he had almost forgotten that a few months ago, his soul had been corrugated with goose-flesh at the prospect of this probation. Since August, he had done more actual work than in all his previous life, and the return from it was approximately what his allowance had been from Mr. Starkweather, but Henry had caught the spark of personal ambition, and he wouldn't stop running until the race was over. He wouldn't stop, and furthermore he wouldn't think of stopping. But now and then he couldn't help visualizing his status when he did stop, or was

ruled off the track.

He hadn't quite recovered, yet, from his surprise at the continuing reaction of his friends. He was deeply touched by the realization that even those who were most jocular were regarding him with new respect. Instead of losing caste, he seemed to have risen higher than before; certainly he had never been made to feel so sure of his place in the affection of his own set. And almost more satisfactory than that, the older men in the Citizens Club were treating him with increasing friendliness, whereas in the past, they had treated him rather as an amusing young comedian, to be laughed at, but not with. And finally, he was flattered by the growing intimacy with Mr. Archer.

"A year ago," Mr. Archer once said to him, "I used to think you were a spoiled brat, Henry. Now I think you're--rather a credit to your uncle."

Henry grinned. "And I used to think some very disrespectful things about you, and now I'd rather have you on my side than anybody I know. I *must* have been a raw egg."

"You'll win out yet, my boy--Ted Mix to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Oh, sure!" said Henry, optimistically. "I don't gloom much--only fifteen minutes a day in my own room. I got the habit when I was taking my correspondence course on efficiency." Even in these occasional sessions of gloom, however, (and his estimate of time was fairly accurate) he never felt any acute antagonism either towards his aunt or towards Mr. Mix, he never felt as though he were in competition with them. He was racing against time, and it was the result of his own individual effort which would go down on the record. As to his aunt, she had been perfectly consistent; as to Mr. Mix, Henry didn't even take the trouble to despise him. He carried over to business one of his principles in sport--if the other fellow wanted so badly to win that he was willing to cheat, he wanted victory more than Henry did, and he was welcome to it. After the match was over, Henry might volunteer to black his eye for him, but that was a side issue.

Mr. Mix had said to him, sorrowfully, at the Citizens Club: "One of the prime regrets of my life, Henry, was that you--the nephew of my old friend--should have suffered--should have been in a *position* to suffer--from the promotion of civic integrity."

Henry laughed unaffectedly. "Yes," he said, "it must have raised perfect Cain with you."

"I don't like your tone, Henry. Do you doubt my word?"

"Doubt it? After I've just sympathized with the awful torture you must have gone through?... Tell me something; what's all this gossip I hear about you and Aunt Mirabelle? Somebody saw you buggy-riding last Sunday. Gay young dog!"

Mr. Mix grew red. "Buggy-riding! Miss Starkweather was kind enough to take me out to the lake in her car."

"That's buggy-riding," said Henry, affably. "Buggy-riding's a generic term. Don't blush. I was young myself, once."

Mr. Mix fought down his anger. "You're very much of a joker, Henry. It seems to run in the family. Your uncle--"

"Yes, and Aunt Mirabelle, too."

"What?"

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "Aunt Mirabelle's a joker, too. She advised me not to run the Orpheum in the first place; she'd rather have had me trade it and go into something more respectable, and profitable. Doesn't that strike you as funny? It does me."

Mentally, Mr. Mix bit his lip, but outwardly he was ministerial. "I'm afraid you're too subtle for me."

"I was afraid of that myself."

"Isn't business good?" His voice was solicitous.

Henry was reminded of what Judge Barklay had twice expressed, and for a casual experiment, he tried to plumb the depths of Mr. Mix's interest.

"Oh, with a few new schemes I've got, I guess I'll clean up eleven or twelve thousand this year."

Mr. Mix shook his head. "As much as that?"

Henry inquired of himself why, to accompany a question which was apparently one of mere rhetorical purport, Mr. Mix should have shaken his head. The action had been positive, rather than interrogative.

"Easy," said Henry. "Come in next week, and see how we're going to turn 'em away. I've got a new pianist; you'll want to hear him. He looks like a Sealyhan terrier, but he's got a repertoire like a catalogue of phonograph records. I dare the audience to name anything he can't play right off the bat--songs, opera, Gregorian chants, sonatas, jazz--and if he can't play it, the person that asked for it gets a free ticket."

"So--to use a colloquialism--you're going very strong?"

"To use another colloquialism," said Henry, "we fairly reek with prosperity, and we're going to double our business. That is, unless you Leaguers stop all forms of amusement but tit-tat-toe and puss-in-the-corner."

Mr. Mix smiled feebly. "One expects to be rallied for one's convictions."

Henry nodded, engagingly. "I certainly got rallied enough for mine. That justice of the peace rallied me for twenty-five to start with, and followed it up with twenty more.... But if you want my opinion, Mr. Mix, you'll lay off trying to promote civic integrity with a meat-ax. All you did with that Sunday row was to take a lot of money away from the picture houses, and give it to the trolley company and the White City--white when it was painted. And if you don't behave, I won't vote for you next election."

Mr. Mix ignored the threat. "Come to a meeting of the League some time, Henry, and we'll give you a chance to air your views."

He reported the interview to Anna, and she seemed to find in it the material for reflection. She asked Henry if he thought that Mr. Mix was deliberately making up to Mirabelle. Henry reflected, also.

In January, Henry had an interview with Mr. Archer, who went over his books with a fine-tooth comb, and praised him for his accomplishment.

"But it only goes to show how the best intentions in the world can get all twisted up," said Mr. Archer, gravely. "Here you've done what you were supposed to do--you've done it better than you were supposed to do it--and then because of that cursed enforcement that neither your uncle nor I ever dreamed about, you're liable to get punished just as badly as if you'd made a complete failure. It's a shame, Henry, it's a downright shame!"

"We're packing 'em in pretty well," said Henry. "I figured out that if we sold every seat at every performance we'd collect fourteen hundred a week gross. We're actually taking in about eight fifty. That's a local record, but it isn't good enough."

"No, you seem to be shy about--three thousand to date. You've got to make that up, and hit a still higher average for the next seven months, and I'm blessed if *I* can see how you're going to do it."

"Oh, well, I'll have the theatre. That's something."

"Yes, it'll bring you a good price. But not a half of what you *should* have had. One thing, Henry, I wish your uncle could know how you're taking it. As far as I know, you haven't swung a golf club or sat a horse for six months, have you?"

"Oh, shucks!... When Uncle John went to a ball game, he always liked to see a man run like fury on a fly ball. Nine times out of ten an outfielder'd catch it and the batter'd get a big hoot from the grand-stand. The other time he'd drop it, and the batter'd take two bases. That's all I'm doing now. Playing the percentage. And golf takes too much time--even if there weren't snow on the ground--and stable feed's so high *I* can't afford it. The fool horse would cost more to feed than I do myself."

"And even if the percentage beats you, you've got something you never had before, Henry, and that's the solid respect of your community. Everybody knows you hated this job. Everybody's back of you."

"Up on the farm," said Henry, thoughtfully. "There was a field-hand with a great line of philosophy. Some of it was sort of crude, but--one day Uncle John was saying something about tough things we all have to do, and this fellow chimed in and said: 'Yes, sir, every man's got to skin his own skunk.'"

Mr. Archer smiled and nodded. "Your year won't have been wasted, Henry. And when it's over, if you want to get out of the picture business, you'll find that you can get a dozen first-rate jobs from men who wouldn't have taken you in as their office-boy a season ago.... Give my love to your wife, Henry, and tell her for me that I'm proud of you."

"I'll tell her," said Henry, "but *I* won't be proud until I've nailed that skin over the barn-door."

On his way out, he dropped in for a moment to see Bob Standish. Bob was at his old tricks again; and while his competitors in realty, and insurance, and mortgage loans, made the same mistake that once his classmates and instructors and the opposing ends and tackles had made, and argued that his fair skin and his innocent blue eyes, his indolent manner and his perfection of dress all evidenced his lack of wit and stamina, he had calmly proceeded to chase several of those competitors out of business, and to purchase their good-will on his own terms. It was popularly said, in his own circle, that Standish would clear a hundred thousand dollars his first year.

He winked lazily at Henry, and indicated a chair. "Set!" said Standish. "Glad you came in. Two things to ask you. Want to sell? Want to rent?"

"If you were in my shoes, would you sell, Bob?"

"I can get you twenty-eight thousand."

"That's low."

"Sure, but everybody knows you've got a clientele that nobody else could get. Are you talking?"

"I--guess not just yet."

"Want to rent? I just had a nibble for small space; you could get fifty a month for that attic you're using for a nursery."

"I--hardly think so, Bob. That's a pet scheme of Anna's, and besides, we need it. It's good advertising."

His friend's eyes were round and childlike. "Made any plans for the future, Henry? Know what you'll do if you stub your toe?"

"Sell out and strike you for a job, I guess."

"Don't believe it would work, old man."

"Don't you think so?"

"One pal boss another? Too much family."

Henry looked serious. "I'm sorry you think so. *I* wouldn't have kicked."

"No, I'm afraid I couldn't give you a job, old dear. I like you too well to bawl you out. But maybe we'll do business together some other way."

As he drove his tin runabout homeward, Henry was unusually downcast. He didn't blame Standish--Standish had showed himself over and over to be Henry's best friend on earth. But it was dispiriting to realize how Standish must privately appraise him. Henry recalled the justification, and grew red to think of the ten years of their acquaintance--ten years of continuous achievement for Standish, and only a few months of compulsory display for himself. But he wished that Standish hadn't thrown in that last remark about doing business together some other way. That wasn't like Bob, and it hurt. It was too infernally commercial.

He found the apartment deserted. His shout of welcome wasn't answered: his whistle, in the private code which everybody uses, met with dead silence. Henry hung up his hat with considerable pique, and lounged into the living-room. What excuse had Anna to be missing at the sacred hour of his return? Didn't she know that the happiest moment of his whole day was when she came flying into his arms as soon as he crossed the threshold? Didn't she know that as the golden pheasants fled further and further into the thicket of unreality, the more active was his need of her? He wondered where she had gone, and what had kept her so late. Was this a precedent, and had the first veneer of their companionability worn off so soon--for Anna?

A new apprehension seized him, and he hurried from room to room to see if instead of censuring Anna, he ought to censure himself. There were so many accidents that might have happened to her. Women have been burned so severely as to faint: they have drowned in a bathtub: they have fallen down dumb-waiter shafts: they have been asphyxiated when the gas-range went out. And to think that only a moment ago, he had been vexed with her. The sight of each room, once so hideously commonplace, now so charming with Anna's artistry and the work of her own hands--her beautiful hands which ought to be so cared for--filled him with contrition and fresh nervousness.

No, she had escaped these tragedies--yet she was missing. Missing, but now half an hour late. And downtown there were dangerous street-crossings, and dangerous excavations, and reckless motorists.... Once in a while a structural-iron worker dropped a rivet from the seventh story; and there were kidnappers abroad.... The key turned in the lock, and Henry dropped noiselessly into a chair, and caught up day-before-yesterday's paper.

He greeted her tenderly, but temperately. "Well, where've *you* been?"

She had to catch her breath. "Oh, my *dear*, I've had the most *wonderful* time! I've--oh, it's been perfectly gorgeous! And I've got it! I've got it!"

He had never seen her keyed to such a pitch, and manlike, he attempted to calm her instead of rising to her own level. "Got what? St. Vitus' dance?"

"*No!* The scheme! The scheme we were looking for!"

Henry discarded his paper. "Shoot it."

She waved him off. "Just wait 'till I can breathe.... Do you remember what you told me a long time ago about a talk you had with your aunt? And she said bye-and-bye you'd see the writing on the wall?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've *seen* it!"

"Whereabouts?"

"Wait.... And remember your talking to Mr. Mix, when he said you ought to go to a League meeting and air your views?"

"Yes."

"Well, I went!"

He gazed at her. "You what?"

She nodded repeatedly. "It was a big public meeting. I was going past Masonic Hall, and I saw the sign. So I went in ... oh, it was so funny. The man at the door stared at me as if I'd been in a bathing suit, or something, and he said to me in a sort of undertaker's voice: 'Are you one of us?' And I said I wasn't, but I was thinking about it, and he said something about the ninety and nine, and gave me a blank to fill out--only I didn't do it: I used it for something *lots* better: I'll show you in a minute--and then I sat down, and pretty soon Mr. Mix got up to talk,--and you *should* have seen the way your aunt looked at him; as if he'd been a tin god on wheels--and he

bragged about what the League was doing, and how it had already purified the city, but that was only a beginning--and what a lot more it was going to do--oh, it was just *ranting*--but everybody clapped and applauded--only the man next to me said it was politics instead of reform--and then he went on to talk about that ordinance 147, and what it really meant, and how they were going to use it like a bludgeon over the heads of wrong-doers, and all that sickening sort of thing--and the more he talked the more I kept thinking.... My *dear*, all that ordinance says--at least, all they *claim* it says--is that we can't keep open on Sunday for *profit*, isn't it?"

Henry was a trifle dizzy, but he retained his perspective. "Yes, but who'd want to keep open for charity?"

