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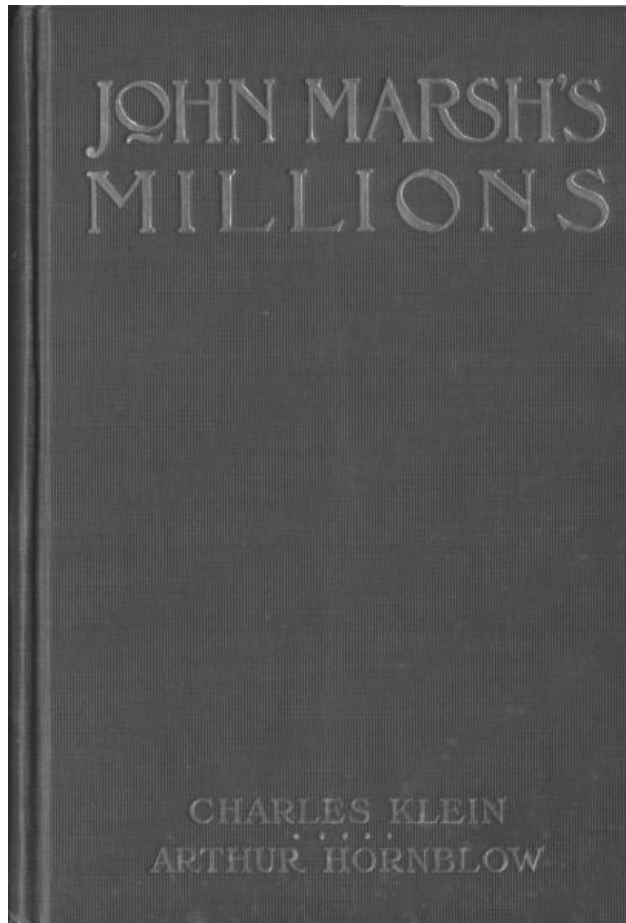
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOHN MARSH'S MILLIONS ***





**"ARE YOU AFRAID OF
YOURSELF?"**
Frontispiece. Page 233.

JOHN MARSH'S MILLIONS

A NOVEL

By

CHARLES KLEIN

AND

ARTHUR HORNBLow

Authors of the Novel "The Lion and the Mouse,"

"The Third Degree," etc.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY

SAMUEL CAHAN

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CHAPTER I.

When John Marsh, the steel man, died, there was considerable stir in the inner circles of New York society. And no wonder. The wealthy ironmaster's unexpected demise certainly created a most awkward situation. It meant nothing less than the social rehabilitation of a certain individual who, up to this time, had been openly snubbed, not to say deliberately "cut" by everybody in town. In other words, Society was compelled, figuratively speaking, to go through the humiliating and distasteful performance of eating crow. Circumstances alter cases. While the smart set was fully justified in making a brave show of virtuous indignation when one of its members so far forgot himself as to get kicked out of his club, it was only natural that the offending gentleman's peccadilloes were to be regarded in a more indulgent light when he suddenly fell heir to one of the biggest fortunes in the country.

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It was too bad about "Jimmy" Marsh. His reputation was unsavory and he deserved all of it. Total lack of moral principle combined with an indolent, shiftless disposition had given him a distorted outlook on things. All his life he had been good for nothing, and at the age of forty he found himself a nuisance to himself and everybody else. Yet he was not without a natural cunning which sometimes passed for smartness, but he often overreached himself and committed blunders of which a clever man would never be guilty. To put it plainly, Jimmy was crooked. Fond of a style of living which he was not able to afford and desperate for funds with which to gratify his expensive tastes, he had foolishly attempted to cheat at cards. His notions of honor and common decency had always been nebulous, and when one night, in a friendly game, he clumsily tried to deal himself an ace from the bottom of the deck, not even the fact that he was the brother and sole heir of one of the richest men in the United States could save him from ignominious expulsion.

The affair made a great noise at the time, and the newspapers were full of its scandalous details. But the public soon forgets, and as to the newspapers—they found other victims. Besides, Jimmy's prospects were too bright to permit of him being dropped from sight altogether. It was

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not forgotten that one day he would step into his brother's shoes and then Society, willy nilly, would have to do homage to his money.

This rich brother, by the way, was largely responsible for Jimmy's undoing. They were both—he and John—the sons of poor English people who immigrated to America five years after John's birth. The father was a journeyman baker and started a small business in Pittsburg. Two cousins of the same name, William and Henry, haberdashers by trade, had likewise settled and prospered in New Jersey. Fifteen years later the mother died in giving birth to another son. The elder boy, a taciturn, hard-working lad with a taste for figures, had found employment in the steel industry, then in its infancy, but growing with giant strides. As he acquired experience, his position was improved until, before long, he was known as one of the most expert steel workers in the iron region. Suddenly, dire calamity befell the little family. One fateful morning, while making his early rounds, the baker was run over and killed by a railroad train. It was a staggering blow, but John rose manfully to the emergency. Silent, serious, masterful, his brain teeming with ideas that would revolutionize the entire steel trade, he stoically buried his progenitor and despatched the orphaned Jimmy to school.

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The years passed. The discoveries of vast ore fields in Michigan and Wisconsin had made the United States the biggest producer of steel in the world. The pace set was terrific, orders poured in from all corners of the globe, plants were kept going night and day, a steady stream of gold flowed into the coffers of the delighted steelmakers who soon became millionaires over night. John Marsh had long since been a partner in the company to which he had remained loyal since boyhood, and in the orgy of profit sharing, he found himself with stock holdings representing millions.

James naturally shared in the good fortune. The hard-working John grudged nothing to the drone. He paid the boy's way through college and gave him a liberal allowance. When he was old enough and had sufficient schooling he'd put him in the steel business and make a man of him. But, unfortunately, Jimmy was not made of the same stern stuff as his brother. Expensive tastes and dubious acquaintances were about all that he acquired at the University. He gambled and drank and got hopelessly entangled in debt. John was not blind to his brother's faults, but, in a measure, he excused them. To the elder brother, plodding, methodical, sober, the hare-brained, irresponsible Jimmy was always "the kid." What was the use of taking him seriously? One day he'd get tired of making an ass of himself. So he paid his debts without complaint. One day Jimmy boldly demanded an increase in his allowance. John, still unruffled, shook his head. "No, kid," he said quietly, "you must manage with what I give you. When I'm gone you'll get it all." This was the first time that John had hinted at the disposition he had made of his fortune. Of course, it was only natural that an old bachelor should leave practically everything to his only brother, but this was the first intimation he had given of his intentions. Rendered almost speechless from emotion, Jimmy hurried to the money lenders and borrowed on "futures" to the limit.

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This was the real starting point of Jimmy's downward course. From now on he was unfitted for any serious effort. If he ever had any ambition he lost it now. He lived solely on "prospects." What was the use of exerting himself, he argued, when any day he might come in for millions? When he left Harvard—under a cloud, of course—John took him in the steel works. But Pittsburg's strenuous, nerve racking, smoky life did not appeal very strongly to a young man who thirsted for the more voluptuous joys of Broadway. He left for New York saying he would shift for himself, and John, secretly glad to be rid of him, gave him a handsome cheque and his godspeed.

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So well did Jimmy "shift" for himself that within a year he had squandered \$10,000 and was hopelessly involved in debt. Once more the patient John straightened matters out, and when Jimmy said he thought he could win out in Wall Street if only given the chance, he purchased for him a seat on the Stock Exchange. Two years later, as a result of certain stock jobbing operations, not entirely free from scandal, he was temporarily suspended from the floor, and later forced to sell his seat to satisfy clamoring creditors who threatened to put him in jail. But thanks to the good John's liberal allowance, he was still able to put on a respectable front and thus for years he merely drifted, at heart a crook, but living the life of a gentleman of leisure, awaiting patiently the day when he would come into "his own."

The coming inheritance had thus gradually grown to be an obsession. Night and day it occupied his thoughts. He could think and talk of nothing else. His associates mockingly called him "Inheritance Jim." For twenty-five long years he waited for his brother to die, and when, from time to time, John in his few and far-between letters casually remarked that he was enjoying excellent health, he took the news almost in the light of a personal injury.

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The years went on. The other cousins, William and Henry had died, each leaving a son. William's son, Peter Marsh, feeling within the spiritual call, became a Presbyterian minister at Rahway, and taking to himself a wife, succeeded in raising a numerous progeny on a very slender income. Henry's son, Thomas Marsh, followed his father's trade as haberdasher and barely managed to keep body and soul together. To these poor relatives, also, the dollars of "uncle" John proved an irresistible attraction. In order not to be forgotten, they wrote him affectionate letters, none of which received as much as an acknowledgment. Towards these impecunious cousins James Marsh assumed a patronizing, almost friendly, attitude. On divers occasions when his financial affairs became so critical that he had to negotiate a small loan without delay he had found even their slender savings useful. In return for these pecuniary services rendered he had not discouraged the hope which they often expressed that "uncle" John would remember them in his will. To serve his own ends he kept up the pleasant fiction that he was on the best of terms with

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his brother and that he would gladly use his influence in their interests.

As a matter of fact, nothing was further from the truth. He saw nothing of John. As the brothers grew older they drifted further apart. Months, years, passed without their seeing each other. When in urgent need of funds James made flying trips to Pittsburg, he never saw his brother anywhere but at his office. John never invited him to visit his home, a lonely place situated some miles out in the suburbs. Practically, the old man led the life of a recluse. At rare intervals he would write to his brother James, enclosing a cheque in answer to a begging letter, but otherwise he discouraged all attempts at intimacy. The old gentleman kept entirely to himself, growing more reserved and secretive about his affairs as the years passed. He saw absolutely no one and of recent years had spent six months out of the twelve in Europe. He might have been dead long ago for all that was seen of him.

But Jimmy did not worry. John's will was made, that he knew. Bascom Cooley, his own friend and lawyer, had drawn it up and witnessed its execution. He had it secure in his possession. If anything happened he would be informed of it at once. So there was nothing to worry about. All he had to do was to wait.

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Meantime Jimmy, feeling the need of a companion, took to himself a wife. The lady was the widow of a man named Chase, who had held high position in one of the big insurance companies. The public investigations came with their awkward disclosures, and Mr. Chase, unable to face the limelight of publicity, conveniently succumbed to heart failure, leaving to his relict a few thousand dollars and the responsibility of looking after an eighteen-year-old son—a slangy, flippantly inclined youth rejoicing in the euphonious name of Todhunter, but whom everyone, his cronies and creditors both, knew as "Tod." Mrs. Chase, a stout, vulgar-looking woman, with hair startlingly yellow and teeth obviously false, met Mr. James Marsh at a dinner one night, and when, between courses, the inevitable inheritance yarn was detailed to her by an obliging neighbor, it at once flashed upon the widow that here was a man whose acquaintance it might be worth her while to cultivate. She had still a little money left out of the wreck of the defunct Chase's estate, and this immediate cash asset, she shrewdly reflected, might prove attractive to a man known to live up to every cent of his income, but whose "prospects" were simply dazzling. That he had no money of his own was no serious obstacle. Under the circumstances they could afford to dip into her principal, and by the time that was exhausted, the event which they both so devoutly desired could not fail to have happened.

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The golden bait, thus adroitly hooked, soon caught the fish, and for the next year or two Mr. James Marsh had all the ready cash he needed. At the suggestion of the widow, who naturally was anxious to see in the flesh the mysterious brother on whose state of health so much depended, John was cordially invited to attend the wedding which was solemnized with much pomp at a fashionable Fifth Avenue Church. The wedding day came but no John. Not even by as much as a card did he extend his congratulations to the happy couple. The only members of the Marsh family present were Peter, the Presbyterian minister and his wife, from Rahway, and Thomas Marsh, the haberdasher and his wife, from Newark, while the genial Tod, a broad grin on his face, stood up for his mother.

The newly married pair took a showy house in West Seventy-second Street, and while the money lasted they lived in magnificent style. When it was gone they lived no less luxuriously, thanks to the unwilling coöperation of overconfident tradespeople. Mrs. Marsh felt that she could not get along without her motor car, her butler, and half a dozen useless maid servants. It cost money to entertain so lavishly and creditors were pressing, but her bridge parties could not be interfered with for such a trifling reason. At the pace they lived the few thousand dollars were soon exhausted, yet no matter. Even if the butcher, the baker, or the domestic servants were kept waiting for their money, the social prestige of the Marshes must be maintained.

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It was far from being smooth sailing. Jimmy's wits were taxed to the utmost to ward off creditors who grew more and more importunate in their demands. One day while he was down town trying to raise a loan, Mrs. Marsh was subjected to such a mortifying and humiliating experience that she feared she would never rally from the nervous shock it caused her. It was her regular day at home, and Henry, the butler, stiff in gold embroidered livery, was busy at the front door ushering in carriage arrivals. As already hinted, his mistress was long in arrears with her tradespeople, and being ever apprehensive of a court summons, she had given Henry implicit instructions to carefully scrutinize all comers and slam the heavy door in their faces on the slightest suspicion that the visitors were not all they appeared to be. Having served the best families for nearly thirty years, Henry was in a position to assure his employer that he was more than a match for the wiliest lawyer. Nor had he overestimated his powers. Loudest among the clamoring creditors was the milkman. His bill was formidable, and every effort to collect it had failed. He procured a summons, but it was found impossible to serve it. Every trick known to the thick-soled sleuths of the sheriff's office was thwarted by the vigilant and resourceful Henry.

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The worthy milkman suddenly conceived a bright idea. Among his customers was a young woman lawyer to whom he spoke about the matter. Properly indignant at the treatment to which he had been subjected she offered to help him. She was a novice at serving summonses, but possessed plenty of the quality so necessary in the courts known as "nerve." This modern Portia, after a preliminary survey of the premises which she was to take by storm, quickly determined upon a plan of action. Learning in the neighborhood that Mrs. Marsh was "at home" to her friends every Thursday afternoon, she decided to be one of the guests. Dressing herself in her best finery she took a hansom cab and drove to West Seventy-second Street, arriving at the Marsh residence

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simultaneously with a venerable old lady whom she politely assisted with her wraps. The old dame had no recollection of having seen the young woman before, but distrusting her own bad memory, concluded that she was one of Mrs. Marsh's younger friends whom she had forgotten, and thanked her profusely for her kind attentions. The two women approached the front door together. To the hawk-eyed butler, always on the alert, the young woman was a stranger, and, under ordinary circumstances, his suspicions might have been aroused, but seeing her chatting in the most cordial way with one of his mistress's oldest friends, he felt that any questioning on his part would be resented as unwarranted impertinence. Bowing low, therefore, he ushered the two ladies up the thickly carpeted stairs into the beautifully decorated reception rooms, which were already crowded with smartly dressed women. In the centre stood the amiable hostess, the conventional smile of welcome on her face, exchanging greetings with each arrival. When the new visitors were announced everyone turned, and Mrs. Marsh pranced amiably forward. Her venerable old friend she welcomed effusively, and then her eyes fell inquiringly on the stranger. The smile disappeared, a shadow darkened her face. Instinct told her something was wrong. Approaching the young woman she said with asperity:

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"I haven't the pleasure——"

"You're Mrs. Marsh, I believe," smiled the lawyer.

"Yes," stammered the other, "I'm Mrs. Marsh, but I haven't the pleasure——"

"Quite so," replied the young woman coolly. Quickly drawing a long, ominous-looking folded paper from her dress, she said archly and audibly:

"This is for you, Mrs. Marsh. I regret to serve a summons in this way, but your milkman has waited a long time, and all's fair in love and law."

The people standing about tittered, and there was an embarrassing silence. Mrs. Marsh, at first, wished the floor would open and swallow her up. Then her eyes flashed with fury. Waving the unwelcome visitor back out of reach of her guests' ears, she almost shouted:

"Get out of here, hussy! How dare you steal into anyone's house in this contemptible way? Out with you before I forget myself!"

The astonished and crestfallen butler opened wide the door, not daring to meet his irate mistress' eye, and the woman lawyer hastened back to her client to report success.

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Under the circumstances it was not surprising that this particular Thursday did not count among Mrs. Marsh's successful "At Homes." There was a chill in the air which everyone remarked, and one by one the visitors departed, each impatient to retail the good story elsewhere.

It was some time before Mrs. Marsh got over the shock, and from this time on her troubles seemed to multiply. They came thick and fast. Even Tod worried her. Tired of his fast companions, menaced with a curtailment of the financial supplies which had made his idle life possible, and hopeless under present home conditions of ever making a decent career for himself, her son rebelled and suddenly startled his mother by announcing his determination to go to work. He had been offered the agency of an automobile firm, the engagement including also a preliminary trip to Europe to negotiate for the representation of some foreign cars. There was no need to hesitate over such an offer as that. He was off to gay Paree! A week later he sailed, leaving his mother and stepfather to weather the financial storm as best they could.

Matters did not mend after his departure. Creditors became more insistent, subpoenas more numerous. Then one day, like a bolt from the blue, came the final catastrophe which sent the whole Marsh edifice tumbling like a house of cards. Something unexpectedly happened in Wall Street. Caught in a bad squeeze of the "shorts," involved in another shady transaction of a nature still more serious than the last scandal, Jimmy staggered home one night with ruin and worse staring him in the face. This time there was no way out possible. He could not raise a dollar, and Bascom Cooley, his lawyer and crony, the only man whose skill and influence could save him, was absent in Europe. It was the end of everything. He must either resign himself to prison stripes or blow his brains out.

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Affairs had reached this crisis in the Marsh household when late one evening a messenger boy brought to West Seventy-second Street the following cablegram:

"New York office notifies me Richard Marsh died suddenly in Pittsburg yesterday.
Am returning on the next steamer.

"BASCOM COOLEY."

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CHAPTER II.

"No—no, my boy—this is on me!" protested Mr. Cooley, drawing a wad of money from his vest pocket and carelessly tossing a hundred-franc note across the counter.

While the cockney bartender of the English Tavern in the Champs Elysées counted out the change, Tod, with an unsteady hand, raised to his lips the glass of foaming, sparkling *Clicquot*.

"Here's to Uncle Dick—bless him!"

"Amen!" responded Mr. Cooley fervently.

The regular frequenters of the place, jockeys, bookmakers, racing touts, and other persons of dubious appearance and pursuits who make up that queer riffraff of British sporting characters always found drifting about the French metropolis, either flush after recent winnings at Longchamps or out at elbow from an extraordinary run of ill luck—all these worthies nudged each other and grinned as they watched the two Americans. There was no doubt in everyone's mind as to the nationality of the strangers. Only Yankees could afford the luxury of opening "fizz" so early in the day. What the onlookers did not know, of course, was that an event of exceptional importance had brought the two Americans together on this particular morning and that Tod Chase and Bascom Cooley, the well-known New York lawyer, were celebrating an auspicious event by "setting 'em up." Otherwise there would be little excuse for loitering in the small, stuffy barroom, with its pungent odor of stale beer and atmosphere thick with tobacco smoke, when the call of the beautiful world without was so strong.

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It was a glorious Spring morning, one of those perfect days when Paris, decked in her loveliest raiment, is seen at her best. Under the shade of the fine oak trees lining the entire length of the noble avenue were dozens of buxom *nou-nous*, attractive in their neat caps and long streamer ribbons. They sat knitting and gossiping while their daintily dressed charges, happy and healthy, romped noisily in the bright sunshine. Out in the broad, immaculately clean roadway, a heavy three-horse omnibus *Porte Maillot-Hôtel de Ville* creaked its way up to the Place de l'Etoile.

Todhunter Chase was not a bad-looking boy. There was something about him which at once attracted the stranger. Small hours and cold bottles had spoiled his complexion somewhat, and the vernacular and usages of the Tenderloin had not improved his speech and manners. But people overlooked his foibles because of his intense good nature. Nothing could down that. Always smiling, always jolly, ever ready to go out of his way to oblige a friend, it was little wonder that he was popular. His features were well cut and his athletic, well-knit figure was well groomed. With his frank, engaging personality and more than average intelligence, there was no career in which he might not have done himself credit. But unfortunately for Tod, he was afflicted with matritis. In other words, his mother was solely to blame for his having reached the age of twenty-five without earning as much as the price of a celluloid collar button. Selfish and short sighted, as are many mothers with growing sons, the then Mrs. Chase had preferred to have her boy dangling at her skirts rather than see him prepare himself seriously to battle with the world. After leaving college without honors, he made a half-hearted effort to get something to do. He tried a dozen things and succeeded in none. Utterly unable to concentrate on any one thing he failed miserably in everything. Office routine he found irksome; discipline intolerable. So, for several years he just drifted, leading a lazy, irresponsible life that soon rendered him unfit for anything, more than gambling or carousing with his cronies. As he grew older he acquired more sense, but then it was too late. His mother at times worried about it, but more often took it philosophically. As long as the money held out, there was enough for her boy. There was plenty of time to think of his future. Tod was so popular that he would be sure to marry well. He would get some rich girl whose father would take him in as partner. Then he would find a position in life ready made. There was no hurry. Besides, would they not be rich themselves one day? Thus had Tod's career, also, been marred in a measure by the same dazzling "prospects" which had ruined his stepfather!

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He was weak and he had been foolish, yet at heart Tod was not a bad sort. A little wild, perhaps, as are most boys of his age and opportunities, but by no means a fool. Anyone who took him for lacking in gray matter would make a serious mistake. His moral sense was blunted and his environments were bad—that was all. The fundamentals were good and when a man's fundamentals are good his case is never quite hopeless.

Always in buoyant spirits, to-day Tod felt especially jubilant. Things certainly seemed to have changed for the better. He had been in Paris only two weeks, and he had already secured the American agency of two of the most important French automobile makers, and on top of this unlooked-for success had come the surprising news from home that John Marsh was dead at last. The event so long waited for had actually happened. Too much good fortune is bad for anyone, and for the last few hours Tod had been celebrating not wisely, but too well. His face was flushed and his speech thick as he went on:

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"The old gentleman must have been a decent sort to cash in just now. It couldn't have come at a better moment. Things at home were getting pretty queer. Jimmy will be simply tickled to death!"

His companion, a big, heavily built, coarse-looking man, considerably his senior in years, pursed his lips and nodded.

"I guess you're not sorry," he said dryly.

"Hang it! Cooley, why should I care?" cried Tod explosively. "He was nothing to me. I never even saw him. Yet—do you know—I sometimes felt a sneaking respect for the old man for the delicious way he snubbed Jimmy. No doubt he was disgusted with him long ago. You know he wouldn't see him or have anything to do with him. I guess he knew him better than any of us. Jimmy's the limit—there's no doubt of that. I'm no saint myself, but I know when to stop. The mater must have been wuzzy when she married him. She's had a peck of trouble with him—you've no idea! Of course this windfall puts everything right. I'd have given a couple of hundred to have seen

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Jimmy's face when he opened your cable."

Mr. Cooley smiled grimly.

"Yes—I guess he didn't sleep much that night. He's waited long enough."

"Waited!" ejaculated the other. "Why, he has thought of nothing else—sleeping or waking. If anything should happen to rob him of that inheritance I think it would kill him."

"Ain't much chance of that," replied the lawyer, puffing out his chest. "I drew up the will. When Bascom Cooley attends to a thing, it's likely to be for keeps. The will was witnessed and executed right in my presence, so there isn't any question about it. The will is now in our safe-deposit vaults. That is why I must go back immediately. Nothing can be done until I return. By the time I reach New York, the funeral will be over. Then we can read the will."

Bascom Cooley, who for many years had looked after the late John Marsh's interests, and to-day was one of Jimmy Marsh's closest cronies, was one of the most widely known criminal lawyers in the United States. His reputation was not of the best, but he was prosperous and the world forgives much to the successful man. Shrewd, utterly unprincipled, all kinds of questionable yet profitable legal business came his way, and thanks to a brilliant talent, and a domineering, blustering manner which intimidated judge and jury alike, he usually contrived to score a victory for his client. It is true that only the guilty went to him. Law breakers knew that if Bascom Cooley could not help them escape the consequences of their misdeeds no one else could. He was known to be a crooked lawyer. Corrupt practices, flagrant dishonesty, shameless perjury of which he had been guilty had often been hinted at, yet none dare attack him openly. His mysterious influence with the big political leaders made him a man to be feared. It was Cooley's boast that the law could not touch him. When it was seen that by the powerful influence behind him he could break policemen, smother indictments, muzzle the authorities, and make and unmake judges at will, the public began to believe him.

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He was born in New York City, of Irish parents. His father was a policeman who, thanks to political pull, was able to reach a captaincy. His salary and perquisites enabled him to give his son a better education than he himself had received, and when it came to the choosing of a career, Bascom decided on law. He was admitted to the Bar and began practice in the ninth ward where he had the advantage of his father's influence. A chip of the old block, he realized early in life the power of money. He resolved to be successful, no matter by what means, and with this determination constantly in mind it is not surprising that he soon became involved in all kinds of shady schemes, all looking to the fattening of his bank roll. In a single notorious real-estate deal—the purchase of land for the purpose of a public park—he robbed the city of nearly \$250,000. That is to say, it was shown that the price the city was compelled to pay for the land was exactly \$250,000 more than it was worth. Not that he himself got all the money. He did not expect that. More than half of the spoils in the gigantic, bare-faced steal, went to the men higher up, to those in the inner ring of boodle politicians, a shameless coterie of rascals who at once brought to bear all the power of the System to shield Bascom Cooley from prosecution and themselves from exposure and disgrace. Laughing at threats of disbarment, snapping his fingers at the hue and cry in the newspapers, Mr. Cooley went his way, stealing, perjuring himself, openly defying public opinion.

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The news of John Marsh's death was most welcome to Mr. Cooley. He was taking a vacation in Europe and enjoying the sights of Paris when his New York office notified him of what had occurred, and he cabled that he would return at once. For a long time the wily attorney had had his eye on the Marsh millions. Otherwise, how explain his close friendship for Jimmy Marsh? Such a poor, weak fool could have nothing in common with the famous lawyer whose brain teemed only with big schemes. If he tolerated Jimmy, and dined and wined him and got him elected at his club when no other club would admit him, it was with a purpose distinctly Machiavellian in view. When Jimmy's financial affairs reached an acute crisis it was always Mr. Cooley who obligingly bridged the chasm. Jimmy, as already hinted, had borrowed freely on his prospects. Cooley was nearly always the lender. Now the time had come to settle, and Mr. Cooley promised himself not only to get back his own, plus interest, but a substantial bonus besides. He knew a few things about Jimmy Marsh—things Jimmy would rather not have the world, and especially the yellow newspapers, know. And no doubt Jimmy would pay up like a man. The money had come at a most convenient time. He had some big deals on hand and needed cash badly. Things could not have turned out better. He would go back at once and get in touch with things. It was while he was hurrying from his hotel to go and secure his passage home by the first steamer that he stumbled across Tod, who cheerfully accepted his invitation to drink to the health of the inheritance.

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Tod, who had been silent for a few minutes, apparently lost in thought, suddenly blurted out:

"What gets me is that the old man left Jimmy any money at all! They never saw each other. The old man utterly disapproved of his brother's way of living, and had nothing to do with him."

"There was no one else to whom he could leave it—that's why," replied the lawyer. "John Marsh," he went on, "was a peculiar man. He was distant and reserved, I might say secretive—even with me, his legal adviser. No one knew the real workings of his mind. I drew up his will according to a rough draft, written by him."

"When was that?"

"Twenty-five years ago."

Tod gave vent to an expressive whistle.

"So Jimmy has been waiting twenty-five years?"

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"Yes," said the lawyer, "twenty-five years—the average span of human life."

"Suppose he has made another will since? Did Jimmy ever think of that?"

Mr. Cooley shrugged his shoulders.

"No—no danger of that. Why should he? If he had, wouldn't I know of it? I have always remained on the best of terms with the old gentleman. I have attended to other legal business for him, so if he did change his mind in regard to the disposition of his estate, why wouldn't he come to me? No, I don't think so. He kept aloof from his brother, but it's no more than he did from anyone else. The man was eccentric—peculiar—you must let it go at that."

"What was the old beggar worth? Have you any idea?"

"Twenty years ago he was several times a millionaire. What he has done with the money, how he has invested it, I can't say. But he was no spendthrift. There'll be enough to go round, I promise you that." Draining his glass, he added: "I suppose you'll give up this automobile business now, and go back and do some fancy figure skating on Broadway. There's more fun in that, eh?"

Tod shook his head.

"No—Cooley—you're wrong. Like everyone else, you think I'm crazy for money. But I'm not—honest to God! I've had my fling and I'm through. I'm sick of Broadway, its rotten men and painted women. I'm sick of that idle, stupid existence which stifles every decent impulse a fellow may have. It's always the same, the same crowd, the same drinks and stunts, the same old headache the next morning. I tell you I'm through with that sort of life. I believe I was intended for something better, and, by God, I'm going to make the effort! These last two weeks I've actually respected myself because I've succeeded in making my board bill. Let Jimmy and mater enjoy the money. I want none of it. I tell you I'm going to win out by myself. You see if I don't! Here—have another drink!"

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The lawyer laughed. This kind of talk from Tod was something entirely new. He wondered how much the champagne was responsible for it.

"Shall you go back to New York?" he asked.

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Tod carelessly. "I ought to go on general principles. I only came here on a brief visit."

"I sail to-morrow on the *Adriatic*," said the lawyer. "Come with me."

The young man shook his head.

"That's out of the question. I still have some business to attend to. I may go Saturday on the *Touraine*."

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"Oh, then you'll be right behind me. I'll let them know you're on the way home."

"Tell Jimmy not to have all the money spent before I get there," grinned Tod.

The lawyer made a move towards the door.

"Well— I must be off. It's late, and I've a lot to attend to. I have to go to the Palais-Royal first. Are you going my way?"

A moment later they were on the avenue hailing a cab. The *cocher*, aroused by the promise of an extra *pourboire*, drove off briskly in the direction of the Rue de Rivoli, and soon they were rolling smoothly along that street of wonderful arcades. Passing the gilded gates of the Tuileries gardens they soon came abreast of the Louvre. Tod glanced up at the gloomy, time-discolored walls.

"That's one place I must take in before I leave Paris. Not that I know one picture from another. Ever been there?"

Mr. Cooley gave a snort of disapproval.

"Naw," he grunted. "I've no time to spend in sepulchres. I prefer the Bal Tabarin myself."

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CHAPTER III.

Among the extraordinary attractions which makes Paris the show place of Europe, the historic Palace of the Louvre possesses, curiously enough, the least drawing power of any. Its popularity, from the tourist viewpoint, at least, certainly falls far short of that enjoyed by the Moulin Rouge. In other words, the Louvre, vast repository as it is of the art wealth of the world, would seem to contain little attraction for the multitude. The annual picture expositions in the Champs Elysées

are always crowded to suffocation, especially on free days, showing that the common people are not wholly indifferent to art, but for some reason which has never been satisfactorily explained, the celebrated museum, the one-time residence of the Kings of France, with all its historic memories, its priceless pictures and endless rooms filled with sculptures and antiquities is treated with indifference and neglect. The *blasé* Parisian takes no interest in it, because it is at his very door. If he loves pictures, he prefers the annual *Salon* where he regales on the latest conceptions of the various modern schools. To him, the Louvre belongs to the past, in common with the Sorbonne, the Pantheon, Notre Dame, and other public monuments which constitute the city's pride.

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To-day the Louvre recruits its visitors chiefly from provincial folk and foreigners. Cook's tourists, open-mouthed, heavy-booted, and breathless, rush headlong through the rooms, their feet resounding noisily on the highly polished parquet floors, slippery as ice and shining like mirrors, rudely disturbing the almost religious silence of the deserted galleries. Like a flock of stupid sheep driven by a hoarse-voiced shepherd who acts as official guide, they stumble from room to room, following the long, puzzling labyrinth of corridors, understanding nothing of the stereotyped explanations shouted at them, merely glancing at and quite indifferent to, the art wealth of the centuries which looks disdainfully down upon them from every side. Attendants in uniform, a cocked hat worn jauntily over their left ear, an expression of utter weariness on their stolid, soldier-like faces, walk listlessly up and down with measured tread, secretly despising these foreign barbarians who display so little interest in the great masters, watching with eagle eye that one of the vandals does not stick his umbrella through a priceless Rembrandt or Correggio.

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Here and there, secluded in distant corners, sitting or standing near favorite pictures, which they have come to love as though they were their own, are the true art lovers, the copyists, who spend weeks, months, sometimes years in futile attempts to transfer to modern canvas the wonderful transparent coloring of a Tintoretto, a da Vinci or a Raphael. They are of both sexes. Some are old and others are young. One is a venerable old man, with long, snow-white hair and patriarchal beard, who for half a century has earned a scant living copying the masters. Others are neatly dressed, slim-looking girls—art students of all nations—timidly trying to reproduce works whose fame has rung around the world. Monday is the copyists' favorite day, for then the great Museum is closed to the general public, and by special permission the artists have the huge palace and its precious contents all to themselves. They are not annoyed by the crowding and rude staring of thoughtless strangers. Bent over their easels, they are alone in the great palace, amid silence as heavy and impressive as that in a church.

Perched on top of a high stool, her fingers skillfully, yet delicately plying the brush, a young woman sat copying one of Raphael's Madonnas. The picture showed the Virgin, radiant and beatified, holding the chubby Infant Jesus, while Joseph, slightly in the background, looks benignly on. The coloring in the original was wonderful. The transparent blue of Mary's gown, the living flesh tints of both mother and Child were well-nigh unattainable with modern pigments, and the young artist, descending from the stool to get a better perspective, made a gesture of discouragement as she realized how far her own work fell short.

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She was a tall, striking-looking brunette with large dark eyes and classic features crowned by a mass of black hair, carelessly yet not unbecomingly arranged. Her girlish, slender figure suggested youth, while the delicate features and a broad intellectual forehead indicated refinement and more than average intelligence. Dressed in deep mourning, the sombre garments emphasized still more sharply the extreme pallor of her face. Her eyes were red as if from recent weeping. Just now, however, her thoughts were concentrated on the important work on hand, and so engrossed was she in her painting that she did not hear a man's approaching footsteps. He was close up to her before she was aware of his proximity.

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"Well, Paula," he called out in stentorian tones, "how is it going?"

Startled, the young girl turned quickly. When she saw who it was, her face broke into a smile.

"Oh, Mr. Ricaby, how you frightened me! I did not hear you coming. These galleries are so lonely that even one's friends scare one." Pointing to the canvas resting on the easel in front of her, she exclaimed gleefully: "See how hard I've been working!"

The newcomer, a smooth-faced man of forty with whitening hair and kind gray eyes, smiled indulgently as he silently noted the morning's progress. Yet his attention was not given exclusively to the picture. By the glance he gave the canvas and the way he looked at the artist, a keen observer might have guessed which he admired most. That he was in love with the girl was plain enough on the circumstantial evidence alone, nor was it less clear that either she was ignorant of his feelings, or did not care. True, he was old enough to be her father. To her, he was a good friend, nothing more. Long ago he had realized this, and the love words on his lips had always died away before they were spoken. He suffered in silence. When a man of forty loves for the first time—it hurts.

Leon Ricaby was intended for the church. His personality as well as his training made that his natural vocation. His pale, ascetic-looking face, with its spiritual, thoughtful expression gave him an appearance quite clerical, while his rich and resonant voice, and grave, deliberate enunciation constantly suggested pulpit eloquence. Even as a boy he was serious and studious, and as he approached manhood his mind became filled with noble ideas regarding the uplifting of mankind. He became an idealist, and, not content with mere words, carried his theories into the New York

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slums, doing more than his share in the work of rescuing the degraded and unfortunate. He felt within a call to the ministry, and, on taking holy orders, had entered upon his duties with all the impassioned fervor of a zealot. To established dogmas he paid little heed. Christ was his Church. He tried to model his own life after that of the humble Nazarene. But he soon realized the impossibility of leading a consistent Christ-like life amid twentieth-century conditions. He found no trace of Christ anywhere. Within the Church itself there was not only an unholy traffic in preferments, but he found his fellow clergy, curates, rectors, bishops at war among themselves, self-seeking, greedy for power and money. The men and women in his congregations were envious, selfish, malicious, hypocritical. It made him sick at heart, and when he found that he could no longer reconcile the inconsistencies of spiritual truths to his intellectual point of view, he left the Church and took up the study of law. Admitted to the Bar, he began to practice in New York, but only with indifferent success. In this career, also, his conscience proved a stumbling block. He soon discovered that men employed him not to teach them how to obey the law, but how to evade it. Again he rebelled. He refused cases that did violence to his principles no matter how profitable they might be. He declined to defend law breakers whom he knew to be guilty. Those persons of whose innocence he was assured, he would defend with all the energy and skill at his command, giving his services gratuitously to those who could not afford to pay, and in the court-room his outbursts of eloquence seldom failed to convince the jury. Thus for years he plodded on according to his conscience. He was not rich. Such rare triumphs as he scored in the courts could not make him wealthy. A long spell of hard work had caused a breakdown in his health, and on his physician's advice he had taken a trip to Europe. In Paris he had run across Paula Marsh whose acquaintance he had made in America.

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He had first met her when she was doing Settlement work in New York's Ghetto. A consistent altruist, even after he began to practice law, he did not lose his interest in the splendid organizations which seek to improve the conditions of the poor. He found Paula the leader of a group of ardent young women—all girls of easy circumstances, yet willing to forego social pleasures, and spend their days in congested districts, visiting filthy tenements reeking with disease-laden air, in order to alleviate human suffering and bring a ray of comfort to unfortunates who had almost abandoned hope. This, mused the lawyer, was true Christianity. He found that Paula had convictions and ideas which were in sympathy with his own views and this naturally drew them together. As the intimacy grew Leon Ricaby began to nourish in his heart the hope that one day he could make Paula his wife, but the wish thus far, at least, had found no response in his companion. She enjoyed the society of this man who had struggled and suffered, whose ideals had been shattered. She admired him for his moral courage in living up to his principles, but that he expected she might ever be more to him than a friend had never for an instant entered her thoughts. A good friend he certainly had been. When her mother died he alone consoled her in her sorrow, and now that this new crisis had arisen in her life—the sudden death of her father, necessitating her immediate return to America—he stood ready to assist her again with his advice and protection.

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"Well—where have you been all morning?" she asked lightly.

"Running all over Paris," he answered. "I've seen the house agent and arranged for the cancellation of the lease of your apartment. I've been to the steamship office and booked our passages. We sail on the *Touraine* next Saturday."

Paula dropped her palette and looked up in consternation.

"Next Saturday—the day after to-morrow?" she exclaimed. "It's impossible! It will take another fortnight to finish this picture."

Mr. Ricaby shook his head.

"Then the picture must remain unfinished," he said impatiently. "We must sail Saturday." Changing his tone, he went on almost coaxingly: "Surely, Paula, you realize what is at stake! There is no time to be lost. The cable announcing your father's death reached you five days ago. According to his instructions the old will was not to be opened until three weeks after his demise. That will give us just time to reach New York before the old will is offered for probate. Don't you see the danger of delay? A large fortune awaits you. If you don't go to America and claim it, you may lose it all. Can't you be ready?"

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The girl's pale face flushed with anger. Hotly she said:

"I can't go until my work is done. You lawyers are all alike—only the material, sordid things of life have any weight with you. I think more of my work than of all the money in the world—you know that. Why must I go to America? To be compelled to meet and be pleasant to relatives who at this moment are unaware of my very existence, and who will have every reason to detest me and consider me an interloper. I hate America. What has America ever done for me? It robbed me all these years of a father who, had he seen more of his only child, might have learned to love me. Its severe climate killed my mother, and, when she went, I was alone—without even a friend."

"Have you forgotten me?" he interrupted quietly.

Quick to remark the note of reproach in his voice, she held out her hand:

"Forgive me," she murmured. "It is most ungrateful of me to talk like that. Yes—you are indeed my friend. I shall never be able to repay all that you have done for me. Forgive me. This sudden terrible news from America has unnerved me. I'm all unstrung. Don't mind what I say. I'll go to

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New York if you think it necessary, but my work—what of my work?"

