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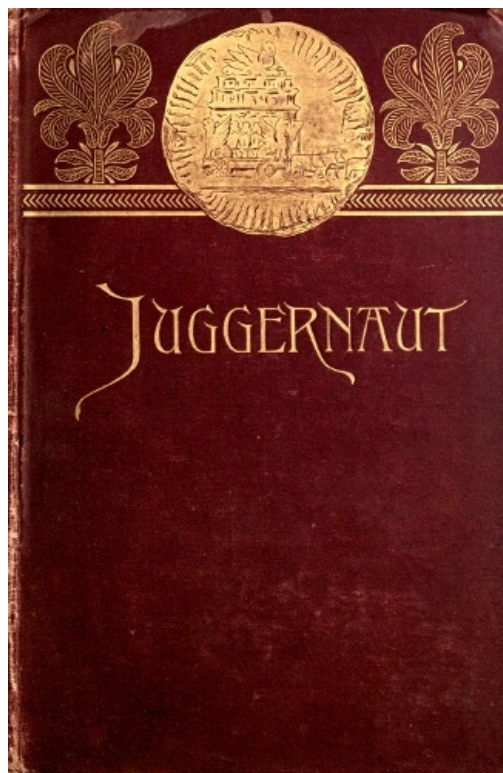
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JUGGERNAUT: A VEILED RECORD ***



JUGGERNAUT

A Veiled Record

**BY GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON AND DOLORES
MARBOURG**

NEW YORK
FORDS, HOWARD, & HULBERT

1891

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GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON
AND

JUGGERNAUT: A VEILED RECORD.

I.

Edgar Braine was never so blithe in all his life as on the morning of his suicide.

Years after, in the swirl and tumult of his extraordinary career, the memory of that June morning, and of the mood in which he greeted it, would rush upon him as a flood, and for the moment drown the eager voices that besought his attention, distracting his mind for the briefest fraction of an instant from the complex problems of affairs with which he wrestled ceaselessly.

In the brief moment during which he allowed the vision of a dead past thus to invade his mind, he would recall every detail of that morning with photographic accuracy, and more than photographic vividness.

In such moments, he saw himself young, but with a mature man's ambition, and more than the strength of a man, as he strode sturdily down the streets of the little Western city, the June sunshine all about him in a golden glory, while the sunshine within exceeded it a hundredfold.

His mood was exultant, and with reason. He had already conquered the only obstacles that barred his way to success and power. He had impressed himself upon the minds of men, in a small way as yet, to be sure, but sufficiently to prove his capacity, and confirm his confidence in his ability to conquer, whithersoever he might direct his march.

Life opened its best portals to him. He was poor, but strong and well equipped. He had won possession of the tools with which to do his work; and the conquest of the tools is the most difficult task set the man who confronts life armed only with his own abilities. That accomplished, if the man be worthy, the rest follows quite as a matter of course,—an effect flowing from an efficient cause.

Edgar Braine had proved to himself that he possessed superior capacities. He had long entertained that opinion of his endowment, but his caution in self-estimate was so great that he had been slower than any of his acquaintances to accept the fact as indisputably proved.

It had been proved, however, and that was cause enough for rejoicing, to a mind which had tortured itself from boyhood with unutterable longings for that power over men which superior intellect gives,—a mind that had dreamed high dreams of the employment of such power for human progress.

His was not an ambition achieved. It was that immeasurably more joyous thing, an ambition in sure process of achievement.

But this was not his only cause of joy. Love, as well as life, had smiled upon him, and the woman who had subdued all that was noblest in him to that which was still nobler in her, was presently to be his wife.

And so Edgar Braine's heart sang merrily within him as he strode through the cottonwood-bordered streets toward his editorial work-shop.

He entered the composing-room in front, and greeted the foreman with even more of cordiality than was his custom, though his custom was a cordial one.

He tried not to observe that Mikey Hagin, the Spartan-souled apprentice of the establishment, was complacently burning a hole in the palm of his hand, in a heroic endeavor to hide the fact that he had been smoking a cigarette in risk of that instant discharge which Braine had threatened as the fore-ordained punishment of that crime, if he should ever catch the precocious youth committing it again.

He saw the cigarette, of course,—it was his habit to see things,—and the blue wreath floating upward from the hand in which a hasty attempt had been made to conceal it, was perfectly apparent. But his humor was much too joyous for him to enforce the penalty, though he had decreed it with a fixed purpose to enforce it. Somehow the grief of Mrs. Hagin, Mikey's mother and Braine's laundress, at the discharge of her not over hopeful son, was much more vividly present to his imagination this morning than when he had promulgated the decree. He was too happy a man to be willing to make any human being needlessly unhappy.

And yet he was too strict a disciplinarian to overlook the offence entirely. He turned to the boy and said:

"It is lucky for you that I didn't catch you smoking the cigarette you have in your hand. As it seems to be smoking you instead, I don't so much mind."

With this, as the lad threw the burning roll into a barrel of waste paper—which he presently extinguished with a bucket of water—Braine took the over-proofs from their hook, and passed on into the back room, which served as the editorial office of the *Thebes Daily Enterprise*.

The four men sitting there presented but one bodily presence. They were: the Local Editor, the River Editor, the Society Editor, and "Our Reporter," and their name was Moses Harbell, or, if universal usage is authority in nomenclature, "Mose" Harbell.

Mose was a bushy-haired man of fifty, who had been Local Editor, River Editor, Society Editor, and "Our Reporter" on the newspapers of small river towns from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.

He had never once dared aspire to a more independent position as his own master. Perhaps the fact that he had imprudently married early, and now had a family consisting of a mother, a mother-in-law, an imbecile sister, a shrewish wife, nine children in various stages of progress toward grown-up-hood, and four dogs of no recognized breed, had dampened the ardor of his ambition, and inclined him to the conservative view that to draw a salary from somebody else, even though it be not a munificent one, is on the whole safer for a prudent family man, than to take ambitious risks on his own account.

Mose was known all up and down the river by his first name in its abbreviated form, and by no other on any occasion. He was never spoken of in print without the adjective prefix "genial," and he never omitted to call anybody "genial" whom he had occasion to mention in his own paragraphs, from the morose curmudgeon who invited everybody in town to his parties except Mose himself, to the most ill-natured mud clerk who stood in the rain on the levee at midnight to check freight received by the steamboat that employed him in that capacity, at nothing a month and his board.

Life had dealt rather hardly with Mose, but it had not succeeded in curdling any of the milk of human kindness mingled with his blood.

His notion of newspaper editing, apart from calling everybody "genial," was to mention everybody on every possible occasion, to praise everybody without regard to the possibility or impossibility of the occasion, and to chronicle the personal happenings of the town after the following fashion:

"Ned Heffron, the genial ticket dispenser of the Central Railroad, borrowed a boiled shirt yesterday, got his boots blacked on tick, and started on a free pass to Johnsonboro, there to wed the acknowledged belle of that young and thriving city, Miss Blankety Blank, who will henceforth be a chief ornament to the society of Thebes."

Mose was a thorn in the flesh of his young chief, who was a very earnest person, possessed of a conviction that a newspaper owes some sort of duty to the public, and that its province is to discriminate somewhat in the bestowal of praise and blame. But Mose was necessary to the *Thebes Daily Enterprise*. Braine could not afford to dispense with his "geniality" as a part of the newspaper's equipment; for Mose knew everybody within the *Daily Enterprise's* bailiwick and everybody knew Mose. Everybody made haste to tell Mose all the news there might be; and, although there was not much of importance in what he gathered, still it was news, and the news seemed to Braine a necessary part of a newspaper. Thus it happened that Mose went on calling everybody "genial" in the news department, even when his chief was excoriating the same persons in the editorial columns for conduct wholly inconsistent with Mose's imputation of unbounded geniality.

On this particular morning, however,—the morning of Edgar Braine's suicide—even Mose's presence, recalling, as it always did, his exasperating methods, could not ruffle the young man's exultant spirits. He was so exuberantly happy that he omitted to remonstrate with Mose about anything, and that tireless manufacturer of praise, observing the omission, immediately wrote and sent to the composing-room an elephantinely playful paragraph in which he said:

"Our genial chief was so much pleased this morning over the impression made yesterday by his apparently severe, but really good-natured leader on the recent defalcation of our genial city clerk, Charley Hymes, that he took the local to his arms and stood treat to a number-one mackerel, and the ever appreciative local picked the bones of the aforesaid saline preserved denizen of the deep, in the bosom of his family at dinner to-day."

That was Mose Harbell's idea of humor. It was not Braine's idea of humor at all, and so Mose was greeted with the harshest reproof he had ever received in his life when he next met his chief. He accepted it "genially."

Having sent out the offending paragraph, Mose went out himself to gather river news, and such gossip as he might, concerning the genial folk of Thebes.

Then Abner Hildreth entered the office, and for two hours was closeted with Braine.

Then Braine committed suicide.

Then he wrote his own obituary, to be printed in that evening's *Enterprise*.

Then he went supperless to his room over a store, where he paced the floor till dawn.

Then began the man's extraordinary career.

II.

When Braine returned to his bare little room after his suicide, he was in a strange, paradoxical mood. His thought was intensely introspective, and yet, with a whimsical perversity, his mind seemed specially alert to external objects, and full of fantastic imaginings concerning them.

The bareness of the room impressed him, and he likened it to a cell in some prison.

"Never mind," he said to himself, "I may have to sleep in a cell some time, and the habit of living here will come handy."

Then, with a little laugh, in which there was no trace of amusement, he stood before his desk, and added:

"But I believe they don't put strips of worn out carpet by the prison beds; and I never heard of a cell having a desk in it surmounted by empty collar-boxes for pigeon holes. Let me see—six times five are thirty. What an extravagant fellow I have been, to use up thirty boxes of paper collars in a year! Ten in a box, that's three hundred—almost one a day! I might have done with half the number by turning them, as I had to do at college before paper collars came in. Psha!" and he seemed to spurn the trivial reverie from him as a larger recollection surged up in his mind, and he began to pace the little room again with the purposeless tramp of a caged wild beast, whose memory of the forest is only a pained consciousness that it is his no more.

The June twilight faded into darkness, and the evening gave place to midnight, but the ghost-walk went ceaselessly on.

In those hours of agonizing thought, the young man—to be young no more henceforth—recalled every detail of his life with a vividness which tortured him. He was engaged, unwillingly, in obedience to a resistless impulse, in searching out the roots of his own character, and finding out what forces had made him such as he knew himself to be.

In the process he learned, for the first time, precisely what sort of man he really was. He saw his own soul undressed, and contemplated its nakedness. One's soul is an unusual thing to see *en déshabillé*, and not always a pleasing one.

He remembered a letter his mother had written him at college—that mother of half Scotch descent, and touched with Scottish second-sight, who had silently studied his character from infancy, and learned to comprehend it not without fear. He could repeat the letter word for word. It had given him his first hint that he had a character, and a duty to do with respect to it. He had cherished the missive for years, and had read it a thousand times for admonition. Alas! how poor a thing is admonition after all!

"There is one danger point in your character, my son"—he recalled the very look of the cramped words on the page of blue-ruled letter paper—"where I have kept watch since you lay in my arms as a baby, and where you must keep watch hereafter. You have high aims and strong convictions, and you mean to do right. You will never be led astray by others—you are too obstinate for that. If you ever go astray, you must take all the blame on your own head.

"You are generous, and I never knew you to do a meanly selfish thing in your life. And yet your point of danger is selfishness of a kind. I have observed you from infancy, and this is what I have seen. Your desire to accomplish your purposes is too strong. You are not held back by any difficulty. You make any sacrifice in pursuit of your ends. You use any means you can find to carry your plans through, and you are quick at finding means, or making them when you want them.

"I was proud of the pluck you showed in doing almost a slave's work for two years, because you had made up your mind to go through college. But I shuddered at the thought of what such determination might lead to.

"Oh! my son, you will succeed in life. I have no fear of that. But how? Beware the time when your purpose is strong, your desire to succeed great, *and the only means at command are dishonest and degrading*. That time will come to you, be sure. When it comes you must make a hard choice—harder for you than for another. You will then sacrifice a purpose that it will seem like death to surrender—or you will commit moral suicide! I shall not live to see you so tried; but if I see you practise giving up a little and trying to keep guard at this weak place, I may learn before I die to think of that hour of your trial without the foreboding it gives me now."

That letter was the last his mother ever sent him. It had been a consolation to him that before

death summoned her, she had at least read his reply, assuring her of his determination to maintain his integrity in all circumstances.

"You say truly," he wrote, "that I never surrender a purpose or fail to carry it out. Reflect, mother dear, that the strongest purpose I ever had is this—to preserve my character. I will not fail to find means for that when the time comes, as I never fail to accomplish objects of less moment."

"The prophecy of the dear old mother is fulfilled," he muttered, while his nails buried themselves in his unconscious palms. "The time she foresaw has come, and I have committed suicide. Thank God the mother did not live to see! Thank God her vision was no clearer! She had hope for me at least. She did not *know*."

III.

As he called up pictures there in the dark, Edgar Braine saw himself a little country boy in Southern Indiana, growing strong in the sweet, wholesome air of the river and the hills, and torturing his young mind with questions to which he could not comprehend the answers.

At first his questioning had to do with nature, whose wonders lay around him. He wanted to know of the river. Whence it came, and how; he asked Wherefore, of the hills; he made friends of all growing things, and companions of those that had conscious life.

Then came his father's death to turn his mind into new and darker chambers of inquiry, and for a time he brooded, disposed, in loyalty to that wisdom which age assumes, to accept the conventional dogmas given to him by the ignorance about him, as explanations of the mysteries, but unable to conceal their absurdity from a mind whose instinct it was to stand face to face with Doubt and to compel Truth to lift her mask of seeming.