She gave a little cry of exultation. "But that's *exactly* what we want to do! That's what we *are* going to do. And they can't prevent us, either. We're going to keep open for a high, noble purpose, and not charge a cent. And the more I thought, and Mr. Mix bragged, the more I ... so I wrote it all down on the back of that blank the man gave me--and there it is--and *I* think it's perfectly gorgeous--even if it *is* mine. *Now* who's Methuselah's wife?"

On the back of the blank there was written, in shaky capitals, what was evidently intended as the copy for an advertisement. She watched Henry eagerly as he read it, and when at first she could detect no change in his expression, her eyes widened, and her lips trembled imperceptibly. Then Henry, half-way down the page, began to grin: and his grin spread and spread until his whole face was abeam with joy. He came to the last line, gasped, looked up at Anna, and suddenly springing towards her, he caught her in his arms, and waltzed her madly about the living-room.

When he released her, her hat was set at a new and rakish angle, and she had lost too many hair-pins, but to Henry she had never looked half so adorable.

"Of course," he panted, "everybody else'll do it too, as soon as we've showed 'em how--"

"What--what difference does *that* make?"

"That's right, too...." He fairly doubled himself with mirth. "Can't you just see Mix's face when he sees *this* writing on the wall--of the Orpheum?"

"I--I've been seeing it all afternoon. When can we start?"

"Right away. *Now*." He stopped, rigid. "No, we won't either. No we *won't*. First, we've got to see the Judge--we've got to make sure there's no flaw in it. And *then*--we won't *let* anybody copy us!"

"But how can you stop them?"

Henry was electric. "What's a movie theatre worth on Sunday? When they can't give a show anyway? I'll rent every house in town for every Sunday from now 'till August! I'll have to go slow, so nobody'll suspect. It may take a month, or *two* months, but what do we care? We'll play it sure. It won't cost too much, and we've got the cash in the bank. We've--" He paused again, and looked down at her, and his voice fell a semi-tone. "I don't know where I get all this *we* stuff. *I'd* have spent two-thirds of it by this time. You're the one that's saved it--and earned it too, by gosh!" He lifted her hands, and while she watched him, with shining eyes, he deliberately kissed the tip of each of her ten fingers. "*That's* where the money's come from," said Henry, clearing his throat. "Out of dish-water. Only tonight we're going out to a restaurant and eat ourselves logy, and you won't wash a damn dish. It's my party."

CHAPTER XI

Miss Mirabelle Starkweather lifted up her cup of tea, and with the little finger of her right hand stiffly extended to Mr. Mix's good health. Mr. Mix, sitting upright in a gilded chair which was three sizes too small for him, bowed with a courtliness which belonged to the same historical period as the chair, and also drank. Over the rim of his cup, his eyes met Mirabelle's.

"Seems to me you've got on some kind of a new costume, haven't you?" asked Mr. Mix gallantly. "Looks very festive to me--very."

For the first time since bustles went out of fashion, Miss Starkweather blushed; and when she blushed, she was quite as uncompromising about it as she was about everything else. It wasn't that she had a grain of romance in her, but that she was confused to be caught in the act of flagging a beau; to hide her confusion, she rose, and went over to the furthest window and flung it wide open. The month was February, and the air was chill and raw, but Mirabelle could think of no other pretext for turning her back and cooling her cheeks. And yet, although she would have perjured herself a thousand times before she would admit it, she felt a certain strange, spring-like pleasure to know that Mr. Mix was only pretending to be deceived.

"Oh, my, no," she said over her shoulder. "I've had this since the Flood."

Mr. Mix had also risen, to hand her back to her seat, and now he stood looking down at her. She

was wearing a gown of rustling, plum-coloured taffeta, with cut-steel buttons; and at her belt there was a Dutch silver *châtelaine* which had been ultra-smart when she had last worn it. Vaguely, she supposed that it was ultra-smart today, and that was the reason she had attached it to her. From the *châtelaine* depended a silver pencil, a gold watch, a vinaigrette with gold-enamelled top, and a silver-mesh change-purse. At her throat, she had a cameo, and on her left hand, an amethyst set in tiny pearls. Mr. Mix, finishing the inventory, seated himself and began to tap one foot on the floor, reflectively. He was a man of perception, and he knew warpaint when he saw it.

"Makes you look so much younger," said Mr. Mix, and sighed a little.

"Don't be a fool," said Miss Starkweather, and to dissemble her pleasure, she put an extra-sharp edge on her voice. "I don't wear clothes to make me look younger; I wear 'em to cover me up."

"That's more than I can say for the present generation."

"Ugh!" said Miss Starkweather. "Don't speak of it! Shameless little trollops! But the *worst* comment you could make about this present day is that men *like* it. They *like* to see those disgraceful get-ups. They *marry* those girls. Beyond *me*."

Mr. Mix sneezed unexpectedly. There was a cold draught on the back of his neck, but as Mirabelle said nothing about closing the window, he hesitated to ask permission. "I've always wondered what effect it would have had on your--public career--if you hadn't preferred to remain single."

"My opinions aren't annuals, Mr. Mix. They're hardy perennials."

"I know, but do you think a married woman ought to devote herself entirely to public affairs? Shouldn't she consider marriage almost a profession in itself?"

"Well, I don't know about that. Duty's duty."

"Oh, to be sure. But would marriage have interfered with your career? Would you have let it? Or is marriage really the higher duty of the two?"

"There's something in that, Mr. Mix. I never did believe a married woman ought to be in the road *all* the time."

"It *was* a question of your career, then?"

Mirabelle put down her cup. "Humph! No, it wasn't. Right man never asked me."

Mr. Mix's mind was on tiptoe. "But your standards are so lofty--naturally, they *would* be." He paused. "I wonder what your standard really is. Is it--unapproachable? Or do you see some good in most of us?"

Mirabelle sat primly erect, but her voice had an unusual overtone. "Oh, no, I'm not a ninny. But good husbands don't grow on goose-berry bushes. If I'd ever found a man that had the right principles, and the respect of everybody, and not too much tom-foolishness--a good, solid, earnest citizen I could be proud of--"

Mr. Mix interpolated a wary comment. "You didn't mention money."

She sniffed. "Do I look like the kind of a woman that would marry for money?"

"And in all these--I mean to say, haven't you ever met a man who complied with these conditions?"

She made no intelligible response, but as Mr. Mix watched her, he was desperately aware that his moment had come. His next sentence would define his future.

He was absolutely convinced, through his private source of information, that Henry was due to fall short of his quota by four or five thousand dollars; nothing but a miracle could save him, and Mr. Mix was a sceptic in regard to miracles. He was positive that in a brief six months Miss Starkweather would receive at least a half million; and Mr. Mix, at fifty-five, wasn't the type of man who could expect to have lovely and plutocratic *débutantes* thrown at his head. He believed--and his belief was cousin to a prayer--that Mirabelle was absorbed in reform only because no one was absorbed in Mirabelle. Indeed, she had implied, a few moments ago, that marriage would cramp her activities; but it was significant that she hadn't belittled the institution. Perhaps if she were skilfully managed, she might even be modernized. Certainly she had been content, so far, to be guided by Mr. Mix's conservatism. He hoped that he was right, and he trusted in his own strategy even if he were wrong. And every day that he continued moderate in his public utterances, and in his actions, he was a day nearer to the golden ambition of an elective office.

He was threatened with vertigo but he mastered himself, and drew a long, long breath in farewell to his bachelorhood.

"You have heartened me more than you know," said Mr. Mix, with ecclesiastical soberness. "Because--it has been my poverty--which has kept me silent." He bent forward. "Mirabelle, am I the right man?" Almost by sheer will-power, he rose and came to her, and took her hand. She shrank away, in maiden modesty, but her fingers remained quiescent. Mr. Mix sneezed again, and stooped to kiss her cheek, but Mirabelle avoided him.

"No," she said, with a short laugh. "That don't signify--I don't approve of it much." She wavered, and relented. "Still, I guess it's customary--Theodore."

Before he left her, they had staged their first altercation--it could hardly be called a quarrel, because it was too one-sided. Mirabelle had asked him without the slightest trace of shyness, to telephone the glad tidings to the *Herald*; and of a sudden, Mr. Mix was afflicted with self-consciousness. Unfortunately, he couldn't give a valid reason for it; he couldn't tell her that illogically, but instinctively, he wanted to keep the matter as a locked secret--and especially to keep it locked from Henry Devereux--until the minister had said: Amen. He admitted to himself that this was probably a foolish whim, a needless precaution, but nevertheless it obsessed him, so that he tried to argue Mirabelle away from the *Herald*. His most cogent argument was that the announcement might weaken their position in the League--the League might be too much interested in watching the romance to pay strict attention to reform.

"Humph!" said Mirabelle. "I'm not ashamed of being congratulated. Are you? But if you're so finicky about it, I'll do the telephoning myself."

Whereupon Mr. Mix went back to his room, and drank two highballs, and communed with himself until long past midnight.

In the morning, with emotions which puzzled him, he turned to the society column of the *Herald*; and when he saw the flattering paragraph in type,--with the veiled hint that he might be the next candidate for Mayor, on a reform ticket--he sat very still for a moment or two, while his hand shook slightly. No backward step, now! His head was in the noose. He wondered, with a fresh burst of self-effacement, what people would say about it. One thing--they wouldn't accuse him of the truth. Nobody but Mr. Mix himself knew the whole truth--unless perhaps it were Henry Devereux. Henry had developed a knowing eye. But Henry didn't count--Henry was beaten already. Still, if Henry should actually come out and accuse Mr. Mix of--why, what *could* Henry accuse him of? Simply marrying for money? If it didn't make any difference to Mirabelle, it certainly didn't to Mr. Mix. And what bootied the rest of the world? Why should he concern himself with all the petty spite and gossip of a town which wasn't even progressive enough to have an art museum or a flying field, to say nothing of a good fight-club? Let 'em gossip.... But just the same, he wished that Mirabelle had been willing to keep the engagement a secret. Mr. Mix was sure to encounter Henry, once in a while, at the Citizens Club, and he didn't like to visualize Henry's smile.

He was in the act of tossing away the paper when his attention was snatched back by a half-page advertisement; in which the name of the Orpheum Theatre stood out like a red flag. Mr. Mix glanced at it, superciliously, but a moment later, his whole soul was strung on it.

THE ORPHEUM
Educational Motion Pictures
FREE! FREE! FREE!
Every Sunday afternoon and evening
ESPECIALLY HIGH-CLASS ENTERTAINMENT
of instructive and educational features
With Sacred Music
ABSOLUTELY FREE

to all those who present at the door ticket-stubs from the previous week's performances (bargain matinees excepted) showing a total expenditure of Three Dollars.

IN OTHER WORDS

Two people coming twice during the week,
in 75 cent seats, come FREE Sunday

Three people coming twice during the week,
in 50 cent seats, come FREE Sunday

A PURELY VOLUNTARY COLLECTION
will be taken up and divided between
The Associated Charities
The Starving Children of Belgium *and*
The Chinese Famine Fund
This Sunday

THE SWORDMAKER'S SON--an absorbing drama
of Biblical days
Next Sunday
BEN-HUR, in seven reels

NO ADMISSION FEE BEING CHARGED, AND
ALL VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS BEING DEVOTED
TO CHARITY, THIS ENTERTAINMENT
DOES *NOT* FALL WITHIN ANY CITY ORDINANCE
PROHIBITING SUNDAY PERFORMANCES

THE ORPHEUM
Motion Pictures

Mr. Mix, goggle-eyed, jumped for the telephone, and called the City Hall, but as soon as the

Mayor was on the wire, Mr. Mix wrestled down his excitement, and spoke in his embassy voice. "Hello--Rowland? This is Mix. I want to ask you if you've seen an ad of the Orpheum Theatre in this morning's paper?... Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

The Mayor answered him in a single word: Mr. Mix started, and gripped the receiver more tightly. "*Nothing!*... Why, I don't quite get you on that.... It's an open and shut proposition--No, I most certainly am *not* trying to make a pun; I'm calling you up in my official capacity. That's the most flagrant, barefaced attempt to evade a law--Why, an *idiot* could see it! It's to drive the crowd into the Orpheum during the week, so that--"

He listened, with increasing consternation. "*Who* says it isn't a violation? *Who?* The City Attorney?" Mr. Mix was pale; and this was quite as uncommon as for his fiancée to blush. "When did he say so?... What's that? What's his grounds?... Repeat it, if you don't mind--Practically a charitable performance by *invitation*--"

"Why, sure," said the Mayor. He realized perfectly that Mr. Mix had the League and another thousand people of small discernment behind him, but the Mayor didn't want to be re-elected, and did want to retire from politics. "The Orpheum doesn't say a fellow that comes Sunday has got to prove *he* spent the money for the tickets, does it? Anybody that's got the stubs can come. They're just as much invitations as if they were engraved cards sent around in swell envelopes. If you've got one--whether you paid for the *invitation* or not, or if you got it in the mail or picked it up on the street, you can go on in. And as long's no money's taken in over the counter, the City Attorney says it's O.K. Of course, you can petition the Council, if you want to."