"Your work?" he echoed gravely. "Haven't you other work left undone in New York? Work more important than that you are now doing?"

"What work?"

"Your Settlement work—have you forgotten those poor people in the slums who each day looked forward to your coming as if you were an angel sent from Heaven to dry their tears and bid them not despair? Has it not occurred to you during these past few days what God might wish you to do with the large fortune your father has left you? You are so different to most women. You are not vain, selfish, preoccupied only with foolish, trivial pleasures. At least I think you are not. I like to imagine that you are one of those noble women who would not hesitate to devote her life, her fortune, to the cause of suffering humanity. Think what good you might do with your inheritance. Paula—surely you realize that this is the opportunity of your life!"

He spoke eloquently, pleadingly, his resonant voice resounding rich and mellow through the empty corridors. As the girl listened, her face grew thoughtful. She clasped and unclasped her hands nervously. Her large, luminous eyes shone with a new light. Rapidly, spasmodically, with growing exaltation, she replied:

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"Yes—yes—you are right. I had not thought of that. My work is there—not here. We will go at once—at once. I'll start packing immediately."

Mr. Ricaby smiled.

"That's the way to talk," he said cheerily. "You see I knew you better than you knew yourself. Of course, it won't be altogether plane sailing. You must be prepared for——"

He hesitated.

"Prepared for what?" she demanded, looking at him curiously.

"Well, you see, you'll have to meet your relatives, and, as they are totally ignorant of your very existence, your sudden appearance will be a shock to them, especially to your Uncle James who, during all these years, has come to look upon the money as his own."

"Poor Uncle James!" she murmured. "I'm so sorry."

"Don't waste any sympathy on him. He isn't worth it," smiled the lawyer. "Your uncle, I'm sorry to say, does not enjoy a very good reputation in New York. His brother knew his character and would have nothing to do with him. Your father kept his marriage a secret from him and rather than destroy the old will, in which he had left James everything, he made a new one leaving everything to you."

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Paula turned away in order to hide the tears that filled her eyes.

"Poor father," she murmured. "I would rather have had his love than his money."

A lump rose in the lawyer's throat, and, the better to conceal his feelings, he suddenly became interested in the surrounding paintings. His heart went out to this orphaned girl. Practically she stood alone in the world to fight her battles. He realized the probability of the later will being fiercely contested. He thought with forebodings of the impending and long drawn-out legal battle, of all the insults that the disappointed James Marsh and his family would heap upon this defenceless girl—their hints of illegitimacy and other unscrupulous methods of attack, all of which would distress and humiliate a delicate and sensitive girl. If she knew what was in store for her, perhaps she would hesitate. But she would not fight the battle alone as long as he was able to champion her cause. He would see that her rights were fully protected.

Taking up her palette and brushes Paula went on with her painting. Quietly she said:

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"Very well, Mr. Ricaby. You know best. We will sail on Saturday."

"That's a sensible girl! I came to take you to luncheon. It's just twelve o'clock. Can you come?"

She pointed at the canvas.

"I have still a little to finish. Then I'm done for the day. I can't work in the afternoon—the light is not good. Couldn't you make it half an hour later?"

"Certainly. That will give me time to go to the American Express office. I must see them about shipping your baggage. I'll come back for you in half an hour."

He lifted his hat and went away.

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CHAPTER IV.

The sound of the lawyer's retreating footsteps died away in the distance. Once more a heavy stillness settled down over the gallery. Left to herself, the young girl resumed working with increased vigor. As her brushes moved rapidly, touching places here and there, now seeking

fresh color on the palette, now making some spot on the rapidly progressing canvas glow with rich tints, her movements gradually grew more or less mechanical. While her hand kept busy, her thoughts were elsewhere.

She was sorry to leave Paris. Much that she held dear, her friends, the bohemian student life which she loved, she must now give up forever. A new world, new acquaintances claimed her. Yes, Mr. Ricaby was right. It was her duty to go back and do good with the fortune which fate had sent her. She would seek happiness by making others happy. She would use the money left by her father to alleviate the sufferings of the unfortunate. She would build model tenements, endow hospitals and homes for orphaned and crippled children. She would make that her life work. Her face flushed with pleasure as she planned out all that she could do. Mr. Ricaby should be her legal adviser. He would tell her how to invest her fortune to best advantage, so she might do all the good possible. It would reconcile her to leaving Paris if she could devote her life to trying to solve the social problem.

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Her thoughts reverted to her childhood days in America. She had a dim recollection of living in a great gloomy house in the outskirts of an ugly, smoky city. At night when she went to bed she could see in the distance tall chimneys belching flame, terrifying tongues of flame that reached almost to the sky. They lived very quietly and saw no one. Her father, reserved and uncommunicative, discouraged callers, and her mother, a French woman, not understanding the language very well, made no acquaintances among her neighbors. Then she went to the convent school where she was educated, and after that they moved to Paris and made a long stay with relatives of her mother. On the return to America they lived quietly for a time in New York, seeing absolutely no one, and it was at this period that she became seriously interested in Settlement work.

She wondered why her father had always insisted on keeping his marriage secret. It was not because he was ashamed of her mother, who came of a distinguished family. He must have been fond of her in his undemonstrative way, for he cried bitterly when she died. For some time he seemed to find comfort in his daughter's companionship, but little by little the man's eccentricities estranged them. Owing to his frequent absences she saw less and less of him until, at last, she asked to be allowed to return to Paris to study art. He readily acquiesced and provided her with a comfortable allowance. To their friend, Leon Ricaby, to whom he handed a long envelope, he had said in her hearing: "This, Mr. Ricaby, contains my last will. I have named you as executor. I have left everything to Paula. If anything happens to me, look after my little girl. Another will, executed years ago, in my brother's favor, is in existence. For reasons of my own I do not wish to destroy that will. It would lead to explanations and unpleasantness I would rather avoid. But this new will post-dates the old one. This is the only valid will." That was only six months ago, and now he, too, was gone.

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Thus absorbed in these reflections, Paula did not notice how dangerously her stool tilted on the treacherous, highly polished parquet floor. There was a little spot high up on the canvas which she wanted to reach, so, slightly elevating herself, she leaned forward, palette in one hand, brush extended in the other. Suddenly the stool slipped backwards and she was thrown heavily against the easel which went crashing to the ground, the picture, palette, paint box, and brushes being hurled in all directions. It was all over before she had time to cry out, and the next instant she found herself sitting unceremoniously on the floor in the midst of all the débris.

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"Gee! That was a tumble! Not hurt, are you?" exclaimed a man's voice in English.

Paula looked up in amazement. She had heard no footsteps and had no idea that anyone was near. Standing looking down at her, his face trying to suppress a grin, was a young man of about twenty-five. He was rather loudly dressed in a check lounging suit and red tie, and as much by his manner as by his clean-shaven face and clothes she took him for a fellow countryman. "Just like an American's bad breeding to laugh at a woman's misfortune," was her inward indignant comment.

Lifting his hat, he extended his hand to assist her to rise.

"Lucky I happened along, eh?" he grinned.

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Paula carefully stretched out her arms to make sure that no bones were broken.

"You didn't prevent my fall," she said ruefully.

"No," he laughed, "but it's given me an excuse to make the acquaintance of a pretty girl."

She tried to look displeased and dignified, but the stranger's impudence and breezy familiarity amused her. He was a clean-cut, rather good-looking boy, and his laugh was not only contagious but positively refreshing after Mr. Ricaby's depressing conversation and funereal countenance.

"How did you know that I understood English?" she inquired.

Pointing to a copy of *Galignani's Messenger* in which her palette and brushes had been wrapped, he said with a chuckle:

"I saw that—jumped at conclusions—that's all. I'd make good as a Sherlock Holmes, eh, what? Besides, don't you suppose I can spot an American girl when I see one?"

"I'm only half American," she answered, surprised to find herself conversing so glibly with a

perfect stranger. "My mother was French. My father was an American."

Noticing that she spoke in the past tense and remarking her mourning dress, he surmised that her parents were dead. She interested him, and it was more sympathy than idle curiosity that prompted the query: [Pg 55]

"Where do you live—New York?"

She shook her head.

"No, I live here, or, rather, have done so until quite recently. I'm going to America next Saturday—to live there for good."

"Next Saturday!" he cried, in surprise. "Say, that's odd! I'm going on the *Touraine* myself!"

"The *Touraine*—yes—I think that's the name of the boat." Almost apologetically she added: "You see I haven't travelled very much." Looking at him more closely, she inquired:

"You are an American?"

He grinned, showing fine white teeth.

"I try to be. Greatest country on earth. My name's Todhunter Chase—'Tod' for short you know. Everyone calls me Tod. It's hard to be dignified with such a name, ain't it?"

Suddenly the girl caught sight of her painting which, hurled a dozen paces away, was lying face down in the dust.

"Oh, my picture!" she exclaimed anxiously. "I do hope it's not damaged!"

She started forward to pick it up, but Tod, by a quick jump, got there before her. [Pg 56]

"No damage done!" he cried triumphantly. With a careless laugh he added: "Anyhow, it's only a picture."

"Only a picture!" she exclaimed indignantly as she clasped the precious canvas to her breast. "Don't you love what is your own? I've worked six long months over it. I wouldn't have anything happen to it for anything in the world. Don't you like pictures?"

He gave a broad grin as he answered:

"Pictures? I'm crazy for 'em—especially the kind engraved on a \$500 U. S. Treasury note. I'm perfectly dippy over those."

"Dippy? What's that?" she asked, puzzled.

"Oh—you're not familiar with Broadway slang, are you? Well—'dippy' is most expressive and up to date. It means that one's joy over a certain thing is so keen that the mental faculties are put temporarily out of gear."

She laughed heartily. He was certainly droll, this American. He made her laugh and that in itself was a novel sensation. As she packed up her things, she asked:

"What is your life work?"

"My what?" he gasped.

"Your work. What is your occupation?"

"Oh, you mean what I do for a living?" Puffing out his chest he went on proudly: "I'm in the automobile business, and I'm a cracker jack at it, too. Only been in it a month, but I guess I've made good all right." [Pg 57]

She smiled at his unblushing self-conceit.

"Only been at it a month?" she echoed. "Why, what did you do before that?"

The question seemed to embarrass him.

"Oh, I worked hard enough," he replied carelessly. "I got up at noon, had breakfast, played golf or took a spin in the machine, ran in to the club, dressed for dinner, ate, went to a show, back to clubs, played poker till three A. M., back home. Same old thing week in, week out, all through the season. Isn't that hard work?"

"Hard work—yes," she answered quietly. "I should think that very hard work if I had to do it. But I don't think it is exactly the kind of work a self-respecting man should do." Looking him straight in the face, she added: "At least, not the kind of man I would care to know——"

Tod shuffled his feet as if ill at ease. Under the scrutiny of her calm gaze he seemed to lose some of his self-assurance.

"You're dead right!" he stammered nervously. "But what can a fellow do? When one's in a certain set, one has to live as everyone else does." Summoning up courage, he demanded boldly: "If you lived in New York and knew everybody, wouldn't you like to have a jolly good time?" [Pg 58]

She shook her head.

"I should live as I want to live," she answered calmly. "My happiness would consist in making others happy. If I were rich, I would go among the poor and try to lighten the burdens of those less fortunate than I."

He laughed scornfully.

"Oh, you're one of those freak suffragettes—a socialist!"

She smiled as she replied:

"I am a Christian—a socialist if you will." There was an amused expression on her face as she asked: "What do you know of socialism?"

"Oh, it's a lot of rot," he retorted. "We see 'em in New York—lazy, wild-eyed guys with dirty faces and long hair, blowing off hot air on Union Square, organizing strikes, throwing bombs, and raising Cain generally. They're usually bums out of a job. As long as they've no money they're rabid socialists; directly they make a little money, they become capitalists. They're fakirs, all right!"

Paula shook her head. Gravely she said:

"I'm afraid you've got the wrong idea altogether. Socialism is beautiful. It is the one thing that will save mankind from decadence and gradual extinction. I am a socialist because I am a Christian. Christ loved the poor and the lowly. I try to follow in His footsteps."

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Tod looked at her in amazement. The kind of girls he was accustomed to associate with talked quite differently. Unconsciously his manner grew more respectful.

"So you're sailing on the *Touraine*! Say, isn't that a queer coincidence? Awfully nice, though. I'll see you on board, won't I? That'll be jolly." He stopped and hesitated. Then looking at her sheepishly, he said with a grin: "Now, I've told you my name, may I know yours? Rather informal introduction, what?"

Paula hesitated. Was it altogether proper to talk to a stranger in this way? But he seemed such a nice, ingenuous young man. Surely there could be no great harm in it. Before, however, she could reply, her ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and at the same instant she heard the big church clock outside striking the half hour. It was Mr. Ricaby returning to take her to lunch. In another moment the lawyer appeared. As he came up he stopped short, as if surprised to find her conversing with a total stranger. Puzzled, he stared from one to the other. Paula quickly explained:

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"I had a little mishap. I fell from the stool and this gentleman very kindly came to my assistance." Introducing the two men, she said: "Mr. Leon Ricaby—Mr. Todhunter Chase."

Tod nodded and Mr. Ricaby bowed stiffly. Feeling that he was now in the way, the younger man turned to go. Removing his hat, he asked again:

"Since we're to be fellow passengers on the *Touraine*, may I not have the pleasure of knowing the name of the lady to whom I was able to be of some assistance?"

Mr. Ricaby frowned disapproval, but Paula, now safely chaperoned, hesitated no longer. Promptly she said:

"My name is Paula Marsh."

Tod could not suppress a start of surprise.

"Marsh!" he echoed. "By Jove! that's another odd coincidence! My stepfather's name is Marsh—Mr. James Marsh, of West Seventy-second Street."

It was now Mr. Ricaby's turn to be astonished.

"Then you are——?" he cried.

"I'm Tod Chase. My mother married Jimmy Marsh. I'm going back home to take part in a family jollification. You know his brother just died, and Jimmy has come in for a windfall."

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Paula, who was busy packing her things, had not heard, but Mr. Ricaby quickly gave the young man a significant nudge.

"Hush!" he said. "You're speaking of her father!"

Tod gave a gasp.

"Her father!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—her father," said the lawyer quietly. "John Marsh married her mother—a Frenchwoman—twenty-two years ago. He kept the marriage secret."

Tod gave vent to a low but expressive whistle.

"Then his money——?" he gasped.

"Goes to his daughter, of course," answered the lawyer, with studied calmness.

"But the will——" exclaimed the other. "The will which Bascom Cooley, Jimmy's lawyer, has had in his possession all these years——?"

"Absolutely valueless," replied Mr. Ricaby coolly. "Before he died John Marsh made a new will. I have it safe in my own keeping. We are going to New York to offer it for probate."

This sudden and unexpected revelation was too much for Tod. Rendered speechless, he just stared at the lawyer. Mr. Ricaby continued amiably:

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"We sail Saturday. I understand that you are going on the same boat. I'm very glad to have met you, Mr. Chase. It is likely that we shall see a good deal of each other in New York. Miss Marsh and I are just going out to get a bite of lunch. Won't you join us?"

The young man stammered his thanks.

"With pleasure—I——"

Paula went out with Mr. Ricaby close behind. As Tod followed he again whistled to himself significantly:

"Well, I'm d——d! What will Jimmy say to this?"

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CHAPTER V.

The cablegram from Paris had effected a startling transformation in Jimmy Marsh. He was a changed man. No longer the cringing, furtive-eyed bankrupt, ever dodging his creditors, he arose masterfully to the new situation created by the sudden turn in his fortunes. From the hopeless depths of moral and financial ruin the news of his brother's death suddenly raised him to the dollar-marked heights of social prestige and great wealth. At last his long years of waiting were rewarded. John was dead! He was the possessor of millions! All the sweets and power which gold can buy were now his! It seemed too good to be true, and he pinched himself to make sure that it was not all a dream. The excitement and nervous strain proved more than he could bear. Locked in his own room he laughed hysterically and wept aloud—tears of gratitude and joy. His brother was dead! Now, for the first time he could begin to live. He was only fifty. He might still enjoy twenty years more.

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The news rushed through the town like a Kansas cyclone. It was the one topic of conversation in clubs, brokers' offices, theatre lobbies, barrooms, and hotel corridors. Jimmy Marsh a millionaire, a power in Wall Street, a personage to be reckoned with! It sounded funny, yet there it was. Men suddenly remembered that Jimmy was not such a bad sort after all, and all day long Mrs. Marsh was kept busy at the telephone answering calls from officious acquaintances who suddenly became very friendly and interested.

Recognizing the propriety of not exhibiting too much joy in public and having little sense of proportion, Jimmy went to the other extreme in his anxiety to observe the conventions. He rushed into violent mourning, and, not content with attiring himself and wife in sombre hue, even to the ridiculous extent of having black borders on his handkerchiefs which he used conspicuously on every possible occasion, he gave peremptory orders that everyone in his household, his chauffeur, his footman, his cook and maids should all be decked in crape. The blinds of the West Seventy-second Street home were tightly drawn and the servants instructed to walk on tiptoe and talk in whispers as in a house of death. Pictures and statuary were covered with black drapery, and a large oil-painting of John Marsh, conspicuous over the mantelpiece in the reception room was likewise covered with crape. These certain outward signs comforted Jimmy. Every day and every hour they convinced him that the death of his brother was not a chimera of his disordered brain, but something very real indeed. This sensation, this assurance he needed to complete his happiness.

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The funeral, which was a very quiet affair, took place unostentatiously with Mr. and Mrs. James Marsh as chief mourners. The only others who attended were some of John Marsh's business associates and the Jersey cousins who hurried respectively from Newark and Rahway in the eager expectation that the will would be read on the return from the cemetery. In this, however, they were sadly disappointed. The representative of Bascom Cooley, attorney for the Marsh estate, said that the box containing the will could not be opened until the return from Europe of Mr. Cooley. He had been cabled for and doubtless would return immediately. In any case, nothing could be done now as Mr. Marsh had expressly stipulated that the will should not be opened for three weeks after his death. Jimmy secretly fumed at this delay, but there was nothing to do but wait. He had waited so long that he could afford to wait a little longer.

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The days went by with exasperating slowness. It was all Mr. and Mrs. Marsh could do to conceal their growing impatience, and, as the time approached for the formal reading of the will, they each grew more and more agitated. Mr. Cooley, full of importance, arrived from Europe a few days after the funeral. He at once went into prolonged secret sessions with Jimmy, and, when he emerged, his face wore an expression of satisfaction not seen there in a long time. Tod, he announced, was coming by the next steamer.

Jimmy decided to do things in as dramatic and ostentatious a way as possible. He arranged to

have the will opened in the library in the presence of the entire family solemnly assembled. In a self-composed, dignified manner he would request Mr. Cooley to read his brother's testament while he, himself, bowed deep in grief in a chair would show proper sorrow by burying his face in his deep black-bordered handkerchief, and listen with thumping heart to the solemn message from the dead which was to make him one of the richest men in New York. The Jersey cousins were invited, of course. He had to invite them. He did not know to what extent, if at all, his brother had remembered them, but it was policy not to ignore them, especially after the little pecuniary services they had rendered. Besides, he did not wish to furnish his relations with any excuse to contest the will. He had nothing to hide. He wanted the whole world to know exactly what the will said and just how his brother had left him the money.

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At length the great day arrived. Jimmy, so arrayed in black from head to foot that he looked like an animated raven, wandered from room to room, instructing the new butler, bossing the other servants, admonishing them to move about noiselessly, rehearsing Mrs. Marsh on the demeanor she must observe throughout the proceedings, arranging the *mise-en-scène* in the library where the will would be read. Bascom Cooley, he planned, would take his seat in a dignified manner at the end of the long library table. He and Mrs. Marsh, together with Tod, whose arrival was expected any moment, would take seats farther down the board. The Jersey cousins would be ushered to places slightly in the background. Overhead, dominating the scene, was the oil-painting of John Marsh, swathed in crape.

For the twentieth time, Jimmy, watch in hand, had gone to the front parlor window and drawn aside the blinds to see if Mr. Cooley was coming with the strong box containing the will.

"Tod ought to be here by this time," said Mrs. Marsh anxiously, her eye on the clock. "It is eleven o'clock. The *Touraine* docked at nine. I ought to have gone to meet him."

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"Nonsense!" exclaimed her husband. "He's big enough to look after himself. I sent the motor to the French line dock. He'll be here any moment."

The front door bell rang violently.

"Here he is now!" cried Mrs. Marsh, hurrying forward.

There was the shuffle of many feet and the sound of strange voices in the hall. The next instant the curtains were thrown open by the butler, and a number of people, men and women, dressed in black, entered, smiling and bowing. They were the country cousins, with their sons and daughters, all come to hear the will read. They slouched in one after the other, sheepish-looking and awkward. James and his wife greeted them politely yet distantly. It was impolitic to be over cordial with people who could never be anything but undesirable relations.

The newcomers sat down gingerly on the heavy gilt chairs. Unaccustomed to such fine surroundings, they were visibly nervous and ill at ease. Their new clothes did not fit them, and they felt generally uncomfortable. They had thought it necessary to go into mourning. It was an expense they could ill afford, and the matter had furnished food for endless discussion. But it was finally decided that at least that much respect should be paid to the memory of a dear "uncle" who, they fervently prayed, had not forgotten them. The men wore new, cheap-looking black suits; the wives and daughters had on heavy crape veils.

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The preacher from Newark, fat and asthmatic, was out of breath after the quick walk from the Subway.

"Phew!" he puffed, mopping his head with a colored handkerchief which contrasted violently with his sombre garments: "We're not late, are we?"

"Oh, dear no," said Jimmy, greeting everyone with forced politeness. "Mr. Cooley is not here yet. Sit down and make yourselves comfortable."

"I told Mathilda it wasn't no use hurryin'!" exclaimed the reverend gentleman peevishly. "She's always so afraid of missing something."

His wife, a shrewish little woman with a snappy manner, bridled up indignantly. Facing her clerical spouse, she exclaimed:

"Now, Peter, how do you come to talk that way? Wasn't you saying to me all the way along: 'Hurry up or when we gets there like as not we'll find they've done us out of what's comin' to us?'"

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The preacher reddened and coughed uneasily:

"No—no—my dear—nothing of the kind. You misunderstood me——"

"I heard you, Dad," piped the falsetto voice of his daughter, a gawky girl of eighteen.

The situation was rapidly becoming strained, and it was a relief to Jimmy when his wife came to the rescue by offering the visitors some liquid refreshment. Mrs. Thomas Marsh, wife of the Newark haberdasher, a tall, angular woman with a shrill, masculine voice, accepted with alacrity:

"Thank m'm, I don't care if I does. You know I hate funerals, I'm that spooky. They allus gives me the creeps. Not that I ever seed nothin', but I'm just afeerd. Glass of brandy? Yes—thank you, m'm. I wouldn't have come to-day, but for Tom's coaxing. He worried and worried——"

"But my dear madam," interposed Mr. James Marsh, somewhat scandalized. "This is not a funeral. We've met here merely to listen to the reading of my lamented brother's will."

Mrs. Thomas chuckled, paying no attention to her husband, who kept nudging her to be quiet.

"Uncle John's will! Well—don't wills and death go together? There's no will readin' without a death, is there? That's why these meetings are spooky." Flopping down on one of the chairs, she demanded: "How long will we have to wait?"

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"Directly my lawyer arrives," he replied, trying to control his temper. "He won't be long now."

An awkward silence followed. Each looked at the other while Jimmy, who was growing more and more nervous, paced restlessly from table to window. Mrs. Marsh, overheated from excitement, was busy giving final instructions to the servants to leave them undisturbed once the reading had begun. The country cousins and their offspring took advantage of the preoccupation of their hosts to glance furtively round the room, making muffled exclamations as they attracted each other's attention to the richness of the furnishings, watching open-mouthed the going and coming of the solemn-faced butler, who, together with his master, was on the alert for the arrival of the much-desired Mr. Cooley.

The reverend gentleman from Rahway nudged his wife.

"I wonder if there's goin' to be anythin' doin' in the eatin' line?" he whispered. "Buryin' people and business of this sort always puts my appetite on edge."

"Really, Peter—you surprise me!" exclaimed his wife with asperity. "What do you think this is—an Irish wake?"

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She lapsed into a dignified silence and glued her eyes on the clock. In another corner of the room the haberdasher's wife, with whom Mrs. Peter was not on speaking terms, was cogitating thoughtfully on what the will might and might not contain. Turning to the haberdasher, she said in a low tone:

"We'll look sweet if he hasn't left us anything."

Her husband put on an injured expression.

"Say, Mary," he grumbled, "can't you be a little more cheerful?"

This playful badinage between the cousins might have been kept up for some time, only, suddenly, there came two sharp rings at the front entrance. There was no mistaking that ring. The mark of the lawyer was written all over it. The cousins, as if detected in some impropriety, sat up with a start. Jimmy, thrusting aside the heavy tapestry curtains, rushed out into the hall and a moment later reappeared, escorting triumphantly Mr. Bascom Cooley, who held in his right hand a small tin security box.

The collective gaze of the country cousins was at once concentrated on the tin box. Instinctively they guessed that it contained the one all important document—the last instructions of their dear lamented uncle, the late John Marsh, regarding the disposition of his fortune.

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Mr. Cooley, full of his usual bluster, advanced briskly into the room. Barely deigning to notice those present and ignoring utterly Jimmy's formal introductions, he proceeded at once to the place prepared for him at the head of the table, and banged the tin box down in front of him. Then with a patronizing gesture, meant to be amiable, he invited the others to take their places. When the shuffling of feet had ceased and everything was perfectly still he turned to his host and began pompously:

"My dear friend and client, we have met here to-day for the performance of a painful but very necessary duty—to ascertain your late brother's wishes in regard to the disposition of his estate —"

Deeming this a proper moment to display brotherly feeling, Jimmy drew from his pocket the black-bordered handkerchief and buried his face in its more or less soiled folds. The cousins, not knowing what was expected of them, began to study closely the pattern of the green cloth which covered the table. Clearing his throat as a preliminary to further oratorical flights, Mr. Cooley went on:

"Yes—I know what you feel at this solemn moment, friend. You feel that if the dead could only be called back to life, you would cheerfully relinquish the wealth to which the grim Reaper has made you heir. But that cannot be. We must accept without question the decree of an inscrutable Providence. Your brother loved you, James—for that I can vouch. He was a silent, reserved man and kept strangely aloof from the world, but his heart was in the right place. On the few occasions when he took me into his confidence, he spoke most affectionately of you—his only brother. You alone were in his thoughts when he had under consideration the important duty of making his will—"

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The cousins looked at each other blankly and shifted uneasily on their seats. The lawyer went on:

"One day—now some twenty-five years ago—John Marsh sent for me to go to Pittsburg. When I arrived he handed me a sheet of note paper with some lines hurriedly scribbled on it—the draft for his will. 'Cooley,' he said, 'this is the way I want to leave my money.' Two days later the will was signed." Tapping the box in front of him, he added impressively: "It has been in this box ever

since. Mr. Marsh, with your permission, I shall now open the box and read the will."

Jimmy, his heart pumping so furiously that he feared his neighbors must notice it, gave a quick gesture of assent. Mrs. Marsh grew a shade paler under her cosmetics. The cousins shuffled closer to the table. The psychological moment had arrived.

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"One moment!" cried Jimmy. Rising quickly and going to the door, he called the butler:

"Wilson, I don't wish to be disturbed on any pretext whatever. Keep this door shut, and don't allow any one to enter no matter who it is."

Returning to his seat, he gave the lawyer a sign to proceed.

Calmly, deliberately, Mr. Cooley inserted a key in the lock. The lid flew open, revealing a number of papers within. The lawyer picked out a formidable-looking folded document, yellow with age. The cousins gasped. Instinctively every one knew that it was the will. Unfolding it slowly, Mr. Cooley looked up to see if all were paying attention. Then, clearing his husky throat, he began to read in impressive, ministerial style:

"IN THE NAME OF ALMIGHTY GOD, AMEN!

"I, John Marsh, of the City of Pittsburg, in the State of Pennsylvania, being of sound health and understanding, do hereby declare this to be *my last will and testament*:

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"First. I direct the payment of my just debts.

"Second. To my cousin, Thomas Marsh of Newark, N. J., I bequeath the sum of *Two Thousand dollars* to belong to him and his heirs absolutely and forever.

"Third. To my cousin, the Reverend Peter Marsh of Rahway, N. J., I bequeath the sum of *Two Thousand dollars* to belong to him and his heirs absolutely and forever.

"Fourth. The remainder of my estate, of whatsoever nature, real estate, bonds, stocks, interest in steel properties, etc., etc., which amounts to nearly *Five Million Dollars*, I bequeath to my only bro——"

Crash! Bang! In the hall outside there was the sound of shattered glass and the angry slamming of doors. Mr. Cooley stopped reading and, looking up, glared at the others in indignant surprise. This was rank sacrilege! He wondered if he couldn't get some one committed for contempt of court. The cousins, not sure whether they should be satisfied or not with Uncle John's remembrance of them, gazed at each other in consternation. Jimmy, wrathful at this flagrant disregard of his explicit orders, rose to investigate. Outside in the hall could be heard the voice of the new butler raised in loud altercation with someone whose entrance into the library he was trying to prevent.

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"Get out of my way! I tell you I will go in!" exclaimed an angry voice.

"It's Tod!" cried Mrs. Marsh, rising.

The library door was flung unceremoniously open and in walked Tod, trying to staunch with his handkerchief the blood which flowed freely from a cut finger. He was somewhat dishevelled after a lively scrimmage with the butler who, not recognizing him as a member of the family, had literally obeyed his master's instructions and attempted to bar the way. It was a poor welcome home, but he was cheery and good natured as ever. Kissing his mother boisterously, he said:

"Hallo, *mater!* How are you? Say—that new butler of yours is a bird—tried to keep me from coming in here to see you. Just think of it! So I smashed him against the glass door and cut my finger." Looking around, a broad grin spread over his face. With well acted surprise, he exclaimed: "Why, what's going on here? Looks like a prayer meeting!" Nodding familiarly to the lawyer and Mr. Marsh, he called out: "Hello—Cooley! Hello Jimmy!"

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James Marsh, his face pale with suppressed irritation, snapped impatiently:

"We waited for you all morning. I told the butler to let no one come in. A disturbance of this kind is most annoying." Turning to the lawyer, he added: "Now, Mr. Cooley, will you please continue —"

"What are you all doing?" grinned Tod.

"Please be quiet, Tod," said his mother, pulling him by the sleeve. "Take a chair and listen. Mr. Cooley is reading the will."

"The will?" echoed Tod innocently. "What will?"

"John Marsh's will, of course. Really, Tod, what makes you so stupid?"

Exasperated, inwardly raging, Mr. Marsh made a sign to Mr. Cooley to proceed with the reading. The lawyer thus urged, resumed. In a loud voice he repeated:

"*I bequeath to my only brother——*"

"That's not John Marsh's will!" cried Tod, again interrupting.

"Not the will!" exclaimed the cousins, aghast.

"Not my brother's will!" cried Jimmy, his face blanching.

"Not the will—what do you mean, sir?" roared Bascom Cooley.

"Just what I say!" replied Tod doggedly. "That scrap of yellow parchment is only good for the waste-paper basket. John Marsh was married, and has a daughter living. Before he died he made a new will, leaving every cent to her!"



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"THAT'S NOT JOHN MARSH'S WILL!"

CHAPTER VI.

"Hilda!" called out a voice in a shrill, angry key. "Hilda!"

"Yes—m'm," came the slow reply.

The boarding house drudge, a bold looking Irish girl, not devoid of certain physical attractions, despite a dirty apron, dishevelled hair, and besmudged face, entered Mrs. Parkes' parlor, carrying broom and dust pan.

"Was it me yer wus after callin', m'm?" she demanded, in a rich, auld counthry brogue.

"I thought I told you to dust this room!" snapped her mistress, with rising wrath.

The girl looked stupidly around.

"Sure—ain't it dusted?" she answered saucily.

Mrs. Parkes bounded with anger. Losing all patience and pointing to an accumulation of dirt plainly in evidence under the chairs, she cried:

"Do you call that dusting? What have you been doing all day? It's always the same—nothing done. I don't know what we're coming to—having to run a respectable house with such help. All you girls think about nowadays is gadding about, getting as much wages as you can, and doing as little work as possible. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

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Mrs. Parkes stopped her tirade for sheer want of breath. Hilda threw back her head defiantly.

"Maybe I ain't as good as some as think they're my betters, and maybe I am. If I don't suit, yer can get someone else. My month's up to-day. I'll go at once."

Throwing down broom and dust pan, she bounced out of the room.

Mrs. Parkes looked after the disappearing form of her housemaid in consternation. She was sorry now that she had lost her temper. Servants were so hard to keep that it seemed the height of folly to deliberately send them away. It would have been better to put up with any insolence rather than expose herself to be left alone. How was it possible to run a boarding house without domestic help? Certainly things were coming to a pretty pass if a mistress couldn't say a few plain words of truth. With a weary sigh of discouragement, she picked up the broom and started to do, herself, the work which Hilda had neglected.

The servant problem had bothered Mrs. Parkes for nearly twenty-three years, since the day when she first took upon herself the task of letting "nice rooms with board for select ladies and gentlemen." Left a widow in straitened circumstances after a none too happy married life, and faced with the urgent necessity of doing something for a living, it occurred to her that the best way to provide herself and boy with a home and income was to open a boarding house. She leased an old four-story residence on West Fourteenth Street, and, furnishing it as neatly as possible with the capital at her disposal, she hung out her shingle. Lodgers knocked at the door to inquire, were attracted by the clean rooms, and remained for years. It was hard work catering for the table and looking after the wants of the guests, but Mrs. Parkes toiled uncomplainingly. It would not be forever, she promised herself. When her boy grew up, she could take a rest. He would provide for everything, and they would no longer be under the necessity of taking boarders.

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Her boy was Mrs. Parkes' one weakness. There were just three things in which she took special pride—cleanliness of her house, the respectability of her boarders, and her son Harry. Not that there existed any good reason for feeling particular satisfaction over her offspring. Harry grew up as other boys do, but his earning capacity did not grow with him. Like other boys who are made too comfortable at home, he saw no necessity to exert himself, and at the age of thirty he

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was still living at home, more of a hindrance than a help in the domestic economy, his usefulness being limited to doing odd jobs around the house and keeping tab on the lodgers' accounts. Recently he had found employment in an architect's office, and then he became intolerable. There was nothing that he could not do; no heights to which he could not climb. A good deal of a *poseur* he wore gold-rimmed glasses, aped the absent-minded manner of the student, and spoke in vague terms of big things he was about to accomplish. That nothing came of them surprised nobody but his credulous and indulgent mother, who lived on year after year in the blissful conviction that one day Harry would astonish the world. If she had any secret worries about her son at all, it was that he might commit some folly with the other sex and marry below his station. Mrs. Parkes was only a boarding house keeper, but she was proud. She did not forget the fact that on her maternal side she was descended from one of the best families in the South. Not that she had any cause to complain of Harry in this respect, but she recalled certain anxieties which her dead husband had caused her in this respect, and she sometimes feared that her son might have inherited some of the paternal traits. For this reason alone she was glad Hilda was leaving. There was no telling what mischief might happen with such a bold creature around the house.

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Mrs. Parkes was absorbed in her reflections when the sound of a well-known voice made her look up.

"Hallo, ma! Whatever are you doing that for? Where's Hilda?"

An oldish-looking young man, a pipe in his mouth, newspaper in his hand, stood in the doorway looking at her.

Mrs. Parkes smiled at her son:

"There's no one else to do it, Harry. Hilda is going."

The young man was so surprised that he took the pipe from his mouth, gave an expressive whistle, and came into the room.

"Hilda leaving? I just met her coming down stairs with all her things on. She looks deuced pretty in her street clothes. What are you sending her for?"

"She gave me insolence. I scolded her for neglecting her work. She said she would go. That's all." Looking at her son searchingly, she added: "Why are you so interested?"

The young man laughed, and, throwing himself into an armchair, proceeded to make himself comfortable.

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"Interested? I'm not particularly interested that I know of. I'm sorry if you have to do all the work, that's all."

Mrs. Parkes shook her head ominously as she said:

"Harry, you're your father over again."

Absorbed in reading his newspaper, the young man at first made no answer. Then looking up, he chuckled lightly:

"Mother—you're over-anxious—and like most over-anxious mothers, you're mistaken."

Mrs. Parkes looked at him fondly as she answered slowly:

"My dear boy—I know human nature——"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently:

"You knew father, that's all," he said testily. "I wish to goodness he'd been a better husband, then you wouldn't make my life miserable by always suspecting the worst. I can't speak to a girl—I can't even look at one—that you don't jump to the ridiculous conclusion that I'm falling in love with her, or that I'm like my father. Why don't you hire Japs?"

His mother could not suppress a smile:

"They're too expensive for a boarding house. Besides, some of my lady guests might object to having them around. No—it's not you, my boy. It's our designing sex I'm afraid of. I know I'm anxious, but I don't want to lose you as I lost your father."

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"You're always throwing my father at me," he answered. "Can I help it if he was a little wild? He's dead now. Why can't you let him alone?"

Rising and flinging down his newspaper with a gesture of impatience, the young man crossed the room, and, pausing at a door near the window, he leaned his head forward and listened. His mother watched him in silence. Disapproval at his behavior was plainly written on her face.

"What are you doing at that door, sir?" she demanded sharply.

Harry grinned. He knew his mother's weakness too well to be much impressed with her affected tone of severity.

"Is Miss Marsh in?" he asked, in a low tone.

A new suspicion crossed Mrs. Parkes' mind. Hilda was safe out of the way, but here was a new

peril. Before this she had noticed her son staring at her young lady lodger. Dear—dear—how like his father he was!

"Why do you want to know?" she demanded. "What concern is it of yours?"

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"I want to see her on important business," he said doggedly.

Mrs. Parkes held up her finger warningly.

"Now, Harry—don't make a fool of yourself. Remember—this Miss Marsh is a boarder—under my roof. She seems a nice girl—even if she does owe me three weeks' rent. But she's nothing for you to waste your time on."

Harry held up his hand in protest.

"Mother," he cried. "I'm thirty years old—I'm earning fifteen hundred a year as assistant draughtsman in the office of the biggest firm of architects in New York City. I'm a free, separate entity, an independent individual, a somebody, and I warn you—if you try to pick out my company for me—as you did for my father, you'll lose me as you did him. You'll not only be a grass widow, but a grass mother. I want to see Miss Marsh because—well, I want to see her——"

"She owes me three weeks' board," repeated Mrs. Parkes doggedly.

"What of it?" he laughed. "I don't want to see her about that."

"I don't trust a girl who owes me three weeks' lodging——"

"You do trust her, or she wouldn't owe you. You trust her because she's a lady, because you like her—yes, you do! She's in trouble, mother—and you're never hard on anyone that's in trouble, you dear old bundle of inconsistencies!"

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Going up to his mother, he put his arm round her neck. Kissing her, he added:

"She'll pay you as soon as she gets the money her father left her. You know she's won her lawsuit."

Fumbling in her pocket, Mrs. Parkes drew out an envelope.

"Yes, so I heard," she said dryly, "but this is a little reminder—just to let her know how much it is. I never knew you took such an interest in her affairs."

"An interest?" exclaimed Harry, with mock surprise. "What nonsense. Come here, mother—sit down. I want to talk seriously with you."

Drawing up a chair, he made her take a seat. Taking a seat opposite, he asked:

"Mother, was my father a serious man?"

"Never—except when he was broke."

"Well—I am serious. I love Paula Marsh. Now, don't faint. Last night I asked her to be my wife——"

Mrs. Parkes gasped.

"Not one word against her," he went on anxiously. "I know your first impulses are never friendly."

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Mrs. Parkes nodded her head sagaciously.

"If—if she inherits all her father's money—you might do worse."