The loneliness of his life was good for him for a time. It taught him to find a sufficient companionship in his own mind—a lesson which all of us need, but few learn. But the time came when his wise mother saw the necessity of a change, and, scant as her resources were, she took him to the little city of Jefferson, where the schools were good and companionship was to be found.

The city was at that time a beautiful corpse. It had just died, and had not yet become conscious of the fact. Ten or fifteen years before, a railroad running from the State capital had made its terminus at Jefferson, making the river town the one outlet of the interior. A great tide of travel passed through the place, and a large trade centred there. But the course of railroad development which gave the city life, destroyed it later. Other railroads were built through the interior to other river outlets, and Cincinnati and Louisville took to themselves what had been Jefferson's prosperity.

And so when Edgar Braine first knew the town, it had lost its hold upon life, though it had not yet found out what had happened to it. The great rows of warehouses along the levee, with the legends "Forwarding and Commission," "Groceries at Wholesale Only," "Flour, Grain and Provisions," "Carriage Repository," and all the rest of it, staringly inscribed upon their outer walls, were empty now, and closed. In West Street, two only of the once great wholesale houses maintained a show of life. In one, an old man sat alone all day, and contemplated three bags of coffee and two chests of tea, for which no customer made inquiry. In the other there remained unsold half a ton of iron bars, and a few kegs of nails, to justify the assertion of the signboard that the proprietors were dealers in "Iron and Nails." The two partners who owned the place appeared there every morning, as regularly as when their sales were reckoned in six figures. They were always scrupulously neat, always courteously polite to each other, and always as cheerful and contented a pair of business partners as one need desire to see. Why not, seeing that they both liked the game of checkers, and had nothing to do but sit in the doorway and play from the beginning to the end of "business hours" every day?

But the town did not realize its condition yet. Weyer & McKee were putting up a new and imposing building for the better accommodation of their wholesale grocery business, inattentive to the fact that their wholesale grocery business had ceased to be. Polleys & Butler were still issuing their *Market Bulletin* for the information of their "customers," not having yet realized that their customers had permanently transferred their custom to Cincinnati. In this interesting little sheet they had not yet begun to discuss "The Present Depression in Trade—Its Cause and Cure." That came a little later.

The city was very well satisfied with itself. It had water-works and gas, broad streets, and comfortable houses in such abundance that every family might have had two for the asking. The people did not greatly mind their loss of prosperity. Those who did mind had already gone away; those who remained had succeeded, during the days of activity, in getting out of other people enough to live on comfortably, and were content to enjoy leisure and occupy themselves with church work and the like for the rest of their lives.

The boy did not discover that anything was amiss with Jefferson until two or three years after his arrival there. Having seen no other city he did not observe that there was anything peculiar in the condition of this one, until he saw a "to let" notice on the gorgeously decorated front of Fred

Dubachs' "Paintery" and learned that Fred was about to remove to Keokuk. Fred was a notably expert painter, and the front of his shop had always a strong fascination for Edgar. Fred had lavished his best skill and industry upon its ornamentation during the two or three years since he had ceased to have any painting to do for others. Now he had given up and was going away.

The thing set the boy thinking. He reflected that it would be a sad waste of time and labor for Fred to paint any more signs for a town which already had some thousands no longer serving any useful purpose. As he followed out this suggestion it dawned upon him that perhaps Jefferson was a city in decay, and when he had questioned the matter a little further, the evidence all about him left no room for doubt.

Then he went home and said to his mother: "I will not live in Jefferson after I finish at Hanover. This town is done for. I must have opportunities, and there will never be any here."

But Jefferson's condition had been educating him all the time, and shaping his character in ways which affected all his future. He saw this clearly now as he paced his room in Thebes that night after the suicide, and recalled it all.

Among his schoolmates in Jefferson there were some, the sons of vulgar people who had grown rich in the rapid rise of the town. These were mainly stupid and arrogant, and their insolence was unceasing. At first it had stung the sensitive boy to that kind of protest which involves blows and bloody noses.

He was lithe of limb and strong, and he usually managed to get a sufficient revenge in that way to satisfy him. But something occurred at last to spoil the enjoyment he got out of pommelling the young bullies, and to show him that, with all his strength and agility, he was meeting his adversaries on unequal terms. He accidentally saw his mother toiling late at night over the clothes in which he had that day fought Cale Dodge to a finish. Cale, he knew, would simply put on a new suit next day.

"I will have no more fights of that kind," he said to himself. Then, after a period of silent thought, he said aloud:

"I have better weapons. I will show them in class who is master."

From that hour the inattention to books which had given his mother some uneasiness, ceased. He mastered every lesson days before it was assigned to him, and when an opportunity offered he submitted himself to examinations in advance, and passed into the higher grades of the high school, leaving his adversaries behind.

In this process he acquired two unquenchable thirsts—the one for knowledge, the other for power. He searched the town library for books that might supplement the meagre instruction of the schools. In his search for knowledge he found culture. General literature opened its treasures to him, and he read everything, from Shakespeare to Burke's Works, that the library could supply.

But while all this went on, his delight in his superiority to the youths who had been insolent to him, and were so still, crystallized more and more into a great longing for power, and a relentless determination to achieve it. Cost what it might he must be great, and look down upon these his foes. His ambition became a passion, wild and unruly, but he resolutely curbed it as one controls a spirited horse, and for the same reason. He did not mean to let the ambition run away with his life and wreck it before the destination was reached.

In the little college ten miles away, when at last he entered there, he was said to have no ambition, because he lightly put aside the petty prizes and honors for which others struggled so eagerly. His mates did not dream how ambitious he was. He was thinking of larger things. There was a scholarship to be won, and he took that, because it would spare him his tuition fees; but for the class and society "honors" he cared not at all.

He made his own all of value that the college libraries held and when the senior examinations were over he was without a rival near him on that record of achievement which determines who shall be valedictorian. But he placed no value on the empty honor so coveted by others. A month remained before Commencement, and he had no mind to lose a month. He said to the President:

"I am going away to-morrow. If you choose to give me my degree please take care of the diploma for me, if it is not too much trouble. Perhaps I shall send for it some day."

"But you are surely not going to leave before Commencement?"

"Why not? I have got all I can out of college. I can't afford to waste a month for nothing."

"But you are first-honor-man, Braine!"

"Yes, so I hear. Give that to some one who cares for it. I don't."

The next morning Edgar Braine quitted the village on foot, and without returning to Jefferson, passed out of the little world of youth into the great world of manhood. His equipment consisted of his character, his education, and fifty dollars.

He thought the character a good one then. He revised his opinion as he paced the little room in Thebes, and remembered.

IV.

The youth's sole thought when he walked out into the world was to find opportunities—for exactly what, he neither knew nor greatly cared. He knew himself possessed of power, and he sought a chance to make it felt. He was ambitious beyond measure, but he believed his ambition to be safely under a curb bit. He would achieve great things, but their greatness should minister to the good of his fellow men.

His selfishness was of that kind which looks for its best satisfaction in self-sacrifice. He would spend himself in the service of mankind, and take his reward in seeing the results of his labor. He had been bred to high conceptions of human conduct, and had filled his mind with exalted principles.

It was for the exercise of powers thus directed that he sought opportunities. He would know what to do with them, he was very sure, when they came. He selected Thebes as the scene of his first endeavors because it presented the completest possible contrast to Jefferson. As Jefferson was a city that had ceased to thrive, so Thebes was one that was just about to begin to thrive, as its citizens took pains to notify the rest of the world. Braine wanted to help it thrive, and share its thrift.

The bread-and-butter problem gave him no trouble. Thebes had plenty of work to do in getting ready to prosper, and Braine was prepared to do any work. The shrewd speculators who were engineering the town's scheme of greatness, were quick enough to discover the youth's capacities, as the race-course speculator is to see the fine points of a horse. In whatever fell to him to do he acquitted himself so well that faith in "young Braine" soon gave place to respectful admiration, and Mose Harbell wrote numberless paragraphs in the Thebes *Daily Enterprise* concerning "our genial and gifted young townsman, Edgar Braine," in which, for reasons that Mose could not have explained, there was notably less of the "genial" insolence of familiarity than was common in Mose's literary productions. When some one mentioned this in Mose's presence, his reply was:

"Well, somehow Braine isn't the sort of fellow you feel like slapping on the back."

It was Abner Hildreth who first drew Braine into relations with the *Enterprise*.

There was "one of Thebes's oldest and most genial citizens"—Jack Summers by name—who, in addition to a mercantile business, carried on a bank of the kind that opens in the evening by preference, while Abner Hildreth, in all his career as a banker, had preferred daylight hours for business.

Jack Summers corrupted the youth of the town, and when one promising young clerk in the Express office was caught opening money packages, his fall was clearly enough traced to his losses in Summers's establishment.

Hildreth, as a banker and business man, objected to gambling—of that kind. He saw how surely it must undermine the other kind by destroying the trustworthiness of clerks and cashiers. He deprecated it, also, as a thing imperilling the young prosperity of Thebes, in which his investments, as merchant, banker, hotel proprietor, mill owner and the like, were greater than those of any other ten men combined, while even with the other ten he was a silent partner so far as their ventures seemed to him sound.

"The town mustn't get a hard name," he said; "Jack Summers must shut up his gambling shop, or get out of Thebes."

Then he sent for Edgar Braine.

"That young fellow," he reflected, "knows how to write with vim, force, pathos, and energy"—a favorite phrase with Hildreth—"and he has sand in him too. He can skin Summers, and rub *aqua fortis* into the raw, and he ain't afraid to do it."

This latter point Hildreth knew to be important. Jack Summers was a reckless person of whom most men in Thebes were inclined to be somewhat in awe. He had lived in the place when the only law there was the will of the boldest, enforced with a pistol, and he had not yet reconciled himself to milder methods.

"I want you to score Jack Summers in the *Enterprise*, Edgar." It was Hildreth's habit to go straight to the marrow of his undertakings. "I want you to drive him out of town, or compel him to shut up his den. He is ruining all the boys, and giving the town a bad name."

"But will Podauger let me?" asked Braine.

"Podauger" was the sobriquet by which old Janus Leftwitch—"Editor and Proprietor of the Thebes *Daily Enterprise*"—had come to be known, by reason of the ponderous unreadableness of his disquisitions.

"Podauger be—blessed! (I never swear, Braine.) I *own* Podauger. I can shut up his office to-day if I want to, and assign him a room in the poorhouse. He will print what I tell him to, and Mose Harbell will keep quiet too, when I tell him not to call Jack Summers 'our genial fellow citizen'

again. The only question is, will you write the articles?"

"I will, on one condition."

"I didn't think you would be afraid."

"I'm not."

"What is the condition then?"

"That I am to be let alone. I won't begin a thing of that kind, and have it hushed up. It must go clear through if I undertake it."

"That's right. I knew you had sand. You may go ahead, and you shan't be stopped by anybody—unless Summers prepares your corpse for the coroner. Have you thought of that?"

"I am not afraid. The cause is a good one. That's all I ask."

"Very well. Now these articles must be editorials. They'll have more weight that way. Salivate the rascal every day, and I'll back you up. You'd better go armed, though, in case Summers suspects who it is."

"I will take care of that. The first article shall be ready in an hour."

And it was. Braine was too fresh from college not to begin it with an allusion to Roman history, but the people of Thebes were not sufficiently familiar with the classics to resent a reference of the kind. Besides, the allusion was an apt one. It was a reference to the Roman method of dealing with persons who made themselves enemies of the State, and it named Jack Summers as one who bore precisely that relation to Thebes.

There was something like an earthquake in the town that night. Never before had the *Enterprise* been known to say a harsh thing or a vigorous one. Podauger was never harsh in utterance, lest he offend a subscriber or advertiser; he was never vigorous, because he did not know how to be so. The terror of Jack Summers's displeasure was something that nobody in Thebes had ever before ventured to brave, and what with surprise, apprehension, and a looking-for of sensational results, the little city was in a ferment throughout the night.

Podauger had shut himself up in his room, and barred his door before the newspaper appeared on the streets. Not satisfied with these precautions, he determined to send a flag of truce to the enemy without delay. He wrote in his tangled fashion:

"DEAR MR. SUMMERS:

"I cannot rest till I have acquitted myself of all responsibility for the outrageous assault upon the good name and repute of a fellow-citizen for whom I entertain so high a respect as I trust I have always manifested toward you, which appeared—or I should say, was made this afternoon upon you—in the newspaper of which I am the unhappy, though till now the happy, Editor and Proprietor. I cannot explain my situation in this affair without a breach of confidence which would imperil my present and future prosperity; but I can assure you that I had no more power to prevent this dastardly outrage, or to shut the noisome stuff out of columns which I take pride in remembering have always been courteous in their treatment of my fellow Thebans, than you are—I mean than you had.

"I am deeply agitated, and perhaps my diction is not as perspicuous as it is my proud endeavor to make it when I am inditing matter for publication, but you can make out this much, my dear and highly esteemed friend, that I shall not seek my couch with any hope or prospect of repose, until I receive from you an assurance that you acquit me of responsibility, and won't ask me to make an apology in the *Enterprise*, for reasons to which I have already alluded in reference to my present and temporary inability to control the conduct of that journal in matters relating to this outrageous affair.

"Do I make myself clear in this the hour of my agitation and humiliation?"

Janus Leftwitch's habit of writing in this fashion was so fixed that he could not write simply, even when he was scared. Summers understood him well enough, however, and wrote him in reply:

"Don't be scared, Pod. Nobody'll ever suspect you. You couldn't write that way if you tried.—JACK."

The next morning excitement was at fever heat. Curiosity to know who had written the article, was the dominant emotion. Excited apprehension of its author's speedy assassination came next.