Mr. Mix was licking his lips feverishly. "I'm obliged to you for your advice. We *will* petition the Council--I'll have it signed, sealed and delivered by noon today.... And if that don't do, we'll apply for an injunction.... And we'll carry this to the *Governor* before we're done with it, Rowland, and you know what state laws we've got to *compel* a Mayor of an incorporated city to do his duty!... This is where we part company, Rowland. You'll hear from me later!" He slammed down the receiver, rattled the hook impetuously, and called Mirabelle's number.

"Mirabelle ... good-morning; have you ... No, I'm not cross at you, but--Oh! Good-morning, *dear*.... This is important. Have you seen the Orpheum's ad in the *Herald*? Isn't that the most barefaced thing you ever *saw*? Don't we want to rush in and--"

She interrupted him. "Why, no, not when it's for charity, do we?"

Mr. Mix nearly dropped the receiver. "Charity! Charity your grandmother! It's a cheap trick to attract people during the week, so they'll have a show on Sunday in *spite* of the law!"

"Oh, I don't doubt there's *some* catch in it. That's Henry all over. But if the League went out and interfered with an educational and sort of religious program with a collection for charity, we'd---"

"Yes, but my dear woman, would we sanction a *dance* for charity? A poker-party? A wine-supper? We---"

"But there won't be any dancing or drinking or card-playing at the Orpheum, will there?"

He lost his temper. "What's the matter with you? Can't you *see*--?"

"No, but I can hear pretty well," said Mirabelle. "I'm not deaf. And seems to me--" She sniffled. "Seems to me you're making an awful funny start of things, Theodore."

"My dear girl--"

"What?"

"I just said 'my dear girl.' I---"

"Say it again, Theodore!"

To himself, Mr. Mix said something else, but for Mirabelle's benefit, he began a third time. "My dear girl, it's simply to evade the law, and---"

"But Theodore, if we lift one finger to stop the raising of money for the poor starving children in foreign countries, we'd lose every scrap of influence we've gained."

"But this means that *all* the theatres can open again!"

"Well, maybe you'd better get to work and frame the amendment to Ordinance 147 we've been talking about, then. And the new statute, too. We've wasted too much time. But under the old one, we can't go flirting with trouble. And if all they do is show pictures like Ben-Hur, and The Swordmaker's Son, why ... don't you see? We just won't notice this thing of Henry's. We can't afford to act too narrow.... And I'm not cross with you any more. You *were* all worked up, weren't you? I'll excuse you. And I could just *hug* you for being so worked up in the interests of the League. I didn't understand.... When are you coming up to see me? I've been awfully lonesome--since yesterday."

Mr. Mix hung up, and sat staring into vacancy. Out of the wild tumult of his thoughts, there arose one picture, clear and distinct--the picture of his five thousand dollar note. Whatever else happened, he couldn't financially afford, now or in the immediate future, to break with Mirabelle. She would impale him with bankruptcy as ruthlessly as she would swat a fly; she would pursue him, in outraged pride, until he slept in his grave. And on the other hand, if certain things *did* happen--at the Orpheum--how could he spiritually afford to pass the remainder of his life with a militant reformer who wouldn't even have money to sweeten her disposition--and Mr. Mix's. He wished that he had put off until tomorrow what he had done,

with such conscious foresight, only yesterday.

CHAPTER XII

Now although Mr. Mix had shaken with consternation when he saw the advertisement of the Orpheum, Henry shook with far different sentiments when he saw the announcement in eulogy of Mr. Mix. It was clear in his mind, now, that Mr. Mix wasn't the sort of man to marry on speculation; Henry guessed that Mirabelle had confided to him the terms of the trust agreement, and that Mr. Mix (who had shaken his head, negatively, when Henry estimated his profits) had decided that Henry was out of the running, and that Mirabelle had a walkover. The guess itself was wrong, but the deduction from it was correct; and Henry was convulsed to think that Mr. Mix had shown his hand so early. And instead of gritting his teeth, and damning Mr. Mix for a conscienceless scoundrel, Henry put back his head and laughed until the tears came.

He hurried to show the paragraph to Anna, but Anna wouldn't even smile. She was a woman, and therefore she compressed her lips, sorrowfully, and said: "Oh--*poor* Miss Starkweather!" To which Henry responded with a much more vigorous compression of his own lips, and the apt correction: "Oh, no--*poor* Mr. Mix!"

He carried his congratulations to his aunt in person; she received them characteristically. "Humph!... Pretty flowery language.... Well, you don't need to send me any present, Henry; I didn't send *you* one."

"When's the happy event to be?" he inquired, politely.

"June. Fourth of June."

"And do you know where you're going for your honeymoon?"

"I don't like that word," said Mirabelle. "It sounds mushier than a corn-starch pudding. And besides, it's nobody's business but his and mine, and I haven't even told *him* yet. I'm keeping it for a surprise."

"Oh!" said Henry. "That's rather a novel idea, isn't it?"

"Humph!" said Mirabelle, dryly. "The whole thing's novel, isn't it? But I'm obliged for your coming up here, Henry. I didn't suppose you had enough interest in family matters to be so nose-y, even."

Later in the week, Henry encountered Mr. Mix, and repeated his congratulations with such honeyed emphasis that Mr. Mix began to stammer. "I appreciate all you say, Henry--but--come here a minute." He drew Henry into a convenient doorway. "I'm sort of afraid, from the way you act, there's something in the back of your mind. I've thought, sometimes, you must have lost sight of the big, broad principles behind the work I'm doing. I've been afraid you've taken my work as if it was directed personally against *you*. Not that I've ever heard you *say* anything like that, but your manner's been ... well, anyway, you're too big a man for that, Henry. Now about this new scheme of yours. It's my feeling that you're dodging the law by sliding in the back door. It's my official duty to look into it. Only if we *do* have to put a stop to it, I want you to realize that I sympathize with any personal loss you may have to suffer. Personally, I'm grieved to have to take this stand against John Starkweather's nephew. You understand that, don't you?"

Henry nodded assent. "Why, certainly. Your motives are purer than the thoughts of childhood. The only thing I *don't* understand is what all this has to do with my congratulating you?"

"Oh, nothing whatever. Nothing at all. It was just your manner."

"Let's come out in the open, then. How do you think you *could* put a stop to it? Because if you could, why, I'll save you the trouble."

Mr. Mix hesitated. "You were always an original young man, Henry. But if it's my duty to stop your show, why should I give away my plans? So you could anticipate 'em?"

"No, I've done that already."

"Now, Henry, that sounds too conceited to be like *you*."

"Oh, no, it's only a fact. But here--I'll run through the list for you. Have me pinched under the ordinance? Can't be done; the City Attorney's said so, and I saw the Chief of Police was in on it. Get an injunction? You can't do that either, because--"

"Why can't we?"

"Because I've got one already."

Mr. Mix's jaw dropped. "What's that? *How* could you--"

"Oh, I got Bob Standish--just as a citizen tax-payer--to apply for a temporary injunction yesterday, to test it out. It's being argued this morning. Don't you want to come over and hear it? If I lose, I won't open next Sunday at all; and if I win, then the League can't get an injunction

later.... What else can you do?"

"We may have other cards up our sleeves," said Mr. Mix, stiltedly.

"Just the place I'd have looked for 'em," said Henry, but his tone was so gentle and inoffensive that Mr. Mix only stared.

He shook hands with Henry, and hurried over to the Court House, where he arrived just in time to hear the grey-haired jurist say, dispassionately: "Motion denied."

Mr. Mix swabbed his face, and thought in lurid adjectives. He wouldn't have dared, in view of Mirabelle's opinion, to ask for an injunction on behalf of the League itself, but it had occurred to him that he might arrange the matter privately. He could persuade one of the old moss-backs that Mirabelle might be swayed by her relationship to Henry (this struck him as the height of sardonic humour), and the moss-back could go into Court as an individual, to enjoin the Sunday performance as opposed to public policy. But Henry had outstripped him; and furthermore, there was no question of judicial favour. The Judge who had refused the application was no friend of Henry, or of Judge Barklay. And Bob Standish's attorney, who by a fiction was attacking Henry's position, had claimed that the Sunday show was designed for profit, and that the price was merely collected in advance. This would have been precisely Mr. Mix's thesis. Henry's own lawyer had replied that since there was no advance in the price of tickets during the week, there was no charge for Sunday. A ticket during the week included an invitation. To be sure, one couldn't get the invitation without the ticket, but where was the ordinance violated? Would the Court hold, for example, that a grocer couldn't invite to a lecture, for charity, on Sunday, every one who had patronized his shop during the previous week? Would the Court hold that an author couldn't invite to a public reading on Sunday, every one who had bought his book on Saturday?

The Court wouldn't.

And Mr. Mix, who knew Henry's income to the nearest dollar, went home and got a pencil, and covered sheet after sheet with figures.

Presently, he sat back and laughed. Why, he had had his hysterics for nothing! Henry couldn't overcome his handicap unless he jammed his house to capacity from now until August. No theatre had even yet accomplished such a feat. And it wasn't as though Henry had a monopoly on this scheme; in another week, all his competitors would be open Sundays, too, with strictly moral shows, and no money taken at the door, and he would have the same competition as always. And yet, to be perfectly safe, (for Henry was fast on his feet) Mr. Mix had better frame his amendment to the ordinance, and set the wheels in motion. With good luck, he could have Henry blanketed by April.

That evening, Mirabelle found him more animated than usual; and more lavish with compliments.

Since he had first seen Henry's advertisement, Mr. Mix had been as uncertain of his prospects as a child with a daisy; he had foreseen that it was only a part of a very narrow margin of fortune which would determine whether he was to be a rich man, poor man, beggar man--or jilt. Now, however, his confidence was back in his heart, and when, on Sunday afternoon, he placed himself inconspicuously in the window of an ice-cream parlour, squarely opposite the Orpheum, it was merely to satisfy his inquisitiveness, and not to feed his doubt.

He had to concede that Henry was clever. Henry had introduced more fresh ideas into his business than all his competitors in bulk. What a customers'-man Henry would have been, if he had entered Mr. Mix's brokerage office! Yes, he was clever, and this present inspiration of his was really brilliant. Mr. Mix could see, clearly, just what Henry had devised. He had devised a rebate: from a book-keeping standpoint he was cutting his own prices during the week (for of course the Sunday performance was costly to him) but he was cutting them in such a subterranean manner that he wouldn't expect to lose by it. Palpably, he thought that Orpheum stubs would become negotiable, that they would pass almost as currency, that when people hesitated between the Orpheum and any other theatre, they would choose the Orpheum because of the Sunday feature. But did Henry imagine that his scheme was copyrighted? Mr. Mix had to smile. Across the street, there were fully a hundred people waiting for the doors to open ... the doors *had* opened, and the crowd was filing past the ticket-booth. The house would be packed solid from now until late evening. But when *next* Sunday came, and all the other houses, relying upon Henry's triumph over the City Attorney and the District Court, stole Henry's thunder.... It was to laugh. Week-day business would be spread thin, as always; people could suit their own choice, and have the same Sunday privilege. And this would knock all the profit out of it.

Mr. Mix retired, in the blindest of good-humour, and on Monday he visited the manager of the largest picture house in town.

"I suppose," he said, "you're going to follow the procession, aren't you?"

The manager looked at him queerly. "Well--no."

"Really?"

"No. That bird Devereux put it all over us like a tent." He snorted with disgust. "Man from Standish's office come round here a while back and asked for a price for the house for Sundays up to August. *We* thought it was for some forum, or something; and the damn place was shut down anyway; so we made a lease. Next twenty Sundays for four hundred and seventy-five

beans, cash in advance. Then it turns up that Standish's office was actin' for Devereux."

The bloom of apoplexy rose to Mr. Mix's cheeks. "You mean he--do you know if he leased more theatres than *this* one? Did he?"

"*Did* he! He signed up the whole damn Exhibitors' Association. There's twenty-two houses in town, and he's tied up twenty-one and he owns the other. Far's I can find out, it only cost him about six thousand to get an air-tight monopoly on Sunday shows for the next six months."

Mr. Mix drew breath from the very bottom of his lungs. "What can you--do about it?"

"Do? What *is* there to do? All we can do is put on an extra feature durin' the week, to try and buck him *that* way--and it won't pay to do it. He's got a cinch. He's got a graft. And all the rest of us are in the soup."

Mr. Mix was occupied with mental arithmetic. "Tell me this--is it going to pay him?"

"Pay him!" echoed the manager scornfully. "Six thou for twenty weeks is three hundred a week. Fifty a day. Twelve-fifty a performance. Twelve-fifty calls for about twenty-five people. Don't you think he'll draw that many new patrons, when he can give 'em on Sundays what nobody else can? And everything over twenty-five'll be velvet. He'll clean up two, three thousand easy and maybe more. What beats *me* is why he didn't get leases for the next hundred years. *We* wouldn't have had the sense to block him."

"I'll tell you why," said Mr. Mix, choking down his passion. "Because there's going to be a new ordinance. It'll deal with Sunday entertainments. And it's going to prohibit any such horse-play as this." He surveyed his man critically. "Does Henry Devereux belong to your Association?"

"No, he don't. And he won't either. We don't want him."