"No—no, mother," replied her son, shrugging his shoulders. "You're mistaken. I love her for herself—not for her money. Besides, she may not get the money after all. Mr. Ricaby, her lawyer, telephoned last night that there is a new move now against her. You see her father made a will leaving her all his money. Her Uncle James is contesting the will and the estate is tied up and she can't get any of it. She hasn't money enough even to get good lawyers. I think Ricaby's an old fluff. It's a shame the way her relations are trying to do her out of it. How I do hate relations!"

"How can they deprive her of her property if it's hers?" inquired Mrs. Parkes incredulously.

"I don't know," said Harry, scratching his head. "They're doing it, that's all. Last night after talking to her lawyer over the 'phone she broke down and burst into tears. Said she was all alone in the world—had no one to protect her—and I—mother—human nature couldn't stand it. I—offered to protect her——"

Mrs. Parkes sighed.

"Your father would have done the same," she said.

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"Kindly refrain from associating my father's name with this matter," he cried impatiently.

Mrs. Parkes seemed lost in thought. Her eyes filled with tears.

"At a time like this I can't forget him—bad as he was—I can't help thinking of him." With a deep sigh, she added: "Well, what did—what did she say——?"

"Nothing," rejoined Harry carelessly, "she looked haughtily at me and walked out of the room. Perhaps I was wrong, mother. I had no right to take advantage of her distressed condition of mind. I'm going to apologize to her. I came away from business early to-day on purpose to do so. It was too soon for a proposal—she doesn't know me well enough—"

Mrs. Parkes tossed back her head indignantly.

"I don't see why you should apologize," she said; "you're as good as she is—and maybe better. If I remember rightly there was some question as to her mother being legally married to the father."

"That's a damnable lie invented by her relations so as to deprive her of her rights to her father's estate!" broke in Harry hotly.

"And her father——" went on his mother, "they say he was crazy when he made his will."

"Another lie!" he cried indignantly. "Don't you know that's what lawyers always say about a man who doesn't leave his estate to their clients. And they can get any number of people to prove it, too—if the estate is large enough."

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His mother was silent for a moment; then, with an air of unconcern, she asked:

"How much money is there?"

"I don't know—a whole pile. If there wasn't, Bascom Cooley wouldn't be the lawyer for the other side—you can bet on that."

"It's very strange," mused Mrs. Parkes; "she promised me three weeks ago that she'd pay me what was owing."

Harry put his hand in his pocket and brought out a roll of bank notes.

"Here, mother, I'm going to pay that bill. When she gives you the money you can pay me back. I don't want you to mention it to her. Will you promise me?"

Mrs. Parkes looked fondly at her son.

"Is it as bad as all that?" she said.

Harry looked sheepishly down at the carpet.

"Yes—I'm—I'm a goner this time——" he murmured.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Parkes, with a laugh, "your father never would have done that. No, Harry, I won't take your money. I can wait. Food is dear, rent is high, and times are hard, but I can wait ——"

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The young man bounded forward and again threw his arms around her.

"You know, mother, that's what I like about you. You're barking all the time, but you never bite."

Mrs. Parkes, overcome at this unusual display of filial affection, put her handkerchief to her eyes. Whimpering, she said:

"You know, Harry, I always did like that girl. There's something about her one can't help liking. She came here from the swellest hotel on Fifth Avenue and took what we gave her without a murmur. At first I thought she was a leading lady out of an engagement, until I found that she went down to the slums every day and worked among the poor. I tell you I was kinder scared when she told me about her lawsuit. Two years ago I had a young lady who occupied the front parlor and back—and private bath, too. She was a show girl, and she ran up five hundred dollars on the strength of a lawsuit she had against a Wall Street man for breach of promise. She lost the case and I lost my money." With a sigh she went on: "It was your father's fault. He advised me to trust her, but this one's different. Yes, quite different." She stopped and burst into tears: "Harry, my boy, you're all I have. I don't want to lose you—I don't——"

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Harry looked distressed.

"Now—now—don't cry," he said. "You won't lose me. You'll get a daughter—that's all."

"God knows I've always wanted a daughter!"

"Well, let me pick one out for you. I think my judgment is better than yours."

The little door opposite which Harry had been watching so eagerly suddenly opened, and a young woman quietly entered the sitting room. It was Paula Marsh, dressed in her street clothes.

She nodded to mother and son in a friendly but reserved manner, and was about to pass out through another door into the outer hall without speaking when she seemed to remember something. Opening a small bag, she said amiably:

"Oh, Mrs. Parkes, I was looking for you. I've just come in. Here is what I owe you. I am sorry——"

Mrs. Parkes, all flustered, rose from the chair.

"Oh, please—not now—there's no hurry—not just now. You look so tired—sit down a moment and rest yourself."

Paula smiled at her landlady's solicitude, and, taking off her hat and coat, thrust some money in the elder woman's hand. [Pg 94]

"Yes—yes—I insist," she said. "I've been downtown all morning, waiting for my lawyer in a stuffy little office—and even then I didn't succeed in seeing Mr. Ricaby. Nothing makes one so tired as failing to do what one starts out to do."

"Sit down, dear, and rest yourself," said Mrs. Parkes, proceeding to bustle about. "Let me get you a cup of tea—now, do—you look so tired!"

"Don't say that, please," protested the young girl. "It makes me feel ten times more tired than I really am."

"But I insist. The water is boiling," said the landlady, hurrying out of the room. "I won't be a moment. A nice cup of tea is just the thing. Harry will keep you company while I'm gone." With a mischievous wink at her son, she added, as she disappeared: "Won't you, Harry—like a good boy?" [Pg 95]

CHAPTER VII.

Two years had slipped by since Paula's return to America and matters relating to the inheritance were no nearer actual settlement than before. They were even more complicated, for the law, with all its ponderous, intricate machinery, all its chicanery and false swearing, had been set in motion, not to protect the orphan but to shield those knaves who sought to enjoy what was not their own.

Tod's startling revelation in his stepfather's library, the morning the will was being read, regarding John Marsh's secret marriage, came as a terrible shock to Jimmy. At first he loudly denounced it as a damnable lie, a blackmailing scheme, the invention of some hidden enemy. Then, as he grew calmer and learned more details, he began to realize that the elaborate structure which he had built up so carefully for years was about to topple and in his disappointment he grew almost hysterical. He stormed and raved, working himself into such a frenzy that it was dangerous to go near him. But for Bascom Cooley, who still held out hope, he would have shot himself. But Cooley, the resourceful, cunning Cooley advised patience. All might be well. The money was not yet lost by any means. What were the courts for if not to see that justice was done? And Mr. Cooley was honest in his belief that a very serious injustice would be done if the money went anywhere else than into his own pockets. The new will must be contested. Some way must be devised to have it declared invalid. It must be shown that John Marsh was insane at the time he made the will and that the Frenchwoman he lived with was not his wife. If this were true the girl Paula Marsh was not his legitimate daughter. The truth of these statements would not be in question for a moment, for reliable witnesses would go on the stand and solemnly swear to them. Mr. Cooley knew where such witnesses could be found. It was only a question of money. The longest purse secured the greatest number of witnesses, for, strangely enough, very few people are willing to commit perjury gratis. Cooley attended to everything, and well, he might. He himself had as much at stake as Jimmy. So, going among his influential friends, the "men higher up," he set the wheels of justice moving—in his own direction. [Pg 96]

The first gun in the long and bitterly contested legal battle, which was to follow, was fired directly Leon Ricaby offered the new will to the Surrogate for probate. Mr. Cooley replied promptly by offering the first will. An administrator was then appointed by the Surrogate to conserve the estate during the litigation, and thus the Marsh estate was tied up into a complicated legal knot which only the Surrogate or a decree of a competent court could disentangle. [Pg 97]

Then began for Paula a long, drawn-out period of mental distress and physical discomfort, which taxed her patience and powers of endurance to the utmost. On first arriving in New York, she had taken a modest suite of rooms in one of Manhattan's luxurious hostelries, but this she soon found too expensive for her slender purse. Until it was proved that she was legally entitled to the fortune her father had left, she could not touch a cent of it. Meantime, her means were limited. Practically all the available cash she had was a few hundred dollars left from her Paris allowance. Mr. Ricaby offered to advance her any amount, but she gratefully declined his assistance, preferring to husband her resources by the practice of strict economy. The first step was to move into cheaper quarters. After a long search she found comfortable rooms at Mrs. Parkes' genteel boarding house on West Fourteenth Street. The neighborhood was far from fashionable, but Paula did not mind that. Indeed, she thought it an advantage, preferring to be quiet and secluded, hidden away, as it were, from the world until the legal fight was over and she could take her proper place in the world. Besides, she was nearer now to the poorer districts to which her daily duties called her, almost next door to the slums where her youthful enthusiasm, tireless energy, fine humanitarianism were devoted daily to the noble work of rescuing the needy and unfortunate. This Settlement work, far from weighing heavily upon her, she regarded as a blessing. It not only enabled her to do some good in the world, but it kept her mind occupied while the lawyers were squabbling in the courts. [Pg 98]

Of Mr. Ricaby she saw very little. He was busy, working constantly in her interests, preparing for

the trial. The case, he told her, was already on the calendar and would come up very soon. Victory, for their side, was, of course, a foregone conclusion. The other side had virtually not a leg to stand upon. They must be prepared, however, for any emergency. Bascom Cooley was known to be unscrupulous, a man who would stop at nothing to gain his ends. Through trickery and his political pull he had already scored an important point. The judge before whom the case would come was an intimate friend of his. They played poker together and belonged to the same political organization. Was it not possible that he might be tempted to let his sympathies lean in his crony's favor? Yet even judges dare not betray their trust too openly. If right were on Paula's side, the Court would be forced to render a decision in her favor.

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Notwithstanding this legal unpleasantness, Paula thought she ought to call on her uncle, and in this Mr. Ricaby agreed with her. So one afternoon she dressed herself smartly and rode up Broadway to West Seventy-second Street. The reception she received was not such as to encourage her to repeat the visit. Her uncle was out, but Mrs. Marsh greeted her with frigid politeness and asked her to have tea. While the two women were taking mental inventory of each other Mr. Marsh came in, and the situation became more strained.

Jimmy had expected this visit and had prepared himself for it. He had intended to call the girl an impostor to her face, to drive her from the house, but now she had come, he did neither. He saw a tall, pale, aristocratic-looking girl who vaguely, despite the difference of sex, reminded him of his brother. Yes, now he saw her he knew it was the truth, but no matter, he would fight just the same. She was his brother's child, the girl who had come between him and his rightful inheritance. She was the enemy. But he would fight her and he would win. Cooley had promised him that. These thoughts were passing through his mind as he sat in silence, staring gloomily at her. Then he asked questions about her father and the way they lived in Paris. It seemed to her that he was most interested in her answers regarding her mother, and it suddenly occurred to her that he was cross-examining her for the purpose of the trial. Disconcerted she relapsed into monosyllables and the atmosphere grew more chilly. There was no hint of legal difficulties. He merely inquired if she intended to reside permanently in New York, and expressed the hope that she would always consider their house her home. Paula silently bowed her thanks, and the ceremonious call was at an end.

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Of Tod Chase she had seen a good deal since the voyage home. He had asked for permission to call and she assented gladly. The young man belonged in a way to the enemy's camp, but she did not mind that. On the ship they had been thrown a good deal in each other's company, and she had taken a fancy to him. He was always in such good humor, always so full of animal spirits that his mere presence relieved the general gloom and cheered her up. He brought her books and magazines and chatted to her by the hour of a world she did not know and did not care to know. He talked freely of the coming trial; denounced the whole thing as an outrage and hotly berated his stepfather and Bascom Cooley as two scoundrels. He got so worked up over the case that Paula had to laugh. Only one person was not convinced of his sincerity and that was Mr. Ricaby. The lawyer was not blind to the fact that the young man was paying Paula a good deal of attention, and he would have been more than human had he not resented it.

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Thus in a way Paula was happy. In the day time she had her work among her poor, and the evening she gave up to reading or music. Sometimes Tod would drop in, and, with Mr. Ricaby, they would have an enjoyable evening. On rare occasions Harry and Mrs. Parkes would be invited to join the little circle.

Then came the trial with all its annoyances, all its brutalities. It was a terrible ordeal for the young girl, and there were times when, utterly worn out and discouraged, she felt it was beyond her strength to go on. The opposite side had no mercy on her. Bascom Cooley was not the kind of man to spare anyone, woman or child. There were no lies and calumnies that a devilish ingenuity and brazen impudence could invent that he did not concoct in order to attack the new will. To discredit the new claimant, he grossly insulted her; to belittle the will, he calumniated the dead man. He produced witnesses who swore on the stand that John Marsh, of late years, was an entirely changed man, irresponsible for his actions. They testified that he not only drank himself to death, but that he acted irrationally and was clean out of his mind. Physicians in Cooley's employ gave corroborative evidence, with some modifications. Mr. Cooley, triumphant, argued that his client, Mr. James Marsh, had amply proved his claim. He alone was entitled to the estate under the original will which was executed at a time when the deceased was in possession of all his faculties. If, thundered the lawyer, the second will was not a damnable forgery—and significantly he added, they had not yet had time to go into that phase of it—it was the work of a crazy man. He would go still further—

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Now he did a horrible thing. Not content with vilifying the father, he besmirched the character of Paula's mother. Granted, he shouted, that John Marsh was not crazy—even then the girl had no legal claim to the estate, for she was illegitimate. John Marsh never married her mother!

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Instantly Mr. Ricaby was on his feet with an indignant protest. Was it not scandal enough, he cried hotly, that members of the bar should prostitute their profession by putting perjured witnesses on the stand without further disgracing themselves by wantonly insulting a defenseless girl? The insinuation of illegitimacy was a cowardly and venomous lie, an outrageous falsehood which could be nailed on the spot, for, luckily, his client, Miss Marsh, had safe in her possession her mother's marriage certificate. As to the other statements made under oath regarding John Marsh's mental condition, they were equally reckless and fabricated solely for the purpose of influencing the court's decision. The witnesses he would call would refute the allegations

entirely.

Long before the trial closed, it was apparent that Mr. Ricaby had by far the best of it. But the fight was not yet won. There were delays and more delays. Mr. Cooley, feeling he was losing ground, changed his tactics. Instead of pushing the case, he sought to gain time. Finally when the evidence was all in, and counsel for either party had exhausted their arguments and powers of vituperation, the Court calmly reserved its decision, and the long, tedious wait and suspense began all over again.

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Paula was glad it was over, and at heart was not really concerned about the outcome. Of course, the money would be welcome. It was hers, and it was her duty to claim it. When it was in her possession, she saw in her mind's eye a thousand miracles that might be worked with it to bring comfort and joy into many a desolate home. But if she lost—well, then she would go cheerfully to work and support herself. There were times when she wondered if she would ever marry. Perhaps she would, but whom? There was no one she cared particularly about. At one time she thought a good deal of Mr. Chase, but since the beginning of the trial she had seen less of him. His visits to the boarding house were less frequent, and it seemed to her that his attitude was more distant. After all, it was only natural. No matter how much he might sympathize with her, he must realize that a victory for her would mean a terrible blow to his own mother. She could not blame him if he stood aloof. Mr. Ricaby had never liked him. Perhaps she herself was mistaken in him. His profession of friendship might be only a blind in order to pry into her movements.

She smiled to herself as she reflected that she certainly would not care to marry Harry Parkes. Yet her landlady's son was the only male who, thus far had ventured to pay court to her. Always solicitous for the welfare of everybody around her, she was sorry for Harry Parkes. That he had faults, she overlooked. He had some good traits—therefore she concluded that there was still hope for him. She tried to get him interested in her Settlement work and offered to find for him duties which he would find congenial. But Harry, his faith in himself unshaken, received all such suggestions with a grimace. As was to be expected, he put a wrong construction on her sympathetic attitude, mistaking kindly interest for adoration of his manly charms, and last evening when they were alone in the parlor he had attempted liberties which she indignantly resented. She let him plainly understand that if it happened again she would be forced to leave the house. That is why she was not particularly grateful to Mrs. Parkes for leaving them alone now. Her mind was too preoccupied for small talk. At any moment, Mr. Ricaby had telephoned her, the Court might be expected to hand down its decision. Still, not wishing to appear curt, she said:

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"Your mother is remarkably amiable this afternoon, Mr. Parkes."

Harry woke up with a start.

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"Yes—yes—she is—she is!" he stammered. There was a short silence, and then he said:

"Miss Marsh—I want to apologize for—for—for my—my—conduct the other night—"

"Apologize!" she exclaimed, as if not understanding.

"Yes," he stammered. "I'm very sorry—very sorry—"

"Sorry—why, what did you do?" she demanded.

Harry looked at her in surprise.

"It isn't what I did so much," he said hesitatingly, "as what I said—I—want—you to forgive me—"

Paula smiled.

"There's nothing to forgive, Mr. Parkes. The fact is, you won't think I—I'm rude, will you—but—I hardly remember what happened last night. I was very weak and foolish, and I'm afraid I gave way to—to tears. I don't believe in tears—it seems you're sorry for yourself—and I'm not sorry for myself—I'm angry with my relations—I'm angry because they make me angry. I love peace and happiness and a calm, quiet life—and they make my existence a hell on earth—with their attacks on my father and mother and their lawsuits. My heart is always in my mouth—I'm always afraid that something dreadful is going to happen—any moment I may hear the Court's decision. I'm unhappy, Mr. Parkes—and I've no right to be unhappy. I'm young and I have a happy disposition—every capacity to enjoy my life but—"

Shaking her head, she added: "But there, I'm not going to bother you with my troubles. You're home early—"

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"You're sure that you're not angry with me?"

"Why, no—what for—whatever did you say or do?"

He hesitated and looked at her, trying to read her mind. Her self-possession disconcerted him.

"Never mind," he said finally, "I was very foolish—"

"Were you?" she replied calmly. "I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary."

He advanced a step nearer and his voice was agitated, as he burst out:

"You see, Miss Marsh, I—"

"Do you mind calling me Paula," she said in the most matter-of-fact tone. "I hate the name of Marsh—it's my Uncle James' name—and it's always on those horrid law papers—'*Marsh versus Marsh*.' It's always connected with defendants and plaintiffs and—affidavits—and other horrible instruments of torture. My heart beats every time I see the dreadful words. *Marsh versus Marsh!* I dream of *Marsh versus Marsh*—and when I wake up in the morning—the first thing that greets me in the morning paper is *Marsh versus Marsh*. I hate the name—I hate it!" [Pg 108]

Was this the opportunity? Harry did not know but he seized it.

"Why—why not change it?" he murmured.

Paula smiled.

"That idea has occurred to me dozens of times," she said gaily. "I will when this horrible lawsuit is settled."

His companion grew a shade paler.

"Is that a—a bargain——" he asked seriously.

"Yes," she laughed.

"And may I—pick—pick out a suitable name for you——?"

"If you like," she said lightly; "any old name will do—Smith—Jones—Billikins——"

"Even Par—Parkes?" he suggested.

"Yes—even Parkes," she laughed. "Anything but Marsh——"

The door opened and Mrs. Parkes entered, carrying a tray with tea.

"Here we are—here we are," she said cheerily, "a fresh cup of tea—I opened a new packet of Lipton on purpose. Say, that Lipton makes elegant tea! Oh, I've forgotten the toast. Harry, run down and get it, there's a dear boy." Turning to Paula, she added: "He is a dear boy, isn't he?" [Pg 109]

"Just like his father, I think you once told me," rejoined Paula, with a covert smile.

"Did I? Well, he is in some ways—and in some ways he isn't."

"Mother, please!" exclaimed Harry. "I'm afraid I'm like you, Miss Paula—I don't like to be reminded of my relations— I'll get the toast, mother."

He left the room to go foraging for toast, while Mrs. Parkes began pouring out tea.

"Did the dear boy tell you?" she asked. "He said he was going to apologize but——"

"Will you kindly tell me what the dear boy did that needs so much apology?" said Paula.

"He's so impulsive," said Mrs. Parkes, with a sigh. "To that extent he is like his father—but—he feels as I do that until your lawsuit is settled one way or the other, he should not have asked you to be his wife. One lump or two?"

Paula opened wide her eyes.

"Be his wife?" she exclaimed. "One lump? No, two. Did he ask me to marry him?"

"Yes. Didn't he? He said he did——"

"So that's what it was—great Heavens! I've been proposed to—and I didn't know it——" [Pg 110]

"Of course, he has my consent," went on Mrs Parkes, in a patronizing tone.

"Of course, I mean—thank you—that's rather nice," rejoined Paula, trying to conceal a laugh. "You're awfully good—but—this is nice tea, isn't it?"

"Why, you haven't tasted it yet," protested the landlady.

"No—I'm just going to. The aroma—is——" Gulping the tea down she scalded herself. "It's hot, isn't it?"

The door reopened and Harry reappeared with the toast.

"Mr. Ricaby has just come in," he blurted out. "He wants to see you at once—says it is most important. I told him to come right up. Why, Miss Marsh, what's the matter——?"

Paula had turned pale. The teacup almost fell from her trembling hand. Perhaps her attorney had brought the message which she had been so anxiously expecting. Had he brought good news?

"You look frightened to death, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Parkes.

Paula rose.

"May I ask you to excuse me?" she said. "Mr. Ricaby wants to see me on most important business connected with my lawsuit. I would like to see him alone." [Pg 111]

"Certainly, my dear," said Mrs. Parkes, rising. "We'll take the tea in my room. Come, Harry, help me with the tray."

The young man frowned disapproval at this most untimely interruption, but there was no help for it. With a glance at Paula that received no response, he rebelliously picked up the tray and followed his mother out.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Ricaby entered the room hurriedly. His face was serious and his manner agitated. Paula advanced eagerly to meet him.

"Bad news!" he began. "That which I feared has happened."

The young girl turned pale.

"You mean that we have lost?"

The lawyer sank wearily into a chair, and in a tone of utter discouragement went on:

"Yes—we've lost! I did all I could. The court allows that you were born in wedlock—oh, yes—that much they admit. Also that your father was not insane when he made his will—very kind of them—and that you, his daughter, may inherit his estates—but——"

"But what?" she demanded anxiously.

The lawyer looked at her in silence. He hesitated to let her know the worst all at once. Slowly he said:

"Your uncle—is appointed your guardian and custodian during your minority, and that means he will have complete control of you—and of your money——" [Pg 113]

"My uncle?" she cried in dismay. "Oh, Mr. Ricaby—couldn't you have prevented that?"

He shook his head. Then, jumping to his feet, and pacing the floor nervously, he exclaimed angrily:

"How can one man cope with a gang of crooks or break up a well-organized System? Bascom Cooley, your uncle's lawyer, is a prominent member of the inner political ring which controls everything. He presented his petition to a judge who received his appointment from this very organization. It was a foregone conclusion what the outcome would be. Now we're no better off than before. The granting of the petition will give your uncle complete control of your fortune."

Paula looked at him blankly. This was too much. Her patience was almost exhausted. She had borne everything patiently up to now, but this new insult went too far. Tears started to her eyes, and, stamping her foot angrily, she cried:

"He shan't have my father's money to squander how and on whom he pleases! On that I'm determined. I'll give it away— I'll— Oh! surely something can be done!"

Mr. Ricaby shrugged his shoulders.

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"I'm afraid not," he answered. "Your uncle is in the hands of an unscrupulous gang. He has spent money like water to break the will. His lawyers resorted to every questionable device under a loosely constructed legal jurisprudence. Where did the money come from? Your uncle didn't have it. His marriage to Mrs. Chase—an extravagant widow with an extravagant son—used up all the money he had. This is Cooley's venture—and Cooley never goes into anything unless he's sure of results."

"And they have won!" she exclaimed.

The lawyer nodded.

"They have absolute control of you—and your money——"

"Can't anything be done?" cried the young girl, wringing her hands in despair. "Can't you do something? Surely I have some rights. Can't you try?—can't you?"

The lawyer was silent for a moment. Then he said thoughtfully:

"I could retain ex-Senator Wratchett—but he would ask twenty-five thousand dollars in advance. He's not as good a lawyer as Cooley, but he has more pull." Excitedly he went on: "Ah! that's what we want, Paula—political pull! My God! What a farce life is! When I was a minister of the Gospel I was a dreamer, howling for purity and truth. Now I'm awake, with my feet on the earth. I'm praying for a liar and a trickster to come and help us out—and cursing myself because I haven't the money to buy him——"

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"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" she echoed helplessly. With a bitter laugh she went on: "I pawned my last ring this morning to pay Mrs. Parkes the money I owed her. You gave the Judge the whole history of the case—you told him how my uncle has deliberately stood in the way of my getting

my rights for two years—you told him that he is my worst enemy?"

"Yes—everything."

"And yet he appointed him my custodian and guardian?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. Dryly he replied:

"He belongs to the same political organization as Cooley. In this State," he went on, "in order to get the nomination, a judge or his friends are expected to contribute a large sum of money to the campaign fund—the idea is that he owes something to the men who pay that money for him, that he must show some gratitude to those who nominate and elect him—fine ethics, eh? I think I'll go back to the pulpit——"

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"Can my uncle compel me to live with him?" demanded Paula.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm afraid so."

The girl jumped up, her hands clenched, her face flushed with anger. Hotly she cried:

"I won't—I won't—live with him! I hate that vulgar, showy woman—his wife! She sneered at me in court because I cried when they said my father drank himself to death. I hate that foolish, giggling son of hers—I hate them all! They've spoiled my life, they've robbed me of the joy of youth. I'm old before my time! My God! I'm not twenty, and I feel worn out. It's a shame the abominable way they've hounded me, but I won't give in—I won't——"

"Come, come, Paula," said the lawyer soothingly. "I feel just as badly as you do about it—I——"

He stopped abruptly and looked out of the window.

Paula watched him in silence. Something within told her that if this man felt bitter under defeat, it was more for her sake than for his own.

"Go on," she said, more gently.

"I don't see that we can do anything more just now," he continued. "The fact is, I'm a bit bewildered. I'm simply stunned!" Hesitatingly, he went on: "I feel I'm to blame to a certain extent. I don't think I quite understand my profession. There are so many laws—so many loopholes to evade the law—so many ramifications—so many interpretations. It's all law—law—law—nothing but law—the question of equity and justice is completely lost sight of in the chaos of procedure—the letter of the law is there, but the spirit is wanting!"

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Sitting down, he buried his face in his hands, the picture of utter discouragement.

Paula approached and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's not your fault, Mr. Ricaby," she said kindly. "You've done your best, but just think! To be compelled to live with my uncle, the man who destroyed my father's memory, who reviled my mother! Oh, it's—it's monstrous! No, they shan't compel me—I defy them—I defy the law! What do you advise?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"You will gain nothing by openly defying them," he said. "When in doubt—wait! Meantime I'll go and see ex-Senator Wratchett. Perhaps I can interest him in our behalf. I'll move Heaven and earth to get him—set a thief to catch a thief, eh? Oh, it's a glorious game! God knows I've tried to be fair!"

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They were so busy talking that they did not hear a timid knock on the door. Mrs. Parkes put her head in.

"A gentleman to see Miss Marsh!" she said, holding out a card.

Paula's face brightened and then grew serious as she caught sight of the name on the bit of pasteboard.

"It's Mr. Chase," she said, turning to the lawyer. "He hasn't been here for an age. I'm surprised he has called so soon after the rendering of the decision. Do you think I should receive him?"

Mrs. Parkes seemed surprised that there should be any question about it.

"He came in a beautiful motor car!" she exclaimed. "Oh, what a magnificent machine! Royal blue color and such a handsome uniform the chauffeur has——"

Mr. Ricaby frowned. He had never approved of this friendship with a young man whose motives he had reason to suspect very strongly. His calling so soon after the verdict was certainly not in the best of taste. It was more than likely that he was a spy sent by the ingenious Mr. Cooley to ferret out their plan of action. Mr. Chase had been very amiable and attentive to them in Paris and during the voyage home, but all that might be only part of the game. On the other hand, if it was a prearranged plan it would work both ways. With a little careful maneuvering they, too, might be able to find out from Tod what new tack the enemy was working on. So, on second thoughts, it might be well to encourage his visits.

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"Tell him to come up," he said to the landlady.

Mrs. Parkes bounced out, and a moment later Tod entered.

"I hope I don't intrude," was his cheery greeting.

"Not at all," replied Paula, somewhat coldly. "Won't you sit down?" she said.

He took a seat and drew off his gloves. Affably, he said:

"Thanks—yes. I'll even take a cup of tea if you'll ask me. When I once get started on a proposition I go right round the course—even with a punctured tire." Turning to the lawyer, he went on: "Say, Mr. Ricaby—I just heard that the case has gone against you. That's fierce! I've come to have a little family talk-fest."

He stopped and looked at his hostess and the lawyer. Both remained silent and non-committal. With a shrug of his shoulders, he continued:

"No answer? Well, then, I'll talk to myself, and you can listen till you feel like joining in——"

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"Are you here at the request of your stepfather?" interrupted Mr. Ricaby coldly.

The young man gave him a look that was intended to be withering. Instinctively he knew that Mr. Ricaby was no friend of his, and perhaps he guessed the reason. But he did not come to see the lawyer. He liked Paula and was sincerely sorry for her. He did not propose to be bluffed out of his newly made friendship by the unreasonable suspicion of a jealous rival. Sharply he retorted:

"No. I am here at my own request. I'm sorry for this little girl. I saw her in court several times when they were trying to break the will, and my heart went out to her. I want to help her. Oh, I know I don't look like anybody's friend. I'm fat—I'm selfish—and I love myself to distraction—and all that, but—I give you my word I felt sorry for her. I'll never forget her face the day she testified. Gee whiz! Cooley laid it onto Uncle John—your father I mean—didn't he? It wasn't right—I felt sorry, and I told Jimmy so. Miss Marsh, believe it or not—I'm here to express myself as thoroughly disgusted with the methods my folks have employed to get Uncle John's money."

"Why do you call my father Uncle John?" demanded Paula haughtily.

"I got your Uncle Jimmy when he married my mother," laughed Tod, "and I take everything that goes with him—including Uncle John and you—I don't see why I shouldn't have the nice things, too."

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"Thank you," she answered, trying to suppress a smile.

Tod grinned.

"I understand you're coming to live with us?" he said.

Paula's face darkened again.

"Am I?" she said frigidly.

"Cooley says so," he went on, "and Jimmy seconded the motion, so I thought I'd come ahead—and sort of break the ice, as it were. I told mother and she said it wasn't a bad idea—for me—and here I am. You are coming, aren't you? It'll be awfully jolly for me. Please say yes—one plunge and it's all over."

Paula was forced to laugh in spite of herself. Then recalling suddenly his attitude at the trial, she demanded:

"Why did you laugh in court when they said my father was a drunkard?"

"Laugh?" he exclaimed. "I couldn't help it. All that Cooley was able to prove was that your father drank a quart of champagne at dinner, now and then. Why, I do that myself—even when I'm out of training! One quart? Why, it's pitiful! I'm laughing yet, but understand, I was laughing for you—not against you."

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She turned away her head so he should not see she was smiling. But he was not slow to note the advance he was making, and, thus encouraged, he went on:

"Another—and perhaps the real reason why I came—and this is on the level—I'm responsible for this whole state of affairs."

Mr. Ricaby looked up in surprise.

"You?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," continued Tod, rising to go. "My mother married Jimmy because she wanted money. You know she's very extravagant, and I'm her chief extravagance. I run up bills and she pays 'em. We've both got the habit. Well, you see, if it wasn't for my debts, she wouldn't have married Jimmy and he probably wouldn't have tried to get his brother's estate. So you see it's all my fault. I'm the black sheep—the others are only dark-brown. But I'm going to do what's right from this out. To begin with, I'm going to turn my new eight-thousand-dollar car over to you."

"Why should you do that?" demanded Paula.

The young man chuckled as he replied:

"I got the cash on a note endorsed by mother, and Jimmy will have to pay it out of your money. It's your money that bought the car—so you take it—but I'll run it for you. It's a dandy. Just romps up the hills. I can squeeze seventy out of it. It's downstairs now. Say, Miss Marsh, come down and take a look at it——" [Pg 123]

She shook her head.

"No—thank you all the same."

He looked at her with an injured expression.

"I give you my word of honor," he said, "I want to do what is right. Jimmy and mother always regarded Uncle John's money as theirs and I unconsciously fell into line. But I've woke up—I withdraw from the contest. I'm out of it—so we can be good friends—but—take my advice and watch Jimmy and keep your eyes on Cooley. You know Cooley cooks up all sorts of schemes for Jimmy, and Cooley isn't exactly working for charity. I don't like Cooley. He's too sharp. Of course, a lawyer ought to be sharp, but Cooley is almost too deuced sharp—one of these days he'll cut himself." As he made a move towards the door, he said: "You will come, won't you? When shall I say you're coming?"

He stopped to hear her answer, but none came. There was an embarrassing silence. Mr. Ricaby, who was walking nervously up and down the room, suddenly turned on the young man, and, looking him squarely in the face, said: [Pg 124]

"You really wish to do what is right?"

"Yes," answered Tod promptly.

"Then tell the whole truth," said the lawyer, raising his voice, "how much are you to receive if you succeed in persuading Miss Marsh to accept her uncle's guardianship without protest?"

The young man answered the older man's steady gaze unflinchingly. If he was playing the role of a spy certainly his face did not betray it. With perfect sangfroid, he answered:

"This is unworthy of you. Yet I don't blame you for suspecting me. It was like this—I told them they didn't know how to handle women——"

"And you do?" laughed Paula.

"Well," replied Tod, his chest inflated with self-importance, "I've had a little experience with women. But I didn't promise to tell you the truth about that. I said to Jimmy and Cooley: Kindness—that's the idea—kindness. Don't jerk at her mouth. Hold the rein loose. Treat women and horses alike. Women and horses—the noblest creatures in God's creation. Leave her to me, I said—you see I wanted to get well acquainted with you—I'm interested—really I am." [Pg 125]

"Indeed!" laughed Paula satirically. "I ought to feel quite complimented."

Tod broke out into a hearty laugh. Pointing gleefully at his hostess, he cried:

"Ha! ha! The ice is cracking. Miss Marsh—I warn you—you're warming up!"

Paula was about to make retort when the door opened and Harry Parkes appeared. He nodded stiffly to Tod and approached the lawyer.

"Mr. Ricaby," he said, "your office is calling you on the telephone."

The lawyer immediately excused himself and hurried out of the room. There was an awkward silence. Tod looked at Harry and the latter looked at Tod. Both rivals for the lady's good graces, neither seemed disposed to leave the field free for the other.

"Well—I suppose I'd better go——" growled Tod finally. Holding out his hand to Paula, he said: "May I report progress?" Seeing her smile and thinking he might be able to get the best of the other fellow after all, he went on: "My car is downstairs. Won't you come down and look it over?"

"Thank you, so——" she replied.

"Just a spin round the park," he pleaded. "I can do it in fifteen minutes. It's all right, you know. The speed limit don't go with me at all—I know all the policemen. You see Jimmy is running strong with the chief—and whatever we say, goes." [Pg 126]

Paula laughed merrily.

"I'm afraid I can't accept your invitation, even with the special inducement of being able to break the law with impunity."

"Sorry. Well, good-bye—I'm off." His manner lost its flippancy, and there was genuine feeling in his voice as he added: "Good-bye, Miss Marsh. Whatever happens I'm really and truly glad I had this chat with you, but I'm afraid I did most of the talking. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Chase," she said, extending her hand.

The door closed and Paula returned slowly to the table.

"A curious boy," she murmured, more to herself than to her companion. "I rather like him."

"Do you?" exclaimed Harry blankly, looking at her over his gold eyeglasses. Awkwardly he went on: "I'm glad he's gone. I wanted to say something to you. Miss Marsh—I—I've thought it all over ___"

Paula resumed her seat and took up a book.

"Now, Harry," she laughed, "you're going to propose again. I can see it in your face. Please don't. There's a good boy." [Pg 127]

"I was only going to say," he stammered, "that the name of Parkes is at your disposal."

"That's very kind, but—"

"Fifteen hundred a year—no encumbrances—unlimited prospects—"

She looked up at him, much amused.

"It sounds a little like a real estate advertisement. But, seriously, Harry—don't—don't—can't you see I've no time for such nonsense? I'm driven almost to distraction. I owe Mr. Ricaby so much money. He has almost ruined himself for me. He has worked day and night on this case—neglected all his law practice. I hear him coming now. Perhaps he has some news."

There were sounds of hurried footsteps. The door opened, and the lawyer entered hurriedly. He looked flurried as if something important had happened. Turning to Harry, he said quickly:

"Will you excuse us a moment?"

"Certainly—certainly—" said the young man.

With a side glance at Paula, he went out, closing the door. Mr. Ricaby quickly approached Paula. Laboring under some excitement, he said:

"Your uncle demands an interview with you. I told him you refused to go to him." [Pg 128]

"Quite right! Go to him indeed!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"He and Mr. Cooley are now at my office. They want to come here to see you."

"I won't see them," she cried.

"Perhaps it would be good policy," said the lawyer thoughtfully.

"No," she retorted emphatically. "I won't see them."

"Yes, Paula," said the lawyer kindly, but firmly, "they can keep up this legal battle for years—as long as they choose—until we're exhausted and most of the money we're fighting for is expended in fees and costs. Cooley will never give up—and we can't go on without money. Something might be gained by meeting them halfway." He hesitated a moment and then went on: "Cooley told me over the telephone just now that he had new evidence. He could prove that his client had a partnership with his brother, and was entitled to half—"

"He can prove anything," she cried contemptuously. "I refuse to degrade myself by a compromise. It shall be all or nothing."

Nervous and agitated, Mr. Ricaby strode up and down the room. He was advising the girl for the best. He had experience in these matters. Well he knew the law's terrible delays, and even then the result was uncertain. [Pg 129]

"If you fight them," he said, "it means more costly litigation. I may be able to get Wratchett, but I'm not sure that he'll fight Cooley. They're such strong political cronies. You've nothing to lose by holding out the olive branch, and much to gain. Really, Paula, it's better for you to see them. I am so sure about it that I told them to come over."

With a gesture of discouragement Paula sank down in a chair.

"God knows I'm as tired of the struggle as you are, Mr. Ricaby," she cried, "but I hate to give up. I know you're advising me for the best—yes—I'll be guided by you—I will see them—and—and yield as gracefully as I can, but it seems hard, very hard. When will they come?"

"In a few minutes," replied the lawyer. [Pg 130]

CHAPTER IX.

Bascom Cooley had not overestimated his abilities or the extent of his pull. He had not, indeed, been successful in his efforts to have the new will set aside. There are some things which not even crooked lawyers, with all their cunning and underhand methods, are unable to do. Even his perjured witnesses could not disprove the fact that John Marsh was legally married to Paula's mother, and that he was of sound mind when he made the second will. Backed by all the influence of the System, he could not prevent Paula from inheriting what was naturally and legally hers. Yet, thanks to the mysterious and powerful support behind him, he did manage to

score in one important point. He was able to manipulate the legal wires in such a way that Paula, after the Court decision rendered in her favor, found herself no better off than she was before. Being a minor, she could not touch her inheritance. The appointment of a guardian was necessary, and Bascom Cooley, after much secret and underhand manœuvring, finally persuaded a judge to appoint the girl's uncle special administrator until she could come of age. It was clearly unconstitutional and at once evoked protest from Paula's attorney. But to no purpose. The court's order was peremptory. An appeal to a higher court would mean more endless and expensive litigation. The best plan, perhaps, was to wait patiently the one short year and then demand a strict accounting. At least, so argued Mr. Ricaby.

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Bascom Cooley now had things going his way. Jimmy, his poor, weak tool, was in sole control of the Marsh millions. For twelve months he could do what he liked with the money. Much can be accomplished in a year—money can be made, money can be lost. If, when the day of accounting came, there was a scandal, Jimmy alone would be held responsible, and as for denouncing others as having shared in the division of the spoils, he would not dare. Cooley knew too much of his business for that.

The next important step was to control, as far as possible, the movements of the ward herself. It would never do to have her living in a cheap boarding house, going and coming as she pleased, surrounded by people who might tell her embarrassing truths. The influence of Leon Ricaby, especially, Mr. Cooley was anxious to remove. He felt that with the attorney out of the way, they would have less trouble with the girl. That is why he had impressed Jimmy with the urgent necessity of taking Paula as a more or less unwilling boarder under his roof.