Summers was in and out of various places of business all the morning, and in each he declared that if ever he learned who had written the article, he would "shoot him like a dog." Nobody doubted the sincerity of the threat, or the certainty of its execution.

About noon Summers was saying something of the kind in a little crowd of business men in front of Hildreth's bank, when Edgar Braine came up the street. He cheerily greeted the company with "Good morning, gentlemen," and then placed himself in front of Summers, and in a very quiet tone said:

"I hear you are going to shoot the writer of that article about you, as soon as you find out who he is. It would be a pity to let you shoot the wrong man by mistake. I should never cease to regret it, because I wrote the article myself, and have just finished a much severer one for to-day's paper."

This unexpected speech fell like a bombshell into the crowd, and Jack Summers was the one worst stunned by it.

He stood staring at Braine, apparently unable to comprehend what had happened. Nobody had ever confronted him in that daring fashion before, and in the novel circumstances he did not know what to do. He did nothing in fact, until Edgar turned to some one else in the crowd, and made pleased comment on the news that land had been purchased by some Pittsburg people for a new rolling mill in Thebes. Then Summers walked away.

While this was going on, Janus Leftwitch was in the bank parlor, talking earnestly with Abner Hildreth. Podauger was in a panic. Jack Summers, he said, had many friends in town, and they would ruin the *Enterprise*.

"I don't see how that can be," replied Hildreth. "The plant of the paper isn't worth more than three thousand dollars; I've lent you money on it up to five thousand dollars already, and you're in debt up to your eyes still. It looks to me as if you had already done all the ruining in sight."

"But, Mr. Hildreth, that ought to make you the more cautious. You have money in the *Enterprise*. I have been careful to make everybody its friend, as much in your interest as mine."

"Yes, and I'm short a pile of money in consequence."

"That will come around right all in good time. Thebes is growing, Mr. Hildreth; her wonderful natural resources, situated as she is—"

"Oh, stop that! I've read that in your editorials every day for three years. Look here, Pod, I'm not ill disposed toward you. I'm willing to go on supporting you, but I must find some cheaper way of doing it. I'll foreclose the cut-throat mortgage on the *Enterprise* now, and give you a place as clerk on the wharf-boat."

"But, my dear Mr. Hildreth—" broke in the editor, with consternation and despair in every line of his countenance.

"There, don't thank me, old fellow," said Hildreth, interrupting; "you know I don't like thanks, and I know you're grateful. The fact is, I ought to have closed out the *Enterprise* business long ago, but I didn't want the town to be without a paper, and I didn't know anybody to edit it. I know the man now. I'll put Braine in charge to-morrow, and you can print as affectionate a card of farewell this afternoon, as you please. Run along and write it. I'm too busy to talk longer now," and with that he bowed the fallen editor out of the bank, and forever out of a profession which suited no part of his nature, except his vanity.

V.

The arrangement between Hildreth and Edgar Braine, by which the young man came into control of the Thebes *Daily Enterprise*, was a much less definite one in its terms than Abner Hildreth was accustomed to make, except in those cases in which indefiniteness was to his advantage.

This was one of those cases.

He simply said to Braine:

"Take the establishment and see what you can make of it. You can make it of some good to the town, at any rate, and that's all I care for. I'll pay you a salary if you like, or you can pocket any profits there are instead, if you prefer that."

"I'll take the profits," said Edgar.

"Suppose they turn out to be losses?"

"Then the quicker I find out my unfitness the better. I don't want you to pay me a salary for losing your money."

"You've good grit, Edgar," exclaimed the elder man, admiringly, "and you've got 'go!' I'll stand by you and see you win. You'll need money for a little while to pay running expenses, and you can have it on your own notes till you get the old hulk afloat again. I'll back you. Go in and win!"

That was all there was of contract between these two. Obviously the education Edgar Braine had received at Hanover College was deficient in certain particulars.

The change in the *Enterprise* was immediate. Everybody bought it at first to see what more the young editor would have to say in scarification of Jack Summers, and everybody continued to buy it, because the young editor at once ceased to scarify Summers, flinging him contemptuously aside as something done for, and turning his attention to a more important aspect of the same matter.

He wanted to know why Jack Summers had been allowed to maintain a gambling house in Thebes, without disguise and without molestation. He called the public prosecutor by name, and asked him what excuse he had to make for his neglect of his sworn duty. He named the respectable men who had served on the last Grand Jury, and requested them to say why they had omitted to indict so flagrant an offender.

By this time—and it was within the first week of Braine's editorship—the languid contempt hitherto felt for the lifeless newspaper had changed to an eager impatience throughout the town for its appearance each day.

At first there was anger everywhere. Two libel suits were brought, but nothing was ever done about them; they were meant to intimidate, and they failed to do it.

After awhile the community caught something of the editor's enthusiasm. Clergymen preached from the pulpit on the duties of citizens as Grand Jurors and public officers. Finally, a new Grand Jury was assembled, and its first act was to indict Jack Summers, who promptly fled the city.

This was but a beginning. Braine struck at wrong whenever he saw indications of it. He introduced the element of detection into his work, and followed up clues in a way to which the good people of Thebes were wholly unaccustomed.

He did many things merely to excite curiosity and interest. These were harmless fooleries for the most part, and Braine justified them on the ground that they made people read his paper, and thus gave him opportunity for the good work he was doing.

It was this that gave him joy. He had power, and he was using it for the public good. He had borrowed little from Hildreth, and had repaid it easily. His newspaper was profitable, and the job printing establishment connected with it was doing all the business of that kind which the city afforded, now that he had added large supplies of type, a ruling-machine, and a steam press to its equipment.

At the end of two years of hard work Edgar Braine believed that he had conquered the tools of fortune and power. He regarded himself as the owner of a prosperous and influential newspaper. He had an income sufficient to justify a marriage to which he looked forward with eager longing. He saw no obstacle now between him and fortune.

VI.

[From Helen's Diary.]

Edgar left me an hour ago. After he said good night, I came up to my room, took down my hair, put on a wrapper, and sat by the open window, not to think, but to feel.

After all these months of uncertainty—no, not uncertainty, for Edgar was destined to succeed—after all these months of waiting, we have reached the time when separation will soon be at an end.

I seem about to be entering on a new life, as a new woman. I *am* a new, an unfamiliar woman, to myself. I have not realized it until to-night. The change has been so gradual that I have not realized any difference in myself. My love has passed through so many phases.

I remember, to-night, a time when my love contained but one element—trust. I remember a particular day when love was young with me,—I went into the *Enterprise* office with Aunt's chronic "want,"—"A girl to do general housework—references required." It was immediately after Edgar had offered himself for a target to Jack Summers. There is something glorious in a man's inviting another man to attack him—if he dares. I was thinking about it as I went up the *Enterprise* steps. When I entered the office Edgar sat at a funny desk with peculiar pigeon holes—he has said since that he had used it before he took the *Enterprise*, and though he could have had one that would have been an improvement on it, in point of beauty, he had a sort of sentimental feeling in regard to the old one. He says in times of prosperity it will be quite wholesome to look at those collar boxes, and remember the time when he was very thankful to get paper collars.

We laugh a great deal over this, and I am going to have the desk put in our—well, *yes*, in *our* room.

He sat that day by the desk, and Mose Harbell had his feet on the white-washed part of the stove,—Edgar says he always does it after his dinner, while he is preparing his most "genial" paragraphs.

A sunbeam glanced across the room, and made the frayed edge of Edgar's coat stand out beautifully, but he looked terribly clean. He didn't see me at first, and I watched him a minute as he wrote. I loved him first, for the way in which he grasped his pen. He was finishing an editorial on the lack of energy in his esteemed fellow citizens in putting down immoral enterprises that were wrecking the universe in general, and Thebes in particular. I *knew* what kind of an article it was, by the expression of his elbows on the desk, and the way he held his chin.

There, in the office of the Thebes *Daily Enterprise*, with fifty cents in one hand, and Aunt's *want* in the other, with Mose Harbell's feet on the stove, and the frayed edge of Ed's coat looming up in the sunlight, I, Helen Thayer, loved Edgar Braine, in the year of our Lord, 18—. Amen.

I always feel like pronouncing the benediction when I think of that minute. It was the close of an eventless, careless, tiresome period. I sang the doxology in my heart—I said, "and thus endeth the first lesson," and a number of other appropriate, religious things like that. Well, after that, things drifted.

That evening there was a good deal about love for your neighbor—or sentiment after that pattern, in the end of that editorial. Edgar said he was three-fourths done with it when he looked up and saw me.

As the days went by, the *Enterprise* seemed more and more filled with the milk of human kindness. I take a great deal of credit to myself for the present exalted tone of the Thebes *Daily E* ——. Edgar says that I have always inspired him with one great desire—to be good and honorable. He says that no good woman ever lived who did not make the best man in the world feel ashamed of himself. I am glad of this. There is something delicious in making one feel ashamed of himself.

All that time I felt a peculiar reverence for him. It was a feeling almost enervating. I felt as though walking on a tight-rope—mentally. I used to look with awe upon the dignity of those frayed coat bindings, and the bits of white where the button holes were worn—Ed called it "the towel" showing, I believe.

Then *that* period passed, and there came a day when he stopped in on his way from the office to see if Aunt wanted to put in her chronic *want* again the next evening. That day we sat in front of the fire talking for a little minute about Ed's schemes for advancing the universe generally, and Thebes, again, in particular.

Though I was feeling, as usual, on a great mental strain—as I always did when with him, and indulging in an extraordinary deference for the "towel" around the button holes, I became so enthused, and had such a desire to have a hand in advancing something, too, that I leaned forward, and he leaned forward, and—well, that ended the third lesson. We kissed each other. I have never since felt the mental strain that I did before that, when with him. Since then, we have seemed just like two human beings who lived every moment of the time when together.

There is something terribly *equalizing* in a kiss. With it, there came a great tenderness for him, and as we no longer seemed to be two distinct and separate beings, but just one, that tenderness extended to myself. It seemed to grow to a universal tenderness. I have even, at moments, felt tender toward Mose Harbell when passing his house, and happening to see his wife, nine children, and four dogs, his sister and his mother-in-law.

We will be married next month,—Ed and I, not Mose Harbell and I!

Ed will take to linen collars next week, and buy a new desk for the editorial sanctum; and when I am able to have a "girl," I can put in my "want" for nothing. Ed says that for a time we can put on a great deal of style in the manner of serving our meals, and therefore won't have to have so much to eat. One thing is decided; we are to have *some* kind of a house to live in by ourselves, instead of boarding.

Ed declares that it is but a question of time when he shall put on a fresh linen collar every day, and we shall be able to furnish four rooms of a house. At present, the editor will be very well satisfied with three—and me.

I am at once to become a member of the *staff*. I am going to "do" the society items. Ed says I am capable of working into such things beautifully. I am so thankful that at last I may be an assistant in *advancing* things. I feel that it is half the happiness of life to be able to be a co-worker with him. Last night I suggested the points for an editorial. He was amazed at its force, and delighted. I was amazed and delighted myself. I think, together, we shall be able to make Thebes something to be proud of yet. The editor says it will be *such* a relief to have some society notes that are not strictly "genial."

I wonder if a new thought that has taken possession of me is unmaidenly? I think not. At any rate, if it is not maidenly it is very womanly. I have a sudden longing to rear six children. I make this the limit, but I want six. A half dozen. I want to teach six children to be great and good as their father is, and I want to show their father how well I can do this. I want to instil the idea of advancement into six embryonic men and women, that in after years, when I am old, I can say to the world: "You owe me something; look at these six citizens." I think six would be a very commendable showing. I think I could feel that I had paid my debt to humanity.

I am suddenly seized with all sorts of exalted aspirations. It makes a strange difference in one, this deciding to be married.

I solemnly vow this night, that my life shall be spent in an earnest effort to emulate my husband, Edgar Braine, for so good a man does not live.

VII.

This was the situation of affairs with Edgar Braine when he graciously spared the cigarette-smoking apprentice, and passed into his editorial sanctum on the morning of his suicide.

He was putting the sunshine of his own hopefulness into an article on the practical means of promoting Thebes's prosperity, when Abner Hildreth entered.

"You're a worry to me, Braine, when I think of you," said the banker, after a greeting.

"Why, how's that? I'm sure—"

"Oh, don't let it trouble you. It's this way. As a banker, I pride myself on knowing how to size a man up. The man who can't do that, to a hair, had better let banking alone and devote himself to some quiet business, like preaching the gospel, or running a sawmill. I thought I'd sized you up to a fraction when I put you in here, and as to the paper I had. I knew you'd make it the livest sheet in the Mississippi Valley, and you've done it; I knew you'd make it push Thebes with a forty horse-power, and you've done that too. But I missed badly on one point, and it bothers me. It undermines my confidence in my judgment."

"In what particular have I disappointed you, Mr. Hildreth?"

"Well, that's hardly what I mean. I'm not disappointed. But I missed badly as to your business capacity. I knew you were smart at writing, and all that, but I didn't know you had such a head for business on your shoulders. I expected to have to lift you out of money holes every six months or so, and was ready to do it, but bless me, if you haven't made a business go of the thing from the start. You're not in debt much, are you—for the office I mean?"

"Not a cent, for the office or myself. I get enough to live on out of the paper, and have bought new type, a new steam press, a ruling-machine, and other things besides. The paper will pay me a good income now."

"That's splendid!" said the banker, in admiration; "that means you've put the shop ten thousand dollars to the fore. Good! You've been worth a hundred thousand to me, and the laws only knows what, to Thebes. Now, such a business head as you've got oughtn't to be wasted on a single little business like this, and I've made up my mind to take you into bigger things. That's what I'm here for to-day."

Edgar expressed his gratitude for the banker's appreciation and good will, and declared his willingness to take hold of larger things whenever opportunity should offer.