"Then as long as you people can't keep open Sundays anyway," observed Mr. Mix carelessly, "maybe you'd find it to your advantage to support the Mix amendment when it gets up to the Council. It'll kill off any such unfair competition as this."

The manager shrugged his shoulders. "If it wasn't for your damn League we'd *all* be makin' money."

"I'm sorry we don't all see this thing in the same light. But as long as the rest of you *are* out of it--"

"Oh, I can see *that*... And you and me both understand a little about politics, I should imagine." He grinned wryly. "Never thought I'd link up with any reform outfit--but why don't you mail me a copy of your amendment, and I'll see how the boys take it."

Mr. Mix agreed to mail a copy as soon as the final draft was completed, and he was as good as his word. On the same evening, he read the masterpiece to Mirabelle with finished emphasis.

"It's perfect," she said, her eyes snapping. "It's perfect! Of course, I wish you'd have made it cover more ground, but just as a Sunday law, it's perfect. When are we going to offer it to the Council?"

"Mirabelle," said Mr. Mix, "we've got to do some missionary work first. And before you can do missionary work, whether it's for religion or politics or reform, you've got to have a fund."

"Fund? Fund? To get an ordinance passed? Why don't you walk in and *hand* it to 'em?"

He shook his head. "I was in politics a good many years. We've got to get out printed matter, we've got to spend something for advertising, we've got to--approach some of the Councillors the right way."

She sat up in horror. "Not--*bribe* them!"

"Oh, dear, no! You didn't think *that* of me!"

"No, but when you *said*--"

"I said they had to be 'approached.' I didn't mean corruption; I meant enlightenment." He rubbed his nose reflectively. "But the cost is approximately the same."

"Of course, I trust your judgment, Theodore, but ... how big a fund do you suppose we'll want."

"Oh, I should think five thousand would do it."

"Five--! Theodore Mix, *how* could you spend five thousand *dollars* for such a thing? There isn't that much in the treasury! There's hardly *one* thousand."

"My dear, if I were in your place, I'd protect my ante. I'd--"

"What's all that gibberish?"

"I said," he corrected hastily, "we've got too much at stake to risk any failure when a little money would guarantee success."

"Would five thousand dollars guarantee it?"

"If I had that much in cash, to spend here and there as I saw the need of it--take one type of man out to dinner a few times, where I could get close to him--loan another type fifty dollars if he asked me for it (and some of 'em would)--hire detectives to shadow another type--"

"Detectives!"

"Yes. To check up their habits. Suppose we found a man gambling on the sly; we'd hold that over his head and--"

"Humph! I don't like it much, but in a good cause it may be justifiable."

"And leaflets and circulars and one thing and another.... But if I have to go out and get permission from a finance committee before I can let go of a dime, I can't do *anything*. I'd have to have the money so I could use it exactly as I needed it. And if I did, I'll bet I could get support you never dreamed of. Get outside people to bring pressure on the Council." He gazed at the ceiling. "Why, with a leeway of five thousand, I'd even have the Exhibitor's Association with us. I'd have--"

"Think so?"

"I *know* so."

"How?"

"Because long before I was in the League, I was in politics. When I say I know, I *know*. Of course, the Association's help would only go to show that they see the light in respect to their own business--it wouldn't cover all the whole scope of the amendment, but even so--"

"Theodore, you know politics and I don't. But both of us know the proverb about what you catch flies with. So we'll try both methods together. You can put out the molasses, and I'll put out the vinegar; and between us, we ought to get somewhere."

"We can't fail," said Mr. Mix, sitting on needles.

Mirabelle went over to her desk, and searched the pigeon-holes. "I've been told, Theodore, by--people I consider very reliable--that in August, dear John's money will be coming to me." This was the first time that she had ever broached the delicate subject. "I always meant to use some of it for the League." She had unearthed her check book, and was writing words and figures as angular as herself. "So really,--this is on account." She came over to hand him the check, and after a slight hesitation, she stooped and pecked him on the forehead, but immediately afterwards she relapsed into her consistently, non-romantic character. "You better give me an itemized account of how you spend it, though, Theodore. You better give me one every day. We've got to be businesslike, even if we *are*--engaged."

CHAPTER XIII

For two-thirds of a year, Henry Devereux had lived contrary to his independent taste, and to his education. He had virtually cut himself adrift from the people he liked and the pleasures he loved; his sole luxury had been his membership in the Citizens Club; and he had laboured far more diligently and with far less respite than his uncle had ever intended. He had overcome great difficulties, of which the most significant was his own set of social fetiches, and he had learned his weaknesses by exercise of his strength. He had made new friends, and brought the old ones closer to him--and this by virtue of honest plugging, and determination. He was unassumingly proud of himself, and he was prouder yet of Anna; he knew that the major portion of his accomplishment--and especially that part of it which had taken place within himself--was to be put down to Anna's credit. But the spring was coming towards them, and Henry winced to think of it. Heretofore, the message of spring, in Henry's estimation, had been a welcome to new clothes, golf, horseback parties, and out-of-door flirtations; this season, it meant to him a falling-off in the motion-picture business.

The spring was calling to him, but Henry had to discipline his ears. His working hours were from eleven in the morning until midnight; he sat, day after day, in his constricted office, and glued his mind upon his problems. The Orpheum was still a sporting proposition to him, but even in sport, there come periods in which the last atom of nerve and will-power are barely sufficient to keep the brain in motion. Henry's nerves were fagged, his muscles were twitching, the inside of his head felt curiously heavy and red-hot; the spring was calling him, but he didn't dare to listen. The spirit of his Uncle John Starkweather was waiting to see if he came to the tape with his head down, and Henry was going to finish on his nerve.

As a matter of fact, he could easily have spared an hour of two each day for exercise and recreation, but he wouldn't believe it. He wouldn't yield to Anna when she implored him to get out of doors, to freshen his mind and tame his muscles.

The atmosphere of his office almost nauseated him; the endless parade of petty details was almost unbearably irksome; the book-keeping part of it alone was soul-disintegrating; but to Henry, ambition had become a monomania, and to it he was ready to make every conceivable sacrifice, including--if necessary--his health. There were days when he told himself that he would pay a thousand dollars merely to have green turf under his feet, blue sky above, and no worries in his soul--but he wouldn't sacrifice an hour of supervision over his theatre. There were days when he felt that he would give up his chance of salvation if only he could go away with Anna, up into the wooded country, for a week's vacation--but he wouldn't sacrifice a week from the Orpheum guardianship. The spring was calling him--the golf course, the bridle-paths, the lake, the polo--but Henry had put himself in high speed forward, and there was no reverse.

Then, too, he was constantly thinking of Anna, who without the daily stimulus that Henry had, was cheerfully performing the function of a domestic drudge. One of his most frequently repeated slogans was that if Anna could stick it out, he could.

While the winter favoured it, his monopoly had brought him a splendid return, but the first warm days had signalled a serious loss of patronage, and Henry couldn't successfully combat the weather. The weather was too glorious; it called away Henry's audiences, just as it tried in vain to inveigle Henry. And then the monopoly had been double-edged; it had been a good risk--and without it, he wouldn't have had the slightest chance against the requirements--but it had been *too* perfect, too prominent. In the beginning, everybody had hailed him as a Napoleon because he had vanquished his little world of competitors; but now that his laurel was old enough to wilt, he was receiving the natural back-lash of criticism. Naturally, his personal friends were still delighted, the older men at the club were still congratulating him for foresight and ingenuity, and Mr. Archer was still complimentary and confident: but the great mass of theatre-goers, and the mass of self-appointed arbiters of business ethics, were pointing to him as a follower of the gods of grasp and gripe. More disquieting than that, however, were the indications of a new crusade, led by Mr. Mix, and directed against the Council. The Mix amendment, which was so sweeping that it prohibited even Sunday shows for charity, would automatically checkmate Henry; and the worst of it was that money was being spent with some effectiveness. Of course, the amendment wouldn't ever be adopted *in toto*--it was too sweeping, too drastic--but even a compromise on the subject of Sunday entertainments would be fatal.

Despite the strain, he was outwardly as blithe and optimistic as usual. When Anna pleaded with him to take a vacation, he either laughed her off in his most jovial manner, or riposted that she needed a vacation far more than he did, which may have been true; when Judge Barklay attempted to reason with him, he responded with respectful humour. He had seen victory slip within his grasp, and slip out of it, so often that he was on the verge of complete demoralization, but he thought that he alone was aware of it, and because of his pride, Anna didn't disillusion him.

Nor did Bob Standish disillusion him. Standish tried to bolster him up with undergraduate slang, and to convey to Henry the fact that all the hill-folk were solidly behind him, but he knew better than to come out flat with commiseration. Then, too, Standish was conscious of a vague cloud which had come up to blur their relationship. He didn't suspect for an instant the true cause of it, which was his remark, some months ago, that he wouldn't employ in his office a friend such as Henry; but he felt it, and was keenly concerned about it. Nevertheless, his own unselfish interest never faltered, and he waited patiently, because he knew that between himself and Henry there could be no permanent misunderstanding.

Nor did Mr. Archer, Henry's firm friend and ally (insofar as Mr. Archer could separate his personality into two separate entities, one of which was ally, and the other was impartial trustee) disillusion him, although Mr. Archer had also eyes to see with. On the contrary, Mr. Archer put out numerous remarks which he intended as lifebuoys.

"There was a directors' meeting of the Trust and Deposit the other day, Henry, and somehow they got talking about your account. I shouldn't wonder--if you ever wanted to change your business--if they wouldn't give you the opportunity; and if they did, it wouldn't be so very long before they'd invite you on the Board."

Henry disparaged it. "What as--deputy assistant splinter?"

"You've made rather a hit with the older crowd, Henry. And even if you aren't a rich man by inheritance next August, I'm not worrying about your future."

"Neither am I. Not while I've got Anna to think up my best thoughts for me."

The lawyer nodded. "A girl in a thousand, Henry."

"That's the worst insult I ever heard! The population of the world's over two billion!"

Mr. Archer laughed, but his eyes showed approval. "It's simply something for you to keep in mind, my boy--about the bank. It's a possible career, unless you want to go on with the Orpheum. Of course, you'd have to start pretty low, at first, but you know as well as I do that nobody's asked to come into *that* bank unless he's well thought of."

Henry didn't repeat this conversation to Bob Standish, because he thought it would sound too much like saying "Yah!" nor did he repeat it to his wife, because he thought it would sound too egotistical; but on the same day he collected another item of news which he unhesitatingly shared with her.

He said to Anna: "I saw something downtown that'll amuse you. Cigar store with a sign in front: Trading Stamps, Premium Coupons, and Orpheum Theatre Stubs Bought and Sold. If *that* isn't a footprint on the sands of time I'm going to get measured for glasses."

She laughed a trifle recessively. "I'll be glad when it's all over, though. Won't you?"

Inspecting her, he realized with a little thrill of self-accusation, that Anna had worn herself out; she hadn't had a day's freedom from housework, and she had worked twice as hard as he thought necessary. She was very tired, and she showed it; but he knew that when she wanted the year to be over, she wasn't thinking of herself, but of him. He paid her the compliment of accepting what she said, without tossing it back as though she had meant it for herself. "Well, I *told* you I'd drag in the bearded lady and the wild man of Borneo, if I had to. What's the matter; don't you like the show business?"

"Of course, we didn't exactly go into it for *fun*."

"I seem to remember your calling it a lark, though."

"I didn't know it was going to be quite as awful as this."

"Awful?"

"You know what I mean--you're worn out, and you look *dreadfully*--and I *didn't* know we'd have to do so much--" She fumbled for the word. "What is it when a man stands outside, and tries to make people come in and look at the snake-charmer?"

"Ballyhoo. Would you have wanted me to stay out of it, if you'd known?"

She deliberated. "It's funny--but I don't think I would. In a way, it's been good for both of us. I'll just be glad when it's over.... What sort of house did you have?"

Henry put on his best smile. "Not too good. Fair."

"If we should fall down, after all we've done--oh, we *can't!* Henry, we just *can't!*"

"I used to know a poem," he said, "that kept asking the question 'Where are the snows of yesteryear?' Well, if I could find out, and have 'em shovelled back in the street, we'd be in a good position. But as soon as the snow melted, so did the big crowds. I'll never look a crocus in the face again. They've croaked us out of a couple of hundred a week, gross."

"If we *should* fall down, do you know who I'd be sorry for? The managers of the other theatres. We'd just have been dogs in the manger. And every time I think about it, I don't feel nearly as smart as I did last January. Of course, I suppose it was *fair* enough, but--"

"Fair? Oh, yes. That sort of thing'll always be fair--as long as there's any business. Queer, though, when you come to think of it. *We* hadn't any grudge against the other fellows; but they'd have stolen our idea, so we had to protect it. If they'd stolen our ten dollar bill, they'd have had to go to jail for it; but they could have stolen an idea worth ten *thousand*, and we'd just have had to stand back, and gibber. As long as *that's* fair, then *we* were fair."

"I wonder," she said, "if all monopolists go through the same thing--first, they get such a wonderful scheme that they hardly dare to go to bed for fear they'll talk in their sleep: then they're crazy for fear it won't work; then it *does* work, and they think they're the Lord's anointed; and bye-and-bye they look around and feel--sort of apologetic."