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"She'll kick like a steer," he growled. "But that's nothing. I like a gal with some spirit in her. She must do what we say, whether she likes it or not."

Overbearing, brutal, defiant, Mr. Cooley entered the sitting room of Mrs. Parkes' boarding house, followed meekly by Jimmy Marsh. Fashionably dressed, dyed and perfumed, Paula's uncle, in personal appearance, offered a sharp contrast to the burly, coarse-looking lawyer. The two men were types so utterly dissimilar that it was almost paradoxical to find them in such close association. It was as if the lamb suddenly found it to his taste to consort with the wolf. While the lawyer advanced into the room, his air arrogant, his manner insolent, Jimmy remained in the background, nervous and fidgety. That he was completely under the mental control of his attorney was plainly evident.

Mr. Ricaby was alone in the room, awaiting their arrival.

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"Hallo, Ricaby—howdy?" exclaimed the big lawyer. "You know Mr. Marsh——"

Jimmy nodded and Mr. Ricaby bowed stiffly. His manner was freezingly polite.

"Yes, I think I have that pleasure."

Without troubling to wait for an invitation, Mr. Cooley flopped his large person into an armchair. Then, looking all around as if in search of someone, he asked:

"Well, where's the young lady?"

"She'll be here in a moment," replied Mr. Ricaby. There was an awkward pause, and then he went on: "I need scarcely tell you that this sudden visit is most unexpected."

The big lawyer gave a coarse laugh.

"Always expect the unexpected from Bascom Cooley!" he cried. "Sit down, Mr. Marsh. Yes, Mr. Ricaby, Bascom Cooley aims at a certain point, but he never looks in the direction he's aiming, and while the other side is carefully guarding the wrong place—bing!—Bascom Cooley's got 'em where he wants 'em."

Mr. Ricaby nodded.

"Quite so!" he said, with a shade of irony.

Mr. Cooley grinned.

"That's why the aforesaid is in a class all by himself," he chuckled.

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Mr. Marsh ventured to obtrude himself into the conversation. Timidly he said:

"Perhaps my niece may find the hour inconvenient. I'm perfectly willing to postpone——"

Mr. Cooley stamped his foot impatiently.

"Now, look here, Marsh, don't be a fool; don't establish a precedent of meekness, or you'll have to be meek all the time. That's the advice I give young married men, Ricaby."

He laughed boisterously at his own wit, and looked at Mr. Ricaby as if expecting him to join in the merriment. But Paula's attorney remained sober as a judge.

"Come, come, be cheerful!" went on Mr. Cooley; "why not let us be good friends? Why can't Miss Paula be made to understand that my client is her friend as well as her nearest relative? Flesh and blood is flesh and blood—you can't get away from that fact. He wants to open his heart to her. Hang it, they've been separated long enough! All his movements, however seemingly

unfriendly, have been actuated only by a sense of justice to his own family."

"Perfectly true—perfectly true," broke in Jimmy eagerly. "She is my brother's child, and, although we've seen nothing of her, nevertheless I feel that I am far more competent to—to take charge of—the family estate—than she is." [Pg 135]

"The family estate?" interrupted Mr. Ricaby, elevating his eyebrows.

"Yes," said Jimmy boldly. "My brother's estate and mine. You know, the woman he married——"

Cooley held up his hand with a deprecating gesture:

"Now, please, don't let us go into that phase of the matter. The marriage was kept secret, but we have conceded that it was a marriage. Once and for all, let us have done with this litigation business. My client doesn't want to drag this case through the courts for years. He can if he wants to—but he doesn't. What he wants is—peace and harmony."

"And his brother's estate," interrupted Mr. Ricaby sarcastically.

Mr. Cooley looked aggrieved.

"Ricaby," he said, "that insinuation is not in keeping with the friendly purpose of this meeting. My client is special administrator—an appointee of the Court—and we are acting under the law——"

"The law!" exclaimed Mr. Ricaby scornfully. "That's the damnable part of it! You're acting under a law that compels a widow or orphan to spend thousands of dollars on litigation in order to obtain what is theirs by right." [Pg 136]

Mr. Cooley shrugged his shoulders.

"The law is all right."

"Then it's dishonest interpretation that's at fault," retorted the other hotly. "Something is rotten somewhere when the courts can be used to legally deprive this girl of her inheritance."

Mr. Cooley rolled his eyes and remained unperturbed. Suavely, glibly, he said:

"You're repeating yourself, brother Ricaby. So you told the judge, and it didn't do your case a particle of good. That's a sign of weakness. But come, I promised myself not to allow anything to interrupt the peaceful, harmonious flow of events." With an effort at flowery rhetoric, he went on pompously: "Let us bury the legal axe, let's bring flesh and blood together, that they may be reunited over the grave of a buried family feud. Let us bring our clients together on terms of peace. It's a sacred duty we owe our profession, Mr. Ricaby, a duty that exalts our profession over all other callings. The ministry may make peace for man in Heaven, but we are peacemakers here on earth."

"Quite true—quite true," chirped Jimmy from the far corner of the room.

Mr. Ricaby shrugged his shoulders.

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"No wonder they call you the silver-lipped orator," he muttered contemptuously.

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Ricaby went forward to see who it was. Speaking to someone in the hall outside, he said:

"My clerk? Oh, yes, ask him to come up. No—I'll go down." Turning to the others, he asked:

"Will you excuse me for a moment?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Cooley, "and, while I think of it, do your best to persuade Miss Paula that we are really acting for her best interests. She is alone in the world. Her uncle will take her into his own family, welcome her as his own child."

Mr. Ricaby, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, went out without waiting to listen to any more. Mr. Cooley, who had not noticed the attorney's departure, went on:

"Can't you see the picture, Ricaby? Uncle—niece—bosom of family—happy home—cousins—smiling faces—all radiant with newly found happiness?"

Suddenly he noticed that Ricaby was no longer there. Turning to Jimmy, he exclaimed, in a changed tone of voice:

"You know that fellow is the damndest bore I was ever up against! His arguments to the judge were puerile—positively puerile! That one about the ethical aspect was a bird. You know it's all I can do to keep my temper with that brand of practitioner." [Pg 138]

Jimmy nodded approval.

"You've been remarkably patient—remarkably," he said.

Mr. Cooley's face broke into a self-satisfied smile.

"Those fellows theorize and theorize by the yard. I've sat on the bench and listened to their cackle till I got so hot under the collar I'd like to jump down and bang 'em over the head with their own law books. They quote authorities by the stack and hand you all the old-time stuff from

old Roman and British digest down to last year's decision. Those fellows forget that Henry Clay and Daniel Webster oratory is out of date. Marsh—while I think of it—don't make too much show of affection to the girl—not too much 'Uncle' business at the start, she may not take to it kindly."

"Of course, of course," said Jimmy impatiently. "I'm not exactly a fool."

"Not exactly—no—but sometimes perilously near," retorted Cooley dryly.

"My dear Cooley——"

"Now, my dear James, you must really be guided by me——"

"But there are limits," said the other.

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"Quite so," acquiesced the lawyer, "and I apologize for not observing them, but I really can't allow you to lose control of your brother John's fortune without at least making the effort to guide you properly."

"No, of course not," muttered his vis-à-vis. "God knows how I should ever pay your fees if I did ——"

The lawyer opened wide his eyes as if he did not quite comprehend.

"Pay my fees? Why, my dear Marsh, I don't want to be paid fees——"

"No?"

"You don't suppose I'm working for mere fees, do you? I'll tell you what I'm after when we get control of the estate."

"We?" echoed Jimmy interrogatively.

"*Oui—oui*"—snapped Cooley. "That's French for 'yes.' Do you imagine that Bascom Cooley intends to desert you after the battle is won? No—no—he will help you handle your victory."

"Quite so—quite so," nodded Jimmy vacuously, "but at the same time——"

"There is no same time," snapped Mr. Cooley; "you take your *tempo* from me." Holding up his hand he demonstrated with his fingers: "Move number 1—give her a regular allowance and regulate all expenditure. Move number 2—turn all her father's investments into cash. Move number 3—reinvest the cash, so that we can handle the profits."

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"But suppose she—she refuses?" demanded the other.

"She won't. She daren't. If she does"—He hesitated as if unwilling to give expression to his secret thoughts, even to Jimmy—"we'll put her where she can't refuse."

"Put her where she can't refuse?" echoed his client, puzzled. "I don't understand."

The lawyer put his finger warningly to his lips.

"Hush!" he whispered, "I've got it all planned out. There isn't one chance in a thousand for us to miss fire, but you must follow—not lead. Bascom Cooley has never lost a case. He can't lose a case. Why, Marsh, I'll take either side of this case and win."

"What colossal confidence!" cried Jimmy admiringly.

Mr. Cooley looked around as if to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers. His manner became very serious and determined.

"That's the whole secret, Jimmy," he said. "Believe in yourself and that flock of sheep we call the world will follow you. The power to be is only the power to will. Whatever I will—happens, and that is a very valuable political asset. Why, I can take a rank outsider at a crowded caucus—over the heads of all the regular nominees—nominate him and jam him through to the front. I've done it—they can't resist me. When I say 'yes,' by God! it's yes! It's got to be 'yes.' Your claim wasn't worth a button when you first came to me. Well, what do you think of your chances now? You wouldn't take ninety cents on the dollar for it, would you? Well, I guess not!"

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The door opened and Mr. Ricaby reappeared with a bag in his hand. He seemed surprised to see the two men still alone. Looking around, he exclaimed:

"Isn't Miss Marsh here yet?"

"No," said Cooley, with a covert sneer, "the young lady is taking her time——"

Jimmy made an effort to put on an air of offended dignity.

"My niece is perhaps unaware," he said loftily, "that Mr. Cooley is waiting. I don't mind for myself ——"

Mr. Ricaby was about to leave the room to investigate, when suddenly the door of the bedroom on the right opened and Paula appeared. Her face was pale, but she was cool and self-composed. The girl's manner gave little indication of the agitation within. These men who had come to see her against her will, she feared and abhorred. That they were her mortal enemies instinct told her, that they would stop at nothing to gain their ends, she had every reason to believe. This new

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proposal sugar-coated as it was with proffers of friendliness, could only cloak some sinister, covert design. She would have liked to communicate her fears to Mr. Ricaby, but this unexpected visit had so taken her by surprise that there was no opportunity. But she would be on her guard. They should get nothing from her.

"Thank God!" she murmured to herself, "this is a free country. They may annoy me, but they can do me no bodily harm."

As she came in the two men arose, Jimmy feeling more and more uncomfortable, Mr. Cooley beaming with smiles, Mr. Ricaby anxious.

"Miss Marsh," began Mr. Ricaby, "these two gentlemen—er—"

Paula advanced and bowed distantly.

"Yes—I know—Mr. James Marsh and—Mr. Cooley."

"Will you—er—sit down—Paula?" stammered her uncle.

"Thank you—no," replied Paula, with quiet dignity. "I—I prefer to stand." Significantly she added: [Pg 143]
"It won't take us very long to say what we have to say."

Jimmy muttered something under his breath, and Mr. Cooley got ready for action. Taking the floor, he began pompously:

"Miss Paula, your uncle wants you to—— It is his earnest desire that bygones—bygones—and that the past be forgotten."

"We're not in court now, Mr. Cooley," answered the girl quickly. "If my uncle has anything to say to me I prefer to hear it directly from him. He does not need an attorney."

The lawyer shrugged his massive shoulders and sat down.

"Oh, just as you please," he said.

Jimmy came forward.

"Of course, of course," he said quickly. "I want you to—to come home—Paula. Your aunt also wishes you to come—she is eager to welcome you——"

Paula's face did not change its expression. She had made up her mind. Nothing could shake her from that determination. Still, it was perhaps just as well to find out just what the other side had to propose. Calmly she said:

"That much I understand, but I want to know exactly what you expect of me so that there may be no misunderstanding in the future. What is my exact position according to your idea——" [Pg 144]

"Your position——" stammered Jimmy.

"Yes," she insisted. "My position in regard to my father's property? In other words, what are your demands?"

Mr. Ricaby interfered.

"Mr. Marsh—I think she means——"

Paula raised her hand as if she did not need any assistance.

"Mr. Ricaby, I wish to know from Mr. Marsh himself exactly what he expects of me."

"What we expect?" stammered Jimmy.

This was a question he was unprepared for. He looked at Paula helplessly and then turned to Mr. Cooley. There was a hurried whispering, during which time Paula and her attorney stood waiting. Finally Jimmy came forward:

"You will come and live with us, of course?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, with a careless nod.

"Yes, as our own child, Paula," he went on eagerly.

"Oh, yes," she repeated.

"You will have a regular allowance from the estate," continued her uncle.

"Yes."

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"You will be your own mistress. That is—er—you will come and go as you please, of course. But I think it best that we—that is, your aunt—select such companions for you as—er—we deem advisable."

"To safeguard my morals, I presume?"

"No, no; just a—a social precaution. Perhaps it won't be necessary. I don't insist on it. It just occurred to me, that's all. Of course we shall be guided by your own desires, but as your uncle and guardian I reserve the right to decide what is best for your social welfare."

"What about my debts?"

"Your debts?"

He looked helplessly at Mr. Cooley. The big lawyer guffawed, and said promptly:

"They will be paid out of the estate."

"My counsel fees are very large," went on Paula. "I owe Mr. Ricaby an enormous sum."

"We'll examine his accounts carefully and decide," echoed Jimmy.

"No," said Paula decisively, "his accounts will not be examined carefully. They will be paid without question—and without delay."

Mr. Cooley shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll—we won't discuss that point now."

"We won't discuss that point now," echoed Jimmy. Turning to her attorney, he said: "Mr. Ricaby, you will turn over all the papers referring to this or any other matter that Miss Marsh may be interested in—as in future Mr. Cooley will be her counsel and legal adviser."

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"Indeed!" cried Paula.

"Yes, my dear girl," said her uncle; "it would be rather inconvenient to have more than one legal adviser in the family. In fact, it will be impossible—quite impossible."

Paula shook her head.

"Mr. Ricaby is my friend—the only friend I have in the world," she said.

"That's rather a pity," answered Jimmy, with a feeble attempt at irony. He turned to Mr. Cooley and the lawyer shook his head. Jimmy went on:

"I am very sorry, Paula, but that doesn't alter the position. It's the one point I'm afraid I must insist on."

Paula turned to her attorney.

"Mr. Ricaby, will you kindly tell these gentlemen that our interview is at an end?"

Jimmy started forward.

"Paula! My dear niece——"

"I have nothing further to say," answered Paula coldly.

"Paula—won't you listen?"

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"Please ask them to go," she repeated.

"Won't you reconsider?" cried her uncle. "I express my sincere regret for any annoyance I may have caused you."

She smiled bitterly. All the hate that she had nourished in her heart against this man was now heated to boiling point. Vehemently she burst out:

"I expect to suffer through coming in contact with a mean, mercenary nature like yours," she cried, "that's the penalty I pay for being 'your dear niece.' What I cannot understand and what I cannot forgive is your cruelty in blackening my dead father's memory—to stamp your own brother a lunatic and drunkard! Why, it's—it's horrible! Even the love of money in a degenerate age doesn't explain that. And my dead mother! Her name had to be dishonored, that I might be stamped as illegitimate. No accusation too scandalous, too shameful, or too degrading, could be made—because I had come between you and this miserable money!" Shaking her clenched fist in his face, she cried: "But you'll never get it, Uncle James, you'll never get it! You hear that, sir? You'll never get it—and, now—please go."

Mr. Cooley looked at her in silence for a moment, whispered a few words in Jimmy's ear, and then both men left the room.

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CHAPTER X.

Paula now breathed freely for the first time in weeks. The enemy was utterly routed. Temporarily at least she might reasonably expect to be spared further annoyance. Her uncle, it was true, had control of her fortune, and until she came of age her hands were completely tied. But in another year she would be her own mistress. Then they would be powerless to molest her. Meantime, she devoutly hoped that they would leave her in peace to live her own life as she saw fit.

The excitement and turmoil incidental to the trial having quieted down, affairs at the boarding house soon resumed their normal aspect. Paula became more active daily in her Settlement

duties, and was already well known as one of the most prominent and energetic workers in that humane organization. Conspicuous in the public eye as the heiress to a large fortune, the great interest she took in the condition of the poor attracted much attention in the newspapers. They printed her portrait with eulogistic comments, sent reporters to interview her, and printed statements, entirely unauthorized, to the effect that when she came into her inheritance she would devote her millions to the cause of charity. All day long she was busy downtown on her mission of mercy and even at night was frequently called away either to address some socialist gathering or attend a committee meeting.

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Mr. Ricaby, ever attentive and devoted, always escorted her on these occasions, not realizing himself, perhaps, that he took keener pleasure in these nocturnal excursions than a legitimate interest in the case would warrant. Paula was grateful for his company, but that was all. For a pretty girl, full of life and sentiment, she was singularly heart whole. Of the deeper passions which disturb other normal healthy girls of her age she seemed entirely free. Men had declared her cold. The opposite sex appeared to have no attraction to her. But this was a mistaken impression. She was not cold. It was simply that the right man had not yet appeared. Certainly, Leon Ricaby with his grave manner and shattered illusions was not her ideal. She found him devoted, but dull. She found no pleasure in his society. Harry Parkes was shallow and impossible. The most interesting man she knew was Tod Chase. He was original and he interested her. His breezy manner and cheerful way of looking at things was just what her own life lacked. His mere presence, his droll utterance, and broad grin dispelled the blues and made her feel happier. She believed, too, that he was a friend. He had not called since her refusal to go and live with her uncle, but she had no reason to believe that he disapproved of her action. Perhaps he was afraid to intrude on her. She had offered to take him down to the slums to show him just how the poor people lived. Any day he might come to claim the promise.

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But with all her courage Paula was far from happy. Often she wished that her father had not left her a cent, and that she was back in Paris, copying the old masters in the Louvre. All she had gone through could not have failed to affect her nervous system. She was singularly depressed. Try as she would, she was unable to shake off the idea, which soon became an obsession, that something serious was about to happen, that some catastrophe, compared with which all that had until now occurred were trifles, was hanging over her head. Never so much as now had she realized her utter loneliness and defencelessness. Mr. Ricaby and the Parkes were very kind and sympathetic, but at best they were only acquaintances. She had no real claim upon them. There was apparently nothing to fret about. Her uncle and Bascom Cooley gave no sign of life, yet still she worried. She tried to centre all her attention on her work, but always the silent question arose in her mind: "What is being plotted in the dark?" The uncertainty of suspense unnerved her so much that she was soon rendered unfit for work of any kind.

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One evening about two weeks after the ignominious retreat of Messrs. Marsh and Cooley, she was sitting alone with Mr. Ricaby in Mrs. Parkes' parlor. She had been busy at the Settlement all day and returned home so tired that she was glad when, after dinner, the call of her attorney gave her an excuse for not going to a lecture which she had promised to attend.

"What do you think?" she asked anxiously. "Will they leave me alone now?"

The lawyer shook his head ominously:

"You don't know Bascom Cooley. He never admits defeat. Baffled in his attempt to keep you under close control in the Marsh house, he will scheme to gain his ends in some other way. While you are free to come and go as you please you are a hindrance to their plans. Besides, all this newspaper talk about your intention to spend millions on your Settlement work must have made them furious. They will seek other means to coerce you into passive obedience. They are both scoundrels, and there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that they have entered into a conspiracy to make unlawful use of your money. But until they show their hands we can do nothing."

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The young girl sighed. Would all this trouble, the plotting and counterplotting, never end? How weary she was of it all! Mr. Ricaby heard the sigh and guessed the reason.

"Don't be discouraged," he said. "It's only the things which are worth having that are worth fighting for. Think of all the good you can do with your money when you get it."

Paula's dark eyes flashed.

"You are right," she murmured. "It is ungrateful of me to fret like this. You are so kind." She hesitated a moment, as if there were something on her mind to which she feared to give utterance. Then timidly she said: "Everything will come out all right, no doubt, but I can't shake off an uncomfortable feeling that there's still more trouble coming. I don't like that man Bascom Cooley. He talks and acts as if he had the power to do anything, even to compelling me by force to do what I don't wish to do." With a little shudder she added: "I had a horrible dream last night."

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Mr. Ricaby laughed.

"Come—come, Paula! Don't let this thing take hold of you like that. What was the dream?"

The young girl's large eyes, turned toward him, were dilated with panicky terror. Her pallid face was still paler and the muscles about her sensitive mouth twitched spasmodically. In a low,

frightened voice, she went on:

"I dreamed that my uncle came to see me. He said insolently that I must go and live with him. I replied that I would not, and I ordered him from the house. Instead of going, he merely laughed, and, opening the door, beckoned to a man who stood waiting outside. The man entered. He was a gaunt, sinister-looking person, with a cruel mouth and big, hollow, staring eyes that seemed to pierce me through. A sardonic smile was on his face. My uncle pointed at me. 'There she is!' he said. 'Take her away. She's mad.' I gave a scream, and woke up."

Mr. Ricaby laughed outright.

"You must have been eating something which disagreed with you," he said. "Surely you don't allow yourself to be frightened by anything so silly as that?"

Paula nodded.

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"It was all so vivid that it seemed true. Suppose——"

She hesitated.

"Suppose what?" he demanded.

"Suppose they did something like that. Suppose they had me declared insane and placed in an asylum? One has read of such things. I think they are capable of anything."

The lawyer looked amused. Laughingly he asked:

"In what age do you think you are living, Paula—in the twentieth century or in the middle ages? Put all such nonsense out of your head. They couldn't do what you suggest unless a medical commission signed papers of commitment, and how could they get them? You'd have no difficulty in proving that you are as sane as they are."

Paula's face brightened. This dream had been haunting her, and she felt a sense of relief that she had been able to confide it to some one.

"I suppose it is foolish," she faltered. "But you know how it is when one gets a fixed idea. It's hard to shake it off."

Mr. Ricaby looked at her in silence, a wistful expression on his face. Had he dared, he would have gone forward and taken her in his arms, telling her hotly that he loved her, and asking her to let him henceforth be her natural protector. But there was no response in the girl's face to the tumult that raged in his own heart. Her thoughts were not of him. He checked the ardent words that rushed to his lips, and, as usual, was silent.

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"Won't you have some tea?" she asked carelessly, quite unconscious of what was passing in his mind. Before he could reply there was a sharp rap at the door, which half opened.

"May a fellow come in?" called out a cheerful voice.

The next instant Tod Chase poked his head in the room. Paula rose.

"Come in— I'm very glad to see you," she said, advancing with outstretched hand. The flush of pleasure that covered her cheek was proof enough of the genuineness of her cordiality.

Tod came in, good humored as usual, and with a broad grin on his face. All in one sentence he blurted out:

"Hope I don't intrude—looks kind of cozy in here. Been trying to come round for a week, but our factory's been working overtime these days—greatest rush you ever saw—a fellow's kept on the jump—how have you been? You look just right. Howdy, Mr. Ricaby?"

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He stopped to take breath. Paula laughed. It was the first laugh in weeks. It did her good.

"Take a seat, won't you?" she smiled.

Tod laid down his hat and drew up to the little circle.

"I wonder you look at me after what's happened," he said, as he drew off his gloves. "Anybody connected with our branch of the family ought to be kicked. Of course, you understand it isn't my fault. My sympathy is all yours. You see, Jimmy had looked upon this money as his own. He's sore, Cooley's sore, everybody's sore. I don't care a rap myself. I'm making an honest living for the first time in my life. I don't need your money. Why don't they leave you alone? The money's yours—that's all there is to it."

"I suppose you know that they wanted Miss Marsh to go and live at your stepfather's house?" interposed Mr. Ricaby.

Tod nodded.

"Yes—another pipe dream. That was Cooley's suggestion. I heard them talking about it. The day you turned Jimmy down he came home mad as a hornet."

"All I ask is to be let alone," cried Paula.

"Haven't you heard from them since?" inquired Tod.

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Mr. Ricaby looked up quickly.

"No—we've heard nothing. What is it—some new nefarious scheme?"

Tod was silent, and looked at Paula. Noticing his hesitation, she was at once filled with apprehension. He had heard something and did not wish to cause her anxiety.

"Tell me," she said quickly, "what do you know of their plans? If you are my friend you will conceal nothing."

"Yes," chimed in Mr. Ricaby. "It would be a kindness to let us know."

Tod looked from one to the other in a perplexed sort of way. Evidently there was something on his mind that troubled him. Finally he said:

"I don't know a thing—honest I don't. They have some idea that I don't approve of their actions, so they tell me nothing. Only——"

Again he hesitated.

"Only what?" said Paula eagerly.

"There's a lot of talk going on," continued Tod. "Cooley's at the house every night, and they have long conferences in the library behind closed doors. Last night my curiosity got the better of my manners. I glued my eye to the keyhole and listened. Jimmy and Cooley were sitting at the table in silent consultation. There was another man present—Dr. Zacharie. You know Dr. Zacharie—the nerve specialist. I think he's a humbug and a charlatan myself, but he gets himself talked about, the women crowd his consulting rooms, and he's making piles of money. Suddenly your name was mentioned. I tried to hear what was said, but they spoke in low tones. Every now and then Cooley turned to Dr. Zacharie and asked something, whereupon the doctor nodded."

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Paula looked at Mr. Ricaby.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? I wouldn't pay any attention to it, if I were you. Your uncle can surely have friends at his home without our getting alarmed over it."

"Mr. Ricaby's dead right," burst in Tod. "It's a bally shame that I told you. I wouldn't have said a word if you hadn't pressed me. The meeting probably had nothing to do with you——"

Mr. Ricaby looked thoughtful.

"Birds of a feather flock together. I've known Dr. Zacharie for years. He always had a bad name. One day he will be shown up as the scoundrel that he is. If he's in with Cooley and Jimmy Marsh it's for no good. Still, as Mr. Chase says, it may have nothing whatever to do with us."

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Paula shook her head apprehensively.

"I don't know Dr. Zacharie," she said. "But I don't like his name. A chill came over me when I heard it. I'm dreadfully nervous."

Tod seized her hand.

"Now, Miss Marsh—say one word more and I'll go and kill him! Dismiss Zacharie and all the others from your mind. Why—they are not worthy to breathe the same air as you. If you don't brighten up and forget all about them I'll do something desperate. Anyhow, I came here to-night on a desperate errand. It was to remind you of a promise."

"A promise—what promise?"

"Didn't you say that you would take me down to the slums one day?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, I'm ready to go. When shall it be?"

The young girl hesitated a moment. Then she said:

"To-morrow's an interesting day. There are classes at the Settlement home and house visits among the poor." Holding up a finger, she added warningly: "Mind, it isn't exactly fun. You'll see a new phase of life, something you do not know—the appalling misery and sordid wretchedness of a great, careless city."

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"That's immense!" cried Tod, rising enthusiastically. "I'll come for you to-morrow. What time?"

"About eleven o'clock," she smiled.

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CHAPTER XI.

The Bowery, that Broadway of the slums, odoriferous sink of cosmopolitan pauperism, degradation, and crime, wore its familiar, everyday aspect of ugly squalor and vice—grimy, dilapidated rookeries, dark, sinister hallways, filthy, greasy pavements littered with decayed fruit skins, gutters choked up with offensive black slime, suspicious-looking characters, abominable stanches of sauerkraut and stale beer which offended the nostrils on every side. On the slender rails high overhead occasional trains crashed by with a sullen roar; in the middle of the roadway rushing trolley cars noisily clanged their warning gongs, while on either sidewalk stretching as far south as the City Hall cheap clothing shops, tough saloons, low dance halls, pawnbrokers, penny arcades, vaudeville shows, displayed their gaudy signs. Up and down pushed and jostled a perspiring and motley crowd—bearded Jew peddlers, pallid sweat-shop workers, Chinese, flashily dressed "toughs," furtive-eyed pickpockets, sailors on shore leave, factory girls, painted street walkers, slouching longshoremen, tattered tramps, derelicts of both sexes—an appalling host of unkempt, unwashed, evil-smelling humanity.

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In the side streets, just off the main thoroughfare, conditions were even more congested and depressing. On either hand rickety, grimy tenements were alive with bearded Russians, fierce-looking Italians, vociferating Irish, pot-bellied Germans. From broken windows hung clotheslines bending under the load of newly washed rags; on flimsy, rusty fire-escapes were jammed filthy mattresses on which slept the wretched occupants, glad to escape from the foul air and heat within; dark stairways and stoops were thronged with neglected, consumptive children. The evil smells were so numerous that it was impossible to determine which was the most objectionable. The air was full of discordant, nerve-racking sounds. On one side of the street an Italian was grinding a wheezy organ, while little girls, some with bare feet, danced to the music. A few yards farther on, boys with white faces drawn by hunger, were rummaging eagerly in ash barrels, hunting for scraps of refuse. Two women were pulling each other's hair in the centre of a circle of encouraging neighbors, neglected babes were screaming, dogs were barking, a vendor was shrieking his wares. It was Hell, yet nothing unusual—only everyday life in the slums.

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"Isn't it dreadful?" murmured Paula, as she and Tod hurried along Rivington Street.

"Gee!" replied her escort. "Look at some of those faces! They seem hardly human. Animals are better looking."

"They are not to blame," answered Paula sadly. "These poor people are the victims of circumstances. They have been brutalized—the Jews by centuries of race persecution, the others by merciless economic conditions. The black poverty in which they live is well nigh inconceivable. Their desperate struggle for mere existence is unbelievable."

"Phew!" exclaimed Tod, as he peeped through the window of a gloomy, broken-down rookery. "How can any one live in such a place? The Black Hole of Calcutta couldn't have been much worse!"

"That's just it," answered Paula, with some warmth. "You self-satisfied, well-fed people uptown don't take the trouble to come down here to find out how the poor live. We Settlement workers know, for we are right in the heart of it all. What you see from the street is nothing. You must enter some of these tenements if you wish to become really acquainted with the shocking conditions in which they live—the crushing poverty, the physical and moral suffering, the gross immorality. In some places as many as twelve persons, full-grown men and women, half-grown boys and girls, all eat and sleep in one dark, ill-ventilated room. Can you wonder that such a life brutalizes them and that they die like flies?"

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Tod shrugged his shoulders.

"What good would it do if we did know? We couldn't help all of them. You remember what Baron Rothschild said to a wild-eyed anarchist who one day managed to break into his office brandishing a pistol: 'My friend, you insist that I share my fortune with the poor. I am worth five millions of dollars. There are in the world more than five hundred million paupers. Here is your share—exactly one cent.'"

"That's all very well," smiled Paula. "I don't go to that extreme. We can't help all, but we can help a little. If the rich could see things as they are, it would make them reflect. I don't think they would be so wickedly extravagant in their own homes if they saw all this misery. The price of one big dinner served in a Fifth Avenue mansion would support half a dozen families here for a year."

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Tod looked skeptical.

"I like to hear you talk," he said lightly, "because you're so earnest about it, but really you're wrong. If these people were given assistance to-day they would be as badly off to-morrow. All civilizations have had this problem to deal with. The poor are the underdogs in the struggle for life. They're only half human, anyway. Most of them have never known anything better. They are used to roughing it. They actually enjoy their dirt. They themselves are largely responsible for their own misfortunes. They drink, they're shiftless and thrifless."

"The rich have more vices than the poor," answered Paula quietly. "The poor drink to drown their troubles. We can't say just why, of two men born with the same advantages, one prospers and the other remains in the gutter. We can only deal with the problem as we find it. It is dreadful to think that buried in these fearful tenements, brutalized by their frightful environments, are numbers of talented young men and women who are trying to better themselves. Left to themselves they are likely to sink deeper in the frightful morass that surrounds them, but if

extended a helping hand they may be able to rise above the appalling conditions and so escape the terrible degradation and suffering that otherwise awaits them. A boy or girl, children of the tenements, may have within the genius of a Wagner or a Rosa Bonheur, but from infancy these children are so dragged down, so brutalized by their unspeakable environments that their natural aspirations and talents are hopelessly crushed. It is to such as these that the Settlement lends its aid. We are trying to help the deserving, we are seeking to sift the gold from the dross. Look, there is the Settlement House!"

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On the opposite side of the street was a substantial-looking building resembling a small school-house. Conspicuous by its cleanliness among the surrounding dingy tenements, erected by enlightened and humane idealists for the sole purpose of uplifting humanity, it stood as a kind of moral lighthouse set down in a deadly morass of crime and hopeless pauperism.

"Come, I will show you all through," cried Paula enthusiastically. Her face brightened up and her step was elastic as once more she found herself in the midst of her fellow workers. Smiles and nods greeted her from every direction. The place was busy as a beehive. The halls were full of people; classes were going on in the different rooms. Taking Tod's arm, she led him in this direction and that, proud to show all there was to be seen. There were regular night classes where those employed during the day could receive instruction in stenography, bookkeeping, and other useful vocations, gymnasiums, classes where the technical trades were taught, classes where music lessons were given. There were also attractive recreation rooms which kept young men from the dangers of saloons and young girls from the temptations of the dance halls.

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"It's such interesting work," she said. "Here I have no time to think of my troubles. I can forget Uncle James and Bascom Cooley."

Tod was full of enthusiasm.

"No wonder you've no use for society and the rest," he said admiringly. "If I'd taken a taste for this sort of thing years ago perhaps I wouldn't have made such a fool of myself."

Paula laughed.

"There's still time," she said mischievously. "It's never too late to mend, you know." Leading him once more in the direction of the street, she added: "This is the bright side of my work; I'll let you look now on the darker side. It isn't so pleasant. Come with me."

Docilely he followed her out of the building, wondering where he was being taken, caring little, so long as she was with him. This dark-eyed girl, with her serious views and charming manner, had already taken a strong hold of the young man. She was utterly different from any girl he had ever known, and cogitating secretly with himself, he came to the conclusion that the comparison was in her favor.

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Quite unconscious that she was the object of her companion's thoughts, Paula hurried along the narrow, slippery pavements, crowded with pale-faced women and children, obstructed by all kinds of wagons and hucksters' pushcarts. Stopping for a moment at a delicatessen shop, she purchased some ham, eggs, butter, and bread, and then hastened on again until she came to a big, dreary tenement.

"We go in here," she said, quite out of breath after the quick walk. "It is the home of one of my favorite pupils, Annie Hughes. They are wretchedly poor. The father is an incorrigible drunkard and the mother is bedridden. Only the devotion of her child keeps her alive. I want you to see Annie. She is only twelve, but she does the work of two women. She cannot play like other children of her age, yet she never complains. She is entirely devoted to her mother. It's a dreadful hovel they live in. You'll be shocked at what you see, but don't show surprise. Mrs. Hughes is a decent woman, and it will only distress her. She's consumptive and can't live long. If she dies I shall adopt and educate Annie as my own."

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They entered a dark, narrow, forbidding-looking hallway, with walls thickly begrimed with the accumulated filth of years, and so cracked that the plaster in places had fallen out in huge chunks, exposing the wood lathing. At the far end was a winding, rickety staircase, every stair filthy with refuse and rubbish, and only dimly lighted by small windows that did not look as if they had been washed since the house was built. It was a steep climb to the sixth floor, and both were out of breath when they reached the top. Paula approached a door, and knocked.

"Is that you, Annie?" called out a feeble voice.

"No, Mrs. Hughes—it is I, Miss Marsh, with a friend."

Without waiting for further invitation, they pushed open the door and went in.

A shocking scene of neglect and squalor met their eyes. In a dimly lighted, poorly ventilated room about fourteen feet square, on a tumble-down bed, covered with filthy rags, lay a woman past middle age, apparently asleep. Her eyes were closed and she did not take the trouble to turn her face as the visitors entered. The place, living room and bedchamber in one, was indescribably and hopelessly dirty and littered with broken furniture and rubbish of every description. It was really the attic of the house, the low ceiling formed by the roof sloping down to the front, where a small window looked into the street below. Half the glass panes being broken and patched up with paper, only a poor light entered the room, and this helped to partly conceal the dirt-encrusted floor, torn, filthy bedding, and greasy stove piled up with unwashed dishes. The foul air

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reeked with offensive odors of decaying vegetation and bad drainage.

The woman on the bed started to cough, a violent cough which shook the bed. When the spasm had passed she turned to see who had come in. Paula she knew, but Tod was a stranger, yet her face expressed neither surprise or embarrassment. The poor are accustomed to unceremonious visits from Salvation Army workers and others, and they are so wretched that they have ceased to care about anything. A faint smile came over the invalid's pale, wan face.

"I thought it was Annie," she said. "She's been a long time gone. I had to send her to the Dispensary to get some more medicine. My cough is very bad to-day."

She stopped, seized again by a fit of coughing.

"I brought you a few little things, Mrs. Hughes," said Paula, laying down the packages she had brought. At the same time she slipped a five-dollar bill into the woman's hand. "Let Annie beat you up a fresh-laid egg. It'll do your cough good. You must get all the nourishment you can or you'll never get strong."

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"God bless you, lady," murmured the sick woman. "Where would Annie and me be to-day if it wasn't for you?"

"Where's your husband?" demanded Paula.

Mrs. Hughes shook her head feebly.

"I don't know," she whispered. "He never comes near me. He earns wages now and again, but it all goes in whisky. The neighbors say he was arrested last week and sent to the Island."

Paula turned to Tod.

"Isn't it fearful?" she said, in a low tone.

Tod put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a ten-dollar bill.

"Terrible!" he said. "Here—give her this. She needs it more than I. It's the first thing I've done for charity in my life, and somehow it makes one feel good."

Paula looked at him and smiled as she passed the money over to Mrs. Hughes.

"This is from my friend here," she said.

"God bless you, sir!" she said. "It'll help keep Annie and me going a little while more. 'Tain't for long, though. I've given up hope. I'll never get any better. The doctor says I'm a goner. He knows. He told a neighbor, and she told Annie. The poor child came home crying as if her dear little heart would break. It's not for myself that I'm worrying. It's for Annie. If you only knew what a good child she is, sir—"

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She stopped short, choked by another fit of violent coughing.

"Don't worry," said Paula, soothingly and trying to keep back her own tears. "We'll take good care of Annie."

The sick woman raised herself with difficulty on one arm.

"The child's gone a long time," she said uneasily. "I'm always anxious when she's away."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when through the crack in the window came the sound of unusual commotion in the street below. There was the noise of an automobile stopping with a jerk, warning shouts, and then the shrieks and sobbing of women. Tod rushed to the window.

"It's an accident!" he said. "Some one has been run over."

Paula, her heart in her mouth, seized by an indefinable dread, leaned out of the window. All they could see was a surging crowd gathered round a big, red automobile. A burly policeman, and a tall, thin man in a linen duster were stooping over a prostrate form. Suddenly a wild cry from the bed behind them froze the blood in their veins. They looked back. Mrs. Hughes, livid, had raised herself to a sitting posture and was trying to get out of bed to come and see for herself. The mother's unerring instinct had told her what had happened—yet she dare not give expression to her dread. Her hollow eyes dilated wide with terror, she cried:

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"Annie only went to the Dispensary. She ought to be back by now. Where can she be?"

Outside, the noise and excitement had been succeeded by an unnatural calm. Suddenly Tod, who was still hanging half out of the window, turned round, and before Paula could silence him, called out:

"They're coming into this house."

A cry from the mother answered him. She did not know why she called out. Surely it was no misfortune of hers—this accident. She only knew that her child was out, and should have returned long ago.

Paula rushed to the top of the landing and looked down. Below, she saw a procession of people slowly ascending the stairs. First came the stalwart policeman bearing something white in his arms, then came the tall, thin man in the linen duster, followed by a number of women weeping

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and wailing. Paula felt herself grow pale. A vague intuition told her that a terrible tragedy had occurred. Her heart seemed to stop beating. Up and up, closer and closer, came the policeman with his burden.

"What is it?" cried Paula, scarcely able to control herself.

"A child run over, m'm," answered the officer stolidly. Tears were in his eyes as he added: "It's little Annie Hughes. I'm afraid it's all over."