"Well now, there's this special election. The Common Council will order it, you know, for the twenty-fifth. There's only one thing to be voted on, and that is the proposition to give the Central Railroad the right to run down the levee to the Point, and take the Point for a depot and wharf."

"Yes, I know. I have an article ready on the subject. I haven't discussed it yet, because I want to kill it at one blow and see that it stays dead."

"But I think you don't understand it just right, Braine, and I want to talk to you about it."

"Certainly I understand it. You and I talked it over three days ago, you remember. I understand perfectly that the thing is a trick to rob Thebes of her most fruitful source of revenue, by giving the levee, and with it the exclusive right to collect wharfage, to this railroad crowd. I know the resolution to be voted on has been drawn so as to make it seem nothing more than a grant of right of way, but that it really authorizes the Common Council to give away the levee and the wharfage rights absolutely. I have found out that our rascally aldermen intend to do just that, and I mean to find out how much they have been paid for doing it and who has paid them. But in the mean time, I intend to defeat the whole rascally scheme at the polls, by exposing it."

"Now, wait a minute, Braine, and don't go off half-cocked. Really, that's your one fault, and you must cure it. Let me tell you about this thing. I felt as you do about it, but since we talked it over, I've had more light. I've been in correspondence with the railroad people, you know, and I understand their plans better now. I have a letter from Duncan this morning, in which he says,—let me see," glancing over the letter, and finding out the part he wanted to read. "Oh, yes, here it is: 'You quite understand me now. You're one of us'—no, that isn't it—that refers to another matter. Ah! I have it: 'We depend upon you to see the thing through in that charter election. Young Braine will certainly kill it if he isn't gagged. Why not let him in on the ground floor a little? He may be of great use to us in carrying out the other matter, and if we don't control him, he's sure to do us a great deal of damage. Can't you explain the thing to him, and make him see it in its right light?' There, I oughtn't to have read the letter to you because I can't read it all. Some of it's confidential, and hearing only a scrap that way, the expressions seem blind and misleading to you."

"I think I understand better than you suppose, Mr. Hildreth. This man Duncan has bought your favor for his scheme; you have been fighting the ring, not to break it, but to break into it, and you've succeeded. Now the fellow wants to buy me. He can't do it, that's all."

"Very well, only don't think Abner Hildreth a fool. I didn't blunder into reading that part of the letter to you. I did it on purpose. I wanted you to understand the lay of the land; and decide for yourself. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to expose the whole criminal conspiracy. I'm going to fight this greedy gang of speculators, and I'm going to beat them at the polls."

"How will you go about all that?"

"In the *Enterprise*."

"But I *own* the *Enterprise*, you remember Braine, and naturally you can't do it in my paper. I've never asked you to help me in any of my enterprises, but I shan't let you use the paper to hurt the biggest one I ever engaged in. You can't do this in any other paper, because you've driven the *Argus* out of town, and I took pains to buy the *Item* this morning early, on the chance of its being turned against me. I've got a bill of sale of the whole concern, stock, lock, and barrel, in my pocket now!"

"My God!" exclaimed Braine, for the first time realizing his helplessness, and the consequences it involved with respect to his marriage and his future.

"Don't swear, Edgar. It's immoral. I'm a religious man myself, and might put the matter in a stronger way; but you're not a professor of religion, and so I only say its immoral."

Edgar sat thinking for ten minutes, during which neither man spoke. Then Hildreth said:

"You mustn't take an unbusiness-like view of this thing, Edgar—"

"Call me by my last name, please—somehow I like it better," interrupted the young man.

"Oh, all right. As I was saying, you oughtn't to look at this thing in your high and mighty way. It's unbusiness-like. It isn't practical. Let me explain a little. This is a great business enterprise, far-reaching, and sure to make Thebes great. The men who are engineering it and putting their money into it, naturally want some return. They ask this right of way—"

"And intend to steal the whole levee under cover of a swindling document," broke in Braine.

"Now don't get excited, and use harsh terms. These men want certain privileges in return for making Thebes a great railroad centre, and the Common Council is willing to make the grant as soon as the people, by a vote, give them authority under the law. You have thought it would be your duty to oppose the thing, but I have shown you its nature, and asked you to change your opinion. You can carry this election by the influence of the *Enterprise*. We ask you to do it, and tell you that if you do you shall be let in on the ground floor. I'll make that more definite. If you help us, on the day after the election the *Enterprise*—good-will, business, presses, type, and everything, shall be Edgar Braine's, absolutely, to do what he pleases with, and in any political, or other aspirations he may have, he will enjoy the support of the moneyed interest of the State. If you refuse to help, why, naturally, I must put a man in charge of the *Enterprise* who will. He is at my office now."

Braine said nothing for a long time. He was taking account of his situation. He had thought himself prosperous. In fact, if he broke with Hildreth, he had scarcely more than the fifty dollars with which he had come to Thebes several years before. He might have saved a few thousands from the earnings of the *Enterprise*, but he had preferred, in his eagerness to make the paper successful, to spend the money in improvements. All his plans had been laid with reference to his continuance in his present position, with the certain income it secured. But Abner Hildreth held all his prospects and all his plans in the hollow of his hand, to do what he would with them.

It was a choice between certain ruin on the one hand, and practically limitless success on the other, for he saw more clearly than Hildreth did, how potent a lever the influence of the "moneyed interest" might be made, and how much more perfectly he could command its aid than Abner Hildreth dreamed.

The temptation was frightful. The horror of such iniquity in his soul was not less so.

"This craze of speculation, which seems to dominate everything of late years in our money-cursed country, is a very Juggernaut," he said at last, in bitterness of spirit, and less to Hildreth than to himself.

"Juggernaut?" responded the banker, "that's the Hindoo car that runs over people and crushes 'em, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Yes. Well now, let me call your attention to an interesting fact about that car. Did you ever observe that it never runs over the people that ride on it?"

"Yes. I've observed that. I'm not so sure that the analogy will hold, however. One might get jostled off, and fall under the wheels. But I seem to be almost under now." He hesitated a moment more, and then—"For safety I'll get on, and trust to my grip to hold on. I'll favor the proposal, Mr. Hildreth, and I'll carry it through at the polls."

Then changing his tone to one a little less grim and more cheerful, he went on: "But our contract has been rather indefinite in the past. Would you mind signing an agreement now as to the transfer of the *Enterprise* to me on the day after the election?"

"No, certainly not. I'll write it."

He wrote hurriedly and signed. Braine looked over the paper and tore it up.

"That's worthless," he said. "A contract without consideration can't be enforced. I want a legally binding agreement this time. I'll draw it."

He did so, and then read it to the banker, who assented to its terms, and was about to sign it when Braine stopped him.

"Wait a moment" he said; then raising his voice he called: "Mikey!"

The apprentice appeared, trembling lest judgment day had come for the sin of smoking cigarettes.

"I want you to see Mr. Hildreth and me sign this paper. Never mind reading it," he said, laying a blotting pad over the lines, as he saw the boy's eyes wandering curiously over the document. When the two had signed, he turned to Mikey and said:

"Now, write the word 'witness' in that corner, and sign your own name under it."

When the lad had finished, Braine turned to Hildreth, who was beamingly about to shake hands with him, and said in a strangely cold and haughty tone:

"I believe that finishes our business, Mr. Hildreth, and as I have some matters to discuss with Mikey, I beg you will excuse me. Good morning, sir."

Hildreth passed out of the office, astonishment, vexation, and triumph struggling for mastery in his mind.

"He's a cool hand, sure," he muttered, "to bow me out in that fashion, just when I'd bought him, body and breeches! Somehow I can't feel quite easy about this thing yet. He didn't act as though he thought he belonged to me. Wonder if he's going to burst the whole thing up after all! By—George! I haven't got a scrap of writing to hold him by! I haven't got a line binding him to anything!"

With that he stopped short in the street, and after a moment's reflection, muttered again:

"Abner Hildreth, you're a fool! You have sized that fellow up, and you know he is too honorable to go back on his promise. Well, of course, there ain't so much to be said about his honor now—but he won't lie, that's certain. He'll keep his part of this bargain."

Braine when left alone with Mikey, said to the lad:

"Mikey, how far did you go in arithmetic at school?"

"Clear troo, sir."

"What did you get on examination?"

"Eighty-six, sir."

"Well, here's a sum I want you to work out for me. If a boy, fourteen years old, smokes a dozen cigarettes a day at five cents a dozen, allowing compound interest on the money, how much will the smoking cost him by the time he's twenty-one? It will be a long sum to do. If you get tired while working at it, here's a good Havana cigar to smoke for a rest. Do the sum to-night, and bring me the answer in the morning. Go along to your work now."

Then Edgar Braine sat down to write, for the first time in his life, in advocacy of what he believed to be iniquity. The article was the most difficult one he had ever tried to write, but when done, it was almost startling in its vigor and persuasiveness.

When he had read it over, he thought:

"It almost convinces me that the thing is right, and I know better. It will surely convince men who don't know better. It's a strange experience for a man who has conscientiously written for the public instruction, to turn about and write with a deliberate purpose to deceive the public and wrong it. But the Edgar Braine who worked for the good of his fellow-men is dead. He committed suicide to-day. By the way, he ought to have a good obituary. I'll write it."

And he did. The article began:

"There died in this town to-day, a young man much esteemed by his fellow-citizens. The young man was known to all our readers as Edgar Braine, the editor. He died by his own hand, and no cause for the deed is known to the public."

It went on to give a sketch of the suicide's life, and an analysis of his character, and the purposes which had animated him in his work.

When the foreman got the obituary with "must" written upon it, he was thrown into a panic, and rushed into the editorial room to remonstrate.

"I can't believe you mean to kill yourself, Mr. Braine—"

"Be perfectly easy in your mind, Snedeker," replied Braine, with a smile, "I'm not going to do myself any further harm."

The foreman wanted to ask what the thing meant, but was not encouraged by the look on Braine's face to indulge his curiosity. He "set" the article himself, thinking that should the editor change his mind about it, it would be just as well not to give the journeymen a chance to talk. But Braine did not recall it. He corrected the proof slip, and went on with his work.

When the *Enterprise* came out with the obituary of its editor staring at its readers between turned rules, the little city was thrown into something like a convulsion. It was soon learned at the newspaper office that Braine was not dead—Abner Hildreth was the first to make the inquiry—and the good news spread rapidly through the excited community. But what did the obituary mean?

Conjecture busied itself with an effort to find a solution for the mystery; for wildly, personal and audacious as journalism was in small western towns at that time, the effrontery of this stroke startled the community. One wise one suggested that Mose Harbell must have done the thing for a joke, as he had manifestly done the mackerel story in the same issue of the paper; but that theory was unanimously rejected as soon as it was observed that the article did not once call Braine "genial."

Finally the community settled down to the conviction that this was only another of Braine's devices—a trifle more startling than the others—for exciting interest in the paper, and making it a subject of universal talk.

Abner Hildreth alone understood, and he was satisfied to be silent.

VIII.

As the sun rose after his night of tramping and troubled reminiscence, Edgar Braine resolutely put the past out of his mind, and turned to the future.

"The old Edgar is dead," he said; "let us see what we can do for the new Edgar."

But before attacking that problem, he cleared his head by going out to the little shed that served him for a bath house, filling his home-made shower-bath with fresh water and drenching himself in the chill air of the June morning. When dressed, all the weariness of watching was gone, his pulse was full and his mind clear.

He called across the street and bade the negro caterer bring him a cup of coffee, and not until it came did he permit himself to think of anything more important than the beauty of the morning, and a pet scheme he had of persuading the aldermen of Thebes to offer citizens some sort of inducement to plant more permanent trees among the quick growing and quick decaying cottonwoods of the streets.

When the coffee came, he dismissed all these things, and set himself to work out some problems.

"Hildreth thinks he has made himself my master," he thought, "and Duncan and the Boston crowd are sure of it. They intend to make me serviceable to them, and kindly mean to toss a financial bone or two to me now and then. Thank you very much, gentlemen, but the relation you propose doesn't suit me. I prefer to occupy the place of master myself. It suits my peculiar temperament better."

Saying this in imagination, he began to think earnestly of means.

His first task was to discover as accurately as possible what the plans of the speculative combination were,—to spy out the camp which he meant to conquer.

The levee, which the Common Council was about to cede to the Central Railroad, covered the whole water-front of Thebes available for steamboat-landings, wharfs, grain-elevators, warehouses, and the like. To Thebes, the loss of the ground-rents and wharf-charges would be a great sacrifice, but the value of the privilege in that way was clearly not enough to account for the eagerness of the railroad people to secure it. They had other things in mind—indeed, there had been a reference to other things in Duncan's letter. It was Edgar Braine's first care to find out what those other things were.

He reflected that another railroad—the Northern—was in process of extension to Thebes. Upon consideration, he saw that the grant of the levee to the Central would effectually cut off the Northern from a terminus on the river. "That," he said to himself, "will enormously depress Northern stock, as soon as the effects of the cession are understood. Then, this crowd will buy it up for a song, consolidate with the Central and make a Union Depot at the Point. Yes—I see. That's the first part of the game. Then there's the Southern connection. They mean to build the twenty-five miles of road between here and Columbia on the other side of the river, and probably lease the whole system from that point, south. That will give them complete control of a vast system all centring here in Thebes. They'll establish a railroad ferry across the river, of course. Oh, by Jove!" he cried, starting up in excitement, "*There are two sides to this river!*"

With that he hastily finished his toilet by putting on a paper collar, thinking, as he did so: "I must take to linen, I suppose, now that I am to be a great financier."

After he was dressed, he hastily wrote a note to Helen, which began with the greeting he sent her every morning, and continued with a few loving words as to their approaching marriage.