"Oh. Do *you* feel apologetic?"

"I'm looking around, anyway."

"You'd better save your energy. Mix's amendment's coming up pretty soon, and even if it doesn't pass, I don't see how we're going to compete with this weather. It's so abominably beautiful that it's--sickening."

"Oh--Mix!" she said, scornfully. "It gives me the creeps just to hear his name! He's a nasty hypocrite, and a sneak, and a--How long do you suppose he'll be hurrying around with that pious air after he gets his money? Why, he won't even stay in the League!"

Henry grimaced. "You're wrong. If he gets his money, he *will* stay in the League, and I'll bet on it."

There was a short silence. "Henry," she burst out, "everything considered, I believe he wants your uncle's money more than we do!"

"Whichever one of us gets it,--" said Henry grimly, "--He'll *earn* it!"

When he recalled his previous years of irresponsibility, he was staggered to realize how little a fifty dollar bill had meant to him. It had meant a casual request across the breakfast table; now, it meant that seventy-five or a hundred people were willing to pay him a few cents apiece for the result of his headaches; and the absence of those people, and the failure of those receipts, meant the difference between achievement and bitter downfall.

He had risked everything on his monopoly, and added six thousand dollars to his quota. For two months, he had carried the double load, and beaten his schedule; in early May, he was falling behind at the rate of fifty dollars a week. With twelve weeks ahead, he faced a deficit of a paltry six hundred dollars--and the Mix amendment was peeping over the horizon.

He shaved down his expenses to the uttermost penny; he ruthlessly discarded the last fraction of his class pride, and in emergency, to save the cost of a substitute, acted in place of his own doorman. He rearranged the lighting of the auditorium to save half a dollar a day. When the regular pianist was ill, he permitted Anna, for an entire fortnight, to play in his stead; and during that fortnight they ate three meals a day in a quick-lunch restaurant. There was no economy so trivial that he wouldn't embrace it; and yet his receipts hung steadily, maddeningly, just below the important average. Meanwhile, the subject of reform crept out again to the front page of the morning papers.

For nine months, Mr. Mix and Henry had occupied, mentally, the end seats on a see-saw, and as Henry's mood went down, Mr. Mix's mood went up. By strict fidelity to his own affairs, Mr. Mix had kept himself in the public eye as a reformer of the best and broadest type, and he had done this by winning first Mirabelle, and then the rest of the League, to his theory that organization must come before attack. Needless to say, he had found many impediments in the way of organization; Mirabelle had often betrayed impatience, but Mr. Mix had been able, so far, to

hold her in check. He had realized very clearly, however, that Mirabelle wasn't to be put off indefinitely; and he had been glad that he had a readymade ruse which he could employ as a blinder whenever she began to fidget. This ruse was his amendment; and although he could no longer see any value in it for the purposes of his private feud, yet he was passing it for two reasons; Mirabelle was one, and the public was the other. Even a reformer must occasionally justify his title; and besides, it wasn't the sort of thing which could injure the majesty of his reputation.

On this, then, Mr. Mix had laboured with unceasing diligence, and he had spent Mirabelle's money so craftily that thirty five hundred dollars had done the work of five thousand (and the balance had gone into his own pocket, and thence into a disastrous speculation in cotton), but as the year came into June, he told himself cheerfully that amendment or no amendment, he was justified in buying Mirabelle a wedding-ring. And when a belated epidemic of influenza rode into town, on the wings of an untimely spell of weather, and the Health Department closed all theatres for five days, Mr. Mix told himself, further, that the end of his career as a reformer was in sight, and that the beginning of his career of statecraft was just over the hill. Once the minister had said "Amen," and once his bride had made him her treasurer, and helped him into the Mayor's chair, the Reform League was at liberty to go to the devil.

Mirabelle had persisted in keeping the wedding-journey a surprise from him. She had hinted at a trip which would dazzle him, and also at a wedding gift which would stun him by its magnificence; Mr. Mix had visions on the one hand, of Narragansett, Alaska or the Canadian Rockies, and on the other hand, of a double fistful of government bonds. Mr. Mix didn't dare to tease her about the gift, but he did dare to tease her about the journey, and eventually she relented.

"I'll tell you," said Mirabelle, archly. "We're going to the convention."

Mr. Mix looked blank. "Convention?"

She nodded proudly. "The national convention of reform clubs, in Chicago. Aren't you surprised?"

Mr. Mix swallowed, and made himself smile, but it was a hazardous undertaking. "Surprised? I--I'm--I'm knocked endways!"

"You see," she said, "we'll be married on the fourth and be in Chicago on the sixth and be home again on the fourteenth and the Council won't vote on the amendment until the sixteenth. Could anything have been nicer? Now, Theodore, you *hadn't* guessed it, had you?"

"Guessed it?" he stammered. "I should say not. I don't see how you ever thought of it. It's--why, I'm paralyzed!"

"You could be a little more enthusiastic without hurting yourself any," she said suspiciously.

"I was thinking. I used to fancy I was pretty good at making plans myself, but this beats *me*. The way those dates all dovetail like the tiles on a roof. I never heard of anything like it. Only--well, if you *will* be so quick at reading my mind, I was wondering if we ought to leave town before the Council meets."

"That's mighty unselfish of you, Theodore, but you said only a couple of days ago you'd done all you could. And the Exhibitors'll still be working--"

"I don't believe they'll work any too hard. It's taken too long to get under way. If the amendment passes, you see they'll only have the advantage of six weeks of fair competition. I mean, Henry'd lose only six weeks of his *unfair* competition. And then we've got to see about getting new quarters for the League, when our Masonic Hall lease runs out, and--"

"But our advertising'll be running just the same, and the League'll still have its public meetings, and all. And everywhere I go I hear the same thing; the people really want this passed. And *anybody* can find us a new hall. I'll appoint somebody. No, you're just as unselfish as you can be, but we'll be back in time. Truly, Theodore, didn't you guess?"

Much of the jauntiness had gone out of Mr. Mix, but he consoled himself with the certainty that in another two months, he would be in a position to become masterful. The week in Chicago would bore him excessively, but after all, it was only a small part of a lifetime. He reflected that to any prisoner, the last few days before release, and freedom, are probably the hardest.

"How could I, my dear?"

"No, you must have thought I'd want you to traipse off on some perfectly aimless, nonsensical trip like a pair of sentimental idiots."

"Oh, you know me better than that," he murmured.

"Yes, but I didn't know how well you knew *me*. Sometimes I've been afraid you think I'm too--gushing."

"Oh, Mirabelle!"

"Just because I chatter along to you as any innocent young girl might--"

She continued to chatter for some minutes, but Mr. Mix was absent-minded. He had chewed the cud of his own virtue for too long a time, and it had given him a sour stomach. He was thinking that if her gift to him were in money (and from her hints he rather expected it) he might even manage to find, in Chicago, a type of unascetic diversion which would remove the taste of the convention from his spirit. But it was better to be safe than sorry, and therefore Mr. Mix

decided to make a flying trip to New York, for his bachelor celebration.

To Mirabelle he said that he was going to confer with his friend, the head of the Watch-and-Ward Society. Mirabelle promptly volunteered to go along too, but Mr. Mix told her, as delicately as he could, that it wouldn't look proper, and Mirabelle, who worshipped propriety as all gods in one, withdrew the suggestion.

"But before you go," she said, "You've *got* to do something about the state-wide campaign. You've got to write the literature, anyway."

Mr. Mix felt that he was protected by the calendar, and promised.

Before he went to New York, he wrote three pamphlets which were marvels of circumlocution, as far as reform was concerned, and masterpieces of political writing, as far as his own interests were concerned. He had borrowed freely, and without credit, from the speeches of every orator from Everett to Choate, and when he delivered the manuscripts to Mirabelle, and went off on his solitary junket, he was convinced that he had helped his own personal cause, and satisfied the League, without risking the smallest part of his reputation.

On his return, he stopped first at the Citizens Club, and when he came into the great living-room he was aware that several members looked up at him and smiled. Over in a corner, Henry Devereux and Judge Barklay had been conversing in undertones; but they, too, had glanced up, and their smiles were among the broadest.

Mr. Mix had an uncomfortable intuition that something had blown. Could he have been spotted, in New York, by any one from home?

"What's the joke?" he inquired of the nearest member.

"Got a new name for you--Pitchfork Mix." Mr. Mix spread a thin smile over his lips. "Supposed to be funny, is it?"

"Some folks think so."

"Where'd it originate? Let me in on the joke."

"Where *would* it originate? You're some strenuous author--aren't you? Didn't know you had that much acid in your system."

"Author? Author?"

From the table at his side, the man picked up three pamphlets. One was entitled *The Model Statute*, the second was *Local Problems*, and the third was *Reform and Regeneration*. To each of the three, Mr. Mix's name was signed. He took them up, and scrutinized them closely.

"Why, what's so remarkable about these?"

"Well, that one on *Local Problems* isn't so bad, but you know, Mix, when you come out in print and tell us that sooner or later you're going to stop the manufacture and sale of playing-cards, and--"

"What?"

"And stop all public dancing, and--"

Mr. Mix looked moonstruck. "Who ever said *that*?"

"And hand us out sumptuary laws--regulate the length of women's skirts and--"

Mr. Mix caught his breath sharply. "Where's *that*? Where is it? Show it to me! Show it to me!"

Obligingly, the member showed him; and as Mr. Mix stared at the pages, one by one, the veins in his cheeks grew purple. Mirabelle had edited his manuscript,--thank Heaven she hadn't tampered with the Mix amendment of the blue-law ordinance, which Mr. Mix had so carefully phrased to checkmate Henry, without at the same time seeming to do more than provide conservative Sunday regulation,--but in the other articles Mirabelle had shovelled in a wealth of her own precious thoughts, clad in her own bleak style, and as soon as he had read two consecutive paragraphs, Mr. Mix knew that the worst wasn't yet to come--it had arrived.

The other man was amusedly calm. "Well, you're not going to deny you wrote it, are you? Too bad, in a way, though. Oh, I don't blame you for getting it off your chest, if you really mean it--a man might as well come out in the open--but I'm afraid too many people'll think it just funny."

Mr. Mix produced a smile which was a sickly attempt to register nonchalant poise. "What do you hear about it?"

"Oh, what I said. Say Mix, do you honestly mean all that blood-and-thunder?"

Mr. Mix smiled again, and hoped that his expression was taken to be non-committal. To save his life, he couldn't have helped looking towards the corner where Henry and Judge Barklay sat, and his fury and chagrin were multiplied when he saw that they were still affected by humour.

He went out, with vast dignity--even the doorman had a twinkle in his eye--and made for Masonic Hall. Mirabelle was there, in the committee room, and at sight of him, she had a temporary fit of maidenly diffidence. He wanted to slap her; but he didn't even dare to use a tone of voice which was more than disapproving.

"Those pamphlets--" he began, censoriously.

"Oh, yes, Theodore, I took the liberty of making a few slight changes."

"Slight changes! Sleight of *hand* changes!"

Mirabelle drew herself up. "Do you mean to say you criticise what I did? *I* couldn't see the sense of being milk-and-watery, even if *you* could. All I put in was what you've said to me a hundred times over. We've wasted too much time already. I thought we'd better show our true colours."

Mr. Mix stood and gaped at her. Underground politician that he was, he knew that Mirabelle had utterly destroyed the half of his ambition. She had made him a laughing-stock, a buffoon, a political joke. To think that his name was connected with a crusade against short-skirts and dancing--Ugh! Not even the average run of church-goers would swallow it. "Mayor!" he thought bitterly. "President of Council! I couldn't get elected second deputy assistant dog-catcher!"

Aloud, he said slowly: "I'm afraid it was premature, that's all."

"Oh, no, it wasn't! You've no *idea* how people are talking about it."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Mr. Mix, but he hadn't the temerity to put a sarcastic stress on it. He was wondering whether, if he issued a statement to assure the public that what was in those pamphlets was pure idealism, and not to be taken as his outline of any immediate campaign, he could remove at least the outer layer of the bad impression, and save his amendment from the wreck. He had thought, earlier, that he wouldn't need that amendment as a personal weapon against Henry, but the value of it had appreciated by the possibility of losing it. As to the state-wide law, Mr. Mix was totally unconcerned. "Oh, yes, I have," he said.

"Don't get too conceited, though, Theodore. The *best* part of it was mine."

Mr. Mix's eagle eye saw a loophole. "You don't think I'm going to take praise for what belongs to *you*, do you?" he demanded.

"Why--"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Mix. "Not exactly. I'm going to tell the truth about it at our next meeting, and I'm going to send a statement to the *Herald*."

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

"It matters to me. Maybe I'm too finicky, but that's the kind of man I am."

"You're too generous," she murmured.

Mr. Mix wiped away a stray bead of perspiration, and breathed more freely. With Mirabelle's money to back him, and the stigma of those two pamphlets removed, perhaps he had a fighting chance for the mayoralty yet.