The child's form was limp, the eyes were closed, her little dress was saturated with blood.

"Oh, God!"

With an involuntary shriek of horror, Paula staggered back into the attic. Her first thought was of the poor mother, to save her the shock of seeing the body of her mangled child, but as she crossed the threshold, she suddenly felt sick and dizzy. The room seemed to swim round. She called loudly:

"Mr. Chase! Come quick!"

Then she fainted, just as Tod reached her.



**THE AGONIZED SCREAM OF A
MOTHER ROBBED OF HER
YOUNG.**

But poor Mrs. Hughes had heard the shriek and she answered it with one even more terrible—the agonized scream of a mother robbed of her young. Suddenly possessed of almost superhuman strength, she left the bed and staggered to the door while Tod, panicstricken, was dashing cold water into Paula's face, trying to revive her.

The policeman entered with his pathetic burden and laid the child gently on the bed.

"We've rung for an ambulance," he explained, "but——"

A fierce, hysterical outburst interrupted him. The wretched mother snatched her child from his grasp and, fondling it to her almost naked breast, tried with wild, staring eyes and trembling hands to find its injuries. Not understanding, unable to help, crushed under the awful weight of this supreme blow which had stricken her, she frantically kissed the child's white face and called upon her by name.

The tall, thin man in the linen duster advanced, felt the child's pulse, and then tried to lead the mother away.

"Madam," he said, "I'm a doctor. There's nothing to be done. It's all over. I can't tell you how I deplore this accident. If money can help matters, I am willing to pay. The little girl ran right into my automobile as I was turning the corner." Turning to the policeman, he added: "It was an accident, officer, wasn't it? Thank God, you were a witness to that. Everybody saw how it happened."

The policeman glared angrily at him. Almost savagely he replied:

"You may thank your stars it was, or you'd never have got out of this neighborhood alive. They'd have strung you up to a lamppost sure as fate, and served you right. I guess it was an accident, all right, and you're not to blame, but I'll have to arrest you, anyway, on a technical charge of homicide."

The distracted mother, staring at the two men, had listened stupidly. Suddenly she understood, and, pointing a scrawny finger at him, cried hysterically:

"Ah—you are the murderer! You killed my child! He killed my child! Oh, justice in Heaven!"

The effort was more than her weakened condition could stand. Sobbing violently, she fell prostrate over the body of her little daughter.

The stranger turned to Tod, who was still engaged in reviving Paula. It seemed to Tod that he had seen the pale, sardonic face, those piercing eyes and jet black hair before. He could not tell just where.

"You seem the only reasonable one here," said the stranger. "The woman's hysteria is only natural. I am entirely blameless in the matter. Of course, it is very sad, but these children of the tenements will run under the wheels of carriages. It is a wonder more are not killed." Looking at Paula, who was slowly coming to, he inquired: "Fainted, eh? One of the family?"

Tod did not like the man's cold, indifferent, almost brutal manner. It was with an effort that he replied civilly:

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"No—this lady was merely paying a visit here. The child was one of her pupils. She is Miss Paula Marsh, teacher of the Rivington Street Settlement."

The stranger started and looked at Paula more closely.

"The niece of Mr. James Marsh?" he cried, in surprise.

Tod nodded.

"Yes."

"How strange!" muttered the stranger. Drawing a card from his pocket, he said: "I am Dr. Zacharie!"

Now Tod remembered where he had seen this man. It was through the keyhole of the library the night of that secret midnight meeting. [Pg 178]

Paula opened her eyes. At first she saw only Tod. Then her gaze, wandering round the room suddenly rested on Dr. Zacharie, who stood staring with his black, piercing eyes and sardonic smile, silently studying her. For a moment she stared back at him, without making a movement or a sound. A look of repulsion and fright came into her face. Suddenly she uttered a shriek:

"The man of my dreams!" she cried.

Then she fainted again.

Dr. Zacharie put his finger on her pulse and turned to Tod. It seemed to the latter that a smile of satisfaction hovered about his mouth.

"She's a highly nervous girl," he said, "and subject to strange hallucinations. I am a nerve specialist. Cases like this interest me. Her condition is well known to her uncle. He asked me to call and see her. It is a curious coincidence that I should meet her under these tragic circumstances. You had better get her home at once. My automobile is at your disposal." [Pg 179]

CHAPTER XII.

Three weeks passed and Paula still felt the terrible shock of little Annie's death. The sad affair had made such an impression on her sensitive nature that she was compelled to give up her Settlement work temporarily if not altogether. For days she was haunted by the wretched mother's agonized face; that shrill scream of despair still rang in her ears.

For some time she had been thinking of leaving town and going somewhere for a rest. Certainly she needed it. Her nerves were all unstrung; she felt more low-spirited and depressed than ever. With her music and her books she tried to shake off the melancholy that weighed upon her, but without much success. The book dropped from her listless hands and she found herself incapable even of thinking, her mind constantly filled with a vague, indefinable feeling of uneasiness.

Both Mr. Ricaby and Tod tried their best to cheer her up, insisting that there was nothing to worry about. It was ten months now since her uncle was appointed administrator of her estate. In two months more his guardianship would be at an end, and she would be legally entitled to come into her own. Yet, in spite of this reassurance, strange misgivings seized the girl. What new move were her uncle and Bascom Cooley contemplating? She had heard nothing of them for weeks, but that in itself meant nothing. Under the peculiar circumstances, such silence was, perhaps, all the more suspicious. [Pg 180]

Why had her uncle spoken to this Dr. Zacharie, the nerve specialist, about her? How frightened she had been that fatal afternoon in Mrs. Hughes' attic when she first saw the doctor. As he stood staring at her, with those black, piercing eyes and sardonic smile of his he looked exactly like the terrible man in her dream. Of course, that was silly, but she could not overcome her first aversion to the man. Since the accident he had called at the boarding house several times on the pretense of inquiring after her health, and on each occasion she noticed that he looked at her strangely. Why did he come so often—by what right did he stare at her and question in that searching, inquisitional manner? In future, she would not allow it. She would resent it as an intolerable impertinence. If he came again she would refuse to see him. [Pg 181]

One afternoon she was home, alone. The weather was stormy and had spoiled a little shopping excursion arranged with one of her Settlement friends. At a loss what to do in order to kill time, she thought she would practice a little, so going to the piano, she played a few bars. This soon tired her. Finding she had no mind for music, she picked up a book and tried to read. But she found it impossible to become interested. For some reason she could not explain she felt nervous and ill at ease. Depressing fancies came crowding into her brain. There was nothing particularly to worry about, yet something within told her that a critical moment in her affairs was fast approaching. She was growing more and more uncomfortable, when suddenly there came a rap at the door. Nervously she jumped up, wondering who it could be. Surely Mrs. Parkes would not knock, and she had not heard the front doorbell.

"Come in," she called out timidly.

The door opened and Dr. Zacharie appeared on the threshold, bowing and smiling.

Dr. Louis Zacharie belonged to that class of medical practitioner, limited happily in number, who do not hesitate to disgrace a noble profession for mere love of lucre. An arrant humbug, he called himself a nerve specialist, and with the help of one or two yellow newspapers ever ready to print any trash so long as it was sensational, had succeeded in getting himself talked about as an authority on nervous diseases. Silly women and foolish men believed he possessed extraordinary powers to cure their imaginary ailments, and flocked in crowds to his waiting rooms. Society took him up. It became the fashion to consult him. Soon he was so busy that he could be seen by appointment only, and money literally flowed into his coffers. A man of magnetic personality, with some skill as a hypnotist, he had no difficulty in persuading his patients that they were in a very alarming condition, and that only the closest care at his hands could save them from total nervous collapse and worse. His real character as an unprincipled charlatan was, of course, well known to all his medical colleagues, but he was clever enough to cover up his tracks and thus managed to escape disciplinary action by the Medical Society. He was a comparative newcomer in New York, but in the West he had blazed a long trail of crookedness. Driven from San Francisco for malpractice, he turned up in Denver, where he again aroused the authorities to action. He fled to Chicago and for a time kept from public notice. Then there was a new scandal, and once more he disappeared, to turn up two or three years later in New York. In the metropolis his peculiar talents seemed to find a more profitable field. Within a short time he found himself one of the most successful and fashionable specialists in the city.

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One day he found among the patients in his reception room a big, blustering man who introduced himself as Bascom Cooley. The doctor had already heard of the criminal lawyer, and for a moment was inwardly perturbed, thinking the visit might have some connection with his past history. But Mr. Cooley soon put him at his ease. He had called on behalf of a friend of his, Mr. James Marsh. They understood that he, Dr. Zacharie, was an expert on all nervous disorders. There was a case in Mr. Marsh's immediate family that they believed needed watching. Would the doctor be willing to come to Mr. Marsh's house for a conference? The doctor looked at the lawyer and the lawyer looked at the doctor. Each understood the other. There was money in it—big money. That decided it. Dr. Zacharie went that same night to West Seventy-second Street, and ever since had evinced a warm interest in James Marsh's ward.

Paula's face flushed with annoyance. Going hastily forward, she said:

"I am afraid I cannot see you, doctor."

Not in the least abashed by this chilly reception, Dr. Zacharie advanced into the room, the sardonic smile hovering round his thin, cruel mouth.

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"I won't detain you a minute—I have come to say good-by," he said blandly.

Thinking that she might get rid of him the more quickly by a pretense at politeness, Paula said more amiably:

"Are you leaving town, doctor?"

The question was unfortunate for, thus encouraged, he took a seat uninvited, and drew off his gloves with deliberate slowness.

"Just a few words before I go." Fixing her with his penetrating black eyes, he went on: "You know, your case interests me—so much——"

"My case?" echoed Paula, coldly elevating her eyebrows as if not comprehending his meaning.

He nodded.

"When I first saw you the day of that unfortunate accident I said to myself——"

He stopped and shook his head ominously. Then, after a pause, he continued:

"I said to myself, she's a fine, highly strung girl, who needs care and attention, and, above all—rest—rest. Yes, your brain needs rest. It is over-worked—you think too much—the wheels go round too fast."

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"Yes?" said Paula, trying to curb her growing impatience.

The doctor smiled.

"You don't mind my sitting down, do you?" he asked.

"Not in the least—if you wish to," she replied curtly, without making a move to take a seat herself.

He sat in silence, watching her stealthily.

"Won't you sit down, too?" he said. "We will talk a little."

She shook her head decisively.

"No—I—I can't talk to you. I had fully made up my mind never to see you again. I'll be perfectly frank, Dr. Zacharie, you have a disquieting effect on me."

He smiled again, a cynical, horrible smile, which made her shudder.

"That is because I tell you the truth," he said, blinking his eyes. "You don't like to hear about your state of mind."

"No. For I don't believe what you say," she retorted hotly. "My health—my mind—is as clear as yours. I am only tired. I'm weary to death of this awful lawsuit. I am compelled to stay in-doors, to keep my door locked so that they shan't serve me with any one of those dreadful papers summoning me to appear, to answer, to show cause, to answer endless questions. Even when you knocked just now my heart began to beat."

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He shrugged his shoulders as if the symptoms she described confirmed only too well his diagnosis.

"You see," he cried, "you are all nerves! There is great danger there—hidden dangers that only we men of science can see."

Starting involuntarily, she exclaimed apprehensively:

"Hidden danger! What do you mean? Why do you tell me these things? Do you think it does me any good to hear them? Last time you were here, doctor, I asked you not to call again. I told you I needed no further professional advice. I am perfectly well—and strong—and—and—and——"

She stopped and stared at him, as if struck with a new idea.

"You see," he cried quickly, "you cannot even finish your sentence. You have forgotten what you were going to say."

"No," she replied promptly, "I was just thinking—something flashed across my mind. Dr. Zacharie, you were sent here by Uncle James to watch me."

"To watch you?" he echoed with well-simulated surprise.

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"Yes," she said firmly. "To watch me—am I right?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Your uncle is anxious about you, of course—why not? You have said many strange things about him. He is actually afraid for you, and for himself. It's natural enough. But come, don't let us speak of him. That is the one subject that we should never mention before you. It is your—your—what shall I call it—that the non-scientific person may understand?"

Paula paced nervously up and down the room. What did these insinuations mean? What was the real object of this ambiguous questioning? She was about to retort angrily, when the door opened, and to her great relief Mrs. Parkes entered.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the landlady, about to withdraw.

"Don't go, please," cried Paula, going forward. "I want to see you, Mrs. Parkes. Dr. Zacharie is just going." Turning to dismiss him without further ceremony, she said curtly: "Good-by, doctor. Please thank my uncle, and tell him I don't need medical attention."

Dr. Zacharie rose and bowed. He understood that he was unceremoniously dismissed, but he was not the kind of man to easily lose his sangfroid.

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"As you wish," he said, as he rose and went toward the door, "but you will be careful—won't you?" Impressively he added:

"Remember—there is danger—great danger of total collapse. Your nerves need watching. The slightest imprudence——"

"Lord sakes, doctor, you're not very comforting!" cried Mrs. Parkes.

"I always tell my patients the truth," replied the doctor. "It is better."

"Then I'm glad I'm not your patient," retorted the landlady promptly. "Give me the good, cheerful lie that comforts, even if it ain't true. My experience with Parkes taught me that, Paula— I was only happy when he was lying to me."

"Well, I have warned you, Miss Marsh," repeated the doctor, "take care!"

Paula bowed haughtily.

"Thank you—good-by," she said icily.

Dr. Zacharie opened the door and disappeared.

"Phew! Isn't he the Job's comforter!" exclaimed Mrs. Parkes. Looking suddenly at Paula, she said:

"Lord sakes, child, how pale you are!"

Paula was visibly distressed. The man certainly had frightened her, for she was all trembling. Going to the door, she first locked it, and then, turning to Mrs. Parkes, she said, in an agitated voice:

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"Don't let him come here again—please! He has such a depressing effect on me. Somehow or

other I'm afraid of him—afraid of him. I don't know why—but I am."

Suddenly she stopped, and, approaching the landlady, said, in a shuddering whisper:

"Mrs. Parkes, if anything happens to me——"

"Gracious! What could happen?" cried the old lady.

"I don't know," replied the young girl gloomily. "My uncle is desperate for money. If anything happened to me—he's the next of kin—he'd get the estate." She stopped, as if unwilling to tell what was on her mind. Then, with an effort, she continued: "Supposing he——"

"Supposing he what?" demanded the other.

"I don't know—I have such strange thoughts—I never know what they're going to do next. Mr. Ricaby doesn't know, either. There's this strange, inexplicable silence, these strange visits of Dr. Zacharie. It is as if they were waiting for—for— It's the uncertainty that gets on my nerves so."

The old lady shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you get married and settle the whole business?" she said.

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"Get married!" cried Paula, compelled to smile in spite of her anxiety.

"Certainly. Then your husband can do the worrying, and your uncle could whistle for the money.

"Yes, yes; but who could I marry?" laughed Paula.

The old woman shook her head sagaciously.

"Oh, just look around a little. You won't have to look very far. My Harry's a good boy—as different from his father as chalk is to cheese. He's fine looking, too, and he's a good son—and, Paula, a good son makes a good husband."

"Get married," said Paula musingly, "and get away from here? Yes. That's it—that's it."

"I was speaking to Mr. Ricaby about it," went on Mrs. Parkes.

Paula looked up, surprised.

"Mr. Ricaby? What—what did he say?" she demanded.

"He said it was a splendid idea—but you'd have to get your uncle's consent—or the consent of the court—or something. My advice is to marry first and ask consent afterward."

Paula was silent and thoughtful for a moment. Then she asked:

"Did Mr. Ricaby seem pleased at the idea?"

"Well, not—not—exactly pleased. He didn't throw up his hat and dance a hornpipe, but he congratulated me on having such a fortunate son."

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The young girl stared at her landlady as if dumbfounded.

"What!" she cried, "did you tell Mr. Ricaby that your son—what did he say?"

"I said that Harry loved you and would make you a good husband," replied the mother proudly.

"How did you dispose of me in the matter?" smiled the girl.

Mrs. Parkes seemed embarrassed for an answer. Hesitatingly she answered:

"I said—that you—that you were not exactly opposed to the idea."

It was only with difficulty that Paula could keep her face straight. Controlling herself, she said:

"Mrs. Parkes, you have said that a good, cheerful lie is sometimes very comforting, but—in this case it's not only cheerless and uncomfortable—it's also most embarrassing. As it happens, I'm very much opposed to the idea."

The mother looked at her blankly. That her Harry was not a suitor any girl would eagerly jump at had never entered her mind.

"You could learn to love him," she said testily.

Paula was getting rather weary of the subject. Impatiently she replied:

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"But I don't want to learn to love him. Forgive me, Mrs. Parkes, if I ask you not to refer to the subject again."

"The poor boy is eating his heart out," said Mrs. Parkes, wiping away a solitary tear.

Just as she spoke the door opened and the object of the conversation put his head in.

"Say, *mater*," he grinned, "do you know Mr. Chase has been waiting downstairs half an hour?"

"Oh, my gracious!" cried the old lady, all flustered. "I quite forgot—so he has! He wants to see you. He came while the doctor was here. I told him to wait, and I'd—I—clean forgot—oh, dear! I'll

tell him to come up. Excuse me, dear, I'm all upside down to-day."

With more excuses the landlady bounced out of the room, leaving the two together. Harry had been listening at the keyhole, and now he eyed Paula sheepishly. There was an awkward silence. Finally he took courage, and said:

"Miss Paula—I want you to forgive my mother's meddling with our affairs. I promised you I would never speak of marriage again, and I won't. But I can't get mother to—stop spreading the news. She has told Mr. Ricaby, she has told Dr. Zacharie, and now she has just told Mr. Chase that—that the matter between us is settled."

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Paula gasped with mingled surprise and indignation.

"Mr. Chase! Oh! And Dr. Zacharie! Oh!"

"Don't be too hard on her, Miss Marsh," he said apologetically, "it's the vanity of the mother, she thinks her son is good enough for any one, just because he's her son. But he isn't—I know it, and—when he's a confirmed bachelor of eighty she'll know it, too."

"I hope she's alive then," smiled Paula, who had recovered her good nature.

Just then the door opened, and Tod entered. He first looked at Paula, and, with a grimace, extended his hand to Harry Parkes.

"First of all—congratulations!" he said.

Offering his hand to Paula, he said:

"Congratulations!"

The young girl showed impatience.

"Please, Mr. Chase—don't jest!" she cried.

"What!" exclaimed Tod, a pleased expression on his face, "nothing in it?"

"Nothing at all!" replied Paula laconically.

Tod looked immensely relieved. Then, turning the subject, he said in a low tone:

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, Paula, but it's bound to be in all the papers to-night."

"Bad news!" exclaimed Paula apprehensively.

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"What is it? Tell me; I'm used to that."

Harry moved towards the door.

"If you'll pardon me I'll go."

He went out, closing the door behind him. Approaching Paula, Tod said earnestly:

"I should have come here before, only I could not get away. I'm keeping tabs on Cooley. I wanted to warn Ricaby. Ricaby is all right, but he doesn't seem to know how to handle the case. He gets the worst of it every time."

"What is the news?" demanded Paula uneasily.

"Well, they've arrested Ricaby!"

"Arrested him! What for?"

"For debt. It appears that he has borrowed money on some securities left in his charge by a client, or something of that sort. He was taken from his office this morning to the City Hall Court. He's trying to get bail."

"Mr. Ricaby in prison!" cried Paula. "The only friend I have in the world!"

"Not the only friend," replied the young man promptly. "Count me, too, Miss Paula. I'm with you in the fight you're putting up against that school of sharks, and you couldn't drive me away from you with a Gatling. This is a new move in their game, but we'll block it. I'm going on Ricaby's bail bond myself."

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"Can you?" asked Paula eagerly.

"Can I?" laughed Tod. "It's the easiest thing I do. Mother's got some real estate, and she'll sign anything for me. You know it's a joke on Jimmy to make his wife put up bail for the man he's had arrested. As for Cooley, it will be a scream when he finds it out."

"Oh, but the disgrace of it!" cried Paula, in dismay. "The humiliation—he's so sensitive. Poor Mr. Ricaby!"

"That's all right, Miss Marsh," said Tod consolingly. "It's a put-up job of the Big Chief—that's one of his methods. We'll get Ricaby out before to-night. I thought you'd like to come with me to jail—he's down in the Tombs."

"The Tombs!" she exclaimed.

"Of course," he went on, "that's no place for a lady, but when I'm with you, you might be in the St. Regis for the courteous treatment you'll get. Say, can you see Cooley's face when he finds out who went on Ricaby's bond! Do you know what worried them so? They heard that Ricaby is trying to raise money to retain ex-Senator Wratchett. That fellow Cooley's a wonder! He hears about things before they happen."

"Then it's for me—for my sake," faltered Paula, "that Mr. Ricaby is in prison. I believe he has beggared himself for me—to fight this case. He never tells me how much I owe him. It's all my fault. Let's go to him at once. Oh, Mr. Chase, I'm so grateful to you!"

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Going into her room, she reappeared immediately with her hat and coat and began hurriedly to put them on.

"Then call me Tod, won't you?" grinned her companion. "All my men friends call me Tod. The only name I won't stand for is Todhunter. Your Uncle Jimmy insulted me with that epithet once, and I went up so high in the air that he never did it again. I'm the one man your uncle respects. I make so much noise he has to bribe me to keep quiet. That's Bascom Cooley's argument—the more noise you make the more attention you get, and the more you fool people. Cooley says——"

"Don't be like Mr. Cooley," she protested.

"He's mighty successful, all the same. Do you know, Miss Marsh, he and two or three others run this city?"

"More's the pity," she replied dryly.

Enthusiastically he went on:

"Bascom Cooley is the great American legal genius—he never loses a case. If I thought it would please you I'd cut out the brass band effects and put some soft pedal polish on my manners. You wouldn't believe it, would you? I almost graduated, that is, I nearly took a degree. I can slow down to society speed if I want to."

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"Whatever you are, be yourself," smiled Paula gently.

"Then you like me as I am, eh?" he grinned. "Well, that's a good start!"

"Let us go, please," said Paula, embarrassed at the personal tone the conversation had taken. "When I think that a noble-hearted, self-sacrificing friend is in prison because he tried to help me—I—feel I ought to share his prison cell with him. Let us go to him at once."

"Say, I'd go to jail for the rest of my life if you'd share my cell with me," he said, with mock heroism.

Paula laughed.

"I think you said you'd cut out the brass band effects, Tod."

"That's right," he replied. "I'm an extremist. When I like anybody I—I don't know where to stop. Ricaby is a good fellow, and he's entitled to anything you can say about him."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when suddenly there was the sound of footsteps outside. The door opened and Mr. Ricaby appeared.

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CHAPTER XIII.

Paula did not believe her eyes. She could hardly have been more startled if she had seen a dead man suddenly come back to life. Here she had been busy making plans to go and console him in prison, and behold he walked in!

The lawyer's face was pale and serious, and his manner agitated. Certainly he had gone through an experience unpleasant enough to upset any man. The enemy had made a trap for him, and, like a fool, he had walked into it blindly. Arrested on an absurd charge while trying to raise more funds to carry on the case, he had been subjected to the most mortifying humiliation and annoyance, no doubt at the suggestion of the wily Mr. Cooley himself. Of course, he had no difficulty whatever in making an explanation so satisfactory that the Court at once dismissed the case, but then it was too late. The mischief was done. The reporters had the story, and the yellow extras with their exaggerated "scare heads" were already shrieking their way all over town. Who was responsible for this new outrage? Who was it that had informed Mr Cooley that he was trying to borrow money in order to engage the legal services of ex-Senator Wratchett? To Paula alone he had confided his plans. No, there was still another. Yes, he remembered it now. He had spoken of his intentions in the presence of Mr. Chase, the last time the young man had called at the house. No doubt he had betrayed them.

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Disregarding Tod's presence, the lawyer advanced quickly towards Paula.

"Pardon my coming up without being announced," he said. "But I heard Mr. Chase was here, and I came straight in."

Paula's face lit up with pleasure. Hurrying forward and extending both her hands, she cried:

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you! We were just going to—to—the prison. Tell me how—when—did you ___"

The attorney halted and pointed to Tod.

"First," he said severely, "dismiss that gentleman! While he is here I can say nothing."

Paula, surprised, looked from one to the other.

"Why," she exclaimed, "Mr. Chase is here to help us! He came with the news of your arrest, and he was going with me to get bail for you. He's our friend!"

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"He is not your friend," retorted the lawyer indignantly. "Every word you utter, every action, every detail of your conversation, no matter how petty, is reported faithfully to Mr. Cooley—by this man."

Tod looked at Paula.

"Do you believe that?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"How else are they acquainted with all that happens here?" demanded Ricaby, trying to control his temper. Turning on Tod, he went on angrily: "You have called here almost every day, you've talked to Mrs. Parkes, to young Parkes; you've played the spy under pretence of friendship—and you can't deny it."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"You're quite right, Mr. Ricaby," he said calmly. "There are some things that a man can't stoop to deny, and this accusation is one of them."

"Then how can I explain it?" demanded the lawyer. "They knew that I was trying to raise money." Turning to Paula, he added: "They know of your engagement to young Parkes."

"There is no engagement," interrupted Paula quietly.

Mr. Ricaby looked searchingly at her as if trying to read what was in her thoughts. Then he went on:

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"They know of your intention to fight your uncle's guardianship to the bitter end. They know your nervous condition. They know everything—even the fact that Dr. Zacharie comes here."

"I'm not surprised at that," exclaimed Paula. "I believe he was sent here by my uncle purposely to annoy and frighten me. He came here again to-day, but I got rid of him. I don't think he will come again so soon."

The lawyer grew thoughtful, then suddenly, as if a new idea had suddenly flashed into his mind he exclaimed:

"Ah! he did, eh? I don't like that man coming here so often. There is something in the wind. I don't know what. I intended to warn you."

He stopped for a moment, and then, looking at Tod, he said apologetically:

"The fact is, we hardly know friend from foe. I may be doing Mr. Chase a serious injustice. If so, I beg his pardon. We are fighting in the dark. We're fighting men without conscience or principle. We can't trust anyone. We dare not."

Paula turned to Tod.

"Will you give us your word?" she said, with an encouraging smile.

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The young man looked at her reproachfully as he shook his head:

"No," he said, "that means you have some doubt. No, Miss Marsh, I won't give my word. It shouldn't be necessary. I guess I'll go. You're all right, Mr. Ricaby, you're doing your best, but you get rattled. You lose your head and you bark up the wrong tree. I guess that's where Cooley doubled up on you." Reaching the door, he turned round: "I'm sorry you don't believe me, Miss Marsh. I'll do all I can for you, but you're kinder tying my hands. Good day, Mr. Ricaby—good-bye, Miss Marsh, and good luck to you."

"Oh, don't go, Mr. Chase," exclaimed Paula, going towards him. "I don't believe—"

"Yes, I guess I'd better go," he replied doggedly, "he's your counsel. Good-bye!"

The door closed behind him. He was gone. Mr. Ricaby turned to the girl:

"Paula," he said earnestly, "we must trust no one. They won't stop at anything, as you see. They even had me arrested on a ridiculous charge. I was trying to borrow money—to carry on this case—to engage ex-Senator Wratchett. Mr. Chase knew this, didn't he?"

"Yes."

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"You see, he knows everything. I'm afraid he's a spy."

The girl shook her head. She was too good a judge of human nature to be so easily deceived.

"I can't believe it," she said quietly. "I don't believe it."

"At all events," said the lawyer, "we dare not risk taking him into our confidence any more. Listen, I've raised the money, and I'm going to see Wratchett to-night."

"Why did they arrest you?"

"Because I overlooked the formality of having a certificate of shares endorsed over to me. As soon as I could get word to my friend, who loaned me the securities, he came down and the magistrate released me at once, but the stigma of arrest, of accusation, of prison, is there. That's what Cooley wants—to discredit me in court. Cooley knows that if he throws enough mud some of it is bound to stick."

The young girl made a gesture of discouragement. Sinking down in a chair at the table, she said wearily:

"Oh, I'm so tired of it all. Let's give it up, Mr. Ricaby. Let's go to my uncle and make the best bargain we can. I was hasty before. I'll be more patient this time."

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The lawyer shook his head.

"Now that I have the sinews of war?" he cried. "No! We'll win out; you'll see. They must be pretty desperate when they resort to such tactics as false arrest. No, by God! I'm going to stick to them now."

Paula walked to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, gazed thoughtfully into the street below.

"Isn't there some way out of it?" she demanded. "If, for instance, I married—my husband——"

The lawyer started, choked back something that rose in his throat, and hesitatingly said:

"No, you must obtain the consent of the Court or of your guardian. It would make new complications, application of annulment—oh, innumerable opportunities to harass you. No—I—I am opposed to the idea of marriage, Paula."

"I hope you don't think that I have Mr. Parkes in mind?" she smiled.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Do you suppose I pay any attention to that old woman's idle chatter? I don't know whom you have in your mind, but I have too much respect for your intelligence to imagine for a moment that it is Mr. Parkes."

He stopped and looked wistfully at her. Did he dare reveal to this girl what had been so long in his heart? At last, summoning up courage, he said in a low, diffident tone:

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"If I could only think that it was I——"

Startled, she looked at him in amazement. Impulsively, he went on:

"There! I have spoken at last, Paula, after all these years. I didn't intend to say anything. This is no time to speak of such matters, but——"

Eagerly he scanned her delicate and sensitive face, trying to read there some response that would satisfy his longing, but her manner was grave and her voice perfectly calm and passionless, as she answered kindly:

"I had no idea that you thought of me in that way. I am sorry, Mr. Ricaby. I have regarded you as a life-long friend—nothing more. I can never forget what you have done for me. I shall always be grateful for your friendship and untiring devotion. That I can never repay."

Chilled, the lawyer drew back instinctively. There was no mistaking that indifferent, matter-of-fact tone. Bitterly he said:

"Yes, I understand. I have always felt that. I have inspired you with feelings of kindness, gratitude, friendship. But love? No. That you reserve for some more fortunate man."

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"Don't say that, Mr. Ricaby," she replied gently. "There is no other man, I assure you. I would not hurt your feelings for the world, but you know we can't always control these things ourselves. I admire you immensely—I respect you more than any man I know."

Eagerly he darted forward and took her hand.

"Do you give me hope?" he murmured.

She turned away her head as she answered:

"Don't let us speak of this now. You can understand that in this present moment of great anxiety I hardly know what I am doing or saying. I can never forget what I owe you. Any woman should be proud to be your wife."

The lawyer shook his head.

"A woman who really loves does not stop to reason. You might be willing to repay what I've done for you by making me happy, but that is not what I ask. What I have done for you is nothing. It is not such a debt that you should sacrifice your whole life in repaying it. If there can be no other consideration than that, I prefer that our relations should remain as they are." Suddenly turning on her, he demanded:

"Are you sure there is no other?"

The girl shook her head.

"No," she said positively. "There is no other."

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"Then I'll hope against hope," he said hoarsely, "and until your suit is settled I promise you not to mention the subject again."

Going to the table he took his hat and gloves. Then coming back to where she was, he held out his hand:

"Good-bye," he said. "I am going now to Albany. It is a trip that I can't put off any longer. I can't stop to explain what the business is, but it is important and concerns your case. Of course, my every movement is watched, and while I am away they may try to take advantage of my absence by annoying you in some way, so you'd better keep in the house. Bolt yourself in and decline to see anyone, no matter who it is. Above all, don't have anything to do with Mr. Chase. Instinctively I distrust that man."

"Do you? I'm sorry for that," she said, shaking her head. With a deep sigh, she added: "I'm beginning to dread being here alone. I think I'll leave this place. I'm not myself at all lately. Come back as soon as you can. Sometimes I think it would be best for me to go to my uncle and put an end to the whole wretched proceedings."

The lawyer shook his head in protest, and, taking his hat and coat, went towards the door.

"No, we're going to win out, Paula," he said decisively. "You'll see. I trusted to ordinary legal procedure, to the equity and justice of the case. Now I'll adopt their tactics and fight them with their own weapons. Cheer up, Paula, we're in sight of victory. Good-bye."

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"Good-bye, Mr. Ricaby," she said, holding out her hand. "Don't worry about me—I shall be all right."

"Good-bye, Paula," he said, with a smile. "Wish me a safe return."

"God knows I do, dear friend!" she said earnestly.

The young girl carefully bolted the door after him, and, returning to the window, stood looking after her attorney until he disappeared from view. The weather was threatening. Big drops of rain, driven slantwise by gusts of wind, were making the passers-by run hastily to cover.

She was sorry he had spoken. Never had she dreamed that he thought of her in that way. She was sorry for him, because he deserved to be happy. She was grateful to him, but in her heart she knew well that it was useless to hold out any hope. She could never love him. It was too bad that he had spoken. Now their relations would not be so pleasant. There would be embarrassment on both sides. The delightful friendly intimacy of the past must cease. She had lost her best friend.

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Was any girl so unfortunate and so unhappy before? Here she was locked up in this depressing boarding house, afraid to go out for fear that her uncle might try to kidnap her and do her some harm. For some unexplained reason she felt horribly nervous and low-spirited. Whether it was because Mr. Ricaby had left her all alone she did not know, but she felt herself growing more and more nervous. If only Tod would come to cheer her up. Suddenly, as she stood looking disconsolately through the window, her gaze became riveted on a figure which she noticed standing in a doorway opposite. It was a man with a slouch hat pulled well down over his eyes, and it seemed to her that she recognized Dr. Zacharie. He appeared to be watching the house. Instinctively, she shrank back and when she looked again he had disappeared.

She laughed nervously to herself. How foolish she was! Why should Dr. Zacharie watch the house? She was surely mistaken. No doubt it was some stranger sheltering from the rain. If she kept seeing things like that she would soon make herself ill. With a forced effort at gaiety she essayed to throw off her melancholy by humming a song, but soon stopped, unable to continue. Sitting down at the piano, her fingers had just touched the keys when all at once there was a knock at the door. Paula rose and opened. It was Mrs. Parkes.

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"You're wanted at the telephone, my dear," said the landlady.

"Who is it?" demanded Paula.

"Mr. Chase."

Paula hesitated.

"Mr. Chase—I—I can't go—make some excuse."

"Shall I take the message?" asked Mrs. Parkes.

Remembering Mr. Ricaby's parting admonition Paula shook her head.

"No—I—must not receive any message," she replied.

As she spoke she was standing in a position commanding a view of the street. Suddenly she started back in consternation and beckoned to the landlady.

"Mrs. Parkes, come here, quick!"

Pointing out of the window, she said:

"Do you see that man standing on the corner—the one looking up here? I don't want him to see me. Who is it? Tell me."

"It's Dr. Zacharie with some stranger," said the landlady, peering out.

"Ah, I thought so!" exclaimed the young girl excitedly. "I was sure of it. He seems to be watching, doesn't he—watching the house?" [Pg 211]

"Yes," said Mrs. Parkes, looking again, "it's the doctor all right, with another gentleman—the gentleman who was here before. Why, there's three of them!"

"Three of them!" echoed Paula, dismayed.

Fearfully, she looked over Mrs. Parkes' shoulder.

"Yes, I see. It's my uncle and Mr. Cooley. They're pointing at this house and whispering together. What can they want?" Frightened, she turned to the landlady: "Mrs. Parkes, don't let anyone into this house to-night, do you hear? What can they be doing?"

"They seem to be waiting for someone."

"Don't let them see you looking," cried the girl, becoming more and more nervous. "Careful—don't let them see you! This is some new move! They know Mr. Ricaby has gone to Albany. Oh, what can I do?"

"Why, what are you afraid of, my dear?" demanded the landlady, surprised.

"I don't know," replied the trembling girl, in a frightened whisper, "only—don't let them in, Mrs. Parkes. Whatever you do, don't let them in!"

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed the old lady; "what ails you? Whatever is the matter, your hands are as cold as ice—what is it?" [Pg 212]

"I don't know," gasped the other. "I can't explain even to myself, but I don't want to see that man again—don't leave me, Mrs. Parkes."

"But I want to go and give Mr. Chase your message," said the other.

"Mr. Chase—oh, yes!" cried Paula. "Tell him I want to see him—tell him to come here at once! I can't be entirely alone. I must see Mr. Chase. Tell him to come at once!"

Before the landlady could obey, however, there was a loud peal of the front door bell. Paula turned pale.

"It must be those men!" she exclaimed. "Look out! Can you see them there now?"

Mrs. Parkes hurried to the window and looked out.

"No," she said, "they're gone."

In the hall outside was the sound of footsteps and voices.

"They've come for me!" cried Paula, in an agony of fear. "They've come for me! He said he would, and he has." Wringing her hands, she cried: "Why did Mr. Ricaby go away! I'll go to my room—they dare not come there—they dare not." [Pg 213]

Rushing into her room, she shut the door and locked it. Mrs. Parkes went to the door and only partly opened it.

"Miss Marsh cannot see anyone," she said, trying to shut the door in the intruders' faces.

Outside was heard Bascom Cooley's loud, coarse voice:

"But she must see us—she must. It's the mandate of the court!"

Someone pushed the door open. Mrs. Parkes, unable to resist, fell back. Bascom Cooley entered, followed by Jimmy Marsh and Harry Parkes. [Pg 214]

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Ricaby was not mistaken when he said that Bascom Cooley never admitted defeat and would stop at nothing to gain his ends. The situation, as far as Jimmy Marsh and Cooley were

concerned, was certainly desperate. Even in the short time that Jimmy had had Paula's fortune under his control, he had so mismanaged it—to employ only a polite term—as to make his guardianship little short of a scandal. Wall Street, race horses, and the card table had already swallowed a considerable part of the Marsh millions, and that a goodly share of the money had gone to Jimmy's unscrupulous lawyer no one could doubt. A day of reckoning must come sooner or later.

Both men knew this well, and Mr. Cooley also knew that whatever exposure and punishment awaited the ward's uncle would also implicate himself. The important thing, therefore, was to put off that day as long as possible, if not altogether, and the resourceful Cooley was not slow in hitting upon an idea. The girl, he said, must not be permitted to claim her estate. In a few more weeks she would be of age and legally entitled to demand of her uncle an accounting of his stewardship. There was no time to be lost. They must show that the girl was incapable of taking care of her own affairs. Was not her conduct strange and eccentric enough to justify this belief? Had she not flatly refused to live with her uncle, preferring the small, uncomfortable quarters of a cheap boarding house to a luxurious suite in a fine residence? Did she not associate habitually with socialists, paupers, and other undesirables? Were there not rumors that she had affianced herself to the almost imbecile son of her landlady? Had she not announced her intention to give all her money to these people, once it came into her possession? Was she not at all times highly nervous, morose, melancholy? Did she act rationally? What were all these traits and eccentricities but proof of an unsound mind?

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It was a very sad state of affairs, of course, but the truth was that the young woman was mentally unbalanced and needed the rest cure. She should be sent somewhere where her special case could receive proper attention. At first Jimmy was staggered by this audacious proposal. There were some lengths to which even he hesitated to follow Cooley. But his resistance was not long lived. When the lawyer, without mincing words, showed him in what peril he stood and that this step was necessary if he wished to be spared the ignominy of wearing prison stripes, he gave way. The next question was the method of procedure. How could the girl be placed in an institution without regular commitment papers? Again, Mr. Cooley sprang into the breach. Dr. Zacharie would swear to anything for a consideration.

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Mr. Cooley next went before a judge of a competent court, and petitioned for an order for the commitment to an asylum of Paula Marsh, a minor and ward of his client, Mr. James Marsh, on the alleged ground that she was of unsound mind and liable to do injury to someone. At the same time he submitted an affidavit sworn to by Dr. Zacharie, a recognized specialist in nervous and mental diseases, to the effect that on several occasions when he had observed and examined the said Paula Marsh, he had found her highly nervous and excitable and subject to hallucinations. On one occasion, in his presence, she had uttered threats of bodily violence against the said James Marsh. The court thereupon appointed physicians to examine the said Paula Marsh, the physicians being Dr. McMutrie, visiting inspector of the State Asylum for the Insane, and Professor Bodley, a country doctor recommended by Cooley. If in the opinion of these medical experts the girl was insane, commitment papers would be granted. Armed with this formidable mandate of the court, Mr. Cooley gathered his forces and made his sudden raid on Mrs. Parkes' boarding house.