"I have leased the little cottage, with the bed of sweet-williams in front, dear—by the way, I expect you to call them sweet Edgars in your splendid loyalty—with an option of buying it at the end of two years. It will be good property to own, but you shall not live there long, dear. I have grown ambitious since you consented to be my partner. I shall make money and reputation, and surround you with every luxury—for which you do not in the least care. I shall place you where your superior intellectual and social gifts will have play. You don't care for that either? Ah! but you will, when you find how greatly your social supremacy will aid me in my more masculine ambitions. When you are my wife, I shall be not twice, but ten times the man I am now. But first, I must teach you to appreciate yourself, dear, and convince you that I am not the infatuated lover you think me, when I tell you how superior you are to other women. Abner Hildreth told me yesterday that I have a remarkable head for business; well, the best justification my vanity has for accepting his opinion, is that I have had the shrewdness to recognize your worth, and to secure you for my partner. That's a joke not to my taste, Helen dear, but I haven't time to write this sheet over. You *know* I marry you simply because I love you, and that I would not profane my thought of you by associating you, even in my mind, with the things of this world. But I do want to see you shine. I want everybody to know your superiority as well as I do. I am ambitious *for you*, because I love you and wish to exalt you."

A little later, Edgar Braine, with a gun and game-bag, crossed the river in a skiff. It was his custom to shoot a little in the woods beyond the great stream twice or thrice a week, for exercise and for love of the woodland odors that brought back memories of his boyhood. But he was not thinking of exercise or odors this morning, or of the squirrels with which his sport usually filled his bag. When he landed, he walked immediately to the cabin occupied by Waverley Cooke. There he was greeted by Waverley, a tall and once very fine-looking man, whose broad brow was now marked with blotches which had run over as it were, from his brandy-pimpled nose.

Waverley Cooke was a Virginian, whose dignified courtesy of manner had been inherited from ancestors of the old stately school. In his youth he had been promising far beyond the common; in his young manhood he had quickly won distinction as an advocate whose eloquence was singularly persuasive. All doors to success had seemed open to him once; now, all were forever closed. Drink had mastered him before he reached his thirtieth year, and now at fifty, he was old, broken, and hopeless. His patrimony had been wasted, and he had come some years before to live upon the wild waste lands he owned opposite Thebes.

It had been his hope to develop this property, to build up a city there, which should share with Thebes the prosperity that had always been predicted for that town, and was now at last approaching.

But fortune had tarried too long for Waverly Cooke. Hope deferred had made his heart sick, and sorrow and solitude and drink had made wreck of his once buoyant nature. He had no longer any capacity to hope, and all the plans he had cherished lay dead now in his enfeebled hands.

Among these plans had been one to make the river his toll-gate whenever commerce should begin to cross it. In anticipation of that time he had secured in perpetuity the ferry franchise from his own miles of desolate river front to the shore where Thebes had then stood, a half-drowned hamlet waiting to become a city.

In the conviction that some day railroads from the north would meet railroads from the south at this place, he had seized upon this strategic point; this ferry franchise should make him rich, while the building of a town upon his land—it must be there, because there alone was a landing possible for many miles—should make his wealth princely.

But Waverley Cooke had not been able to wait, and all that remained of his project was the plying of his skiff—sometimes rowed by his own hands, and sometimes by a negro man, once his slave, who had remained his faithful attendant in his decay,—to carry infrequent passengers across the stream for hire.

It was to purchase this ferry franchise that Edgar Braine had crossed the river that morning. When the matter was mentioned to Cooke, a sad, dreamy look came into the poor fellow's face, and for a time he said nothing. He poured and drank some undiluted spirit—courteously motioning an invitation to his guest, for he could not speak—and then passed into the rear room of his house.

After a few moments he returned, erect, and with a touch of his old stateliness in his manner, and said:—

"Pardon me, Braine, but it is not a pleasant thing for a man to contemplate a wrecked life, when that life is his own. I quite understand the value this franchise will have some day, and until this hour I have hoped myself to reap the advantage of its possession. It was weak and foolish to cherish such a delusion, but until now I have never frankly admitted to myself the completeness of the ruin I have wrought. I know now that if there were a dozen railroads seeking ferry accommodations here, I could not arrange to provide them. I should have to go to Thebes to negotiate for the means, and I should get helplessly drunk there and part with everything to the

first man that found out I had anything. I would rather sell to you, an honest man, and better still, a brave one. I have loved you with a knightly admiration, boy, ever since that affair with Summers. We Virginians cherish our inherited respect for personal courage, Braine. We hold it the chief virtue of manhood. This money-grubbing age laughs at our chivalric folly and mocks it; but our chivalric folly scorns this money-grubbing age, and so we are quits with it."

After a little further conversation, the wrecked Virginian took another drink, and said:

"Why not face the facts? That is my master"—pointing to the bottle. "I drink whiskey before breakfast; I get up in the night to drink it. I cannot go on in that way much longer, and I should go off at once if I quitted it. It's a sorry thing to joke about, isn't it? No matter. What I have in mind is this: I'm a wreck. I shall never do any good to myself or anybody else. My wife is buried out there in the swamp that poisoned her with its miasms. My children lie by her side. There remains for me only a brief period of wretchedness, and then death and oblivion. Why should I stay here in this pestilential wilderness? Why not sell out the whole thing to you,—land—there's seven thousand acres of it—all worthless at present—ferry franchise, railroad charter, and all? You are young and vigorous. You will make something of it. You will realize my dreams, and I have a sentimental pleasure in thinking of that. Sentiment is out of fashion, I know, but never mind. I'm out of fashion too."

"But I haven't money enough for so large a transaction, Mr. Cooke," said Braine.

"Money? It won't take much. If you were to pay me a thousand dollars now, or five thousand, do you know what I would do? I would go over to Thebes, get drunk and die probably. What would be the use of giving me money in large sums? I can't be helped in that way. But I'll tell you how you can buy me out, and at the same time do the best thing there is to be done for me. The home of my fathers in Virginia is vacant—abandoned as worthless since the war. The man who owns it will let me have the use of it, he says, for a song, and the offer has brought a great longing over me. *I want to go home again.*"

Here the poor fellow broke down completely, tears streaming from his eyes and his utterance choking. Braine turned and walked apart in respectful sympathy. After a time he returned, and Cooke, having recovered himself, resumed:

"I want to take my wife and children out of the swamp and bury them in the little graveyard back of the garden at home, where the sweet-briar roses grow. I want to sit there by them every day till I die, trying to tell them how I repent me of my sin that ruined their lives. Who knows? Perhaps the wife's spirit might smile upon me then, as she smiled when she believed in me. Perhaps the little ones might remember in their graves the stories I used to tell them, and learn to love me again. I want to live in the old home till I die, and I want nothing else in the world. Edgar Braine, you can make that possible. Do it, and all these accursed possessions of mine, which will be golden possibilities to you, are yours!"

Braine was too deeply moved to speak for a time. Broken down drunkard that this man was, he had a certain nobility of character yet—it was all that remained to him of his inheritance from his fathers. It was a reviving glow of the old inherited courage and love of truth that prompted him thus to face his own condition, and assume the responsibility of his folly without an attempt to excuse or palliate the wrong he had done.

"What do you want, Mr. Cooke?" at last Braine asked.

"I want to go back to the old home to die. I want you to pay my passage and *theirs*"—motioning toward the graves—"and to pay me enough every month after I get there to provide me with food and clothes—and this," seizing the bottle and hurling it into the corner angrily. "You are not to send the money to *me*, mind. That would end all at once. You are to send it to some one I will name. A hundred dollars every month will be ample, and it won't be for long, as your debt is to cease with my death. Will you do this? Oh! *will* you do this, Braine? Will you have pity on me, and give me one breath of the old air, one look at the old hills, one little rest under the old trees, before I die?"

In the great longing that had taken possession of his imagination, the broken man was in panic lest his proposal should be refused.

"The land will be valuable some day, Braine, and so will the ferry franchise. It is absolute and exclusive, and the railroad commerce of this region *must* cross the river here. Then there is the railroad franchise."

"What is that?" asked Braine. "You mentioned it before, but I do not understand."

"Why, I have a special charter, granted years ago, for a railroad from here to Columbia—and on to the State line, for that matter, but as there is already a line from Columbia south, it is this twenty-five miles that are important. The charter will be very valuable whenever anybody is ready to build the connecting link, as they will be some day, because it grants valuable, exclusive privileges which can't be had under the present constitution. I drew the charter myself with an eye to the future, and legislatures in those days were ready to grant anything, in their eagerness to encourage railroad-building. I can't recall all the legal points now—my head isn't clear—but I'll show you the charter. You'll see for yourself that whoever builds any railroad to connect the lines centring at Thebes with the Southern system, is absolutely obliged to have this charter."

He took the document from his desk, and Braine read it through carefully. Then he said:

"Mr. Cooke, this is a very valuable piece of paper."

"Then you will grant what I have asked?" eagerly interjected the other, almost in accents of prayer.

"I will if you insist. But as an honest man, or one who tries to be tolerably honest"—he remembered his suicide—"I cannot accept your offer without telling you that you are giving greatly more than you imagine. This twenty-five miles of road must be built, and men of enormous means will build it."

"Will they buy the charter *on my terms, and now?* A month hence it may be too late."

"They would buy it now, and on better terms than I am able to offer, if they knew of its existence," said Braine.

"I tell you there are no better terms possible. I won't have money paid me for it. I should get drunk and die, and never get home with *them*," again pointing to the graves. "Now listen to me, Edgar Braine. I must start home in three days, with *them*, or I must drown myself. I cannot live if this thing is not carried out. It is impossible to make better terms for *me*. All other terms would be worse, infinitely worse."

"Could I not execute a mortgage to you for a sum fairly representing the worth of this?" holding up the paper.

"No! I should trade it off for liquor and die the sooner. I tell you I want one thing and no other. There is nobody to come after me to inherit anything I might leave."

"Very well. Take to-day to think over the matter. You're excited now. If you adhere to your proposal to-morrow, I will accept it."

"No, no, no! It must be *now*, I tell you. I will execute the papers now, and begin to get ready for home!"

And so it was arranged. Excitement seemed to clear the head of the inebriate, and though his hand trembled, he wrote without a pause until every detail of the transaction was covered in legal form. Then he directed the negro boy, Sam, to harness the horse to the rickety buggy, and drove his visitor to the county seat, ten miles away, where the necessary legal forms of acknowledgment, record, etc., were completed.

When Edgar Braine walked into Hildreth's bank parlor late that afternoon, he said quite carelessly:

"I have come into a little property, and have some payments to make in the settlement. I may have to borrow a few hundred dollars to-morrow on a thirty days' acceptance."

"You can have a few thousands if you want it," said the banker, "any time you like. Now that you're one of us, I'll take care that your credit is good."

"Now that I'm one of you," replied Braine, "perhaps I shall be able to look after that a little myself. You say I have a good head for business."

With that he strolled out and bought a copy of the *Enterprise* to see if Mose Harbell had read his proofs carefully in his absence. As he passed a shop he paused and said to himself:

"As there really are two sides to the river, I may as well take to linen collars at once." And he went in and bought a supply.

IX.

[From Helen's Diary.]

June 5, 18—. Received a short note from Edgar at noon. It was a peculiar, unnatural note in some respects. It seemed a mechanical affair, instead of an impulse of the heart. He did not call this evening. *I am much worried* over it.

June 6, 18—. Edgar is just now gone. This morning I received a note from him as usual, saying that he had secured a cottage just at the edge of town for us. He called at eight. He was in the wildest spirits. I have never seen him in this way before. His happiness infected me. He has had a wonderful stroke of good fortune, by which he has come into the proprietorship of the *Enterprise*, as well as the editorship, and he has just engaged in a land speculation—which I am not to mention—that is going to be worth a fortune to him,—something about a railroad grant, or *something*. I don't understand it exactly.

The cottage has seven rooms, and we are going to furnish them *all*. Ed laughed, and observed that he had already reached the linen collar period of his existence. There was a certain grim ring in his laugh to-night. I feel anything but grim. My entire person feels like a perpetual smile

of joy. This stroke of fortune is glorious. Ed said that I must say absolutely nothing about affairs. That he had some people in his hands, and that we must be very discreet. I can't bear *discretion*. It always seems to suggest something to be ashamed of. Of course, it doesn't in this instance, because Edgar is the one who enjoins it. There is something glorious in this feeling of absolute faith. To *know* that for the rest of my life I shall never know the responsibility of having to decide *anything*. To know that I can place myself entirely in his hands, and be confident of always being counselled aright. I could never have loved him if I could not have felt this. It is my temperament. I do not feel this because I love him, but I love him because of this feeling. A good and honorable man—a man above the petty meanness of his fellows—inspires one almost with reverence.

There is a certain magnificent assurance of superiority in Edgar Braine, so that at times the thought of his marriage with a woman like me seems almost outrageous. I feel so inferior, morally and intellectually. I fear being a drag upon him; an obstacle in the road of his advancement. I am determined to keep up with him as far as it lies in my power. He said to-night that he lived for but two things—power, and my love. I can satisfy the latter, and will never hinder the former. I realize how dear this wish for power is to him; how he longs to be able to better the condition of those people whom he comes in contact with. His ideas are constantly broadening. To-night he talked a little wildly, but in a tone and with a manner that in some way carried conviction with it, of becoming a power not only among his immediate associates but among the people in general; a power in the nation.

When I think of the noble aims of this man that I love, I cannot help feeling that such a situation would vastly benefit the country. With such a spirit at the helm, there could be no danger of wreck. Heigho! What speculations.