It was a house-wedding, with very few guests, no decorations, and perfectly digestible refreshments. When the last of the party had gone down the steps, Mirabelle, in a travelling-suit which was new in comparison with the rest of her wardrobe, approached the bridegroom.

"Theodore, I want you to have your gift before we start. I don't want you to feel too dependent on me. Maybe after next month I'll make some kind of a settlement on you, but that's neither here nor there. So ... take it, and I hope it's what you wanted."

He took it, and his fingers trembled. A check? And for what generous amount?

"*Well*--aren't you going to thank me?"

Mr. Mix tried to speak, but the lump in his throat prevented him. She had given him what was the legal equivalent of five thousand dollars, but it wasn't in the form of a check. It was his own demand note, payable to John Starkweather and endorsed by him to Mirabelle. The word "Cancelled" was written, in Mirabelle's angular hand, across the face of it.

CHAPTER XIV

As Henry and his wife went down the steps, they exchanged glances and smiled faintly. "First time I've been in that house for seven months," said Henry, half to himself. "It's a bully old shack, too. I lived in it ever since I was six."

"Still, we're pretty comfortable right where we are, dear."

Henry lagged a little. "That *does* hurt my feelings. Of course, I'm so busy I could live in a dog-kennel and hardly notice it, but when *you* have to camp day in and day out in that measly little joint, and smell everybody else's corned beef and cabbage, and dig like a general-housework girl and cook, and manicure the stove, and peel the potatoes and dust off the what-not and so on--not that you haven't made it a mighty pretty place, because you *have*--without one day's vacation since last August--"

"But I've told you so often, dear, I'm *glad* to do it if it helps you."

"It helped a lot. If you hadn't done it in the first place, I wouldn't have had the cash on hand to tie up the rest of the picture houses. But that time's gone by. I don't see why in thunder you

won't hire some servants. And at least you could pike up into the country for a week. Why don't you?"

She hesitated, for temptation was strong, and she was really very tired. "Maybe it's just because I want to play the game out, too. It's only two months more."

"And after that," he said firmly, "we're going to move. I'll have enough to buy a young bungalow up on the hill, even if I don't get anything from Archer. And then I'm going to make up to you for this year--see if I don't."

"Would you sell the Orpheum?"

"Sell it!" he echoed. "I'd sell it so quick you'd think it was a fake oil-well! I could, too. Bob Standish sends me a proposition from somebody about once a week."

"Don't you believe there's any chance of our catching up, then?"

"Looks pretty black," he admitted. "They've got us eight down and nine to go, but if this amendment holds off we've still got eight weeks left to think up some wild scheme."

She squeezed his arm. "I'm not afraid of the future, no matter what happens. We can take care of ourselves."

"Sure we can," he said, easily. "Maybe I could get a job keeping the books for the League!... Seriously, though, I've had two or three different propositions put up to me over at the Club ... but Lord! how I hate to be licked! Well--let's train our gigantic intellects on the job, and finish out the heat, anyway."

She went back to her hated housekeeping, and Henry went back to his hated theater, and for another week they labored and pinched and saved, each in a specific purpose, and each in desperate support of the other's loyalty and sacrifice.

He brought her, then, the morning edition of the *Herald*, and pointed out a telegraphic item on the first page. "They must think it's a sure thing," he said, "and the devil of it is that I guess they're pretty nearly right."

Anna glanced at the headlines, and gasped. "Mix elected second vice-president of the national organization--and pledges twenty-five thousand dollars to the national campaign fund! Oh!... I *wish* I could say what I think!"

"If a hearty oath would relieve you, don't mind me," said Henry. His chin was squarer than usual, and his eyes were harder. "You can see what happened, can't you? Aunt Mirabelle railroaded him through--and the pompous old fool looks the part--and she let him promise money she expects to get in August. And I'll bet it hurt him just as much to promise it as it does me to have him!"

She threw the paper to the floor. "Henry, can't we do *something*? We're only a few hundred dollars short! Can't we make up just *that* little bit?"

"It's a thousand, now," he said. "A thousand, and we're falling further behind every time the clock ticks." He retrieved the *Herald*, and abstractedly smoothed out the pages. "That was a great spread-eagle speech of Mix's wasn't it? Talking about his model ordinance, and what he's going to do next year!... Nothing I'd love better than to give that fellow a dose of his own tonic. But that's the deuce of it--I can't think how to put it over.... Even if I'm licked, I wouldn't feel so badly if I just had the personal satisfaction of making him look like a sick cat. Just once."

"Yes," she said, sorrowfully. "Dad's prophecy didn't seem to work out, did it?"

"What prophecy was that?"

"Don't you remember? He said if Mr. Mix only had enough rope--"

"Oh, yes. Only Mix declined the invitation. He's handled himself pretty well; you've got to grant that. There's a lot of people around here that honestly think he's a first-class citizen. Sometimes I'm darned if I don't think they *will* elect him something. And then God save the Commonwealth! But if they ever realized how far that League'll go if it ever gets under way, and what a bunch of hocus Mix's part of it is--" He stopped abruptly, and froze in his place; and then, to Anna's amazement, he turned to her with a whoop which could have carried half-way to the Orpheum.

"Henry! What on earth *is* it?"

Henry snatched up his hat and made for the door. "More rope!" he said, exultantly, over his shoulder. "*Lots* more rope--I'll tell you tonight!"

He arrived at the City Hall before the record room was open, and he fretted and stamped in the corridor until a youthful clerk with spats, pimples, and an imitation diamond scarf-pin condescended to listen to his wants. In twenty minutes he was away again, and he was lucky enough to catch Judge Barklay before the bailiff had opened court.

"Hello, Henry," said the Judge. "Did you want to see me about anything?"

"Rather!" said Henry, who was slightly out of breath. "It's about a comma."

"A what?"

"A comma. Where's your copy of the ordinances?"

"On my desk. Why?"

Henry ran through the volume to the proper place, inserted his thumb as a marker, and held the

book in reserve. "Judge, do you suppose the voters want any of these fool blue-laws passed?"

"No."

"Well, who does, then, outside of the League?"

"Nobody. All we want is a decent city."

"It's simply that the League's got the Council more or less buffaloed, isn't it?"

"That's what I've heard, Henry."

"And the first thing we know, the League'll have put in such a big wedge that it'll be too late to get it out. If this amendment gets over, Mix'll have a show in the fall, and then the League'll run wild. Just as they said in those pamphlets that Mix published, and then squirmed out of. Isn't that so?"

"Very likely. Very likely."

"And yet everybody's afraid to stand up against it, for fear they'll be called names?"

"It looks so, Henry."

"But if the people once started a back fire--"

The Judge shook his head. "Mobs don't start without a leader."

"I know, but if they ever realized what a ghastly farce it would be--not even using any of the League's *new* notions, but taking what we've got on the books right now--" He opened the volume of ordinances, and read slowly: "'Whosoever shall fail in the strict observance of the Lord's Day by any unseemly act, speech or carriage; or whosoever shall engage in any manner of diversion--'" Here he paused impressively. "'--or profane occupation--'" He slung the volume on the desk, and faced the Judge. "Don't you get it?"

"I'm afraid I don't--quite."

"Why," said Henry, with a beatific grin. "Why, *there's a comma after that word 'diversion.'* I've just come from the City Hall. I've seen the original copy. There *is* a comma. 'Any manner of diversion'--that's one thing: '*or* any manner of profane occupation for profit--' that's something else again, and different entirely. And the Reform League has been shrieking to have that ordinance enforced--to say nothing of the amendment. Well, why not enforce it once. 'Any manner of diversion?'" He began to laugh, helplessly. "Oh, come on, Judge--take the pins out and let your imagination down. *Any manner of--*"

The Judge was whistling softly. "By George, Henry--"

"Can't you *see* it working? I'm not sure anybody could even take a nap! And--"

The Judge stepped past him. "That's all right, Henry. Stay where you are. I'm just going to telephone Rowland... Hello: Mayor's office, please--" He motioned to his son-in-law. "Make yourself comfortable--I shouldn't wonder a bit if these blue-laws weren't going to get just a little bit--bleached."

On his delirious way to the Orpheum, he stopped in to see Bob Standish, not to share the joke with him, for Judge Barklay had laid great stress on the closest secrecy, but in answer to a recent message asking him to call.

"What's the excitement, Bob?"

His friend regarded him with the innocent stare which had made his fortune. "Remember I spoke to you some time ago about renting that space over the Orpheum?"

"The nursery? Yes."

"Well, it's come up again. Different party, this time. Of course he hasn't seen it yet, but it's a chap who wants about that much space--might want to enlarge it a little, but we'd arrange that; he'd do it at his own expense--and he'd pay fifteen hundred a year."

Henry deliberated. "It's so near the finish.... I don't much care one way or the other. Who's the party?"

"Bird named McClellan."

"I don't know him; do I?"

"I don't know why you should; never met him before, myself. Well, do you want to trade?"

"I don't much care what I do."

Standish surveyed him closely. "You're very peppy this morning, seems to me."

"I've got an excuse to be."

"For publication?"

"Not yet. You'll see it soon enough."

Standish's eyes dropped back to his desk. "Well, let's get this lease question off our chests. If you'll let me handle it for you, I'll guarantee you'll be satisfied."

"Would you do it if you were in my shoes?"

"Absolutely--provided you were in mine."

Henry laughed. "Well, Mr. Bones, what *is* the answer?"

"Why--this *may* do you some good. That is, if you let me manage it for you. But suppose it's immaterial. Suppose you run out your string, and win or lose, you know what's on the docket for you, don't you? If you want it?"

"I haven't thought that far ahead. I've had one or two things put up to me."

"Forget 'em." Standish pointed at the wall. "Nice new mahogany flat-topped desk right there."

Henry's mouth relaxed. "Why--*Bob*."

As Standish gazed at him, no observer would have said that this immature-looking boy was rated in the highest group of local businessmen. To a stranger, the offer might have seemed insignificant, even humorously insignificant; but to Henry it was stupendous, and for two widely varying reasons.

"Just to think over," said Standish. "In case."

Henry's fists were doubled. "It isn't so much the ... the commercial side of it, Bob, but when I know you've always had me down for such an *incompetent* sort of--"

"That was before the war. To tell the truth, old rubbish, last August I couldn't have seen it with the Lick telescope. Thought you were a great scout, of course--good pal--all that--but *business*; that's different. A friend's one thing; but a partner's a lot of 'em."

Henry was staring fixedly at him. "I wouldn't have any money to speak of--"

"Then don't speak of it. I'll name the price. The price is your year's profit on the Orpheum."

There was a little silence. "When did you get this hunch, Bob?"

"Oh, about last February."

"But it was about then that I came in here one day, and--and you said you--you said one pal *couldn't* boss another. You said--"

"Oh!... But as I recall it, you were talking about a job."

"Yes, and you said you wouldn't give me one! And ever since then I've been--"

"Idiot!" said Standish. "Is that what's been gnawing at his tender heart! Why, you astigmatic fool--why.... Stop right there! Certainly I wouldn't have you for an employé, but as a partner--that's different. If you apologize, I'll slay you. Shake hands and wipe it off your brain.... Now let's get back to business. We've got to have quick action."

CHAPTER XV

As the train slowed for the station, and a score of other passengers began to assemble wraps and luggage, Mr. Theodore Mix sat calm and undisturbed, although inwardly he was still raging at Mirabelle for making a spectacle of him. It was fully half an hour ago that she had prodded him into activity, ignored his plea of greater experience in ways of travel, and compelled him to get the suitcases out to the platform (she didn't trust the porter), to help her on with her cape, and to be in instant readiness for departure. For half an hour she had sat bolt upright on the edge of her seat, an umbrella in one hand and an antique satchel in the other, and her air was a public proclamation that no railroad, soulless corporation though it might be, was going to carry her one inch beyond her destination.

By a superhuman effort, Mr. Mix removed his eyes from Mirabelle's convention badge. It was a chaste decoration of three metal bars, two sets of supporting chains, and a half foot of blue silk ribbon, with white lettering, and Mirabelle continued to wear it for two reasons: she was proud of it, and Mr. Mix had made his initial attempt to be masterful, and told her twenty-four hours ago that it looked as though she belonged to the Third Ward Chowder Club. Since then, she had reproached him afresh whenever she caught him looking at it. And inasmuch as it could hardly be avoided by anyone who cast the briefest glance in her general direction, he had been in hot water from Chicago to the present moment. He couldn't even escape to the smoking room.

When a man is telling himself that a woman has made a fool of him in public, and that every one in the neighborhood is amused to watch him, he finds it peculiarly difficult to carry on a conversation with the woman. But Mr. Mix saw that Mirabelle was about to converse, and glowering at a drummer across the aisle, he beat her to it.

"Seems to me the League had an almighty gall to wire you for that three thousand dollars, Mirabelle. If it had been *my* money, I'd have hung on to it until I knew what they wanted it for."

She straightened her lips. "Well, it wasn't, was it?--So I didn't, did I?... If I can't have faith in my own associates, who *can* I have it in? And it isn't a gift; it's a loan. Treasurer said he needed it right off, and there wasn't anybody else to get it from in a hurry." She caught his eyes wandering towards her gorgeous insignia, and her own eyes snapped back at him. "And I hope at least I'm to have the privilege of doing what I choose with my own money. Don't forget that

women are *people*, now, just as much as men are. After the first of August, maybe I'll--"

"Mirabelle. Sh-h!"