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It was in vain that the landlady tried to bar the way. The burly lawyer, more aggressive than ever, now that he felt himself armed with the authority of the Court, roughly pushed his way in.

"Now, my good lady," he said coaxingly, in a clumsy effort to be amiable. "I will assume the entire responsibility and that ought to relieve you of any further anxiety."

"I know, sir," said Mrs. Parkes, "but Mr. Ricaby's orders——"

Paula had already taken refuge in her own room. Harry tried to prevent Cooley's further entrance.

"Miss Marsh doesn't want to see you," he said. "Her orders were——"

Before he could complete what he was going to say the muscular Mr. Cooley gave him a push that nearly knocked him over.

"All orders are superseded by an order of the court!" he retorted. Going back to the door, he called out to others waiting in the hall: "Come in, gentlemen!"

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A strange and lugubrious procession filed into the parlor. First came Dr. Zacharie, his swarthy face beaming with insolent triumph. Behind him was Dr. McMutrie, the State Inspector, a smooth-faced keen-eyed man, and close at his heels trotted Professor Bodley, a fat, asthmatic person with spectacles and side whiskers. Jimmy Marsh, feeling anything but at ease, brought up the rear. Solemn-faced and ominous-looking, the doctors stood in a row, waiting for further developments.

"This is an outrageous intrusion!" cried Mrs. Parkes.

"Nonsense!" retorted Mr. Cooley. Pointing to Jimmy Marsh he exclaimed: "This gentleman is appointed special administrator and guardian of the Marsh estate, and as such is empowered to take any steps he may deem necessary to effect an interview with his niece." Waving the other gentlemen to chairs, he said: "Sit down, gentlemen."

The doctors, thus invited, took chairs in a semi-circle on one side of the table. Dr. McMutrie, as

head of the insanity commission, sat in the centre. On his right was Dr. Zacharie and on his left Professor Bodley. Directly they were seated Dr. Zacharie put before his colleagues a number of papers which they proceeded to peruse carefully.

Jimmy sat in a corner, nervously twirling his thumbs while Mr. Cooley waited impatiently for Paula to come in. At last, his patience exhausted, he turned to the landlady. Pointing to the room on the left, he asked: [Pg 219]

"Isn't that her room?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Parkes hesitatingly, "but——"

The lawyer advanced as if about to force his way in, but Harry Parkes sprang forward and barred the way. If ever there was an opportunity to display his devotion and heroism, it was surely now.

"This is an unwarrantable intrusion!" he cried indignantly. "If you don't desist I—I shall call an officer!"

Mr. Cooley shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Please do," he chuckled, "and I'll have you arrested for obstructing a special appointee of the court in the performance of his duty." Staring at Harry, he went on: "Let me see—you're the young chap who entertains the absurd notion of marrying Miss Marsh. You're Henry Parkes, are you not?"

Harry looked uncomfortable.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let me inform you, Mr. Parkes," said the lawyer grimly, "that any marriage ceremony with Miss Marsh, without the consent of her uncle, will not only be illegal, but it will also render you liable to imprisonment for contempt of court." [Pg 220]

"What!" cried Harry frightened. "Imprisonment!"

"Precisely!" rejoined the lawyer, "and I now notify you that until these gentlemen have decided whether Miss Marsh is competent to enter into a marital engagement, contract, or promise, any such engagement, contract, or promise is null and void and can in no way or manner become the basis for any legal action on your part. I think that will be about all." He coughed and looked around for admiration.

"There is no promise," gasped Harry terrified; "no engagement—nothing."

"No, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Parkes, with a low curtsy. "Indeed, there isn't."

"A very sensible way to look at it," replied the lawyer with a grim smile of satisfaction, "and now, my good lady, please tell Miss Marsh that we are waiting for her."

Jimmy Marsh came forward, his manner fidgetty and nervous.

"Perhaps my niece may not be quite prepared," he stammered. "In that case you will tell her that we will wait for her." [Pg 221]

"Quite so," chimed in Cooley. "That is—we'll wait a reasonable time."

"We'll be very gentle with her," added Jimmy considerately.

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Parkes, now thoroughly cowed. She crossed the room and knocked at Paula's door. Receiving no answer, she knocked again. At last a voice called out:

"Who's there?"

"It's only me, dear—Mrs. Parkes."

There was the sharp click of a key being turned. The door was opened cautiously. The landlady went in and the door slammed to again.

"And now, young man," said Mr. Cooley, who had watched the proceedings without comment. "If you will kindly withdraw we shall all regard your absence most favorably."

Thoroughly intimidated by the lawyer's domineering manner, Harry went sheepishly towards the door. As he reached the threshold he turned and said timidly:

"Of course you understand, sir, that there is no engagement of any sort—there never was."

With a gesture the lawyer waved him to be gone.

"That's all right," he said disdainfully.

As he disappeared the lawyer turned to see what the commission was doing. All the doctors were busy. Dr. McMutrie was deeply engrossed in the reading of a voluminous report. Professor Bodley, not quite sure what was expected of him, was glancing over some newspaper clippings and trying to look wise. Dr. Zacharie rose and held out a paper which he had selected from a number of others spread out on the table before him. [Pg 222]

"This, gentlemen," he said pompously, "is the daily report—a very minute observation."

"Hum!" growled the inspector, looking up, "I don't see anything very serious so far."

"Do you anticipate any trouble?" whispered Jimmy to Mr. Cooley.

"I don't anticipate it," rejoined the lawyer dryly, "but I'm prepared for it. If it comes, Bascom Cooley will be on deck." Confidently he added: "McMutrie is the only hard nut we have to crack. He's one of those d—d conscientious fellows. He may ask awkward questions. Zacharie is ours—and Bodley is a d—d fool. He's liable to jump in any direction, but he'll follow McMutrie in the final say. Zacharie is the family physician, and that always carries conviction."

"We were very lucky to get him," chuckled Jimmy.

"Hush!" commanded Cooley. "Dr. McMutrie is talking to you." In a warning undertone, he added: [Pg 223]
"Take care what you say!"

"Has your niece ever threatened you personally, Mr. Marsh?" demanded Dr. McMutrie.

"Specifically no—constructively yes," answered Cooley promptly for his client.

The inspector looked annoyed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Cooley," he snapped. "I addressed Mr. Marsh."

Jimmy turned red and shuffled uneasily on his feet. Quickly he said:

"Yes, I should say so. Yes, her manner was always very—very—I should say quite threatening."

"It's all there in the affidavit," said Mr. Cooley.

Ignoring the interruption, Dr. McMutrie went on:

"Has she ever made a personal threat against your life—in your hearing?" Pointing to the paper in his hand, he said impatiently: "These statements are all more or less vague."

"The affidavit of the family physician bears that out," interrupted Cooley again.

Dr. McMutrie frowned.

"Mr. Marsh, will you please answer my questions? Yes, or no."

"Yes," said Jimmy positively.

"She has?"

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"Yes, sir. I'm in actual fear of my life—that's the whole truth."

Mr. Cooley beamed satisfaction.

"Yes," he said quickly, "my client can never tell when this girl's mania for the punishment of imaginary wrongs inflicted on her may not assume the form of personal violence. We have thirty witnesses who can prove the existence in this unfortunate girl's mind of the most unaccountable, unreasonable desire to—to inflict something she calls retribution on this innocent man's head. Oh, it's a positive danger—a positive danger!"

Professor Bodley peered over his spectacles and grew reminiscent.

"I remember," he said, "a case up the State, where that condition resulted in a fatal shooting affair."

"Of course," exclaimed Cooley eagerly, glad to grasp at any straw, "that's just it. It isn't her ridiculous notion about money—or the fact that she is being sought in marriage by penniless paupers. It's the fear of violence which prompts us to ask that she be taken care of, and watched, at least for a time, for her own sake absolutely—for her own sake."

The inspector's face grew grave.

"Quite so—quite so," he said thoughtfully.

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Professor Bodley held up a newspaper clipping.

"Is it really a fact," he demanded, "that Miss Marsh stated that she intended to contribute a large sum of money to——" He stopped a moment to consult the clipping and then read on: "An institution for the development of the psychic self in domestic animals?"

"That's sworn testimony!" exclaimed Mr. Cooley, pointing to the newspaper.

"It's a positive fact," nodded Dr. Zacharie affirmatively, "she told me so herself."

"Animal-psychology is decidedly far fetched," laughed the professor. "It seems to me that the human race has a hard enough time in developing its own soul."

He threw himself back into his chair convulsed at his own humor.

"Rather good," grinned Cooley, joining in the merriment.

"Of course," went on Dr. Zacharie gravely, "these strange ideas may mean nothing. But with the delusion of imaginary wrongs a violent mania may develop. You never can tell where it will lead."

A case of this sort needs close study."

Jimmy nodded approval.

"Just so," he said. "A year or so of rest in the calm seclusion of some country retreat would do the poor girl so much good. It might work a complete cure—don't you think so?" [Pg 226]

Mr. Cooley gave him a nudge.

"Hush!" whispered the lawyer.

Up to this point the lawyer had followed the proceedings eagerly, highly gratified at the progress made, but Jimmy's loquaciousness threatened to spoil everything. Aloud he said:

"Er—these gentlemen will form their own opinions. Whatever is best will be done. If your niece is, as I fear, hopelessly incompetent, you can rely on them to—to—take the proper step to prevent any catastrophe."

"Her attitude is certainly very significant," said Dr. Zacharie pointedly.

Dr. McMutrie was still sceptical. Dryly he said:

"Yes, it signifies that she dislikes her relatives, but dislike of one's relatives is not necessarily a sign of mental derangement. I know some very excellent people who cannot bear the sight of their relatives."

"On the other hand," retorted Mr. Cooley, "Hamlet hated his uncle, and it developed into a general mania for killing people. If he'd been properly restrained five innocent lives would have been saved." [Pg 227]

"Five lives—that is not in the medical records, is it?" demanded Professor Bodley anxiously.

"Shakespeare killed them—not Hamlet," laughed Dr. McMutrie.

"Still," said Mr. Cooley significantly, "it's a good object lesson."

"We don't need object lessons from playwrights," rejoined Dr. McMutrie sharply.

"Certainly not," chuckled the professor.

"Hush!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Here comes my niece!"

The door of the little room opened, but it was not Paula. Mrs. Parkes appeared instead.

"She won't come, sir," said the landlady apologetically. "I told her, and I tried to persuade her, but she wouldn't."

"Then we'll go to her," said Mr. Cooley determinedly.

He made a motion as if he would use force, but Mrs. Parkes, alarmed, held up her arms entreatingly.

"No, please, sir, the poor girl's so frightened! Won't you come to-morrow?"

Dr. Zacharie advanced, full of importance and authority.

"I'll get her," he said grimly. "That is, of course, unless I have completely lost my influence over her. In these cases one can never be sure what form the delusion will take." [Pg 228]

"Do as you think best, doctor," assented Mr. Cooley.

Dr. Zacharie opened the door and went in. There was a short delay during which the others waited expectantly. In a few moments the door again opened and Paula entered docily, the physician at her side. [Pg 229]

CHAPTER XV.

Nervous and trembling, in a condition verging on total collapse, the young girl suffered herself to be led into the parlor, there to face the strange tribunal which was to pass judgment upon her. Further resistance she felt was useless. That she realized. These men would sit there and persecute her until she surrendered and submitted to their merciless cross-examination. Whether they had a legal right thus to invade the privacy of her home she did not know. Mr. Ricaby had gone to Albany, and there was no way of communicating with him. No doubt her uncle and Mr. Cooley knew he was away and had taken advantage of it. If only Tod would come. Perhaps he had already received the message.

As she entered, the doctors half rose from their chairs and bowed. There was a quiet dignity in her manner that compelled their respect. Each looked intently at her, and Dr. McMutrie, leaving his seat, placed a chair for her so she might face them. [Pg 230]

"Now, Miss Marsh," he said, not unkindly, "please don't be alarmed. There is nothing to be afraid

of. We are here only for your own good. Won't you please answer the few questions we shall ask you? It is merely a matter of form. Please take a seat, and above all, don't be nervous."

Paula sat down, and he returned to his place. Mr. Cooley made a sign to Mrs. Parkes to withdraw, and the landlady was about to obey when Paula stopped her.

"Please don't go, Mrs. Parkes—please don't go!" she cried almost hysterically.

Mr. Cooley was about to object, but on a sign of assent from the head of the commission, the landlady was allowed to remain.

Mr. Cooley now proceeded to business.

"We ask your pardon, Miss Marsh, for what seems to be an unwarranted intrusion, but—the law prescribes our rights—that is, my client's right to take any steps he may deem necessary to see you and bring these gentlemen with him for the purpose of—er—talking over your future."

"My future?" she echoed. Looking around in bewilderment she demanded: "Who—who are these gentlemen?"

Mr. Cooley hastened to reply.

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"Friends of your uncle's—friends of mine—of yours."

"What do they want?" she demanded falteringly.

The lawyer grew red in the face. He was at a loss to answer frankly her very direct question. Stuttering and stammering, he said:

"To—er—just to—er—" Not knowing what to say, he introduced the doctors: "Professor Bodley, of Michigan, State Psychopathic expert—also Professor of Psychotherapy, Ann Arbor—Miss Marsh."

Professor Bodley bowed pompously.

Mr. Cooley continued the presentations:

"Dr. McMutrie, the eminent expert pathologist, psychologist, and alienist—Examiner New York State institutions, etc., etc., etc., Miss Paula Marsh—my client's niece. I need not introduce Dr. Zacharie—your family physician."

"He is not my family physician," interrupted Paula, with quiet dignity.

"Not now perhaps," said Cooley soothingly. "But he was—er—now—er— I'm sorry Mr. Ricaby isn't here to explain more fully the object—"

"What is the object?" demanded Paula.

The lawyer evaded a direct answer.

"Your interests," he replied quickly, "are perfectly safe in your uncle's hands. Oh, if I could only convince you—but never mind." Turning to the doctor, he said, in a low tone:

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"Observe the unnatural glitter of the eye when I mention the uncle. Will you proceed, gentlemen?"

From the time that Paula seated herself Dr. Zacharie kept his big, black eyes fixed on her. Once or twice she turned, and, noticing the persistence of his stare, she shuddered involuntarily. It made her restless and uncomfortable. She wondered if Harry Parkes had succeeded in telephoning to Tod. If only he would come! She didn't know what he could do to help her. These men, no doubt, had some sort of legal authority to torture her in this way, but Tod's mere presence would reassure her and help her to bear the ordeal.

"Doctor," said Professor Bodley pompously, "I think you had better—"

Dr. McMutrie began fumbling with some papers. Looking up, he said:

"Certainly, certainly. What is your age, Miss Marsh?"

"Twenty," she replied quietly.

The inspector cleared his throat and went on:

"Miss Marsh, will you tell me why you prefer to live here under these conditions rather than go and live with your uncle and aunt, where you would have so many more social advantages?"

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The girl hesitated for a moment. Then she said:

"I—I prefer not to say."

"Is it not because you hate your Uncle James?" demanded Mr. Cooley.

The inspector held up his hand warningly to the lawyer.

"Please!"

"I do not hate him," said Paula. "I am afraid of him."

"Are you afraid of yourself?" continued the inspector. "You told Dr. Zacharie that you could not control yourself in his presence."

"Yes," she cried, with a little shudder. "I—I am afraid of myself. He inspires me with hateful thoughts, and I believe that hateful thoughts injure the person who thinks them." Suddenly she turned and again found Dr. Zacharie staring at her. She stopped and almost hysterically she cried: "I—I can't answer you if—I can't think if that man sits there and stares at me. Won't you please ask him to go?"

Dr. Zacharie smiled indulgently and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, my dear child, I was unaware—" He shook his head significantly as if her hysterical outburst only went to confirm his diagnosis. [Pg 234]

Mr. Cooley chuckled, and in an undertone to the experts he whispered:

"Another delusion—you see." To Dr. Zacharie he said: "Sit over there, will you, doctor?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

The physician rose, and, crossing the room, took Professor Bodley's seat at back of table where Paula could not see him.

"So you are afraid of yourself?" continued the inspector.

"No—I don't mean—that," she answered quickly.

"You told Dr. Zacharie so—you told us so," interrupted Mr. Cooley rudely.

"Yes," she said slowly, "but I meant—"

She stopped, not knowing what to reply.

"Well, never mind!" smiled the inspector. Looking at her curiously, he asked: "Why are you afraid of your uncle?"

"I don't know," she replied, hesitating. "He— I'm afraid of him, that's all. I can't explain why." Laughing hysterically, she went on: "I'm at a disadvantage here. I can't seem to say even what I've said a great many times."

The physicians looked at each other significantly. Mr. Cooley nudged Jimmy. The examiner went on: [Pg 235]

"Did you tell Dr. Zacharie that you'd rather die than let your uncle get his brother's estates?"

"I may have said so. It's very probable," answered Paula quietly.

"Did you say you'd rather he was dead?"

"No, I did not," she answered emphatically. Pointing to Dr. Zacharie she exclaimed indignantly: "That man has twisted my words! He'd ask me questions, and I'd answer them without thinking."

"Oh!" sneered Mr. Cooley. "Then you might have said it and have forgotten that you said it?"

"Yes, I might," she said falteringly. "But I—I don't think it's fair to—to—to— It isn't fair—"

"Naturally she would deny it," suggested Dr. Zacharie in an undertone to the other physicians.

"Of course," chimed in Mr. Cooley. "I think we've established the facts that she fears him, hates him, and wishes he was dead. That alone is ground enough for our application."

Suddenly there was a commotion in the hall outside. The door was flung open and Tod appeared, cool and self-possessed.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Paula, overjoyed. [Pg 236]

"Hello, everybody!" grinned Tod. "Why, I didn't know you were giving a party, Miss Marsh!"

"What do you want here?" demanded Jimmy, trying to prevent his stepson's further entrance.

But Paula jumped up and ran eagerly to greet him. Never had he been so welcome. In one instant her anxiety and apprehension had disappeared. Her manner was entirely changed. Smiling, she extended her hand:

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Chase—so glad! Won't you come in?"

Mr. Cooley frowned.

"It's impossible!" he said emphatically.

"You can't stay here," said Mr. Marsh. "Don't you see we're engaged?"

"Yes—yes—Jimmy," grinned Tod.

"You can't stay here, Mr. Chase," said Mr. Cooley sternly.

Tod looked at Paula inquiringly.

"Please don't go," she said, in an undertone.

"But he must go," said Mr. Cooley, who overheard.

Tod laughed, and, going to a side table, laid down his hat and cane. Coming back he said, with a careless laugh:

"My dear old Cooley, when a lady invites me to stay and that lady happens to be the hostess, one doesn't need any lawyer's advice on the subject—one simply stays." [Pg 237]

He looked across at the table where the commission were sitting, and, surprised to see them, he turned to Paula for an explanation.

"What's the game?" he asked. "I don't see any chips—can I get in? Say, this looks like a nice little party, Miss Marsh. I'm awfully glad I came."

Mr. Marsh, who was fast losing his temper, went up to him and took him aside.

"Now, Tod," he said angrily, "you must really go! Don't you understand this is a—a—very sad— Please go at once."

"Behave yourself, Jimmy," laughed Tod, shaking his stepfather off.

"Damn!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"Young man," said Mr. Cooley sternly, "this is very serious—believe me."

Tod grinned.

"That's the trouble with you, Cooley. You take things too seriously."

"But this is serious, sir," thundered the lawyer.

"All right— I'll be serious, too," retorted the young man. "What's the trouble?"

"Your son?" inquired Dr. McMutrie blandly.

"My wife's son," replied Jimmy sourly.

The examiner rose.

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"Just a moment, sir," he said.

Drawing Tod aside, he crossed the room with him, conversing in a whisper, while the others watched in silence, Paula in an agony of suspense. Suddenly the young man started and exclaimed:

"Good Lord! No—no—no—not for a moment. It's a lie!"

For all reply Dr. McMutrie handed the young man his visiting card.

"I don't care a d——" cried Tod wrath fully. "Excuse me, sir—excuse me—I'll—I'll—well, I'll be— Pardon me, won't you, sir? My feelings got away with me."

The examiner bowed and returned to his seat.

"You'd better go home, Todhunter," said Jimmy, severely.

"No, James," retorted his stepson calmly. "I think I'll stay here."

"But this is a private commission, sir!" roared Mr. Cooley angrily.

"Well, let's make it public," retorted Tod quickly. Turning to Paula, he said: "Would you like me to stay here, Miss Marsh?"

"Oh—please—please!" she said imploringly.

"It's impossible!" shouted the lawyer angrily. "I object."

"Nothing is impossible when a lady requests it," rejoined Tod determinedly. "Go on with the examination! I'm going to stay—don't trouble, Cooley—I'll find a chair." [Pg 239]

He looked around and took a seat near the fireplace. Mr. Cooley, unable to control himself, moved towards him with threatening gesture. In another moment he would have attempted to eject him forcibly, but Jimmy restrained him:

"Better let him stay," he whispered.

"Very well," grumbled the lawyer, "but young man—perfect silence!"

"Go on now," grinned Tod, "go on—never mind me."

The examiner resumed the questioning:

"Miss Marsh—you have stated on several occasions that when you came in for your father's estate you would give large sums of money to various charities?"

"Yes."

"Did you say you were going to"—he stopped and looked at a paper in his hand. Reading, he went on—"found an institution for the development of the psychic self in animals?"

"No!" she replied, with an emphatic shake of her head.

Dr. Zacharie threw up his hands with a gesture meant to express utter disbelief in her denial.

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"The money," went on Paula, "was to be expended for the prevention of animal torture in the name of science."

Mr. Cooley now took a hand in the cross-examination.

"Isn't it a fact," he demanded, "that all these large bequests to societies for the psychic development of monkeys or mice or old ladies, as the case may be, were made for the express purpose of preventing your Uncle James and his family from participating in the enjoyment of the family estate?"

"Exactly," answered Paula calmly.

Mr. Cooley gave vent to a noisy chuckle. Turning to Dr. McMutrie, he said:

"Ah! That establishes irresponsibility."

"Quite so—quite so," chimed in Professor Bodley, trying to look alert by peering over his spectacles.

But the lawyer's interference only earned for him a well-merited rebuke from the head of the commission. Frigidly the examiner said:

"I prefer to draw my own conclusions, Mr. Cooley." Turning again to Paula, he went on: "You left your church a year ago—why?"

"Because Mr. James Marsh is one of its chief pillars," she replied spiritedly. "He prays the loudest and receives the most homage——"

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Tod laughed outright.

"That's rather rough on you, Jimmy!"

Mr. Cooley glared at him.

"Silence, sir!" he thundered.

"How dare you!" exclaimed Jimmy, in a fierce undertone.

The lawyer tried to impress on the physicians the importance of the girl's replies.

"The illusion of imaginary wrongs," he said, "must have taken a terrible hold on her when it compels her to give up her religion."

"I did not give up my religion," protested Paula quickly. "I gave up a church that countenanced hypocrisy."

"You said," interrupted the examiner, "that the law of compensation will punish him. What is the law of compensation?"

"It's the pit a man digs for others—and falls into himself."

"And if the law of compensation fails," interposed Mr. Cooley, "you'll undertake Uncle James' punishment yourself—eh?"

"Mr. Cooley—I must insist!" cried the examiner angrily.

Paula was rapidly becoming more and more hysterical. With growing exaltation she cried:

"Yes, I will—of that you may rest assured!"

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Mr. Cooley, with an expression of triumph on his coarse face, looked toward the examiner.

"The law would construe that answer as a threat, sir."

Professor Bodley leaned forward to ask a question:

"How would you punish him, young lady?"

The girl shook her head.

"I don't know—it will come to me."

"She will hear a voice within, eh?" laughed Dr. Zacharie.

"Ah—so you hear voices?" demanded the examiner.

"Oh, yes, she does," said Dr. Zacharie.

"We all hear voices within," said Paula seriously.

She stopped speaking. The men all looked at each other significantly. Then she went on:

"Something tells us to do this or that, and we obey. We obey blindly—instinctively. Men call it reason, but it's only intuition."

Suddenly the girl became confused, as if conscious of being closely watched. Slowly, as if impelled by some superior mental force, she turned around until she found herself face to face with Dr. Zacharie, who was once more fixing her with his steady gaze. Again she shuddered, and, recoiling from him with a look of horror, for a moment stood as if transfixed. Then she turned mutely to Mrs. Parkes, as if instinctively seeking the protection of one of her own sex. In a hoarse, nervous whisper, she cried:

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"I'm afraid! I'm afraid! I don't understand myself! If I stay here I shall say things I don't mean! That man is putting thoughts into my mind—thoughts that are not my own. I don't seem to be able to say what I want to say. I won't stay here any longer——"

She tried to rise from her chair, but her limbs failed her.

"I can't. I don't seem able to move. Don't let them speak to me again. I'm afraid! I'm afraid!"

Mrs. Parkes tried to soothe her.

"Oh, Miss Paula—Miss Paula—don't give way!" she cried.

"I know it's foolish," moaned the young girl, "but I can't help it. It's got on my nerves at last, and I —— Let me go while I can still act of my own will."

Suddenly she rose to her feet, angry and defiant. Facing her judges boldly, she almost shouted:

"I won't stay here! I won't stay to be questioned until I don't know what I'm saying."

With the dignity of an offended queen, she made a step in the direction of her room. But Mr. Cooley, on the alert, quickly advanced and placed his large hulk in her path.

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"One moment, Miss Marsh, you can't leave until——"

Tod, who had often distinguished himself on the football field, promptly went into action. Bringing his old tactics into play, he rammed the lawyer in the stomach with a bump that nearly doubled him up.

"Oh, yes, she can!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with you, Cooley? Can't you see the lady is tired and confused?"

"She can't go," said the lawyer, gasping for wind.

"No, she really can't!" piped Jimmy, scandalized at Tod's behavior, "until these gentlemen have signified——"

"Well, she is going, all right," said Tod determinedly. Planting himself before the other men, he effectually blocked the way until Paula was safe back in her room and had shut the door.

"I had still one or two questions I want to ask!" cried Professor Bodley, in an injured tone.

"I'll fetch her back!" said Dr. Zacharie, advancing toward the bedroom.

"Yes, and I!" chimed in Jimmy.

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"Come on!" roared the outraged Cooley.

The men made a concerted movement in the direction of the ward's place of refuge. Tod, white with rage, threw himself before the door:

"In the name of the law!" said Cooley.

"Damn the law!" retorted Tod.

"In justice to my claim!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"These men of science," said Mr. Cooley, in a tone of injured innocence, "are actuated only by motives of pure——"

"So am I, so are you, so are we all," cried Tod impatiently. "But I warn you, you've gone far enough. You've frightened this poor girl into such a state that she's not responsible for anything she says, and you've got me so worked up I'm not responsible for what I do."

Dr. Zacharie advanced threateningly. Assuming his sternest manner, he said:

"Sir—I shall not allow you to—to interfere——"

Tod, thoroughly exasperated, looked as though he would rather enjoy a personal encounter with the physician.

"You won't allow—you—you——"

He leaped forward, but Cooley restrained him. Jimmy pulled Dr. Zacharie back.

"Don't use any force, doctor."

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"Please don't—please don't!" cried Tod sarcastically.

"He's an amateur champion athlete," whispered Jimmy into the doctor's ear, "and I don't want you to get hurt."

"He is a ruffian!" retorted Dr. Zacharie angrily.

Leaving them, he joined the Examiner and Professor Bodley, who were talking earnestly in a group by themselves.

"Do you know, young man," said Mr. Cooley severely, "that this is contempt of court?"

"If you're the court, it is!"

Shrugging his shoulders disdainfully, the lawyer joined the doctors at the table. After a quick, anxious glance in their direction, Tod turned to Mrs. Parkes. Pointing to Paula's door, he said in a whisper:

"Can you get to Miss Marsh without going through that door?"

"Yes, through my room," she replied, in the same tone.

Unobserved by the others, Tod quickly scribbled a few lines on a piece of paper and handed it to her.

"Give her this note. Tell her to— No—never mind— I don't want them to see her. Don't ask any questions, but do just as I tell you. She will understand——" [Pg 247]

The landlady hesitated. She stood in considerable awe of Mr. Cooley's wrath, and was not quite sure that Tod's request would receive his sanction. The young man pushed her toward the door.

"Go quick! You're wasting time."

"All right, sir, I'll go."

Profiting by Mr. Cooley's back being turned, she slipped out of the room. No one noticed her departure. All were talking at the same time. The lawyer, conversing in a low tone with Jimmy, was impatient to bring matters to a head. Turning to the commission he demanded:

"Well, gentlemen, what is your decision?"

"I have expressed my opinion," said Dr. Zacharie calmly.

"Yes," said the examiner hesitatingly. "What do you think, Professor?"

"I'd like to study the case a little more," answered Dr. Bodley. "It has a great many points of interest." Ticking off with his fingers, he went on: "A self-evident delusion—a possible—and sporadic indications of general derangement."

"But there's no absolute evidence of derangement," objected the examiner. [Pg 248]

"You can never tell what may develop," insisted Professor Bodley.

"Quite true," said Dr. Zacharie, quickly rubbing his hands.

"Of course," remarked the examiner sagely, "that applies to any of us."

"My client must be protected," insisted Mr. Cooley, "prevention is a d—— sight better than cure—that's scientific, isn't it?"

"Not quite the way you express it, Mr. Cooley," replied the examiner dryly. "I confess I'd like to see her again, she's an interesting subject."

"Quite so—quite so," puffed Professor Bodley bombastically. "She ought to be watched—no doubt about that—and I haven't the slightest hesitation in recommending that she be sent to Sea Rest, Tocquencke——"

"For a few months, at least," put in Dr. Zacharie.

"A splendid idea!" exclaimed Mr. Cooley, rubbing his hands. "You can watch the case together—I'll retain you both. It's not a question of fees—any sum you ask is yours. Mr. Marsh is most anxious to do all he can for her."

The doctors looked at Jimmy, who nodded acquiescence. Mr. Cooley continued:

"Take her under your own charge, gentlemen. Of course, her counsel will get out a habeas corpus and make all possible effort to obstruct justice, but, in the meantime, she goes to Sea Rest. Will you make out the certificate?" [Pg 249]

"Very well," said Professor Bodley pompously. Turning to the examiner, he asked: "Have you any objection, doctor?"

The examiner shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no; no positive objection—merely a natural disinclination to jump hastily at conclusions." Looking toward Dr. Zacharie, he said:

"You are positive, doctor?"

"Positive!"

"And you, Professor?" he asked, looking at Professor Bodley.

"Not exactly positive," replied the Professor, "but I think we shall be on the safe side if we study the case for a few weeks."

"For a few weeks? Very well, I'll make out the certificate."

The examiner produced blanks, and Mr. Cooley got busy getting pens and ink. While he was thus engaged Mrs. Parkes reëntered. An affirmative sign of the head assured Tod that the message was delivered.

"You'd better telephone up to Tocquencke that you're coming," said the examiner, as he made out the certificate.

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"That's already arranged for," Mr. Cooley said, beaming with satisfaction. "She's to have the best suite of rooms, the best attendance, everything that the most lavish expenditure can purchase. Oh, she will be well taken care of. By the way, Dr. Zacharie, I'm going to recommend your nomination for Health Officer of this Port, and if the Big Chief Cooley recommends anything it's '*un fait accompli*.' as the girls from Paris say; in other words, a sure thing."

"Thank you, counsellor," said Dr. Zacharie, bowing and handing him the certificate.

"Thank you. Now, madam," smirked Mr. Cooley, turning to Mrs. Parkes and scarcely able to contain his satisfaction, "will you please tell Miss Marsh that we're waiting for her?"

The landlady crossed the parlor and entered Paula's room, while the lawyer, with a chuckle, showed Jimmy the certificate.

"This simplifies matters, eh?" said Mr. Cooley, with a broad grin.

"It's taken a long time, Counsellor."

"Great bodies move slowly, James, but they move."

Suddenly Mrs. Parkes reappeared precipitately, her manner all flustered.

"Is she ready?" demanded the lawyer.

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"She's gone, sir," replied Mrs. Parkes, in consternation.

"Gone—where?" roared Mr. Cooley.

"I think she's gone over to Jersey to get married, Bascom," said Tod, with a grin.

"Quick!" cried Mr. Cooley. "She can't be gone far. My automobile is downstairs—come!"

Cooley went out hurriedly, followed by Jimmy.

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CHAPTER XVI.

Completely dazed, quite ignorant as to where she was going, hardly knowing where she was, so quickly had events followed each other, Paula found herself on the upper deck of a ferryboat which was churning its way out of the New York slip, bound for Jersey City. At her side stood Tod, whose eyes, assisted by a powerful fieldglass, were riveted on the now fast-receding ferryhouse, trying to distinguish among the belated arrivals who had rushed up at the last minute, only to miss the boat, the disappointed faces of Mr. Cooley and Jimmy Marsh.

The day was superb, and in the swirling river, tinted a glorious blue by the bright sunshine, flocks of white seagulls rode buoyantly on the dancing waves. A magnificent view was before them. Ahead lay New Jersey and the wide stretch of land-locked water which forms Manhattan's matchless harbor. Close by, on the left, Governor's Island appeared as a splotch of inviting green in the blue expanse; farther South soared the noble figure of Liberty holding aloft the torch that enlightens the world. Away to the East smiled the green hills of Staten Island, and farther on were the fortified Narrows and Sandy Hook, with the open sea beyond.

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The ever-busy river was literally alive with craft of every kind. The swift ferryboats hurrying from shore to shore, the countless little tugs, puffing and whistling as they darted, mosquito-like, here and there, graceful sailing vessels staggering along under clouds of canvas, stately ocean liners passing majestically out to sea—all this made up a spectacle of which the eye could never tire.

But both Paula and her escort were too much preoccupied to pay proper attention to the beauty of their surroundings. The eyes of both were turned anxiously in the direction of the receding shore.

"It's all right!" said Tod reassuringly, as he lowered the glass. "I don't see anything of them."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed his companion, making a great effort to control her agitation.

"But that Cooley's certainly a bird!" went on the young man. "He guessed that it was I who put up

the job on him. He knew that he could find you quickest by keeping close at my heels, so he and Jimmy jumped into a red taxi and shadowed my machine. I threw on all the speed I could, trying to get away. I went like the very mischief. I knocked over a fruit stand and nearly killed a policeman. But I couldn't shake them off. The red taxi was close behind me all the time. Just as I got near to the ferry the man was raising the draw. I yelled and shook a five-spot in his face. It worked like a charm. He lowered the drawbridge again, and I shot across."

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His companion gave him a look in which gratitude and admiration mingled.

"How clever you are!" she smiled. "I should never have got away but for you. I was terribly frightened. When Mrs. Parkes came in and handed me your note I could have hugged her. I did not lose a minute, but put on my hat and ran downstairs. Harry Parkes hailed a cab for me, and I reached the ferry a few minutes before you arrived. I can't tell you how glad I was to get away. What did those horrible men want with me?"

He made no answer, hardly knowing what answer to make. How could he tell this intelligent, high-spirited girl, whose mental faculties were every bit as sound and keen as his own, that her unnatural uncle had sworn out an affidavit, committing her to the horrors of an insane asylum? The very idea of it was monstrous. Pretending that he had not heard the question, he directed Paula's attention to a schooner heavily laden with lumber which was coming down the river on the swift ebb tide. It was a pretty sight to see how gracefully she cut through the water. Notwithstanding the fact that she had only sail for motor power, the craft was going very fast, and Tod began to speculate idly whether their ferryboat would cross the stranger's bow or slow down to pass under her stern. But his companion, preoccupied with more serious thoughts, was not to be put off.

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"Tell me," she repeated anxiously, "what did those horrid men want with me? What right had they to catechise me as they did?" He remained silent, and appealingly she went on: "Please don't hide anything from me. I want to know the truth."

He still hesitated. It was incredible of belief—too infamous a proceeding. Yet Cooley and his stepfather were acting well within the law. It was plainly a conspiracy to do this poor girl out of her rights, yet those scoundrels had the sanction of the Court for the action they were taking. After all, why should he hide anything from her? She would soon learn the terrible truth. It was his duty to let her know everything, so she might be forearmed.

His silence only alarmed her the more.

"It must be something serious," she exclaimed, "or you would tell me. What did those dreadful men want of me?" Peremptorily she said: "I wish you to tell me. I appeal to your honor as a man."

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No longer able to restrain himself, Tod burst out:

"Pardon me if I express myself too emphatically, Miss Marsh, but I just can't keep it in any longer. You are the victim of as damnable a plot as was ever hatched outside of Hell! Your uncle, desperate at the nearness of your attaining your majority, wants to put you in a place where you will be powerless to interfere with his plans. Alleging that you are highly excitable and not responsible for your actions, they have secured from the Court an order committing you to the Tocquencke Asylum."

"Not that—my God! Not that!"

The young girl turned white as death, and with an exclamation of horror collapsed onto the seat. Her entire body trembled like a leaf.

"What have I done," she moaned, "that I should be persecuted in this way?" Looking up at her companion, her eyes filled with tears, she demanded: "Is it possible that they have the right—does the law give my uncle this power over me?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"Unfortunately it does," he replied. "The law is all wrong, but it's the law. All your uncle has to do is to secure the affidavit of two physicians that you are insane. You may be perfectly sane, but if it pleases these physicians to conclude otherwise you can be committed to an asylum."

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"Then no one is safe!" cried the girl. "Any relative wishing, for reasons of his own, to get you out of the way could bribe two unscrupulous physicians and deprive you of your liberty!"

"Certainly," rejoined the young man. "There have been many cases of the sort. The process is very simple. In case the person can be made out as violently insane so as liable to do injury to some one, two physicians are called upon to examine the person and to make the necessary affidavit. Then on the petition of anybody interested in the person—your uncle, for instance—a Court can at once, on the statement of the physicians, commit the person to an asylum."

"Horrible!" cried Paula. "And these things can happen in free America? Surely there is some remedy?"

"Yes," he replied. "Anybody interested in the person, like a father, brother, next friend, or anybody else, can apply at any time they see fit, to a Judge of the Supreme Court, on a *habeas corpus*, and have the question of the sanity of the person tested. This may be done in open Court by a Judge, or he can send it to a referee, if he sees fit, where the proceedings are lengthy. This

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judge decides whether the person is sane or not. Of course if they had succeeded in putting you in the asylum Mr. Ricaby would have immediately applied for a *habeas corpus*."

Paula grew silent. How she wished herself back in Paris! It was all on account of that wretched inheritance! How she regretted having come to America to claim it! If she was nervous, who could wonder at it? The manœuvres of her Uncle James, Mr. Cooley, and Dr. Zacharie were enough to unnerve any one. If they put her in an asylum, she would go really mad. She had heard and read so much of the terrors of private insane asylums. It was nothing but a living death. The horror of it seized upon her. Shaken by a sudden nervous trembling, she exclaimed fearfully:

"Don't let them take me, Mr. Chase! Please don't let them take me away!"

Tod put his arm around her sympathetically. He felt sorrier for her than he dare show. Never so much as now did he realize the place which this girl had taken in his life. Was it love? He did not know, but he certainly was more attracted to her than to any girl he had ever known.

"No—no," he said reassuringly. "You're safe from them now. The Court order which they have secured is only good in New York State. In a few more minutes we shall be in New Jersey. They can't touch you there."

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"But afterward?" she asked. "What are we going to do when we get to Jersey?"

Tod grinned.

"I haven't the remotest idea," he answered. "All I thought was getting away from those land sharks!"

"But I must go somewhere," insisted Paula, who was beginning to feel uneasy, now that the first excitement of the escape was over. Until now she had not had a moment's leisure in which to think matters over calmly.