I found myself smiling at the absurdity of my thoughts just now. If I believed that such a thing could be, I should not be so supremely happy as I am now. I could sacrifice my feelings, if it were to the interests of the country, or Edgar. I should even enjoy sacrificing them, I think. But there will never be any question of that. It seems to me that all has come to the point that I have longed for. We are to be married; never separated; live comfortably, without the necessity for anxiety as to the practical things of life, and love each other unmolested by anyone or anything. This is absolute and perfect happiness. To love and live with no ambition save to do right, and feel that the world may be a little better for two loving people having lived in it.

When I teased Ed to-night about not taking me to New York for our wedding trip, he actually looked unhappy, and as though he thought I meant it. It made me laugh to see the miserable expression on his face for a moment, when I have been thanking Heaven all this time that we could not afford to go further than Chicago, and so would get back here to Thebes and our little home in half the time. Besides, I hate travelling. It covers me with dust till I feel as if I could never be clean again. The dust seems to get even into my mind and soul. It isn't so with Edgar. There is a halo of immaculateness about him: cleanliness is in the very atmosphere when he is near. He is absolutely an indescribable man. He walks down the street, and if one but gets a glimpse of his shiny coat-tails rounding the corner, one is impressed with the superiority of the manner those coat-tails have of rounding that corner. One *knows* that they belong to a man who is worth knowing. One would be impressed that the proprietor of those shiny coat-tails had accomplished some great thing.

If I don't stop right here, I shall get to elaborating on this subject until I shall not get to bed at all.

Good night, Edgar. I hold up my face to be kissed.

June 19th. I have not written in this diary for days. There has been plenty to write about—plenty of emotions, not many incidents.

Edgar has reached what, to me, seems the pinnacle of fame and honor—though he only laughs when I say so, and says, with almost a touch of contempt in his tone—"Wait!"

I am a thousand times more elated over the situation than he is—and yet I hardly know whether I am quite as happy as I was before, or not. When I am overwhelmed with exaltation and admiration for his wonderful achievements, Edgar smiles indulgently, and the other night he turned suddenly and said:

"Listen, dear! When I was a young boy, I used to become frenzied at times with certain indignities that other boys with only half my brains compelled me to endure, because they happened to be situated more advantageously than I as regards material things. While I had perfect contempt for them, I felt a wild desire to convince them of my superiority, as I was convinced of it. I decided that brute force was the only thing at my command at first, and one morning, went out and whipped that one of them whose prestige was such in the town that victory over him meant reverence for me from the rest in the set. It was this very respect which I had whipped the fellow to gain, and which these little ruffians accorded me afterward, that disgusted me. I found I didn't value the respect of a lot of little loafers who could appreciate superiority of that kind only. That evening, when I saw my mother patching those clothes that had been torn in the fight, I discovered that there was no longer even the flavor of satisfaction left me. I said then, 'I will adopt a larger plan.' I did. I had then no thought that—that just this would be the outcome," and here he looked out of the window for a time, with the strange, determined, ominous look that I have seen in his face so often lately.

"But the situation is more than my—wildest dreams could have anticipated."

Here he laughed. His laugh, too, has changed a little lately. He went on in a sort of abstracted tone. "And what that first brutal success was to me, now is this that enthuses you so. Like that first success it has, from the very fact of its unsatisfactory character, urged and assured greater achievements. I think of it as paltry, inconsequential—from my present point of view. It is only a means by which to accomplish great things, things worthy of achievement—as most people regard worthiness.

"The present is nothing to me, absolutely nothing, except so far as it affects the future."

Then he fell into one of his little silent moments, of which he has so many now. There is something about it all that makes me feel strange and hysterical. I am so proud of him that I want to cry out on the street corners that this man belongs to me—and yet there is something lacking. He is with me even more than usual, for it seems as though he has sudden plans and constantly occurring things to tell me about.

He always says: "Be discreet; never speak to your Aunt or anyone but me of any of these things. They are just between us." He says that I am remarkably trustworthy, and that he could not live if he could not tell me about how things are going. He never seems to think of himself. He will sit for ten minutes looking at me without speaking, and suddenly say:

"Wait, wait! Just a little time and everything shall be yours. I will bring the world to you and lay it at your feet," and when he says it I almost believe it to be true for a moment.

It is only because his nerves are overwrought. (He is nervous to the verge of insanity sometimes.) It seems to me that I am the only one in the world who could possibly understand his temperament. He says I am. The other night we were at a small reception given by Mrs. Clews. He walked about the house all the time I was putting on my things. I knew that he was so nervous and excited over something that he could hardly control himself.

When we reached the Clews's he suddenly became another man. For an hour and a half he was calm almost to coldness. He was magnificent. Mr. Hildreth was there, and once while Edgar and I were talking together we saw him near us. Edgar had taken me a little aside, and was saying nothing, but allowing himself to relax for a moment from the strain under which I knew he was keeping himself. Suddenly he saw Mr. Hildreth, and his tone and attitude and manner changed completely. Where he had seemed almost like a tired, petulant child looking for comfort from me, he suddenly changed to a stern, masterful man without a trace of helplessness or nervousness.

He said: "This is as good a time as any," and excused himself and went over to Hildreth, and touched his arm. It seemed to me that Mr. Hildreth was positively deferential to him. It was no doubt my imagination, but they disappeared for a while, and when they returned, Edgar and I left.

He was his usual self—the self that others know, until we were outside. Then he became silent—preoccupied. I asked him what he wanted with Mr. Hildreth, and he laughed and said:

"A little matter of business—technicalities that you could not understand." There is a great deal that I cannot understand, and these things he never tells me about, because he says that if he annoyed me with these dry details, I would not listen to him at all by and bye. As though that were true!

When we reached home, he suddenly took me in his arms, and said: "How glorious you are! It would be nothing to me if you were not to share it with me."

He talks in such a wild fashion at times. I suppose he means all this honor and attention that he receives. Since it has become certain that his exertions are to carry through the railroad affair to the advantage of Thebes, he seems to have become a sort of god with the Thebans. I don't understand the business part of it very well, but I know that every one thinks that he has done a great thing for the town. When I speak of the gratitude that the people of Thebes should feel, he shrugs his shoulders and changes the subject. Once, he said in a sort of a passion:—"For heaven's sake never speak again of anything I seem to have done for Thebes."

This sensitiveness and modesty are constant with him in everything that he does—though the trait seems to be intensified now.

The other day I stopped at the office and some man was in there talking to Edgar, and said something about his being a public benefactor, and Edgar said, coldly:

"Don't be grateful too soon, my dear fellow," and when he saw me, his whole face lighted up, and he dismissed the man.

The man stared at me as he went out, and suddenly Edgar looked like a thunder cloud, and slipped between us a sort of improvised screen for me. He said after the door had closed:

"I don't want you to come to the office any more—things are a little different now."

They are different because he has grown to thinking of the effect of everything on other people now, instead of just ourselves, as he always has done. He has always said:

"As long as one has a clear conscience, and is satisfied with one's self, the opinions of other people are of little consequence."

I don't feel quite comfortable with the change, but he reminded me that circumstances alter

cases; that one must adapt himself to changed situations. I asked him if it was quite right, and he looked at me a long time, and finally said with the old, new determination in his face and voice: "*We are to do it,*" without answering my question. Somehow it taught me a lesson. I think I shall never again question anything that he says. His tone, his manner seemed to forbid it, seemed to settle forever any doubt as to a possibility of anything being wrong that he says or decides.

I was almost astonished at myself afterwards, when I realized that I *had* questioned any motive he might have had, or any suggestion he might have made. A woman like me, questioning the propriety of anything that such a man as Edgar Braine might do!

Sometimes I try to make up my mind whether he looked more magnificent in his shiny coat with fringed bindings, or in his present immaculate toilet. I can come to no conclusion. The reverence and awe that Edgar Braine inspired in his shabby suit were overwhelming. The dignity that he lends to his present clothes is—well, is simply glorious. He makes the clothes. In either case, one is impressed that clothes are but a matter of convenience, and really of too little importance to be remembered—except long enough to put them on and take them off—by Edgar Braine. Such a man as he would be perfect in any clothes.

X.

The doings of Edgar Braine, during the few weeks following his negotiations with Waverley Cooke, were a riddle to those who knew of them; but Thebes was so well used to his puzzling methods that the little ripple of talk raised at this time did not swell into a wave of chatter, as it might in another man's case.

In the first place, he borrowed a very considerable sum of money from Hildreth, and insisted upon so arranging the terms of the loan, that he could repay the money at any time after ninety days, but should be free to retain it for a year upon renewals, if that suited him better.

Hildreth was willing enough to lend him the money, but he speculated a little as to what Braine was going to do with so large a sum. He did not find out.

Next, Braine jauntily upset all the plans for the marriage, which he and Helen had so laboriously formed. It was on the evening of the special charter election that he did this. Up to that day he had worked ceaselessly at the task of persuading the people of Thebes that the best thing they could do with their one valuable municipal possession was to give it away to the Central Railroad Company. He had found time in the interval, however, to see Helen almost every day. He had not contented himself with supporting the measure in the *Enterprise*, but had organized support for it in quarters where support was not to be expected, and in quarters in which it was supposed that he of all men had least influence. The machinery of his own political party was easy to handle, but Braine boldly undertook to control that of the opposing party as well.

A city clerk, to replace the one who had defaulted and run away, was to be chosen by the City Council, in which Braine's own party was dominant. Braine seized upon this circumstance as his lever. He boldly offered the place to the leader of the opposite party in return for that party's support of the levee transfer proposal, which, being in no respect a political question, men of either party might advocate or oppose at will. Having made the bargain he set to work to induce the aldermen of his own party to carry it out. He reckoned upon their venality as a stronger motive than their party zeal, and his reckoning was not amiss.

"Hildreth is to pay those rascals for voting the transfer, of course," he reasoned; "and they can't vote it unless this election is carried to authorize it. Hildreth isn't fool enough to pay them till the thing is done. Very well. There is a ring in the nose of every scamp of them."

And it was so. The aldermen were angrily reluctant to surrender a political office, and the one with whom Braine negotiated at first flatly refused. But Braine knew his ground.

"Very well," he said, "but reflect a little. This election is very close. We need all the help we can get. Davidson has his men perfectly in hand, and now that I've offered the thing to him he will vote them to a man on the other side if this isn't carried out."

"Why in thunder did you make him such an offer, then? Nobody authorized it."

"It is not worth while to discuss that. Call it impertinent intermeddling on my part, if you choose, and ease your mind in that way. But the offer has been made. If you ratify it, we shall carry the charter election. If you refuse,—well, you know what the result is likely to be as well as I do."

The alderman understood perfectly, and was not minded to take risks. The bargain as to the city clerkship was carried out. This was one of many ways in which Braine organized the victory he had set out to win, and during those few short weeks, the people of Thebes discovered a new fact about Edgar Braine; they learned that he had what they called "a genius for politics."

When Edgar heard that said, he reflected: "Well, I seem to be developing new qualities rapidly. What with a 'good head for business,' discovered by that expert, Abner Hildreth, and a 'genius for politics,' diagnosticated by those eminent specialists the aldermen of Thebes, I ought to make my way, especially as I own a railroad charter and a ferry franchise. Poor old Waverley Cooke! I hope

he is breathing his native air with a relish by this time. I shall be sorry when the payments to him cease."

He sighed deeply. Was it over Waverley Cooke, or was he thinking of another wreck?

As soon as the polls closed after an exciting contest—for the opposition had been very determined—Edgar turned his back upon the bustling crowds, and briskly walked away.

Helen met him at the door, though she had not expected him that evening. Somehow she had acquired a habit of always discovering his approach and meeting him in the vestibule, a convenient place for the exchange of certain quasi masonic—but we must not intrude upon privacy with prying eyes.

As she was not expecting him, she was not dressed to receive him, a circumstance in which he rejoiced mightily, her careless costume seeming in his eyes to set off her beauty ravishingly.

She wore a loose gown of a thin, limp goods, Pompeian red in hue, with flowing sleeves of white, equally limp, and a broad, starchless collar of white to match the sleeves. The gown was belted in at the waist with a rope girdle of dull, oxidized silver. The costume seemed to cling lovingly to the lines of her superb length, and Braine was at the moment certain that he should never permit her to wear any other. "Man-like," was her commentary, when he told her this a few weeks later.

"You are weary," she said, "and it is very warm. Loll here by the windows. No, not in that chair, it is rickety, and you are so big and strong I always expect weak things to break with you. My will did, you know, when you made up your mind to marry me. No, no, you mustn't, now! people are passing."

What this last injunction and remark had to do with the subject of conversation, I cannot make out, but that is what Helen said, hurriedly, as she drew back a little.

"Now you shall not talk to me," she said, as she sank in graceful folds upon the floor, with an ease which made one doubt the existence of bones in her tall person. "You are tired, and I'll do the talking. What shall the subject be?"

"Tell me of yourself. What have you been doing and thinking?"

"Nibbling pickles, sewing, trying to read Browning because you told me to, and carrying pins in my mouth."

"I thought you promised me not to put pins in your mouth. I gave you a cushion, to bind the bargain."

"That's why I told you about it. You see I'm honest above all things. I get busy and forget, but I'm really trying, Edgar."

"What have you been sewing on?"

"I must tell you. (I'm *too* honest.) Clothes."

"What sort?"

"White. Linen and cotton."

"But what—"

"Hush! You're not to talk. Where did Browning get the story of Hervé Riel? Is it historical?"

"I can't tell you without talking."

"Oh, you can talk just a little, you know—enough to answer my questions. But I don't care anything about Hervé Riel. I asked because I could not think of anything else at the moment. Tell me instead, where our wedding cards should be made—Chicago or St. Louis?"

Taking that evening's *Enterprise* from the table Edgar read aloud:

"There is no longer any occasion for citizens of Thebes to incur the delays and uncertainties incident to having printing of any kind done in Chicago or St. Louis. The job office of the *Daily Enterprise* is now perfectly equipped for all work of the kind, from the plainest of posters to the daintiest of wedding invitations."