"No, I won't either," she retorted. "I don't *care* to shush. After the first of August, maybe you'll have your share, and I won't presume to interfere with *you*. So don't you interfere with *me*. If the League had to have money, it was for some proper purpose. And it wasn't a gift; it was a loan. And if I couldn't trust--"

"Oh, give it a drink!" said Mr. Mix, under his breath; and while he maintained an attitude of courteous attention, he barricaded his ears as best he could, and shut Mirabelle out of his consciousness.

Even in Chicago, he had received bulletins from the seat of war; they had merely confirmed his previous knowledge that Henry was beaten, thoroughly and irretrievably. A few more weeks, and Mirabelle would be rich. Half a million? That was the minimum. Three quarters? That was more likely. A million dollars? It wasn't in the least improbable. And Mirabelle had told him more than once, and in plain English, that she planned to divide with him--not equally, but equitably. She had said that she would give him a third of her own inheritance. Hm ... a hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand, say. And what couldn't he do with such a benefice? Of course, he would have to profess some slight interest in the League for awhile, but gradually he could slide out of it--and he hoped that he could engineer Mirabelle out of it. Mirabelle made herself too conspicuous. But even if Mirabelle stuck to her colours, Mr. Mix needn't hesitate to drift away--that is, after he had received his settlement. Late in August, he would make a trip to New York on business--reform business--and in the glare of the flaming-arcs, he would compensate himself for his years of penance. Mirabelle was sharp, but (he smiled reminiscently) in Chicago he had once managed to hoodwink her; and what man has done, man can do.

"It's nothing to laugh at, Theodore!"

He came to himself with a start. "I wasn't laughing."

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, dear. Certainly."

"Very well. We'll go out, then."

"Out where?"

"Out to the vestibule, just as I said."

"But Mirabelle! We're more than a mile from the station!"

"We're going out to the vestibule, Theodore. I don't propose to get left."

A moment ago, Mr. Mix had been arguing that the smiles and sympathy of his fellow-passengers were cheap at the price, but when he rose and escorted Mirabelle down the aisle, he was telling himself that the old-fashioned principle was best--the wife's property ought to pass under the absolute control of the husband. He was strengthened in this conviction by the fact that two fashionable young men in the corner were snickering at him.

"Home again," said Mirabelle, with a sigh of relief. "Home again, and time to get to work. And I'm just itching for it."

Mr. Mix said nothing: he was wondering how soon he could get to his private caché, and whether he had better put in a supply of young onions in addition to cloves and coffee beans. He hadn't yet discovered whether Mirabelle had a particularly keen scent: but he would take no chances.

"Stop staring at those girls, Theodore!"

"I may be married," said Mr. Mix, defensively. "But I'm dashed if I'm blind.... Immodest little hussies. We'll have to tackle that question next, Mirabelle."

The train eased to a standstill: he helped her down to the platform. The big car was waiting for them: and as the door slammed, Mr. Mix sat back luxuriously, and beamed at the chauffeur. Yes, virtue had its compensations; and as soon as he had money to his own credit, he would figuratively take Mirabelle by the scruff of the neck, and he would tell her just exactly how to behave, and he would see that she did it. But for the present--soft diplomacy.

Mirabelle clamped his arm. "Why, what's that policeman stopping us for, right in the middle of a block!"

"Search *me*..." He opened the door, and he leaned out, imperially. "What's wrong, officer? We weren't going over twelve or thirteen--"

The policeman, who had brought out a thick book of blank summonses, and an indelible pencil, motioned him to desist. "What name?"

Mr. Mix swelled, pompously. "But, officer, I--"

"Cut it out. Name?"

"Theodore Mix. But--"

"Address?"

Mr. Mix gave it, but before he could add a postscript, Mirabelle was on active duty. "Officer, we've got a perfect right to know what all this fol-de-rol is about. I'm the president of the Ethical

Reform League." She flirted her badge at him. "I'm Mrs. Theodore Mix--used to be Miss Starkweather. My husband is a personal friend of Mayor Rowland, and the Chief of Police. I demand to know the reason for this insult!"

The policeman tore off a page at the perforation, and handed it to Mr. Mix. "Judge Barklay's Court, Tuesday, 10 A.M.... Why, you're violatin' City Ordinance 147."

Mirabelle turned red. "Now you see here, young man, I know that ordinance backwards and forwards! I--"

"Try it sideways," said the unabashed policeman. "Ordinance says nobody can't engage in no diversion on the Lord's Day. That's today, and this here limousine's a diversion, ain't it?"

Mr. Mix cried out in anguish, as her grip tightened. "Ouch! It's a damned outrage! Leggo my arm."

"No, it isn't! Oh, Theodore, don't you see what it *means*--"

"Leggo, Mirabelle! It's a damned outrage!"

"No, it isn't either! Theodore, don't you *see*? The Mayor's weakened--they probably read your speech at Chicago--they aren't *waiting* for the amendment! They're enforcing the ordinance--better than we ever dreamed of! And that means that you're going to the City Hall next autumn!" She leaned out and bowed to the gaping officer. "We beg your pardon. You did perfectly right. Thank you for doing your duty. Can we go on, now?"

The man scratched his head, perplexedly.

"What are you tryin' to do--kid me? Sure; go ahead. Show that summons to anybody else that stops you."

In the two miles to the hill, they were stopped seven times, and when they arrived at the house, Mirabelle was almost hysterical with triumph. Without delaying to remove her hat, she sent a telegram to the national president, and she also telephoned to a few of her League cronies, to bid them to a supper in celebration. Mr. Mix made three separate essays to escape, but after the third and last trial was made to appear in its proper light as a subterfuge, he lapsed into heavy festivity; and he spent the evening drinking weak lemonade, and trying to pretend that it belonged to the Collins family. And while his wife (still wearing her insignia) and his guests were talking in a steady stream, Mr. Mix was telling himself that if Ordinance 147 was going to prevent so innocent an occupation as riding in a car on Sunday, he was very much afraid that life in this community was going to be too rich for his blood. That is, unless he were elected to be chief of the community. And in this case, he would see that he wasn't personally inconvenienced.

At half past seven in the morning, Mirabelle was already at the breakfast table, and semi-audibly rating Mr. Mix for his slothfulness, when he came in with an odd knitting of his forehead and an unsteady compression of his mouth. To add to the effect, he placed his feet with studied clumsiness, and as he gave the *Herald* into Mirabelle's hands, he uttered a sound which annoyed her.

"For the cat's sake, Theodore, what are you groaning about?"

"Groan yourself," said Mr. Mix, and put a trembling finger on the headline. As he removed the finger, it automatically ceased to tremble. Mr. Mix didn't care two cents for what was in the *Herald*, but he knew that to Mirabelle it would be a tragedy, and that he was cast for the part of chief mourner.

"Well, what's *that* to groan about? I'd call it a smashing victory--just as I did last night. And *our* being caught only shows--"

"Rave on," said Mr. Mix lugubriously, and stood with his hands in his pockets, jingling his keys.

"Certainly! It shows they meant business. It shows *we* did. We'll take our own medicine. And the amendment--" She broke off sharply; her eyes had strayed back to the smaller type. "Good grief!" said Mirabelle, faintly, and there was silence.

Mr. Mix came to look over her shoulder.

LEADING REFORMERS ARRESTED FOR VIOLATING OWN PET LAW

Police Issue Over 2800 Summonses to Golfers, Pick-nickers, Canoeists, Cyclists, Hikers and Motorists including Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Mix

MAYOR PUTS OVER UNIQUE REFERENDUM TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT

Special Meeting of Council Called This Morning

Entire City Roused to Fight Blue-Law-Campaign:
Mix Amendment Doomed: Ordinance 147 Sure to be
Modified

Mirabelle collected herself. "What are you standing around gawking like that for? Find out what

time that meeting is. Telephone every member of the committee. They won't have any meeting without *us*, not by a long, long row of apple-trees!"

"Save your strength," said Mr. Mix, with a spiritual yawn.

"Save my strength! Well, what about saving my five thousand dollars for--for missionary work!"

"The missionary fund," said Mr. Mix, "seems to have fallen among cannibals. Save your energy, my dear. This isn't reform; it's elementary politics, and Rowland's used the steam-roller. As a matter of fact, we're stronger than we were before. If they'd passed my amendment, a lot of voters might have said it wouldn't do any good to elect me Mayor; when all my best work was done beforehand. Now I've got a *real* platform to fight on. And the League'll have a real fund, won't it? You put up forty or fifty thousand, and we'll stage a Waterloo."

"And you can stand there and--oh, you coward!"

He shook his head, with new dignity. "No, you're simply lucky Rowland didn't think of it a year ago. If he *had*, and--" Mr. Mix broke off the sentence, and turned pale.

"What's the matter, Theodore?"

Mr. Mix slumped down as though hit from behind. "Mirabelle--listen--" His voice was strained, and hoarse. "I may have to have some money today--four or five thousand--"

"I haven't got it."

He stared at her until she backed away in awe. "You--you haven't *got*--four or five *thousand*--?"

Mirabelle began to whimper. "I've been so sure of--of August, you know--I've spent all Mr. Archer sent me. I--"

As he stepped forward, Mirabelle retreated. "You've got something of your own, though?" It wasn't an ordinary question, it was an agonized appeal.

"Only a separate trust fund John set up for me before he died--fifty thousand dollars--I just get the interest--sixty dollars a week."

Mr. Mix sat down hard, and his breathing was laboured. "Great--Jumping--Jehosophat!" He wet his lips, repeatedly. "Mirabelle--listen--if they modify that ordinance--so Sunday shows are legal again--those other fellows'll want to buy back--their contracts--from Henry. There's only a few weeks--but if Henry only raised a thousand dollars--he'd be so close to his ten thousand--" He reached for a glass of water and drank it, gulping. "Henry'll see *that*--he's got his eyes open every minute.... We've got to cut inside of him. Prevent those fellows from buying their Sunday leases back. Get hold of the man that's the boss of the Exhibitors' Association. Tell him we'll buy a *second* option to lease the whole string of theatres for six weeks, subject to our getting a release from Henry. As if the League wanted 'em or something. Offer a big enough rent so they'll *have* to accept--so they'd get more out of *us* than if they opened up. Then they *can't* buy back from Henry--and he's over a thousand short. I *know* he is. And if you don't do it--" His gesture was dramatic.

Mirabelle's expression, as she wiped her eyes, was a pot-pourri of sentiments. "Humph! Can't say I like the idea much, kind of too tricky."

Mr. Mix played his last card. "Don't the ends justify the means? You and I'd be philanthropists, and *Henry*--" He watched her quiver. "And with a fund such as *we'd* have, we'd begin all over again, and next time we'd win, wouldn't we?"

"Theodore. I've got fifty one hundred in the bank. It has to last 'till August. If you took five thousand *more*--"

He snatched at the straw. "You bet I'll take it. It's for *insurance*. And you telephone to Masonic Hall and see what's left of the three grand you wired 'em from--"

"The what?"

"The money you sent from Chicago. Get what's left. Soon as I find out, I'll hustle down town and get busy."

Mirabelle wavered. "The Council's going to--"

Mr. Mix gave her a look which was a throwback to his cave-man ancestry. "To *hell* with the Council!"

For an instant, her whole being rebelled, and then she saw his eyes. "A-all right," she faltered. "I--I'll telephone!"

Inside of five minutes, she told him that of her loan, there was nothing left at all. The money had been wanted for the two-year rental of a new hall, at 300 Chestnut Street; the owner had made a marked concession in price for advance payment.

"Never mind, then," he rasped. "That's cold turkey. Give me a check for every nickel you've got.... And I'll want the car all day. I want a cup of coffee. And you wait right here until I get word to you what to do next."

"Couldn't I even--"

"You stay here! Far's *I* know, I'll have you making the rounds of the hock-shops to cash in your jewelry. But--" He relaxed slightly. "But when it's for reform, my dear--when it's for civilization--the League--isn't it worth *any* sacrifice?"

A spark of the old fire burned in her eyes. "Humph! Good thing *one* of us has *got* something to sacrifice, if anybody asked me. But here's your coffee.... Don't make such a horrid noise with it, Theodore."

At noon, he telephoned her two pieces of news. The Council, fairly swamped with hundreds of outraged voters, had promptly modified the existing ordinance, and rejected--unanimously--the Mix amendment. And Mr. Mix, who had spent three hours in conference, and in battle, had emerged victorious.

"Thank Heaven, we're safe!... And it only costs thirty-nine hundred. (Five of this was Mr. Mix's self-granted commission.) I've bought a second option on every last house in town. And I'll need the car all afternoon. I've got to run all over everywhere and close these deals.... What are you going to do?"

"Why," she said with a rueful glance at her check-book. "I guess I'll go down and see how soon I can get that loan back. I'm not used to--putting off tradesmen's bills, Theodore. I wasn't brought up to it."