"The important thing," said Tod decisively, "is to keep away from Messrs. Cooley, Marsh & Company. They must not know where you are. The best you can do is to go to Philadelphia, and engage rooms for an indefinite period at the Bellevue-Stratford. When I've seen you comfortably settled there I'll leave you and come back here to find Mr. Ricaby. Your lawyer must take immediate legal steps to have the committal order vacated on the ground of criminal conspiracy."

"But how can I go to Philadelphia in this?" cried Paula, looking down in dismay at the simple house dress she was wearing. "I had no time to change. Why, I haven't even a toothbrush!"

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"Oh, that's nothing," rejoined Tod, with calm unconcern. "You can buy 'em by the dozen in Philadelphia. The main thing is to get you away as quickly as possible from the dangerous proximity of Mr. Cooley."

"Look out! Look out, there!"

A sudden warning shout from the group of passengers gathered in the fore part of the boat, followed by a succession of shrill blasts from the ferryboat's whistle, made them jump up with a start. They had been so busy talking that they had not paid much heed to what was going on around them. What they saw was sufficiently alarming.

The lumber craft, going fast with the strong tide, and having, in any case, the right of way, was close upon them. The pilot of the ferryboat, miscalculating the distance that separated one vessel from the other, put on speed and attempted to cross the schooner's bow. But it was too late. He had not taken into account the strength of the tide. The surrounding water was lashed into white foam as the ferryboat made frantic efforts to escape the impending blow. But a collision amidships was inevitable. The lumber boat came rushing on with the speed of an express locomotive. Then the pilot did the only thing he could do. To escape a blow, which, if well delivered, would have sent the ferryboat and its two hundred passengers to the bottom of the river, he gave his steering wheel a few quick twists. The ferryboat, obediently answering the helm, swung round, while the lumber craft, a mass of black and white sail cloth, bore down rapidly and seemed about to overwhelm and crush them. Women screamed, men shouted and tore down the racks containing the life belts. Deckhands ran excitedly about. The whistle was kept going continuously. For a few panicky moments pandemonium reigned.

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"Good God!" cried Tod, snatching up a life belt. "It's an accident. Come, quick!"

But before Paula could move a step or even make reply there came a terrible shock, followed by the sound of smashing glass and the splintering of wood. Officers and deckhands ran about quieting the passengers, many of whom, seized by a frenzy of fear, were ready to jump into the water. The more self-possessed ones cried out:

"Keep cool! There is no danger."

Slowly the two boats drew apart and swung clear. Then it was seen that the ferryboat's injuries were merely superficial. The blow, fortunately, was only a glancing one. No damage had been done below the water line. The paddlebox was smashed to smithereens, and this was a serious enough mishap, for it left the ferryboat completely helpless, drifting with the tide. The whistle blew continuously, summoning assistance from the shore, and the schooner, seeing it could be of no assistance, proceeded down the stream.

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"We're lucky it's no worse!" cried Tod, as he returned, after a tour of inspection, to where Paula

was sitting. "We'll have to drift about a bit until they come and tow us into the Jersey City slip."

A deckhand who was passing heard the remark.

"Guess again!" he snickered. "Jersey nothing! It's New York we're going back to. See—they're after comin' out for us now."

With a jerk of his thumb he pointed to the Manhattan shore. A powerful tug had already left the New York slip and was puffing in their direction.

"Back to New York!" exclaimed Tod and Paula, in startled unison.

This outcome to their adventure they had certainly not foreseen. To be taken ignominiously back and made to walk right in the arms of their pursuers was something they hardly expected. Consternation was plainly written on the faces of both. Tod was not easily excited, but this *contretemps* was too much even for his self-composure. Addressing the deckhand, he cried excitedly:

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"We can't go back to New York! It's out of the question! I'll go and see the captain."

The man grinned.

"I guess I'd leave the Cap'n alone, if I was yer," he said, with a dry chuckle. "He's thunderin' mad over the smash-up. There's no tellin' what he might do ter yer."

"But you don't understand," burst out Tod, with renewed energy. "There's a reason why this lady and I can't go back to New York. There are people there whom we're most anxious to avoid. We must get over to New Jersey without further delay. Can't you hail a passing tug for us, or lower a boat? I'll make it worth your while—see!"

He drew from his pocket a roll of money. The man laughed and shook his head.

"Pair of runaways, eh? Goin' ter git spliced in Jersey?" With an impudent stare at Paula, he added, with a laugh: "I don't blame yer. The gal's pretty, all right. But there's nothin' doin'. I don't want to lose me job. I guess it's New York fer yours, all right. Here comes the tug now!"

He ran forward just as the rescuing tug, puffing and snorting, came alongside. A rope was thrown up and made fast, and the tow back to the city began.

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"Confound the fellow's impudence!" said Tod savagely. "If I wasn't in such a fix I'd punch his head."

Paula, pale and anxious, laid her hand on his arm.

"Never mind him!" she said. "What are we going to do about the others? That is more serious."

Tod, silent and thoughtful, was racking his brain to find some way out of this new dilemma. Yet there was nothing to be done. The accident had been noticed from the shore. Every one knew they must come back. They were trapped like two naughty children who had been caught playing truant from school. A nice laugh Cooley and Jimmy would have on him! Suddenly he turned to Paula.

"We've only one chance left," he said quickly, "and it's a very slim one. Come down to the lower deck. We'll get into the machine. Directly the boat touches the dock and the bridge is lowered, I'll let her go for all she's worth. There's a chance that in the general excitement we may be able to get past them. Come!"

It was a forlorn hope at best, but a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Slowly, like a limping, living thing, the helpless ferryboat entered the New York slip, pushed and coaxed into its berth by the rescuing tug. A large crowd of curious sightseers, gathered on the dock, followed the manœuvres with interest. As Tod sat at the wheel of his machine, his frightened companion by his side, ready to dash forward the moment the boat was made fast, he scanned eagerly the sea of faces turned toward them. There was no sign of the enemy. Apparently the coast was clear. There was a bump as the boat reached the dock and a rattle of chains as the deckhands made fast. The drawbridge came down. Tod pulled the starting lever, and the machine shot forward. At that instant several police officers and a number of men, among whom Tod recognized Mr. Cooley and Jimmy Marsh, ran into the middle of the road and barred the way. A policeman held up his hand to Tod to stop.

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Paula gave a little scream, while Tod let loose a flow of unprintable profanity. Mr. Cooley ran up to the car, his fat, bloated face congested with a combination of anger and triumph.

"Stop that car," he roared, "or I'll send you up for contempt of court!"

Yielding to superior forces, Tod stopped the machine. Mr. Cooley came up with a police officer. Pointing at Paula, the lawyer cried:

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"That's the young lady. She is attempting to evade an order of the Court." Producing a legal paper, he added: "Here is the order committing her to my custody."

Paula again screamed and clung to her companion. The policeman, puzzled, glanced at the Court order. A crowd began to gather. Finally the officer, addressing Paula, said respectfully:

"Do you acknowledge that you are Paula Marsh, the person named in this paper?"

White as a sheet, ready to swoon from terror, the girl nodded faintly:

"Yes."

"Then you must go with this man," said the officer, pointing to Mr. Cooley.

"No, no! I won't— I won't!" she cried, clinging to Tod's arm.

"You had better go with him," he whispered gently. "It's best to avoid a scene. It won't be for long. Leave it to me. We'll soon get you out again. I'll see Ricaby at once, and to-morrow we'll swear out a *habeas corpus*. You'd better go quietly with him."

With an unobserved pressure of the hand, which he felt was returned, Tod silently said good-by. [Pg 267]
Paula slowly descended from the automobile. Turning to Mr. Cooley, she said, in a deliberate, dignified manner:

"Very well, Mr. Cooley, I am ready to accompany you." [Pg 268]

CHAPTER XVII.

Among the unspeakable crimes which man, in the name of humanity, has perpetrated against his fellow man, none has been more gruesome, more merciless, more fiendishly cruel than the abuse of the private sanitarium.

There is a hazy notion in the public mind that the private insane asylum, the horrors of which were so vividly depicted by Charles Reade, Edgar Allan Poe, and other writers, are things of the barbarous past, and that in our own enlightened, humane, practical twentieth century, when the liberty of the individual was never so jealously safe-guarded, it would be impossible for any unscrupulous person, actuated by interested motives of his own, to "railroad" a perfectly sane relative to an institution, and retain him there indefinitely against his or her will. The startling truth, however, is that, under our present lunacy system, nothing is easier.

The infamous madhouses of half a century ago, with their secret dungeons, their living skeletons rattling in chains, their brutal keepers who tickled the soles of hapless inmates' feet to drive them into hysterics in anticipation of the annual perfunctory visit of the State examiners in lunacy, have, it is true been driven out of business; the existing sanitariums are now more or less under rigid State control, yet this official supervision is not always adequate protection against misrepresentation and fraud. By the free expenditure of money and with the coöperation of unscrupulous physicians, foul wrongs are frequently inflicted on the most innocent and unoffensive people. At the present moment it is not only possible for scheming persons, interested in getting a relative safely out of the way, to accomplish their sinister purpose, but each year in the United States dozens of perfectly sane persons are actually incarcerated in private asylums scattered over the country. [Pg 269]

The medical superintendent of a prominent State hospital, in a paper read recently before the Bar Association practically admitted the truth of this. At the same time, reviewing the laws bearing upon the commitment and discharge of the criminally insane, he proposed certain changes suggested by the actual operation of the present laws. He also drew attention to a statement made by the *Medical Record* to the effect that, only a short time since, no fewer than fourteen persons were committed to one small institution by juries in a single year and every one of them was found later to be sane, and had to be discharged. The superintendent very properly insisted that there should be some modification of the present law whereby lunatics, accused of serious crimes against the person and especially those committing murder, should be dealt with by a tribunal having fixed, continuous responsibility, and that a jury of laymen should not be allowed to decide regarding the mental condition of any person with a view to his commitment to an asylum for the insane or to his discharge therefrom. [Pg 270]

The abuses possible under the present loose system are only too obvious, the opportunity offered to fraud and crime only too apparent. Putting troublesome relatives in lunatic asylums might be considered an easy way of getting rid of them by those who are too tender-hearted or too cowardly to murder them outright. It is scarcely more merciful. Frequently the request for incarceration is not brought before a court or jury at all. A commission of insanity experts is summoned by the alleged lunatic's relatives, and if they are satisfied that the patient is of unsound mind they sign a paper committing him or her to some institution. Sometimes the signature of one physician only is sufficient, and in fraudulent cases, where the persons calling in the physicians are keenly interested in the result, everything is done to make out a *bona-fide* case, and prove the patient out of his or her mind. Harried, nervous, fearful of everybody and everything, the slightest lapse from control or commonplace speech is used for the patient's undoing. [Pg 271]

The mental anguish and actual suffering that a sane person must necessarily undergo when suddenly deprived of his liberty and brutally incarcerated in some lugubrious, lonely sanitarium can better be imagined than described. To know that one is in perfect health and yet compelled to associate with poor creatures whose minds are really shattered, forced to listen to their

senseless chatter all day and to hear their blood-curdling screams all night, to be under constant surveillance, an object of distrust and pity, subject to a severe and humiliating discipline, punished by the dreaded cold-water douche when refractory—all this is enough to make a madman of the sanest person. And when, added to these horrors, the unfortunate victim sees himself deserted by all, deprived of means to employ a lawyer, knowing that the enemies responsible for his misfortune are squandering his money and profiting by his misery, is it a wonder that in a moment of discouragement and desperation he abandons hope and does away with himself? Then the indifferent world sagely wags its head and accepts without questioning the coroner's verdict: "Killed by his own hand in a fit of suicidal mania."

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Among the larger private insane asylums in New York State, the institution "Sea Rest" at Tocquencke, bore a fairly good reputation. That is to say, the skirts of the management had been kept relatively free from scandal, and suicides were of comparatively rare occurrence. The institution, under the direction of Superintendent Spencer, was pleasantly situated on Long Island, overlooking the Sound, and catered almost exclusively to a wealthy class of patients who, for one reason or another, found themselves compelled to take the "rest cure."

One morning, about three weeks after Mr. Cooley's spectacular arrest of the runaways at the Jersey ferry, Superintendent Spencer was seated at his desk in the general reception room at "Sea Rest," dictating reports to a young woman stenographer. There was little about the surroundings to suggest the sinister character of the place. Only the heavily barred windows, overlooking the grounds enclosed by high walls, and the massive doors fitted with ponderous bolts and locks suggested that padded cells with wild-eyed inmates might be found in some other part of the establishment. Otherwise it was an ordinary, everyday business office. The large desk near the window was covered with ledgers and papers, while close at hand was a telephone and clicking typewriter. To the left of the desk a small, narrow door led to the wards. On the right a heavy door opened on the vestibule and grounds.

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The superintendent himself was a clean-shaven man of about thirty-five. Alert-looking and well groomed, he had the energetic manner of the successful business man. Mechanically, as if it were a matter of tiresome routine, to be hurried through as speedily as possible, he went on dictating in a monotonous tone:

"Report on Miss Manderson's case. Attendant, Miss Hadley; physician, Dr. Bently. Patient's demand for stimulants decreasing, but she calls constantly for bridge-playing companions. Patient generally cheerful—will not retire till 3 A. M. Six packages of cigarettes in her room—"

Buzz! buzz! A disc fell down on the indicator on the wall, disclosing a number.

The superintendent turned quickly and, glancing at the indicator, pressed a button in his desk. This released a bolt in the door leading to the outer hall, a safeguard necessary to prevent reckless patients from wandering outside to help themselves without permission to the fresh air. The big door swung open and an old man, bent with age, entered.

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"Ah, Collins—I wanted to see you!" said the superintendent sharply.

Seized with an attack of coughing, the old man could not reply at once. For thirty years he had been an inmate. When a man is going on eighty, he is not as vigorous as he once was. Formerly a waiter at Delmonico's, he found the pace too swift. His mind gave way, and a rich patron, pitying his condition, sent him to "Sea Rest." For a long time now he had been cured, but, broken in spirit, he found he could not return to the old life, so he had remained at the asylum in the capacity of attendant.

"Yes—sir," he gasped, between spasms of coughing.

The superintendent looked at him severely:

"Collins, did you buy six packets of cigarettes for Miss Manderson?"

The old man cowered. He was afraid of the superintendent. He had reason to dread those cold douches.

"No, sir," he replied, trembling.

"Are you sure?" demanded the superintendent.

"Yes, sir," answered the old man hesitatingly, his eyes on the floor.

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"Look at me," thundered the superintendent.

"Yes, sir."

He looked up timidly and shook his head.

"Don't you know," almost shouted the superintendent, "that she has come to 'Sea Rest' to recuperate from an overdose of social life, and that she must not smoke?"

"Yes, sir."

"You've been a waiter all your life, Collins—and I'm afraid that the old instinct to take tips is too strong."

"It's hard to refuse sometimes, sir," replied the old man, his knees shaking, "but I manage to

overcome my feelings—occasionally."

The indicator again rang. The superintendent turned.

"It's the front door," he said, with a gesture to go and answer the bell.

"It's Dr. Bently, sir," rejoined the old man.

As Collins went to open the outside door, the superintendent turned to the stenographer.

"Make a note in your report suggesting that Miss Manderson's money be taken from her while she is an inmate of the sanitarium."

"Yes, sir."

The superintendent took up another paper.

"Report on Mr. Jeliffe's case. Attendant, James Hurst; physician, Dr. Macdonald. Same as previous report." [Pg 276]

Suddenly the small, narrow door on the left opened and the head female attendant, dressed in a gray uniform with white cap and apron, entered. She was a big, muscular-looking woman, the kind of person one might expect to find in her particular business, a woman who looked capable of meeting, single-handed, any emergency that might arise. Her face was hard and unsympathetic, yet it belied her real character, for, as asylum nurses go, she was kind to the patients under her care.

"Well, Mrs. Johnson, what is it?" exclaimed the superintendent testily, annoyed at the many interruptions.

"Miss Marsh wants to see you, sir."

"Not to-day, Mrs. Johnson. I have seventy reports to make out, and I'm only half through. What does she want to see me about? Same thing, I suppose."

"She insists that she is being unlawfully detained here, and she wants to go."

"Of course—of course," exclaimed the superintendent impatiently. "In the short time that she's been here her case has received more attention than any in my experience. What with doctors, and lawyers, and newspaper men, I'm hounded to death about her. Tell her that she can't be permitted to go without an order of release from a physician. The State demands that. You know it as well as I do and yet you waste my time every few hours. Tell her that her *habeas corpus* case comes up next Friday." [Pg 277]

He returned to his papers with an impatient gesture, as if he dismissed the matter from his mind, but the attendant still remained. Hesitatingly she said:

"She's so unhappy! She cries so constantly that I—I wish you'd see her, Mr. Spencer—if only to satisfy her. What can I do?"

The superintendent looked up from his work and glared at his head nurse, as if amazed at her obstinacy. Coldly, deliberately, he said:

"Mrs. Johnson, I'm afraid you are wasting a lot of sympathy on this case. This patient was caught by her guardian at the Jersey City ferry, in the act of eloping. She's mad as a March hare. Her certificate is signed by three of the most eminent physicians in the country, and her application for release is opposed by the biggest lawyer in New York—Bascom Cooley. There is no question about her mental condition."

Turning once more to his desk, he resumed dictating: [Pg 278]

"Report on Mr. Jeliffe's case——"

The attendant still lingered.

"Well, sir," she said hesitatingly, "will you send a telegram to Mr. Ricaby, her lawyer, asking him to come up."

"He was here yesterday, wasn't he?" snapped the superintendent.

"She is most anxious to see him," persisted the nurse.

The superintendent frowned. This obstinacy was very annoying. Still, he dare not refuse such a simple request.

"I'll see what Dr. Zacharie says," he said curtly. "His instructions were that she must not be excited or annoyed by visitors."

"Very well, sir," said the nurse respectfully, as she went out again through the little door.

The superintendent resumed his work.

"Have you made out the report on Miss Marsh's case?"

"Yes, sir."

The stenographer was busy searching through a mass of papers when Collins reappeared.

"Will you see Dr. Zacharie, sir?" inquired the old man.

"Yes—show him in," replied the superintendent.

Collins half opened the door and Dr. Zacharie entered, full of authority. Like most charlatans who find it necessary to deceive the world, the physician tried to cover up his shortcomings by noisy bluster. Advancing to the desk, his chest inflated with self-importance, he greeted Mr. Spencer in a patronizing tone: [Pg 279]

"Good morning, Mr. Spencer. Well, how is she to-day?"

The superintendent shook his head, as if much discouraged.

"Rather restless, I should say." Handing a paper to the physician, he added: "Here's the report."

Dr. Zacharie took the report and hastily scanned it.

"Ah, well!" he muttered, "it is to be expected."

"Will you see her?" inquired the superintendent.

"No; it—it is not necessary just yet. There is to be a consultation to-day. Dr. McMutrie and Professor Bodley will be here presently—also Mr. Cooley."

"Her *habeas corpus* comes up on Friday, I believe," said the superintendent politely. Mr. Spencer always made it a rule to stand in well with the visiting physicians.

Dr. Zacharie frowned.

"Yes, a jury of illiterate ignoramuses to decide a scientific question! Ah, such laws in this country!" He stopped and read aloud from the report: "Cries constantly—sits silent and moody for hours." Looking up, he said: "Poor girl, she—she seems to be conscious of her position at times—she talks much, eh?" [Pg 280]

At that moment old Collins reappeared.

"Mr. Ricaby wishes to see Miss Marsh," he said.

The superintendent made a gesture in the direction of the wards.

"Tell Mrs. Johnson to bring her here." As the old attendant went to obey the order, the superintendent turned to Dr. Zacharie: "Will you wait, doctor?" he asked.

The other quickly shook his head.

"No," he said. "I don't like that fellow Ricaby. He has a stupid idea that we are opposed to him. May I take this report? I would like to show it to my colleagues when they come."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the other.

He rose from his desk, indicating by a nod to his stenographer that there would be no further dictation. As the secretary gathered her papers the bell rang.

"There's the luncheon bell," said the superintendent. Addressing Dr. Zacharie: "Won't you join us?" [Pg 281]

"No, thanks," replied the physician. "Send us a copy of the other reports, will you? We shall need them on Friday."

Buzz! buzz!

Mr. Spencer touched a button and the big doors swung wide open, giving admittance to Mr. Ricaby, who, pale and anxious-looking, advanced quickly into the office. As he came in Dr. Zacharie, a sneer on his lips, made a formal salutation, but it was not returned. Ignoring the physician's presence entirely, the lawyer made his way straight to the superintendent's desk:

"I wish to see my client, Miss Marsh," he said, in a firm voice that would brook no refusal.

Dr. Zacharie gave a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders and, with a significant smile at the superintendent, went away.

"I have sent for Miss Marsh," said the superintendent coldly.

"Thank you," replied the lawyer curtly.

The air was full of hostility. The superintendent stood in silence at his desk putting away his papers. Mr. Ricaby, taking a seat uninvited, looked around him and shuddered as he thought of the poor girl whose rescue from this dreadful place he was moving heaven and earth to effect. After a few minutes' wait Collins reappeared. Addressing the superintendent, he said: [Pg 282]

"Miss Marsh will be here directly, sir."

"Very well," growled the other. "They can have this room."

"Yes, sir."

"Who is on watch duty to-day?" demanded the superintendent.

"Lockwood at the front gates, sir, and Medwinter patrolling."

"Very well," said the superintendent airily. "If you want me I'm at lunch."

Then, without so much as a glance at the lawyer, he closed his desk lid with a bang and left the office.

Mr. Ricaby waited anxiously for the coming of his client. All voices and sounds had died away, and a heavy, sinister silence fell upon the entire building. There was something unnatural about the dead calm. Suddenly there was a scream of terror, followed by peals of hysterical laughter. Then all was silence again. In spite of himself the lawyer felt uncomfortable. He shuddered as he realized what Paula had suffered in such a place. The quiet now was uncanny and oppressive. All one heard was the loud ticking of the office clock and the stealthy walk of old Collins, who, gliding about the room in his noiseless felt slippers, halted every now and then to glance in the direction of the visitor. Like most persons of weak mind, he was easily excited by the appearance of a new face. Indeed, strangers at "Sea Rest" were enough of a novelty to excite interest. With the physicians and regular callers the inmates were familiar enough, but the sight of a stranger revived in their debilitated minds old recollections, thoughts of the outer world, a world of sunshine, joy, and liberty of which they themselves had once been a part and which they had abandoned all hope of ever seeing again. At last, unable to control his curiosity any longer, the old man stopped in front of the lawyer and inquired respectfully:

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"Can I get you anything, sir?"

"No, thanks," replied Mr. Ricaby. There was something in the appearance of the old man that interested him, and kindly he asked: "How long have you been here?"

"Nearly ten years, sir—on and off. I was an inmate here, sir, when Dr. Spencer—Mr. Spencer's father—was the proprietor."

"Are you still a—a—an inmate?"

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"No, sir—not so to speak. I'm a waiter, sir—my old profession. After I got better I went back to my old position at Delmonico's, but I couldn't stand the excitement. You wouldn't believe it, sir, but waiters are frightfully tried. We've got to know just what people want, who don't know what they want themselves, and who complain if we make the slightest mistake. Don't they make mistakes, too? Don't they point with their knives and forks while they talk in a vulgar, loud voice with their mouths full of food? Don't they put vinegar on their oysters and ice in their claret? Don't they drink champagne with fish? Don't they expect a half portion to be enough for two? And, cruellest act of all, they talk to us in a language they call French. They blame us when the cashier makes mistakes. They blame us when the cook makes mistakes. They blame us when their own digestions make mistakes. They forget that we're human. And, I tell you, sir, it gets on our nerves at last. It's bound to." Suddenly the electric indicator buzzed loudly. The old man started nervously and glanced up.

"It's the dining room, sir. Excuse me, sir."

Before he could obey the summons a bell sounded violently from the same direction.

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"All right—all right," he cried. "I heard it the first time."

He toddled off, grumbling. A moment later the small, narrow door opened and Mrs. Johnson, the head attendant, entered, followed by Paula.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

Every minute of the day and night, for three long, weary weeks, that had seemed like years, Paula had prayed for deliverance from what was little better than a living death. At first, when she was brought to the asylum she thought she would go really mad. The first glimpse of the barred windows, the bolted doors and padded cells filled her with terror. She became hysterical, and for two days could not be pacified. She refused all nourishment, and, unable to sleep, passed her time pacing up and down her room. The superintendent and nurses fully believed that she was insane, and the symptoms she displayed being common in patients, no heed was paid to them or to her protests. Gradually, seeing the futility of tears and resistance, the girl grew quieter, and calmly began to look forward to the moment when the horrid nightmare would be at an end, and she would be set free. She knew that Mr. Ricaby and Tod were exhausting every legal resource to procure her liberty and that an order for her release was only a question of time. But the long, agonizing wait, the knowledge that she was the associate of, and breathed the same air as wretched, demented beings whose one hope of deliverance was a speedy death, was more than she could bear. Of Dr. Zacharie she had, fortunately, seen very little. Only once since her incarceration had the physician attempted to visit her professionally, and then she was seized with such a violent attack of hysteria that the nurse, alarmed, begged him to retire.

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All this anxiety and mental distress could not have failed to affect her general health, and Mr. Ricaby was startled when he caught sight of the girl's pale, wan face, with its traces of suffering.

She smiled faintly when she saw him, and, as he darted forward, extended a thin, emaciated hand.

"Oh, Mr. Ricaby, I'm so glad, so glad to see you!" she said weakly. "I didn't expect you to-day."

Shocked by her appearance, the lawyer was too much agitated at first to answer. Controlling himself with an effort, he asked in a low tone:

"How are you? Have they been kind to you?"

Paula made no answer. Looking over her shoulder in a frightened kind of way, she said in a whisper:

"Tell that woman to go away."

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He turned to the attendant.

"Will you please leave us?" he said politely.

Mrs. Johnson hesitated. It was against the rules to let the patient out of her sight. Shaking her head doubtfully, she said:

"I'm supposed to— You see, sir, I'm responsible for the young lady. But I'll go. It will be all right, I am sure. If you want me I shall be in there." Pointing to the entrance to the wards, she opened the door and quietly disappeared.

"She's a good woman," said Paula. "She's very kind and obliging. But she follows me everywhere. If I could forget my position even for a moment, the constant presence of that woman would remind me. Oh, it's so hard to bear!"

"But she's kind, you say—and obliging. That's something, isn't it?" said Mr. Ricaby encouragingly.

"Yes, it's something," replied the girl. She laughed bitterly as she went on: "They're all kind and considerate, Mr. Ricaby, but it's their very kindness and consideration that hurts me most. They look at me with such sympathy and pity. I can read their very thoughts. They seem to say: 'Poor thing, you have no mind. You can't think as we do.' And they treat me as tenderly as they would a child. They try to amuse me and comfort me. They give me everything I ask for—everything, except my liberty. I demand my liberty. It won't be long now. The case comes up the day after tomorrow, doesn't it?"

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The lawyer looked away. Awkwardly he replied:

"No, Paula; it's postponed for a week."

"What!" she cried, in dismay. "Postponed—postponed! Oh!"

"If we'd been successful in getting Senator Wratchett," he explained, "Cooley never would have obtained a stay of proceedings. But Wratchett says he is not prepared."

"And until he is prepared I must stay here?" she cried, in consternation.

"The time will soon pass," he replied soothingly.

The girl walked nervously up and down the floor. Turning quickly on the lawyer, she exclaimed, with angry vehemence:

"Soon pass! Soon pass! Do you realize what it means to stay in this dreadful place another whole week? To meet only men and women who regard you with pity and curiosity—as—as hopelessly unfit to go into the outer world? Their very kindness and consideration is a mockery. Another week? Seven long days, seven endless nights? I can't sleep, I only get fitful snatches of oblivion during which my dreams are worse than the awakening. I've been here only three weeks and it seems like a lifetime—a lifetime. The companionship of that woman for another week!" Hysterically she cried: "I can't do it, Mr. Ricaby, I can't do it! You must take me away from here!"

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The lawyer made no reply. Then, as if suddenly actuated by a determined resolution, he went up to the window overlooking the grounds and glanced out. Perhaps there might be a chance to get away. But when he noted the precipitous stone walls and the man on guard at the locked iron gates, he was convinced of the futility of any such attempt. It would only injure her cause. Shaking his head, he returned to where Paula stood.

"It isn't possible," he said, in an undertone. "That woman is behind the door. A man is over at the gate. No, that's not the way. If you go at all it must be through the front door, with head erect."

With a gesture of discouragement, Paula sank down on a chair.

"I can't stand it any longer," she cried, her face streaming with tears, "it's unbearable—simply unbearable! Did you ever try to count the time away? The first day I was here I determined not to think of my position. I counted the seconds. I counted one, two, three, four, five thousand—counted until I became exhausted. I thought I'd counted for hours, but I found that barely one little hour had passed—one little hour—and that the more I tried to forget my position the more intolerable it became."

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Almost beside himself, not knowing what to suggest next, the lawyer strode nervously up and down the room. Each word she uttered was a stinging reproach and a knife thrust in his heart.

Yet could he do more than he was doing? Stopping in front of her, he seized her burning hands and held them firmly in his own.

"Paula—Paula!" he cried appealingly, "for God's sake don't go on that way! I can't stand it. Try, try to bear up. The sun is shining somewhere behind these clouds—if we could only see it! This darkness will only last for a few days—a few hours—and then——"

"And then," she echoed with a hollow, mocking laugh. "Sometimes, when I think of the frightful ordeal I shall be compelled to go through to prove that I am entitled to my freedom, I—I feel unequal to the task— I'm—I'm afraid—afraid——"

"You'll be all right—you'll come out triumphant!"

She shook her head doubtfully.

"How can I tell that I shall be able to convince these strangers? They don't know me as—as you do. Suppose I don't make a good impression. Suppose that the answers I make to their questions are not—not what they consider intelligent. Suppose I become confused and lose control of myself as I did before—what then?"

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He held out his hand deprecatingly.

"Paula!"

"What then?" she demanded plaintively.

"It's impossible!" he answered. Entreatingly he went on: "Oh, Paula! for God's sake don't let these gloomy thoughts get hold of your mind!"

"But they do get into my mind," she went on hoarsely. "How can I tell for certain that these strange men who will be called upon to decide finally—will decide in my favor? They may mean to do what is right, but do they know? It's the uncertainty that makes my position here so intolerable—the dreadful uncertainty. If I thought that when my case did come up I would walk out of court a free woman, I'd try and bear this temporary restraint—but it's the horrible uncertainty—the suspense—the anxiety that's gnawing at me—the secret dread that constant contact with these people may make me one of them——"

"Don't say that," he interrupted.

"But it's true," she insisted. "That's why I must go away from here at once!"

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"Yes, but how—how?" he demanded.

"I don't know."

There was a deep silence. Neither spoke. Helpless, crushed by the law's heavy hand, with hardly a ray of hope ahead, both sat stunned by the calamity which had overtaken them. All at once their reverie was disturbed by the sound of approaching footsteps. The big door opened and Collins appeared. Addressing the lawyer, the old waiter said:

"There's a gentleman in the visitors' room—a Mr. Chase, sir. He's come up from New York specially to see you, sir. When I told him you were talking with the young lady—he—he made me promise him to bring him to see her, too. He has no permit, but I've waited on him scores of times at Del's, and he was always so liberal, that I couldn't refuse him. Shall I bring him here, sir? And would you mind taking the responsibility—if any question is raised?"

Paula rose, a flush of pleasure reddening her pale cheeks.

"Oh, please, Mr. Ricaby, I do so want to see him," she cried.

"I had better see him alone, Paula," objected the lawyer.

"But I want to see him," she insisted.

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Mr. Ricaby nodded to Collins.

"Very well; tell him to come in."

The old man disappeared, and the attorney turned to his client. There was a tone of reproach in his voice as he said:

"How glad you are to see this man, Paula!"

"Yes; I—I——" she stammered.

"You don't stop to think," rejoined her companion bitterly, "that his family is the cause of your present predicament. You might say it is his fault."

"His mother's fault, perhaps, but not his," corrected Paula quickly. "You don't like him—you never liked him. Yet he is my friend—the one friend I feel I can depend upon besides yourself. Won't you try and like him for my sake?"

The lawyer shook his head. Doggedly he replied:

"If I don't like him that is my affair. I don't see why you should take it so much to heart."

"Well, don't—don't say anything to him, will you?"

"No, no, of course not. I only wish I could share your good opinion of him."

Paula was about to reply, when they heard the noise of approaching footsteps. The next instant Tod came in, beaming over with high spirits.

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"Hello, people! hello!" he cried heartily.

His jocular manner and hearty greeting might lead one to think that it was a pleasure jaunt rather than a sympathy call on an inmate which had brought him to the asylum. Not understanding his gaiety, Paula and the lawyer stared at him in amazement. It was the first time that Paula had seen him since they were parted so unceremoniously at the ferry, and she thought he might show a little more concern.

"How are you, Mr. Ricaby?" he said cheerily. "Miss Paula, I never saw you looking better!" Looking around curiously, he went on enthusiastically: "Do you know this is a great little place up here? Gee, the scenery is great!—finest view of Long Island Sound I ever saw. Well, they got us at the ferry, didn't they? If the blamed old boat hadn't broken down they'd never have caught us, would they?"

"It was very good of you to come to see me," said Paula, somewhat distantly.

He stared at her in well-feigned astonishment.

"To see you?" he exclaimed. "Why, I'm up here for my own health. Mother is with me. She wants to see you. You know I'm going to spend a couple of weeks here and rest up. I've just looked the place over and I tell you it beats all your summer hotels to a standstill. No bands of music, no bridge parties for mother, no late suppers for me, no late hours, not even a golf link! Oh, it's just the place for me. I'm glad I came—I'm all run down, and I—I need——"

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Suddenly he noticed Paula's pale face and traces of recent weeping. He stopped chattering and for the first time looked serious. But the girl was not deceived. She knew that his apparent carelessness was only make-believe. With a forced smile, she said:

"You're trying to cheer me up."

"Why shouldn't I?" he laughed. "Don't you deserve it?"

Mr. Ricaby was impatient to hear what news the young man had brought.

"You came to see me?" he interrupted anxiously.

"Incidentally, yes," smiled Tod.

"How did you know I was here?" demanded the lawyer.

"Missed you at your office. Listen, we'll just talk business a few minutes, Miss Marsh, and then devote ourselves to the enjoyment of the place. Gee, what air! what ozone! what trees——" Suddenly stopping, he scratched his hand vigorously. "And what mosquitoes! Now, in the first place, Ricaby, I'm your witness—you can depend on me. I can prove that Jimmy needed money— and that he was compelled to resort to desperate means to raise it."

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The lawyer looked at him keenly.

"Are you aware," he said, "that it will involve your mother?"

"Your mother!" cried Paula, astonished. "Oh, no! You—can't do that. Oh, Tod, your mother!"

"She's all right," cried the young man. "She has left Jimmy——"

"Left him!" cried Mr. Ricaby.

"Yes, left him for good and all! I explained his dastardly conduct to her, and when I refused to live in the same house with him, she said: 'If you won't live with him, neither will I.' So she just left him, and if I can help it she'll never go back to him. You can count on mother and me, and I think that between us we ought to bottle up Jimmy and Mr. Cooley."

The lawyer held out his hand.

"I've done you a wrong, Mr. Chase, but I—you'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Don't speak of it," laughed Tod good-humoredly.

"You may be of great value," went on the lawyer hastily. "Of course, it depends on what kind of evidence you have. What proof have you?"

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"The best of proof," replied the young man mysteriously, "but don't let us bother her with it— I'll show you my proofs later on."

Mr. Ricaby's face brightened. Perhaps they might yet be able to trap the wily Cooley, after all. Thoughtfully he said:

"If you could persuade your mother to furnish us with some evidence of his intention to defraud ——"

Paula protested.

"Oh, don't ask him to do that! Betray his own mother," she exclaimed. "It seems so—so—unnatural!"

Tod laughed. Looking at the girl fondly, he said:

"Paula, for your sake I'd—I'd commit every crime on the calendar! Anything short of murder goes with me. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. My stepfather and Bascom Cooley are the most desperate diseases I've ever encountered." Looking out of the window, he continued, with pretended enthusiasm: "Gee! but this is a lovely spot! Look at that sunlight shimmering on the water! This air is like the cocktail that exuberates but does not intoxicate! I'll be writing poetry if I stay here long."

The door leading to the wards suddenly opened and Mrs. Johnson appeared. Advancing toward Paula, she said: [Pg 299]

"Dr. Zacharie thinks it advisable for you to rest before the others see you. Come, Miss Marsh."

She took her patient by the arm, but Paula, made bolder by the presence of friends, shook her off:

"I don't wish to go," she avowed decisively.

"Does Dr. Zacharie know we're here?" demanded Tod, turning to the lawyer.

"Yes," rejoined the other.

"You had better come, miss," said the attendant firmly.

Paula looked at Mr. Ricaby and Tod helplessly.

"You won't go away until—until—— Don't leave me here alone—will you?"

"Leave you?" echoed Tod. "Certainly not. I'm going to get mother. Why, I'm a fixture here—hotel picked out—baggage unpacked—rooms taken for a month ahead."

"A month? Why, you said two weeks!" cried the girl, delighted at the thought that she would have his company so long.

"Did I?" he grinned. "Well, you see, the place grows on me."

"Come, miss," said the attendant impatiently.

"You are sure you won't go?" said Paula, addressing Tod.

"I'm sure," he said. "If I go, you go with me."

Paula gave him a long look of gratitude, and, with a sigh of resignation, left the office in company with the head attendant. As soon as the women had disappeared Tod's gaiety of manner underwent a sudden change. Gulping down a dry sob, he broke down completely, and, throwing himself on to a chair, covered his face with his two hands.

"Oh, the damned scoundrels!" he cried, with a vehemence that astonished the lawyer, who had little suspected so much feeling in a youth apparently so flippant. "To think," went on the young man, "that they dare do such a cruel thing as this! How I wish I had them both in a twenty-four-foot ring—if I wouldn't give them what they deserved!"

Mr. Ricaby was anxious to hear what his companion had to impart to him.

"Now, tell me," he said impatiently, "what proofs have you got?"

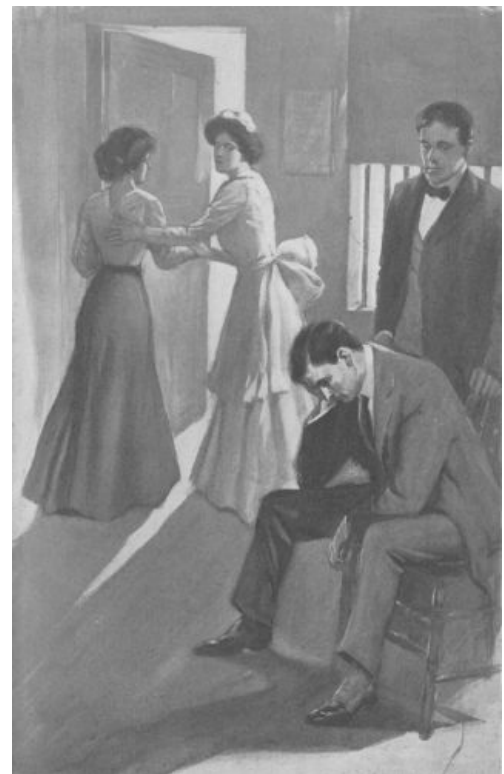
"I have no absolute proof," replied the other. "Only a very strong suspicion."

"But I thought you said you had proofs?" cried the lawyer, disappointed.

"I said that to comfort her. I have no absolute proofs. I am just as much stumped for an idea as to what course to take as you are. But the girl can't stay any longer in this place—that is certain. I have a plan that may work out all right."

"What is it?" demanded the other.

"Just a minute," replied Tod. "I want to telephone mother to come over. She may be able to help us."



PAULA LEFT THE ASYLUM OFFICE ACCOMPANIED BY THE NURSE.