"But I won't have printing done at that establishment, Mr. Braine."

"Why not, Miss Thayer?"

"I don't approve of its editor."

"What has the poor fellow done to incur your displeasure?"

"Many things. He persists in asking me about the clothes I am making; he insists upon changing my pretty name, and he is too stingy of his time to take me further than Chicago for a wedding trip when I am crazy to be stunned and bewildered by the glories of New York."

"Helen dear," broke in Braine, with a sudden earnestness of protest in his tone, "you know, do you not—"

"Certainly I know, and I perfectly approve that and everything else you do, Ed. Forgive me. I was only teasing."

At this point there was a brief wait in the dialogue. Then Helen, sitting down on the floor again, resumed in an earnest tone, with her large eyes looking fixedly at her lover:

"You must never misunderstand me, Ed. You know I am devoted to your interests only. I would not let you spend an hour that you cannot spare from your work, in gratifying me. I was only jesting, dear. You understand me, don't you?"

If the words did not make the matter entirely clear to Braine's intelligence they were helped a good deal by the "eloquent language of signs," and the whole matter was rapidly becoming perfectly lucid, when a knock at the door startled the pair, and caused Helen to withdraw suddenly to a particularly prim and painful Queen Elizabeth chair on the other side of the room. By the time she was uncomfortably seated, the knock was repeated, and it dawned upon her mind that some one should open the door. She did this herself, as on the whole, best.

"It's Mikey, with a note for me," said Braine; "I told Mose Harbell to send him."

Helen brought in the note, and Braine quietly opened and read it.

"Please tell Mikey to wait for an answer," he said. "May I have some paper?"

Helen supplied him, and he wrote. When the messenger was gone, he turned and said:

"Come here, Helen dear. Kneel down here by my chair. I want to talk to you."

His manner was a trifle puzzling. It indicated a good deal of earnestness and some concern to enforce whatever it was he meant to say; but there was an inflection of exultation in his voice:

"I'm going to upset all our arrangements, Helen. You needn't have any wedding cards printed at all."

"Oh Edgar!" she cried in distress. "What has happened? Are you ruined in your business, dear? Tell me what it is?"

"No, I'm not ruined—not in my business at least," he added, with a meaning to which Helen had no clew. "On the contrary, my prospects were never so good before. But you don't need any wedding invitations, dear, because we must be married to-night. We leave by the midnight train for a wedding journey to New York."

"But, Edgar, how absurd!"

"Yes, I know it's absurd. Many things I do are so. But it must *be*, all the same. I have just had the returns from this election. It has gone as I wished, and that involves a good many things—among them an immediate journey to New York, and perhaps a stay of several weeks there. I have only been waiting till Mikey brought me certain news of the result before telling you about this."

"You mean to tell me that you have sat there chatting with me all this time, with that in your mind, and not telling me a word about it?"

"I couldn't, you know. You told me not to talk."

"You don't deserve that I should marry you at all."

"I know it. I've told you so all along. But the same thing is true of every other man in the world, and so you will have to put up with it."

"But you're not serious about this, Edgar?"

"Perfectly."

"It's preposterous!"

"Of course it is, but I can't help it."

"It's out of the question."

"Of course it is. Things that are decided are no longer in the question."

"But seriously, Edgar, I'm not ready. I can't be married so suddenly. I haven't any *clothes*," with that tremendous emphasis on the word clothes which the feminine mind instinctively places on the idea it represents, where marriage is in question.

"Seriously, Helen, I know this is a great annoyance to you, and I deeply regret annoying you with anything. But it is absolutely necessary for me to go to New York at once, and to remain there for I don't know how long. It means more to me than you can imagine. It means success and power. Perhaps it may mean wealth, also. We were to have been married in July. I may not be able to leave New York then without risk of loss and ruin. So we must be married to-night, and you shall have your vision of New York after all. It is now nine o'clock. I will be back here at eleven, with a license and a clergyman. I have written to Mose Harbell to send you a dozen newsboys for messengers. They'll be here soon. He will send 'genial' ones, of course, and they will carry notes summoning all your friends to the wedding. Lily Holliday will help you with the notes. You might send for Daisy Berkeley too, or I'll call by there on my way down town, and tell her you've a

romantic secret to confide to her. That will send her to you in five minutes. It would if it were midnight and she in bed."

With that he hurried away, leaving Helen standing in the middle of the floor in a dazed condition, till Daisy Berkeley, who lived but a little distance away, came hurriedly in to ask: "What is it?" in many and varied forms of words.

"I could not think of yielding to so preposterous a plan," said Helen, after she had briefly explained the situation, "but what am I to do? Edgar is gone, and I can't argue it with him. And the clergyman will be here at eleven, and there come the newsboys now, and I haven't *a stitch of clothes!* Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do?" cried Daisy. "Why carry the thing through, of course. It's the most deliciously romantic thing I ever heard of in my life. Oh, how I do envy you!"

"But what am I to do for clothes, Daisy? And besides, it's so undignified!"

"*A fig for Dignity! Vive la Romance!* I'll lend you all my clothes. I always have lots of them, and mamma is sure to know where they are."

"Daisy Berkeley! You forget yourself. You are under five feet high, and I am five feet eight inches."

"Well, never mind about clothes. You have plenty of them. It's all nonsense, the way we women talk about nothing to wear. Somebody wrote a book or something to prove it once. Who would spoil a delicious romance—oh, it is so delicious—for nonsense like that! Why, it'll make you the talk of the town."

"That's just it. I have no desire to be the talk of the town. But there is no help for it now."

So the two, with Lily Holliday, summoned from next door, set to work upon the notes, while the trunk packing was done by Helen's aunt, who was weeping all the time, till Mary Malony, the maid, who was helping her, exclaimed:

"Sure mum, it's not packin' a thrunk, but a dampenin' down of clothes ye are, and they's no ironin' convayniences on the cars at all."

XI.

For a man on his wedding journey Braine seemed to have an extraordinary amount of business to attend to from the first hour of his arrival in New York. Sometimes it occupied his mornings, and sometimes his down town engagements stretched far into the afternoon, though he avoided that as much as possible, and managed almost always to have his evenings free.

In his hours of freedom he threw off care so completely that if Helen had been capable of doubting anything he said, she would not have believed in his business engagements at all.

He took her to the theatres, where light summer plays of no possible interest were running, and joined in the poor sport with the relish of a boy, and apparently without once thinking of the affairs with which he was toiling down town every day. He sought out all the places where summer music was to be heard. He went to the sea side, and would sit on the sands for hours with Helen, idly listening to the lazy swash of the surf as it surged in from the indolent summer sea. He watched even the merry-go-rounds with a contagious interest in the joy the children seemed to get out of them.

And yet all this time Braine was playing a great game, with success or failure for the stakes; a game mainly of skill, at which he was a novice, while his adversaries were veterans. If he succeeded, nothing was beyond his reach. If he failed—but he did not contemplate failure. It had never been his habit.

At first, Helen enjoyed the privacy of a stranger in the great town, going and coming at will, knowing nobody and expecting attention from nobody. But this was of brief duration, and signs that it was destined speedily to end appeared when men of wealth and social prominence began to show themselves at the hotel with Braine, and to seek presentation to herself in her private parlor.

It was during this blissful period of obscurity that Helen wrote in the diary:

We have been in the city now three days. I am happy, but tired out with a rush of new experiences. I am still in the daze occasioned by the suddenness with which events have occurred. Married, and seeing New York, all in six days, is too much for any woman, even a Western woman. And my wardrobe! Until this evening I have had no time to think of it. But at this moment it comes to me with terrible and tragic force that I have just three presentable dresses to my name, and these are not so presentable as they seemed before we went down to dinner that first evening.

By the way, dinner means that of which I have never dreamed before,—and means it at six o'clock. In Thebes, dinner meant a sort of juggling at noon; and supper, a scrabble at six. Dinner here means science, art, and awesome ability in some one.

For just one moment I was ready to sink through the floor when I entered the dining-room—no, we dined in the café. (These little distinctions must not escape me, nor be neglected.) But in an instant I glanced at Edgar, who seemed so unconcerned with surrounding things, and so preoccupied with some weighty matter, that everything but him seemed to sink into insignificance, and by the time I was seated at the table, and remembered the strangeness and magnificence of it all, I had forgotten to be overpowered.

I noticed that Edgar was looking at me with a smile and very earnestly once, and when I said, "What is it?" he replied:

"Any other woman who had never eaten terrapin would have said that she didn't like it. This dinner has convinced me that you are a wonderful woman."

I half understood him, and my happiness at having unconsciously pleased him made me blush. The blush itself seemed to delight him, and he said: "Good heavens! a woman who has had time to enjoy terrapin, and is still able to blush so beautifully!"

I left the dining-room in a state of mind almost bordering on exaltation.

People stare very rudely here. Every one looked at us. Edgar did not seem to observe it, but somehow I could not help being conscious of it. I first thought that they looked at Edgar, but I found they were staring at me too. That was because I was with him. I am more than ever determined to keep up with him as well as I can, that I may be no drag upon his advancement—or rather on his efforts to advance others.

I experience a little suspicion of regret now and then. Edgar and I cannot possibly seem so near to each other while we are amid such startling surroundings, and one has to bear in mind, to an extent, that she must not appear too much surprised.

He has hardly been in the room half an hour at a time since our arrival. He no sooner comes in and gets ready to talk to me, than he receives a card from some one and goes to the parlor—he will have no one come to our private parlor. He says "Not yet," and laughs.

He seems almost fierce sometimes, at the thought of other people even looking at me. He said, when he saw a man looking after me in the hall: "It makes me feel murderous! These men are not fit to breathe the same atmosphere with you. Neither am I, for that matter, any more, but I love you, that makes it different; and what I do is *because* I love you."

It delights me cruelly to hear him depreciate himself—not because of that depreciation, but because it illustrates his extraordinary love for me.

I wish we were in the little cottage at Thebes. The sweet-williams are ravishingly sweet now; and I would like to have just my dog near when I love Edgar so. He would be so sympathetic! There is such an aggressive feeling of selfishness in the air here. Something not quite sympathetic, or clean, or good. It is because it is all new and strange to me, of course, but it certainly seems so. I mentioned this thoughtlessly a while ago, and Edgar threw his arms around me and stopped the words with kisses. I know that he did it so that I would say no more, for his face looked peculiarly pained. His lip quivered for a moment, and that almost frightened me. Such a thing in Edgar means more than even I can divine. In a moment he was gravely gay again. Even in his merriest moments there is a sweet dignity about him that fascinates and commands me. I seem to demand, but he seems to command. There is no other man living whom I could have loved.

New York, July 2. Until now I have always thought that the day on which I met Edgar was the most marvellous one of my life. I now think it is not so. This has been the most eventful one surely.

Last night I said to Ed that this morning I *must* go out and get something to wear. He said, "Very well. While I am down town you can do your shopping." That was all that was said. We breakfasted at nine, and at ten Ed said we had better go, as he must be down town by 10:30. I had no idea where to go or just what to do. There was a certain embarrassment about the situation, but I concealed the fact, and trusted to Ed's wonderful management and delicacy.

He was equal to the occasion. Nothing was said as to where I should go, or concerning means with *which* to go, until we reached the hotel entrance. He put me into a coupé, and said: "The man will take you to an establishment where they can tell you what you want without your having to bother about it," and thrust a roll of bills into my hand, threw me a kiss, nodded, smiled, and closed the door.

The coupé started before I could recover from astonishment. For a minute I sat looking at the bills in my hand. They made a terrible roll. When I found what he had given me I could only gasp and drop them on the floor. The amount frightened me. I was sure that he had made a mistake, and I put the bills in a separate compartment of my purse, all but fifty dollars, to give them back when I returned.

We stopped at a ladies' tailoring establishment of some kind. I was really too much overcome and disturbed to know what I was about. The coachman opened the coupé door, and said:

"Blossom's, madame," and my heart quite stopped beating for a moment. But I suddenly felt the necessity of not displaying my ignorance, for Edgar's sake, and pretended to be preoccupied, and so gained time to look about me covertly, and prepare an excuse for any *faux pas* on my part.

Well, in about one minute after I entered the parlor, I felt that I had been born passing judgment on styles and fabrics. I seemed to have nothing to do. I said rather abstractedly and indifferently "Something in a street dress. I leave it to you," and made a little inconsequent gesture. In a minute I found everything taken out of my hands, and a man and a woman declaring that they knew at once what madame wished; they would satisfy me, etc., etc., all in a suddenly changed manner that amazed me. They were treating me like some extraordinary personage. It was my little gesture of ennui that accomplished this. (By the way, I did not say "dress" a second time, but "gown," which is now considered the proper term.)

I felt almost like an impostor at first, but I had a desire that Edgar might be there to witness the little performance. I felt that I had, at least, not disgraced him.

Then I said: "Something in a house gown," when they had settled the street gown. The house gown was decided, and before I knew it they had the most wonderful designs for dinner and reception gowns before me that I ever dreamed of.

I seemed to be in a maze, and acquiesced mechanically in what they proposed. Finally, things seemed to come to an end, and I asked for my bill. They were to supply the materials, calculate the cost, etc. They seemed a little surprised, and said I could attend to that at my convenience—when I came to-morrow. I suddenly felt panic-stricken and determined to find out the extent of my madness. I insisted in a peremptory and dignified way—saying I preferred to settle such little matters on the spot. They kept me waiting half an hour, and then-handed me the bill.

It makes me faint now to think of that moment. I sat staring at the paper. It amounted to one hundred and fifty dollars more than was in that roll of bills! I felt my hair make an attempt to stand erect. I mechanically opened my purse, and handed them the money that was to have been returned to Edgar, and said in a voice that I did not recognize as my own: "That is all I happen to have with me—I will attend to the other trifle to-morrow."