CHAPTER XVI

Now after prolonged debate, and a trial of irresistible force (which was Henry's logic) against an immovable body (which was Anna's loyalty), she had finally consented to run up into the country for a week's respite from the hot weather. Before she left, however, she was first sworn to secrecy, and told of the discovery of the lurking comma, and of the plan for a militant referendum; she was properly convulsed, but a little later, when her practical instincts had had a chance to assert themselves, she inquired of Henry where there was any benefit to the Orpheum.

"Not a bit," he assured her cheerfully.

"Not even in the Council--"

"Dearest, it doesn't make the difference of the billionth part of a counterfeit Russian rouble."

She regarded him curiously. "Are you as cheerful as all that just because you're getting back at Mr. Mix? And maybe spoiling his boom for Mayor?"

Henry said that he was all as cheerful as that; yea, more so. He was merely snagging the rope which had already been paid out; and it was glory in his pocket, because so many people before him had found the rope twitched out of their hands. She thought that this indication of a vengeful spirit was out of place in his character, but she forgave it, because at least it was founded on humour. And when he took her to the train, she forgave it on another score, because she realized that not since last autumn had she seen him so fundamentally boyish and irresponsible. She was glad that so much of his spontaneity had come back to him, but at the same time she was puzzled, for it didn't seem altogether like Henry, as she had analyzed him, to gloat so thoroughly over mere retaliation, humorous or not.

On Monday, he met her at the station, and as soon as she saw him, she remarked again the extraordinary uplift of his mood. She had read the *Herald*, and taken deep enjoyment from it; but Henry had a hundred unpublished incidents to tell her,--one of them concerned his own escape from possible complications by closing the Orpheum, issuing passes good for the following week; and spending the day in the library of the Citizens Club--and in her amusement, and also in her happiness to be back with him, she didn't notice that Henry was driving her to the Orpheum instead of to their apartment.

"Why, what are we stopping here for, dear?"

Henry's laugh had a pronounced overtone. "To meet Mr. Archer. I thought you'd like to be in on it."

"In on what?" She caught his arm. "Henry! Has something happened? Has it?" She stared at him, and as she recognized what might be hidden behind his expression of exquisite, unreserved joy, she was almost as frightened as if he had looked despairing instead of joyful.

"It wasn't settled until last week," he said, still with that wide, speculative smile, like a baby's. "It *really* wasn't settled until Saturday. And it won't be *positively* settled until we've seen Archer.... And there he is waiting for us! I couldn't get him before--he was in the country for the week-end."

With no clear recollection of how she got there, she was sitting in Henry's tiny office, and Mr. Archer was sitting beside her, and Henry was standing at his desk, pawing over a heap of ledgers and cash-books. To Anna, there was something commanding in his attitude, something more of crest than she had ever seen in him, even during the early period of his intrepid youth. And yet she could see, too, that his hands were a trifle unsteady, and that his lips betrayed an immense excitement.

"Mr. Archer," he said. "There's no use waiting until the first of the year. Either we've made good by this time, or we never will. Here's the books. They'll show a net profit, including Saturday's deposit, of ten thousand five hundred."

Anna turned weak and faint, and she wanted to laugh and cry in the same breath, but she gripped the arms of her chair, and clung fast to what was left of her poise. If Henry had a miracle to report, Anna must hear it.

"It's a matter of interpretation," he went on, with his voice shaking for an instant. "And you're the interpreter. It came up so suddenly last week that I couldn't get hold of you. But I took a chance, anyway.... Does a lease count?"

The lawyer looked very sober. "A lease?"

"Yes. If I leased part of the theatre to somebody, would the income from that count?"

During the resultant silence, Anna distinctly heard her own heart beating. She looked at Mr. Archer, and saw that his brows were drawn down, and that his eyes were distant. Fearfully, she hung on his reply.

"That's a delicate question, Henry. You were supposed to make your profit from the operation of the theatre."

Henry was tense. "I don't mean if I leased the *theatre*. I mean if I leased some *part* of it--some part that wouldn't interfere with the show."

Anna closed her eyes. Mr. Archer's brows had risen to normal. "Why, in that case, I should certainly say that the income would count, Henry. Let's see the lease?"

Anna wished that Henry would come over to her, and hold her in his arms while Mr. Archer, with maddening deliberation, glanced through the long typewritten document--but Henry had turned his back, and was gazing out of the window.

"Peter McClellan? What's *he* want so much space for?"

Henry made no response. There was a long hiatus, broken only by the rustling of the pages.

"Just a minute, Henry. Some of this is all right--and some isn't. The space you mention is what you're using now for the--er--nursery, I take it. And the privilege of the lessee to enlarge the upper story at his own expense is all right." His brows had gone down again, and Anna shivered. "But even if you've got your whole rental in advance, you aren't entitled to claim all of it belongs to this year's income. As a matter of fact, you actually *earn* a twenty-fourth of that whole payment every month for twenty-four months."

Henry spoke over his shoulder. "You haven't read far enough."

"Oh!" Mr. Archer laughed, but his voice was no lighter. "Why, how on earth did you persuade anybody to execute such an agreement as that?"

Henry faced around. "Bob Standish engineered it. Told this chap as long as he paid in advance anyway, to get a bargain, it wouldn't make any difference to *him*, and it made a lot to me. Nine hundred and fifty a month for July and August and fifty a month for the next twenty-two months."

"But my dear boy, you still don't *earn* more than a twenty-fourth of the whole rental each month. That's ordinary book-keeping. I should have thought you'd have learned it. It makes no difference *when* the lessee pays. All you can credit yourself in July and August is--"

"Oh, no, Mr. Archer. There's a consideration. You'll find it on the next page. I'm to keep the theatre closed every afternoon in July and August so the lessee can make his alterations to the second story. And the extra price for those months is to pay me for loss of revenue. So it *does* count on this year's income. Maybe I'm no impresario, but by gosh, I can keep a set of books."

Mr. Archer nodded briskly. "That *is* different. Why, Henry, as far as I can see ... what's this? 300 Chestnut Street? But the Orpheum's on Main."

"300 Chestnut is the back entrance," said Henry. He smiled across at Anna, and she stood up and came a perilous step towards him. "Well, old lady," said Henry, and the same wide, foolish smile of utter joy was on his lips. "I guess this fixes it. I--"

He was rudely interrupted by the violent opening of the door. His Aunt Mirabelle stood there, dynamic, and behind her, in a great fluster of dismay and apprehension, stood the chairman of the Quarters Committee of the Reform League.

"Henry! Henry Devereux! You--you swindler!" Her speech was seriously impeded by her wrath. "You--you--you." She flung a savage gesture towards the little man in the background. "You had an agent show him--show Mr. McClellan--this place through the back door!--*He* didn't know I--Henry Devereux, you've got *my* three thousand dollars, and you're going to give it straight back to me! This minute! Do you *hear*?"

Anna stared at her, and at Henry, and sat down plump and cried into her handkerchief, from sheer hysterical reaction.

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "Through the back door, if you say so. But that's the regular business entrance. I suppose the agent thought it looked better, too."

"The agent! That Standish man! You *conspired*. You--"

Henry's chin went up. "Excuse me, Aunt Mirabelle, but I didn't know the first thing about it

until Bob Standish told me he had a client ready to close, and to pay in advance. I didn't even know your man by sight. I'd have rented it to anybody on earth on the same terms."

The little chairman edged forward. "Miss Starkweather--Mrs. Mix--I knew how you feel about motion pictures, of course, but how could *I* know you wouldn't even want to be in the same building with--"

"Oh, dry up!" She whirled on the lawyer. "Is that fair? Do you call that fair? *Do* you?"

Mr. Archer put his hand on Henry's shoulder, and nodded benignly. "To tell the truth, Mrs. Mix, I can't see where this concerns you personally at all. It's a straightforward commercial transaction between Henry and Mr. McClellan."

"It isn't, either! Mr. McClellan had authority from the League to get us a hall and sign a lease in his own name. I had the directors give it to him, myself. And it was *my* money that paid for it! Mine!"

Henry grinned at the lawyer. "I didn't know it until last Saturday. Bob told me if I'd make a dirt-low rent I could get it in advance, and up to Saturday I didn't even know who I was dickering with."

His aunt was menacing. "Henry Devereux, if you try to cheat me out of my rightful property by any such flim-flam as this, I ... I ... I don't know *what* I'll do!"

"Oh, don't, Aunt Mirabelle," said Henry compassionately. "You know I won't be a hog about it."

Some of the fury went out of her expression, and Mirabelle was on the verge of sniffing. "That's just exactly it. I *know* you won't. And the humiliation of it to *me*. When you know perfectly well if I'd--"

She stopped there, with her mouth wide open. They all waited, courteously, for her to speak, but Mirabelle was speechless. She was thinking partly of the past, and partly of the future, but chiefly of the present--the hideous, unnecessary present in which Mr. Mix was motoring serenely about the city, paying out good money to theatre managers. Mirabelle's money, not to be replaced. And then--she nearly collapsed!--the unspeakable humiliation of retracting her pledge to the national convention. Her pledge through Mr. Mix of twenty-five thousand dollars. How could she ever offer an excuse that would hold water? And how could she tell the truth? And to think of Mr. Mix's place in the community when it was shown--as inevitably it would be shown--that he had acted merely as a toy balloon, inflated by Mirabelle's vain expectations.

"Humph!" she said at length, and her voice was a hoarse, thin whisper. "Well--you just wait--'till I get hold of him!"

The door had closed behind her: the door had been closed behind Mr. Archer, whose kindly congratulations had been the more affecting because he had learned to love and respect the boy who had won them: Henry and his wife stood gazing into each other's eyes. He took a step forward and held out his arms, and she ran to him, and held tightly to him, and sobbed a little for a postscript.

He stroked her hair, gently. "Well--Archer says it's going to be about seven hundred thousand. And I deserve about thirty cents. And you're responsible for all the rest of it.... What do you want first? Those golden pheasants, or humming-birds' wings?"

She lifted her face. "Both--*because I won't have to cook 'em*. Oh, my dear, my dear, I've loved it, I've loved it, I've loved working and saving and being poor with you and everything--*b* but look at my h-hands, Henry, and *don't* laugh at me--but I'm going to have a cook! I'm going to have a cook! I'm going to have a cook!"

He kissed her hands.

"It's all over, isn't it? All over, and *we're* doing the shouting. No more wild men of Borneo, no more dishes to wash, no more Orpheum. Remember what Aunt Mirabelle said a year ago? She was dead right. Look! See the writing on the wall, baby?"

He swung her towards the door! she brushed away her tears, and beheld the writing. It was in large red letters, and what it said was very brief and very appropriate. It said: EXIT.

CHAPTER XVII

In the living-room of an unfashionable house on an unfashionable street, Mrs. Theodore Mix sat in stately importance at her desk, composing a vitriolic message to the unsympathetic world. As her husband entered, she glanced up at him with chronic disapproval; she was on the point of giving voice to it, not for any specific reason but on general principles, but Mr. Mix had learned something from experience, so his get-away was almost simultaneous with his entrance.

"Mail!" said Mr. Mix, and on the wing, he dropped it on his wife's desk, and went on out of the room.

The mail consisted of one letter; it contained the check which Henry sent her regularly, on the first of each month.

She sat back for a moment, and stared out at the unfashionable street. Mr. Mix was always urging her to live in a better neighbourhood, but with only her own two hundred and fifty a month, and four hundred more from Henry, she could hardly afford it,—certainly not while she gave so generously to the Reform League.

She thought of the big brick house on the hill and sighed profoundly. She would have made it a national shrine, and Henry—Henry was even worse than his uncle. He kept it full of people who were satisfied to squander the precious stuff of life by enjoying themselves. It made her sick, simply to think of Henry. People said he and Bob Standish were the two cleverest men that ever lived in town. Doubled the Starkweather business in two years. Directors of banks. Directors of the Associated Charities and trustees of the City Hospital. Humph! As if she didn't know Henry's capabilities. Just flippancy and monkey-tricks. And married to a girl who was a walking advertisement of exactly what every right-minded woman should revolt against. *That* girl to be the mother of children! Oh Lord, oh Lord, if Anna were a modern specimen, what would the *next* generation be?

She sighed again, and went back to the lecture she was composing. "The Influence of Dress on Modern Society." Suddenly, she cocked her head and sniffed. She rose cautiously, as one who is about to trail suspicion. She went to the side-window, and peered out. From a little grape-arbor on the lawn, there floated to her the unmistakable odour of tobacco—yes, and she could see a curling wisp of smoke.

"*Theodore!*"

A pause. "Yes, dear." Mr. Mix's voice had taken on, some months ago, a permanent quality of languor; and never, since the day that he was laughed out of politics, had he regained his former dignity and impressiveness.

"Is that *you*--smoking again?"

"Why--"

"*Are* you? Answer me."

"Why--yes, dear--I--"

"Come in here this minute."

Mr. Mix emerged from the arbor. "Yes, dear?"

She brandished her forefinger at him. "I *told* you what would happen next time I caught you. Not one single cent do you get out of *me* for many a long day, young man.... Come in here; I want you to listen to what I've written."

Mr. Mix's shoulders sagged, but he didn't stop to argue. "Yes, dear," he said, pacifically. "I'm coming."

THE END

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