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Going to the telephone, he picked up the receiver. In a tone of irritation, the lawyer said:

"Then all that talk about your baggage and room——"

"All hot air," nodded the other. "I had to say something—or I'd have broken down. What's the number of the hotel?"

"207 Tocquencke," replied the lawyer. Looking at the young man, he went on: "You're a peculiar fellow, Chase."

"Yes, I know," said the other indifferently. "Give me 207, and get Mrs. James Marsh on the 'phone. Hello—yes—will you please tell her to come over to 'Sea Rest' at once and ask for Mr. Chase? Yes, thank you."

Turning to the lawyer he went on:

"It unnerves me to see her in this place—locked in with a bunch of dips and nervous wrecks—compelled to come and go at their call. By God! it's awful, and to think I have to sit here powerless to move a finger on her behalf!" Scornfully he added: "You're a nice lawyer, or she wouldn't have stayed here twenty-four hours! Can't we dope out something—are we going to let them cook up all those schemes while we sit back and watch them?"

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"I am doing everything I can," replied Mr. Ricaby calmly. "Our case comes up next week——"

"Next week!" cried Tod. "She'll be a nervous wreck by then! Can't you see how worried she is? We must get her out of this place at once—if we have to break out with a jimmy. Jimmy! I wish I had him here, I'd wring his neck!"

The lawyer looked at his companion in grave silence. Then he said quietly:

"You think a great deal of Miss Marsh, don't you?"

"Think a great deal of her?" exclaimed Tod. "Ha! ha! The truth of the matter is that I— Ricaby— I — I— I'd marry her to-morrow—if—if she'd have me!"

Mr. Ricaby turned pale. Only by a great effort was he able to control himself. Yet by what right could he interfere? Paula cared more for this man than she admitted. He felt that. Why should he selfishly stand between them? Was that worthy of one who prided himself on his altruism?

"You would marry her?" he cried hoarsely.

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Not noticing his companion's agitation, unaware of the pain he was inflicting, Tod went on:

"Yes, a fine position, ain't it? The first girl I really cared for locked up in a—in a—well, we'll call it a sanitarium. In order to get out she's got to face a public trial to prove she ought not to be there for the rest of her life. How many experts have we on our side?"

"Fifteen!" replied Mr. Ricaby.

"Why don't you get fifty?" cried the young man heatedly. "You can bet that Cooley will have a raft of 'em. Don't take any chances."

"I'm not going to," replied the lawyer quickly. "I've engaged two of the most eminent counsel in the country. They will represent us at the public examination."

Tod's jaw closed with an angry click and his face grew resolute and determined. Clenching his fists, he exclaimed:

"Ricaby, we must prevent that public examination somehow or other. Can you see her facing a crowded court, packed full of curiosity seekers, answering a lot of humbug experts who are paid to prove anything you lawyers want them to prove—the slurs, the innuendos—the insinuations! You know what they said about her father. Well, they'll rake up all that stuff again. If that doesn't break her down, nothing will. We've got to save her that ordeal— Ricaby, we must."

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"I'm afraid it's impossible," objected the lawyer "We must comply with the law."

The young man laughed scornfully.

"The law be d——d!" he exclaimed. "Law is hell, isn't it? It's worse than war, at least, you're not fighting in the dark all the time."

"You're right!" replied the other. "War is fought with weapons—fairly, face to face. This legal strife is combat with hypocrisy—cunning deceit and low political trickery!"

"Well," cried Tod, "we must fight them in the same way! I've got a plan—by Jove! I think it will work."

"What is it?" said the other eagerly.

"Just this," said the younger man, drawing closer. Glancing hastily around to make sure there were no eavesdroppers present, he said, in a low tone:

"For the last three weeks I've had Cooley watched. I know more about him than he imagines. If I choose to, I could ruin him. I know now where he gets his influence and what he pays for it. I

have employed a detective agency. Sleuths have shadowed Cooley and looked up the record of Dr. Zacharie. There is just a fighting chance that we may be able to prove conspiracy."

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The lawyer looked skeptical. Shaking his head, he replied:

"Unless you have absolute proof it will avail nothing. It would mean more endless trouble and litigation, and your charges against these men might come back like a boomerang on our own heads."

The young man grinned shrewdly.

"I have no intention of making complaint to the district attorney. But with the information in our hands we can make both Cooley and Dr. Zacharie believe that we mean business. We can frighten them into thinking that we're going to make a public exposé. Cooley is too deeply involved with the System to run any such chances, and I don't suppose Dr. Zacharie has any particular yearning to be put behind prison bars. I shall lead them to think that we know more than we do, and if I am able to gain Jimmy over, as I think I can, by threats or otherwise, the battle is won. We shall soon see the last of Mr. Cooley, and Miss Paula will go free to enjoy the Marsh millions."

"Hush!" said the lawyer warningly. "Some one is coming!"

The big door flung open, and Collins entered, followed by the superintendent, Jimmy Marsh, Mr. Cooley, and Professor Bodley.

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CHAPTER XIX.

As the gentlemen came in the superintendent was chatting affably with Mr. Cooley, approving everything he said, and laughing loudly at his witticisms, with the forced, artificial cordiality of the man anxious to please. The big lawyer was too influential a personage not to be worth cultivating, and there was no telling when he might prove very useful. Neither of them paid the slightest attention to Tod or Mr. Ricaby, who, anxious to avoid, for the present at least, the slightest excuse for friction, withdrew to the farther end of the office.

Waving the others to seats, the superintendent called his aged attendant:

"Collins, take Professor Bodley to Parlor B."

"Very good, sir."

"Isn't Zacharie here yet?" demanded the Professor.

"Yes, doctor," replied the superintendent civilly. "He's stopping here for a few days."

"Ah, yes—a very conscientious man!" exclaimed the professor. Prattling on, he said: "Well, it's a pleasant place! How is the young lady?"

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The superintendent shrugged his shoulders.

"About the same, doctor, about the same—no change to speak of."

"Hum! ha! yes!" muttered the professor. "Too bad—too bad!"

The superintendent turned again to Mr. Cooley. In an undertone he said:

"The reports are upstairs, counsellor."

"But McMutrie isn't here yet," growled Cooley, glancing around with a frown. "That's the trouble with these successful men. They never have time to keep their appointments."

"I keep my appointments, sir!" snapped the professor peevishly.

"Oh, yes—you do," sneered the lawyer. "Where's Zacharie?"

"Waiting for you upstairs," replied the superintendent, pointing to the staircase.

"Parlor B—this way, gentlemen!" called out Collins.

Mr. Cooley approached the superintendent.

"Get McMutrie on the 'phone," he said impatiently. "Tell him that we're all waiting. And send Miss Marsh up to us as soon as he arrives."

Professor Bodley left the office escorted by the old attendant, and Cooley was about to follow when Mr. Ricaby, who had been watching his opportunity, quickly stepped forward.

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"Mr. Cooley," he said firmly, "I wish to be present at the examination of Miss Marsh."

The big lawyer halted and stared at his opponent contemptuously. Without a word he looked at him from head to foot. Finally he sneered:

"That's not necessary. It's only an informal examination—a private interview for the benefit of our

witnesses. We can't have anyone present but those experts interested on behalf of James Marsh—her uncle and special administrator of the estate."

"I demand to be present," insisted Mr. Ricaby, raising his voice angrily. "It's my client's right, and you know it!"

Cooley shook his head disdainfully.

"I'm sorry," he sneered, "but I can't accommodate you." Scornfully he went on: "Why should we outline our plan of operation to you fellows? The girl's here for her own good, and this *habeas corpus* business of yours is opposing the order of the court. If you want to see her, you can see her, but not while we are present."

"It's an outrage!" exclaimed Mr. Ricaby indignantly.

"An outrage?" echoed Mr. Cooley, elevating his bushy eyebrows in mock surprise. "Why, you saw Miss Marsh this morning, didn't you?" Turning to the superintendent, he asked: "Didn't you so inform me, Mr. Spencer?" [Pg 309]

"Yes, counsellor," replied the superintendent, with a grin.

"Well, what more do you want?" sneered Cooley.

"I demand to be present!" insisted Mr. Ricaby, who was becoming more angry every minute. "The Constitution of the United States expressly——"

Mr. Cooley laughed outright:

"Now, Ricaby, don't let's have any more of this high falutin' nonsense about constitutional rights and curtailments of liberty and all that rot! Keep that for the courts. Miss Marsh is at liberty to come and go as she pleases. But just at present she is engaged. See?" Rudely turning his back on his interlocutor, he said to Mr. Spencer: "Send McMutrie up as soon as he arrives."

"Very well, counsellor," replied the superintendent, bowing deferentially.

With a loud snort of defiance, Mr. Cooley turned on his heel and made his way upstairs. Mr. Ricaby, pale with suppressed wrath, quickly turned to Tod:

"Is your machine at the hotel?" he demanded hoarsely. [Pg 310]

"Yes," replied the other.

"Let me have it," said the lawyer. "I'll run up to town, I'll find a Supreme Court judge and get permission to be present at the examination. Is it a fast machine?"

"Seventy—that's all!" replied the young man laconically.

"All right!" said the lawyer excitedly. "Come and tell the chauffeur to take me to town as fast as he can go. When I get back we'll tackle Cooley together."

"Right you are!" cried Tod enthusiastically.

He was about to leave the office, when suddenly, through the window, he saw a lady and gentleman in the grounds making their way toward the building.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "It's mother."

A moment later Mrs. Marsh, elegantly dressed in the latest fashion, entered, together with Dr. McMutrie. Tod hurried forward to greet her.

"Hello, mother!" he cried. "Did you leave the machine outside?"

"Certainly— I didn't bring it in with me, you silly boy," she laughed. Surprised at his flustered manner, she demanded: "Why are you so excited—what's the matter?" [Pg 311]

Quickly Tod introduced them.

"Mr. Ricaby—my mother! No time to explain." Quickly taking hold of the lawyer's arm, he said: "Come—we don't have to go far for the machine, it's outside. You'll be there and back before you know it. Then we'll give Cooley the time of his life!"

He ran out of the office, followed in more dignified fashion by Mr. Ricaby. While Mrs. Marsh stood looking after them in blank astonishment, trying to guess the reason for this hasty departure, Dr. McMutrie calmly drew off his gloves, and, approaching the desk, saluted the superintendent.

"Good morning, Mr. Spencer," he said blandly.

"Good morning, doctor," replied the superintendent, bowing. "They're waiting for you impatiently upstairs, sir."

The examiner in lunacy turned and looked at Mrs. Marsh, who was still watching Tod and Mr. Ricaby as they hurried through the grounds.

"That's my son!" she smiled. "The most extraordinary boy you ever met."

Dr. McMutrie smiled.

"Yes," he answered dryly, "it seems to me that we've met before. I think—when I was first called into this case."

"Oh, yes, Tod told me," she replied quickly. Then she went on: "Doctor, it was very good of you to bring me in here. They wouldn't have let me in, but for you. I am very anxious to see my niece ——" [Pg 312]

"Yes, it is a very interesting case—very interesting, indeed," said the examiner, with a grave shake of the head. Thoughtfully he added: "Sometimes I have my doubts——"

"About her sanity?" she demanded, reddening.

He nodded gravely.

"Really, doctor?" she exclaimed, in well-feigned astonishment. "Then why should she be in such a place as this?"

The physician made no reply, but, turning to the superintendent, handed him a bundle of administration papers, which the latter proceeded to read. Mrs. Marsh quietly took a seat, awaiting her opportunity when she could approach the desk and request that Paula be sent for.

It was not without a severe struggle with her conscience that Mrs. Marsh had summoned up courage to come to "Sea Rest." While in a sense she was privy to the conspiracy which had robbed her niece of her liberty, she had known only vaguely what Jimmy and Cooley were doing. They were fighting for the control of the Marsh millions, that was all she cared to know. If her niece, who had come to America uninvited, got the worst of it, that was her affair. It was Tod who had awakened her to the full enormity of the crime which her husband and the lawyer had committed, and after that her conscience knew no peace. Mrs. Marsh was not a bad woman at heart. She was vain and luxury-loving, she had been weak and foolish, and she had allowed herself to be governed, to a great extent, by Jimmy's loose code of morals. But she was not utterly depraved. Ever since the day she married Jimmy, she had known that her husband was unscrupulous, but that he would go as far as this she had never dreamed. While she might have overlooked his less important peccadilloes, she was determined not to follow him further in his course of crime. They were in a desperate predicament for money, but that made no difference. She would rather sell everything she had in the world and be reduced to beggary rather than remain an accomplice in such a diabolical action as subjecting a perfectly sane young girl to the horrors of a lunatic asylum. Already she had had a stormy scene with Jimmy. She told him plainly that she had done with him, that she despised him and would leave him forever. And now, at Tod's earnest entreaties, she had come herself to "Sea Rest" to find out what she could do to right a great wrong and help the poor motherless girl who was the victim of two scoundrels. [Pg 313]

She was thus absorbed in her reflections when a loud chuckle close by her ear caused her to look up with a start. It was Tod who had returned after seeing Mr. Ricaby off. With a chortle of satisfaction, he said:

"He's gone! If they don't hit a tree and break their necks he ought to be back in half an hour." Surprised to find his mother still sitting there, he demanded: "Haven't you seen Paula yet?"

"No," she answered. "I was waiting until the gentleman at the desk had time to attend to me."

But Tod was not of the kind who waits for the convenience of others. Striding boldly to the desk, he said, in a tone of authority:

"Mr. Spencer, will you please send for Miss Marsh? My mother wishes to see her at once."

The superintendent, who was busy going over some papers with Dr. McMutrie, looked up at this interruption and frowned.

"Impossible," he snapped. "The patient can't be seen to-day."

"But this lady is Miss Marsh's aunt," persisted Tod, not to be put off so easily.

The superintendent suddenly became more polite. [Pg 314]

"Are you Mrs. James Marsh?" he asked, looking more closely at the visitor.

"Yes," she answered.

Taking up the telephone to communicate with the ward, he said:

"Well, I'll see, but I'm afraid——"

"If he succeeds," laughed Tod, "it will be the first time your relationship to Jimmy has been of the slightest advantage."

"Won't you help us, Dr. McMutrie?" pleaded Mrs. Marsh. "We're so anxious to see her! That will be the second time you've come to our rescue. Don't say no. Let us see her, there's a dear man! If you insist, they can't refuse——"

The examiner turned to the superintendent.

"I don't see why Mrs. Marsh should not see her niece. Send for her, Mr. Spencer."

The superintendent hesitated.

"Mr. Cooley's orders were very positive," he replied.

"Never mind Cooley's orders," retorted the other. "The young lady is under my charge. Have her sent here at once. Is Professor Bodley here?"

"Yes—sir——"

The superintendent went out to obey the order, and the examiner turned to the others.

"Hum!" he smiled significantly. "I think I had better go and send her here myself." As he turned to go he bowed and said: "I shall see you again, I hope." [Pg 316]

"I hope so," smiled Mrs. Marsh graciously. "We dine at the hotel at seven-thirty. Won't you join us?"

Dr. McMutrie bowed.

"You are very good."

With another ceremonious salute, he opened the door leading to the female ward and disappeared.

"Honestly, mother," gasped Tod, "you take my breath away. You've seen that man only once, and yet you call him 'dear man' and squeeze his arm and all that kind of thing. He must think you're crazy."

"I wish you wouldn't be so critical, son," replied his mother, with mock severity. "We were asking a favor. It is no time to be freezingly formal."

"Freezingly formal?" echoed the young man. "Why, you've invited him to dinner!"

"Well, you shall chaperon us," she answered, laughing. More seriously she went on: "Besides, I had an object! Your stepfather, Mr. Marsh, has followed me here!"

"Jimmy?" cried Tod, surprised. "Did you see him?" [Pg 317]

"No, he came to the hotel and tried to force his way in. I refused to see him, but he wouldn't go, so I called the porter and had him removed from the door of my rooms."

Tod rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Good!" he cried joyfully. "That's bully!"

"He acted like a madman," went on his mother. "He said he was sorry and would make any amends if only I would forgive him, but I wouldn't listen."

"I told you what you might expect with a man of that kind. I don't see how you ever married him. I ought to have kicked him downstairs when he first patted me on the head and called me sonny boy."

"To think," wailed Mrs. Marsh, "that his millions consisted of the property left to this poor girl by her father. My whole life wasted——"

"Oh, come now, mother," protested Tod, "not your whole life! You lived happily with my father for eleven years."

"I mean—my widowhood has been wasted," replied his mother, with a sigh.

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of old man Collins, who, going to the desk, gathered pen, ink, and paper and then made his way solemnly upstairs. He had no sooner disappeared than the door of the female ward opened and Mrs. Johnson appeared. Addressing Mrs. Marsh, she said respectfully: [Pg 318]

"If you will step this way, madam, you can see Miss Marsh for a few minutes."

"That's Paula's nurse," whispered Tod.

He also rose and went toward the ward with his mother, but the nurse held up her hand.

"Not you, sir, only the lady," she said.

"There's no danger, is there?" inquired Mrs. Marsh timidly.

"Oh, she's not very dangerous! She won't bite you!" grinned Tod reassuringly.

"This way, please, m'm," said the nurse.

Holding the door open for the visitor, Mrs. Johnson waited until she had entered and then closed it carefully behind her. Tod stood looking after the two women until the door was shut in his face, then he walked over to the window and stood gazing disconsolately out into the grounds. How he envied his mother that brief interview with Paula. Never so much as now did he realize how he loved her. Each day that went by without his seeing her seemed to make his passion burn stronger. And to think that she was kept an unwilling prisoner within these grim walls! Nervously he began to pace the floor. When would Ricaby be back? The examination would soon take place [Pg 319]

upstairs. They ought to corner Cooley before it began. Would they succeed in frightening him? So preoccupied was he with his thoughts that he did not hear anyone enter. But a cough suddenly made him look up. The old male attendant was standing by the foot of the staircase, looking at him:

"Say, Collins," exclaimed the young man, "can't you get me a brandy and soda? I'm awfully dry. This place gives me the blues."

The old man shook his head violently.

"Not without a prescription, sir," he said, with a grimace. "Temperance—oh, my God!—horrible temperance—don't ask me—don't—I've got a little bottle upstairs. It's got a linament label on it, but it's all right—Old Crow."

"Never mind," laughed Tod, "I'll wait till I get to the hotel."

The old man turned to go. Suddenly he stopped, and hesitatingly he said:

"Please, sir—how's the old spot——"

"What old spot?" demanded Tod.

"Why, Twenty-sixth and Broadway—Del's——"

"Oh, it's moved uptown long ago. It's Forty-fourth and Fifth Avenue now."

"Oh, yes— I forgot— Charley's dead, too, isn't he? Ah, times change. You know, I miss the music— and the lights—the low-neck dresses and the popping of corks, but I'll tell you a funny thing, sir. The guests act more human-like here. Yes, they're more human. They don't blame one for everything. If the cooking goes wrong they roast the cook, and when they get their bills the cashier gets hell—not me. This place isn't as black as it's painted. The only thing is, when they drink champagne at Christmas and New Years they drink it out of tumblers. That's bad, isn't it—that's awful bad!"

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Shaking his head, he toddled out of the office.

Tod took out a cigarette and lighted it. His mother had been gone a long time. He wondered what was keeping her and what Paula said to her. Suddenly the ward door opened and Mrs. Marsh reappeared, her manner greatly agitated.

"Oh, Tod!" she exclaimed excitedly, "we must get her out of this place at once. The poor girl is nearly frightened to death! She should never have been sent here. It's an outrage. She is perfectly rational. She's just nervous and afraid—that's all!"

"Of course, she's all right!" retorted Tod. "We've known that right along."

"Yes," said his mother contritely, "we should have taken care of her from the first, and not let her go among strangers. It's your stepfather's fault."

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"Well, what can we do to mend matters?" demanded Tod, with some impatience.

"The poor girl begged me so hard to take her to the hotel with me. I'm so upset I—— When does her case come up?"

"In about a week," replied Tod doggedly, "and until then I'm going to stay right here every minute of the time."

"Supposing I speak to Dr. McMutrie?" suggested his mother.

Tod shook his head.

"There's some legal process to go through. We have to get the consent of the person who placed her here. Cooley and Jimmy alone can do it. They must! We'll make them——"

"Hush!" cried his mother warningly. "Here's your stepfather."

James Marsh appeared at the top of the staircase, and after glancing furtively around, as if to make sure that his wife and stepson were alone, he slowly descended and came toward where they were standing.

He was pale and his manner was greatly agitated. Deep lines furrowed his face as if he had passed nights without sleep. He must have been aware that his wife and stepson were in the asylum, for he evinced no surprise at seeing them. On the contrary, he seemed relieved. Advancing quickly he held out his hand to his wife:

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"Amelia!" he exclaimed imploringly.

"Don't address me!" said Mrs. Marsh indignantly. "Don't come near me, you——"

"Amelia!" he repeated.

"What do you want here?" she demanded.

"There's a preliminary examination before the trial. Mr. Cooley and I have to be present. But what has that to do with it? I want you to come back to me."

"No!" she said positively.

"Do you mean to say you've left me for good?"

"I do! I won't listen to you while that girl remains in this dreadful place!"

"What can I do, Amelia?" he cried, wringing his hands. "I sat up last night—all night—waiting—hoping that you'd come back. All my anxiety about my brother's estate has been on your account, and now you've left me without a word. Everything I've said or done has been for your sake. It's damned ingratitude to leave me like this!"

"It's not half what you deserve," she retorted.

He turned to his stepson:

"Tod, you can put everything right—persuade her to come back."

The young man looked at him indignantly.

"Do you think she'd go back to you after the way you've treated that girl?" he cried hotly.

His stepfather looked aggrieved. Peevishly he said:

"Why, three physicians have attested to the fact that we are doing the best we can for her."

"It's a damnable conspiracy!" cried Tod, with increasing fury.

"It isn't my fault," whined Jimmy. "If I'm mistaken—so are they." Almost in a whisper, he went on: "It was Cooley's idea—his idea from the very beginning. Of course, if she's not responsible she ought to be watched. All I wanted him to do was to contest the will. We've gone so far now, we've got to go on——"

Tod started eagerly forward. That was just what he wanted to know. Quickly he said:

"So it was Cooley's idea, eh? Of course, that changes the aspect of things. If that is so, mother, I think you may reconsider——"

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" exclaimed Mrs. Marsh indignantly.

"Everything I've done," went on Jimmy tearfully, "I've done for your sake— I acted for the best. It's the most ungrateful piece of business——"

"But you said it was Cooley's idea," interrupted Tod impatiently. "Where does he come in?"

"He gets half—half of everything," replied the other.

"Oh, he divides the estate with you, does he?"

"It was his idea from the very beginning," went on Jimmy. "I only wanted my share of my brother's property. I'm entitled to that. Cooley urged me on—and on—until at last we'd gone too far."

"Oh, Tod!" exclaimed Mrs. Marsh, in dismay; "it's worse than I thought——"

Sinking down on a chair she looked helplessly at the two men.

"Well, you can blame yourself, too," said Jimmy doggedly. "Your damned extravagance is responsible for the whole business, and, if the truth ever does come out, you won't escape—that you can gamble on!"

"My mother doesn't want to escape," retorted Tod angrily, "we are both willing to pay the penalty for our association with you."

"Why—what are you going to do?" demanded Jimmy, in alarm.

"Going to do?" echoed Tod. "What else is there to do but tell Mr. Ricaby what you have just told us?"

"Tell—Ricaby—you fool, do you know what he'll do?"

"Yes," replied the young man dryly. "He will probably have you and Cooley indicted for conspiracy."

"He'll have us all indicted," exclaimed the other. "Do you think you can share the spoils without being associated with the crime?"

"You—you wretch!" cried Mrs. Marsh. "Do you mean that we are your accomplices?"

"No, I don't mean that, Amelia," said Jimmy half-apologetically. "I—I've had no sleep for forty-eight hours, and I don't know what I'm saying. But it was all for your sake—every bit of it! You can't make me take that back—for your sake——"

Sitting down, he covered his face with his hands. Tod went up to his mother.

"Mother," he said eagerly, "have I your consent to—to make this matter public? Are you willing to—risk telling the truth?"

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"And go to prison, eh?" sneered Jimmy. "Fine advice!"

"The more wicked a man is, the bigger fool he is!" retorted his wife.

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"Do you suppose that this matter can be kept secret?" cried Tod. "You *are* willing? You want to cut yourself loose from this—this association with a scoundrel like Cooley?"

"God knows I do!" moaned Jimmy. "Oh, this is my punishment—this is my punishment!"

"Then you've got one chance, Jimmy. Go upstairs and tell those people that you demand Paula Marsh's instant release from this place."

Jimmy rose, his face white.

"No," he said. "Give me time— I'll arrange it privately with Cooley. Don't force me to—to—make a public exposure—for your own sakes——"

"You must not consider us," cried Tod.

"Well, you can consider me," said his mother. "I don't mind going as far as the divorce court, but I'm not pining to go to prison."

"Mother!" cried the young man; "we must go on!"

"Of course, you're right, Tod— I know, but—oh, the wretch to drag us into a—a—oh, it's horrible."

There was a commotion at the front entrance. A moment later Mr. Ricaby entered, excited and travel-stained.

"The machine broke down," he explained, "three miles out. I had to drive back—everything goes against us—everything."

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Tod pointed triumphantly to Jimmy.

"Mr. Marsh—tell Mr. Ricaby what you have just told us."

"No," said Jimmy, rising. "I'll—I'll tell Cooley. That's the best— I'll tell him you found out. It was for your sake, Amelia—don't lose sight of that fact—for your sake."

Quickly opening the ward door, he disappeared.

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CHAPTER XX.

The lawyer looked in amazement from one to the other. What he had heard was scarcely credible. He did not believe the evidence of his own ears.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Just what I say," replied Tod calmly. "The fight is as good as won! Jimmy Marsh acknowledges that he and Cooley conspired to divide Paula Marsh's estate, and put her here to gain their ends."

Mr. Ricaby said nothing for a moment. The suddenness of this most unexpected revelation had almost paralyzed his faculties. Could it be possible that they had run the cunning fox to earth, that they had the big criminal lawyer in their power? Was the astute Bascom Cooley trapped at last? It seemed too good to believe. If it were true, then Paula was as good as free. All their worry and anxiety was at an end. There was nothing to prevent her walking out of the asylum at once. All that remained to be done was the punishment of the scoundrels who by audacious fraud and misrepresentation had put her there. Silently the lawyer promised himself that the penalty should be the limit.

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"Is it possible?" he ejaculated.

"Yes," said Tod exultingly. "Jimmy has just left here. He has gone upstairs to see Cooley and call the whole thing off."

Mrs. Marsh, giving way to her emotions, sank down on a convenient seat and buried her face in her daintily perfumed handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm so ashamed!" she moaned.

Tod put his arm tenderly around her. He was fond of his mother in spite of all that had occurred to estrange him from home.

"No, dear," he said gently, "you haven't done anything to be ashamed of. It isn't your fault. Mr. Ricaby knows that. Don't you, Ricaby?"

The lawyer looked at the weeping woman in silence. Then slowly and gravely he said:

"I can't believe it possible that you are associated with your husband in the commission of this crime—no— I am ready to acquit you of that."

"What do you intend to do first?" demanded Tod anxiously.

"The lawyer remained thoughtful for a moment. Then he said:

"I want you both to remain here until I have your sworn testimony as to the facts of the case. Then I shall proceed to have Mr. James Marsh and Mr. Bascom Cooley arrested for criminal conspiracy!" [Pg 330]

"It seems rather hard to make my mother testify against her own husband," objected the younger man.

"It's perfectly disgraceful," sobbed Mrs. Marsh, "but I'll do whatever must be done."

"Well—we won't discuss that question now," replied Mr. Ricaby hastily, "the important thing is to get Miss Marsh out of this place as soon as possible."

Suddenly Tod gave a wild whoop and darted towards the stairs. On the top landing he had spied Paula standing with Dr. McMutrie by her side.

"Here she is!" he cried.

Slowly the young girl descended the winding staircase, carefully assisted round the turns by the Examiner. She seemed weak and looked very pale. But her face brightened as soon as she caught sight of friends.

"Good news, Miss Paula!" exclaimed Tod breathlessly. "You will scarcely believe it."

Mrs. Marsh, who had hastily dried her eyes, rose and went towards her niece with arms outstretched. "Paula!" she cried. "How we have wronged you!" [Pg 331]

"I thought she would be more comfortable with you," smiled Dr. McMutrie. "I'm afraid the presence of we men of science rather disconcerts her."

Paula, who was now leaning on the arm of the supremely contented Tod, smiled gratefully:

"You are very kind, doctor—I—thank you. It does oppress me when I see so many people who are not—not kindly disposed. I'm glad to be here—with my friends."

While Tod talked in an eager undertone with Paula, Dr. McMutrie took Mr. Ricaby and Mrs. Marsh aside.

"The girl's all right," he said. "She's suffering from intense nervousness, that's all! While we were questioning her Mr. Marsh came into the room and took Mr. Cooley away—so I thought I'd bring her down here until she's wanted. By the way, Mrs. Marsh, did you select Dr. Zacharie to attend your niece?"

"No—I certainly did not!" she replied positively.

The examiner hesitated and coughed as if unwilling to express his frank opinion of Mr. Cooley's physician.

"He is certainly a most peculiar man— I—don't agree with him at all. He's essentially too drastic, and I don't think he understands. Do you know who did engage him?" [Pg 332]

"Yes—I think——"

She stopped suddenly, seeing that Mr. Ricaby was signalling her to remain silent.

"Well, I must get back," said Dr. McMutrie, rising. "You had better stay here. I don't approve of your niece remaining at Tocquencke, Mrs. Marsh, and I am going to say so. She ought never to have come——"

With a courteous bow to Mrs. Marsh and the others, he turned and left the office.

"Did you tell him?" demanded Tod eagerly, when he was out of earshot.

"No," replied the lawyer quickly, "we'll tell no one. I don't want the scoundrel to escape."

"I've told Miss Paula everything," said Tod gaily. Jokingly, he added: "Would you believe it? She's sorry to leave Sea Rest!"

Paula laughed, a frank, girlish peal of merriment unclouded by care or anxiety. It was the first laugh since she had come to the asylum, and she was surprised how good it felt. Her eyes sparkled with new joy and happiness. Thank God! Her troubles were at an end. Freedom was now only a question of minutes. The terrible nightmare was over, a thing of the past. No more would she be terrified by the sight of padded cells or haunted by Dr. Zacharie's cruel, diabolical smile. And as she clung more tightly to Tod's arm she thought with gratitude in her heart how true and devoted a friend he had been through all these dark days. But for him, her uncle and Mr. Cooley might have succeeded in their design, they might have kept her confined in the asylum for years. The outside world would never have known or cared. She might have died there and no one been the wiser. She felt sorry for Mrs. Marsh, for she believed in the sincerity of the woman's repentance. Besides, she was ready to forgive her anything. Was she not the mother of the one being she loved better than anyone in the world? [Pg 333]

Turning to Mrs. Marsh, she said with a sympathetic smile:

"It's fortunate for me—but is hard for you, isn't it?"

"Oh, never mind me," murmured Mrs. Marsh, averting her face. "You did not deserve to suffer. I do."

"Dr. McMutrie has been very kind," went on Paula; "he seemed to realize instinctively that Dr. Zacharie was against me. That fact alone enlisted his sympathy."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Marsh, who had somewhat recovered from her agitation, "Dr. McMutrie is an exceptionally nice man. One doesn't often meet such men nowadays." With a mischievous glance at Tod, she added: "He's almost as nice as my son, don't you think so, Paula?" [Pg 334]

Understanding her meaning, the girl blushed, and the alert Tod, quick to seize the psychological moment, thought this as good a time as any to put to words what his eyes had already told her eloquently enough:

"Paula," he whispered, "I——"

"Hush!" said Mr. Ricaby warningly. "Here's Mr. Cooley!"

Bascom Cooley, head erect and defiant as ever, came slowly down the stairs and glared savagely at each individual member of the group gathered in the office waiting for him. He knew that he was checkmated, that his reign of terror was ended, that the Marsh millions had slipped out of his grasp, but still he would not acknowledge defeat. They thought they had trapped him, did they? Well, he would show them that the old fox was too cunning for them. He stood in silence, waiting for someone to speak. Finally, Mr. Ricaby stepped forward. His face was pale, but his voice firm as he said:

"Bascom Cooley, I suppose Mr. Marsh has already told you that we know. There is no use mincing matters. You and James Marsh will have to answer to the proper authorities for as damnable and wicked a criminal conspiracy as was ever plotted in the history of the State. In your greed for gold you have deliberately done a great wrong. You have committed subornation of perjury, you have wilfully concocted and distorted evidence, all for the sordid miserable purpose of securing dishonestly the control of funds belonging to another. Believing that your political influence would hold you immune, you have outraged every law of order and decency. You have robbed both the public and the individual. You have become rich on the sufferings of those you have victimized. There is hardly a crime in the calendar that may not be laid at your door. Your past career is a matter of public record. Until now you have gone scot-free. People knew of your misdeeds, your turpitudes were a matter of common gossip, but everybody was afraid of you, afraid to denounce you. They lacked proof. But now it is different. We have the proofs at last. To-morrow your disgrace will be blazoned forth in flaming 'scareheads' on the front page of every newspaper in the land. You are a contemptible person—not worthy to be called a man! You are a disgrace to the profession of which I myself have the honor to be an humble member. But your day of reckoning is close at hand. In the case of this poor unfortunate girl your greed has overreached itself. You went too far—so far that, at last, your fellow conspirator refused to follow you any longer. He has turned State's evidence. He will help convict you and put you behind the bars!" [Pg 335]

Mr. Ricaby halted a moment, for sheer want of breath. The bystanders, trembling with excitement, crowded eagerly around, closely watching the chief figures in this sensational denunciation. They expected that the burly lawyer, rendered furious by all these insults, would attack his opponent. Physically he was more than a match for Mr. Ricaby, and the latter certainly had not spared his words. But there was no fight in Bascom Cooley. On his pasty white, bloated face, the sweat stood out like glistening beads. His fat, swine-like mouth quivered as, with clenched fists, he replied hoarsely:

"What the h—ll are you talking about? Who'll believe all that rubbish? What proofs have you got?"

Thus challenged, Mr. Ricaby returned to the attack.

"Proofs?" he almost shouted. "We've got all the proofs any jury will want. Not only shall we have the sworn testimony of James Marsh, your accomplice, but we have had you yourself shadowed. Yes, Mr. Cooley, we have had detectives on your track. Unknown to you, unsuspected by you, our men have watched your every movement for weeks past. You have not made a call, you have not sent a message without it being instantly faithfully reported to me. We know now who your political friends are, we know so well that they will not dare come to your rescue, for if they have the temerity to interfere in your just punishment, we will ruin them as well. They shall share in your downfall. Corrupt servants of the public, they have accepted your bribes and they shall share your fate!" [Pg 337]

Mr. Cooley grew whiter and visibly more nervous. His defiant manner had completely disappeared. His attitude was more humble and conciliatory. Shuffling his feet nervously on the floor, he said:

"I don't see why there should be any misunderstanding. I am ready to make amends for any inconvenience I may have caused Miss Marsh. My client, Mr. James Marsh, has informed me of his intentions to withdraw all opposition to your writ of *habeas corpus*."

"Miss Paula may go when she pleases—the authorities have instructions. Furthermore, it is Mr. Marsh's intention to withdraw from the guardianship of his niece—and to return to her the estate intact—intact—with interest if she asks it." [Pg 338]

He stopped and looked around for approval, but everybody was dumb. A dead silence reigned. He went on:

"As to the question of conspiracy—criminal conspiracy—let me remind my client's wife——"

Mrs. Marsh started nervously.

"Yes, madam," he said, pointing his finger at her. "You and your son both! If Mr. Marsh and I go to prison you will go with us. If we are guilty so are you. If my unfortunate client has made any remarks about me they are insinuations based on motives of self-interest— Now, I've warned you—Ricaby—you young reformers must learn to let sleeping dogs lie. Conspiracy is an edged tool—it not only cuts both ways, but sometimes it cuts the hand that holds it."

Turning to Mr. Ricaby, he continued:

"Go to the district attorney, have me indicted, but if you do I swear to God that I'll tell some truths about this woman's husband that will make her regret her action. Do your worst, Mr. Ricaby. Now I have the honor to wish you all good day!"

Turning on his heel, he took his departure. No one attempted to stop him, all rejoiced to see him go. Paula turned to Mrs. Marsh who, overcome with emotion, was weeping bitterly. Tod putting his arm around her, attempted to comfort her, while Paula knelt by her side. [Pg 339]

"In order to protect themselves," said Paula gently, "these men have accused you. We can't reach them without hurting you. Isn't that what Mr. Cooley meant, Mr. Ricaby?"

"Yes," replied the lawyer grimly.

"They will accuse you of conspiring with them, too! Oh, that's horrible!"

"We'll be all right, Paula," said Tod reassuringly.

"Yes, but they may believe this man Cooley. They may believe my uncle. They may put your mother in prison!"

"We must prosecute them, Paula," insisted Mr. Ricaby. "We cannot compound a felony even if ——"

"Yes," she retorted, "but why should the innocent suffer for the guilty? Why should—Tod——Why should he suffer? No, I won't appear against them— I refuse! Do you hear, Mr. Ricaby, I won't!"

"They can't do anything to us, Paula," said Tod. "We shall be all right. They must be punished as a warning to others— I don't feel so hard against Marsh—but Cooley—he's the real criminal." [Pg 340]

"He must go to prison," insisted Mr. Ricaby. "Marsh is only a figurehead—but Cooley represents the System—an iniquitous organization of crooks——"

"What do I care for the System and warning to others if he is to suffer, too?" retorted Paula. "No, I—I care only for——"

She stopped suddenly, and her face flushed and then turned pale. She realized that she was betraying herself, but Tod had heard the exclamation. Silently he pressed her hand and she returned the pressure. Without exchanging a word they understood each other.

"Mr. Chase," said Mr. Ricaby, "will you pardon me a moment? I wish to speak to Miss Marsh alone."

"Certainly," he replied. "Come, mother, we'll prosecute those men, and she will appear against them. Wait out there——"

"Do whatever you think is right, Mr. Ricaby," said Mrs. Marsh.

"Whatever is right," he echoed; "that shall be to them——"

When they had disappeared, Paula said quickly:

"No, I will not— I refuse." [Pg 341]

"You must!" insisted the lawyer, unwilling to be balked of his prey now in his hour of triumph.

"No," she said firmly, "it's only revenge you want—revenge—on——"

"Revenge on whom?" he demanded.

"You hated him from the very first," she cried.

"Hated whom?"

"Tod——"

"Always that man!" cried the lawyer impatiently. "You think of no one else. Ah, you love him! Tell me the truth, Paula, I can bear it now. You love him!"

The young girl was silent for a moment and then, in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible, she replied:

"Yes, I love him."

The lawyer bowed his head. There was nothing more to be said. He could only accept the inevitable.

"I see now why I always mistrusted him," he said bitterly. "But I never hated him, Paula. If he is the man I take him to be, he'll insist on my showing up this rotten system which is a blight on our fair land." Going to the door, he called out:

"Mr. Chase!"

The young man reëntered, his face wreathed in smiles.

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"My machine is outside," he said cheerily, "the chauffeur has fixed it all right. Paula, it is all settled! You are coming home with us, with mother and—me!"

"Going home?—yes," she replied tenderly.

Mr. Ricaby, making an effort to control his feelings, pretended to be busy with some papers at the desk. Turning to Tod, he said:

"I will at once see about getting Miss Marsh's certificate of discharge from this place. Talk to her while I am gone. She's worrying because you are involved in this matter." With a sigh he added: "If she only thought of me as much as she does of you——"

He shook his head sadly and left the office. Tod turned to his companion.

"Paula," he said tenderly, "there is something I've wanted for a long time to tell you——"

"No—not here," she smiled.

"That's right," he laughed. "Not here—but where?"

"At home," she said, in a low voice.

He put his arms around her.

"My machine's at the door—we'll start right now."

THE END.

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