Trifle!! The remainder was more than I had ever spent for clothes before in a year. It never occurred to me that I could countermand the order. I felt that I was helpless and in the hands of the Philistines. I gave them my address, fully determined to get back to the hotel and smuggle Edgar off before the next morning, before the "trifle" could be asked for.

I kept saying all the way:—"We are just married. We are just married. Men always forgive things when they are just married!" I said it over and over.

When we stopped at the hotel entrance some one opened the door at once. It was Edgar. He was smiling and helping me out, and saying that he had been smoking and waiting for me. I prayed that I might sink right down through the coal-hole in the sidewalk.

I did not speak, and Edgar said, anxiously:—"Your shopping has been too much for you, dear. You look pale and tired out!" I thought of that trifling balance, and nearly staggered. I said, "No, oh no!" and got into our rooms in some way.

To think that I, Helen Braine, who never possessed more than three gowns at once, the wife of a man who had had to wear coats with frayed edges, should have spent a small fortune in two hours, and that there was still a "balance"! And it had yet to be told of! That was the worst. I expected to hear him say every minute:

"By the way, my dear, I made a little mistake this morning, and gave you the wrong amount of money. I knew you would understand it."

Well, when we were inside our rooms, with the door shut, I leaned up against the wall. Edgar saw there was something terrible the matter, and he looked quite pale and said: "What is it?"

I was waiting for him to say: "You haven't spent all the money!" and kept thinking to myself very hard—"Men always forgive things when they are just married."

Finally, I said, "Edgar, how much money have you?" And then he stared at me. He laughed, and said: "How mercenary shopping expeditions do make women!"

I thought I should drop down in one minute more, and hoped that I should die. I asked if he had enough to settle our bill and get out of town. He said afterward that he thought I had suddenly developed a propensity for shoplifting, and had been discovered, and that he would have to smuggle me out of the city.

He looked very serious though when I asked the question, and said: "Certainly, dear. We will not stay a moment longer than you wish to." He asked what had happened. I managed to gasp that I had spent all the money. He looked puzzled and said: "Well, go on. What is the matter?" and I repeated that I had spent all the money. It seemed heartless for him to torture me by making me repeat it.

He looked still more puzzled, and said: "Yes, well, what about it?" I said: "And there's a—a balance—a trifle."

He answered: "Of course-well?" And then—I don't know what happened then. I was sobbing, and

Edgar kept frantically pouring cologne over me, and kissing me and saying: "Don't cry, for heaven's sake, Helen," and by degrees he managed to understand the situation, and before I knew it he was lying back in a chair fairly shouting with laughter, and my hair was dripping wet, and I felt as though I had passed through the resurrection, and found myself on the right side.

I finally found that there was no mistake, except that I had not spent the money for the right things; that I was supposed to have purchased all the little things like gloves and shoes and hats and a hundred other trifles with that, and that this frightful bill was to have been sent in to Edgar or me, beside, and settled then.

I may live to be a thousand, but that terrible hour will always be fresh in my memory. I was not unhappy. I experienced a despair that was truly tragic. And the reaction that followed!

Edgar Braine was never so dear and great and glorious before to me. He held me in his arms for two hours and let me cry. He tried to be sympathetic and serious, but every few moments he would burst out in an uncontrollable fit of laughter. He, too, says that he will never forget that hour.

I am still dazed over the situation. But the relief! Oh, the relief!

He says that I am to carry no money hereafter, for I don't like it. It seems—I don't know what. I don't like to handle it, and he says that I am to get anything and everything I want, and have the bills sent to him, and he will attend to them.

I shall know how to deport myself to-morrow, and know about what I want, for I find that I unconsciously noticed everything this morning, and am pretty well informed.

If I had not had that thought, that newly married men cannot be very severe—at any rate I don't *think* they can, judging by Edgar—while I was coming home, to sustain me, I do not think I could have endured that terrible hour.

XII.

It was about the time of Helen's shopping expedition that Braine began to present certain select gentlemen of his acquaintance to Helen in their private parlor. Their visits were promptly followed by attentions that surprised her not a little. Their wives, sisters, and daughters journeyed from Newport, Richfield and Long Branch to call upon her, and, as Gladys Van Duyn said, when she called with her fiancé—young Grayson—"to snatch her as a brand from the burning of a scorching July." By this, Gladys merely meant that she had come for the purpose of taking possession of Helen, and carrying her bodily out of town "to where you can get your breath, dear, and see civilized people again."

Gladys had come reluctantly, and only because old Van Duyn had given her orders to that effect by telegraph. He had told her that Helen was beautiful, accomplished and fascinating, by way of softening the command to his daughter, though he wrote and sent the telegram half an hour before he was presented to the woman whom he thus confidently commended.

Gladys was not much given to trusting her father's judgment of women, or his accuracy of statement, where he had an object in view, and so that part of the dispatch she counted as so many superfluous words, paid for without occasion; but she understood clearly enough that her papa, for some reason connected with business—all his reasons centred in business—meant her to make as much as possible of Helen Braine, and so she arrived in the city fully prepared to pretend a great liking for the wild Westerner with big feet, whom she expected to find there.

Perhaps the agreeable surprise helped, but, whatever the cause, Gladys Van Duyn fell in love with Helen at first sight, and went rejoicingly back to Dorp House, the family place on the Sound, where the Van Duyns were accustomed to entertain their friends by platoons, and make a revel of the summer.

Gladys was a prudent young woman, whose twenty summers had not been misspent; so, when she saw Helen and arranged to have her for a guest during an indefinite period, she decided that Grayson should put his yacht out of commission immediately, and rest himself with a little stay in Switzerland. Grayson accepted the arrangement, under the impression that he had been eagerly contemplating something of the sort for months, and his departure was made so promptly that the only thought he had time to give to Helen was that she was a "dooced fine woman, don't you know."

Braine remained in the city during the day, but joined Helen in the evening at the sumptuous Van Duyn summer place.

Helen was puzzled to understand it all, and in her bewilderment she questioned Edgar a little as to the cause of her sudden finding of favor in the eyes of people who had known nothing of her till then, and that, too, in a society which is not much given to looking beyond its own borders for people to "take up."

Braine laughed and said: "You are much too modest, Helen. You never did appreciate your own charms," and Helen, upon thinking the matter over, found a sufficient explanation in the thought

that nobody could possibly come in contact with her Edgar without recognizing his superiority of mind and character, and wanting to make him an intimate. "These men have met him down town," she reflected, "and have been charmed with him, of course. In order to get as close to him as possible, they have taken up poor me. Well, that places a duty on me. I must acquit myself as well as I can, for dear Ed's sake."

And how she did acquit herself!

Gladys Van Duyn wrote rapturous reams about her new friend to all her old friends at Newport and elsewhere, and in angular, up and down characters, which allowed but three words to the line, and five lines to the page, sang Helen's praises in so many keys that only its scattered condition in summer cantonments saved the feminine part of New York society from panic lest the new star should elect to pass the winter in the metropolitan firmament.

Gladys encouraged confidence and order somewhat by assuring her friends, and especially her enemies, to whom, of course she sent her longest and most affectionate epistles, that Helen was "awfully much married to the dearest fellow in the world, and hasn't a notion of flirting in her."

In the mean time, Helen confided her emotions and experiences mainly to her diary, though her writing in that literary work varied considerably in frequency and fulness according to her moods and the demands upon her time.

[From Helen's Diary.]

July, 18—. This has been a very delightful day. I must record its happenings while Edgar is out. There is no moment that can be spared to record anything when he is here.

This morning I again went shopping. There is something delightful in being able to walk into a shop with the assurance that you are going to buy something. I do not mean to be extravagant. I seem to have regained my mental equilibrium to some extent, and am able to select judiciously what I want; and besides it would be something of an effort to me, I think, to be extravagant. I have had to be economical so long, and extravagance seems vulgar. There is no pleasure in having more things than one wants, and no delicate mind can rejoice in spending money merely for the sake of spending. In fact, the idea that I need have nothing to do with that part of the matter multiplies the enjoyment of the indulgence a hundredfold.

I have selected some charming things, and my gowns will be very beautiful. They have enabled me to understand myself better. They interpret my points, as it were, and I am now capable of making telling suggestions. I have decided to have nothing fashionable. Everything shall illustrate style, not fashion. There is something intolerable in the thought that you are wearing your clothes like a manikin; to walk in the streets and be conscious of a Vanderbilt on one side, with clothing far richer than you have on, which you have tried to copy, as well as limited means will enable you; and on the other side, a shop girl, and behind her, a washerwoman, who are reflections of your fashion, but falling as far short of you as you do of the woman whose purse is on the Vanderbiltean scale; to know that there is this eternal similarity to be seen among the entire multitudes!

I have decided that fashion is intolerable, and style indispensable. I have decided my own style. I shall not change it. It could not be improved for me, and so there is no justification for a change. I think a woman's style should be illustrative of her mind. Of course, if she has no mind of her own, then one does not expect her to have a style of her own. I *have* a mind of my own.

Edgar says we are to remain here six weeks longer, and then return to Thebes for a little time. While every moment here is one of happiness, I cannot help a little longing for the cottage, as we had planned it. I believe I would even have foregone all these charming new things for it. I do not have Edgar *entirely* to myself, but after all, I experience such a delight after waiting a time for him to come, that it may be an advantage.

He seems to regard me with wonder, amazement almost. Last night, he looked at me for a long time and finally said:

"*Honor* is well lost for you."

It made me shiver a little to hear him speak so, and I put my hand over his mouth, but at the same time it gave me a thrill of happiness—as it would even had he said, "I could commit murder for you," for nothing could express his love as that did.

If he loves me better than honor, I know how well that is. Is not honor dearer to Edgar Braine than his life? It is strange how women can even love wickedness—when they are the cause of it.

I think I shall never be able fully to enjoy anything because of my astonishment. Edgar says every little while, with my face between his hands: "You astonished child, how I love you!"

There is nothing in heaven above nor on this earth so wonderful and glorious as married life. Sometimes I do not know what I say or do. I am seized with a sudden ecstasy. At these times I find myself wondering if I have done or said anything that Edgar might not approve. I sometimes fear that I may not be *quite* womanly. I do not know why, but I feel so, and when I tried to explain it, he held me away from him and smiled a little with his eyes, and said in his dearest voice—"Yes,

quite womanly," and then he drew me to him and said: "*Whatever* you say or do I am sure to approve. Whatever you say or do is your right," and then I went off into an ecstasy right then, and forgot again what I said or did, and so I was very glad that he approved, and that it was very womanly and right.

XIII.

[From Helen's Diary.]

A few evenings ago some gentlemen called to see Edgar. He entertained them here in our own parlor, and something in their manner produced a great change in my way of looking at matters.

I had been in a species of revolt against Edgar's way of directing me how I was to receive the different women who called upon me—how I was to be very deferential to this one, haughty to that one, and to assume an easy familiarity with the other, all according to their husbands' relations to Edgar's business. He seemed to be *making use of me*, and the sense of being made use of in that way was degrading, especially as it involved insincerity in my manner toward these women. But when I saw how these men of wealth and influence treated Edgar, it opened my eyes to my stupidity. They recognized him in every way as a superior, a man to be heard with deference, and whose opinions were to be treated with profound respect.

As I listened and watched, a mingled feeling of exaltation and humiliation swept over me; exaltation in the thought that this superior man loved me and had made me his wife, and shame that I had ventured, even in my own mind, to question his instructions. I resolved then that I would devote my life to the task of making myself a fit companion for him, and would never again assume to doubt anything he might say or do. There will always be things that I cannot understand, of course, but that is because I am not his equal in ability and knowledge, and I can at least accept his superior judgment concerning them.

One of the gentlemen was charming, a Mr. Van Duyn. His daughter, Gladys, was to call upon me the next day, and Edgar had been at great pains to impress me with the importance of receiving her in just the right way. I was to wait for her to make all the advances, and to receive them with becoming appreciation. I almost hated the girl in advance, till I saw her father. Then that feeling passed away. He is a somewhat grave gentleman, whose earnestness impresses one. I liked him and decided that I should like his daughter very much.

After they left, Edgar stood at the window looking down into the streets below. He seemed to have forgotten me. My heart was so full of pride and a desire to be with him in everything, that I was oppressed and could not speak. It seemed to me that we had come to a fork in the road, and I must decide whether I should go with him, or travel the other path alone. There already seemed to be a little distance between us. I felt the tears coming into my eyes, and I went to the window and touched him. He turned and looked at me with a little smile, but he looked abstracted and a little sorrowful. I could no longer endure it and I burst into sobs. He took me at once in his arms and soothed me, but it was in a way that impressed me with the thought that I was a child to him, who was irresponsible and needed protection, instead of a woman who shared his hopes and ambitions and thoughts.

I suddenly threw my arms about him, and begged him to let me help him, and to make me understand all things that he strove for. The half shadow on his face disappeared, and a strange gladness took its place. He held me very close and said solemnly:

"Our life, love and ambition, failure or success, shall be mutual. We are man and wife—what can mean more?"

I met Miss Van Duyn the next day. I will say little of her. She is a woman I love. Strangely enough, I *could* not try a system of propitiation. I looked at her and thought "This is my equal." She is neither superior nor inferior to me, and she seemed to know it at once. She is calm, cold, dignified, with a high-bred trick of hand and head; sweet toned and fascinating. There is something subtle about her. I was impressed the moment she entered the room with her immaculateness, her irreproachableness of thought and feeling. She is a woman who might be greatly good or greatly wicked I believe—though one instinctively believes her to be greatly good. There has sprung up between us a strange intimacy—no familiarity whatever, but a dignified intimacy.

Edgar was at first half amazed, and then held out his arms and said: "I ought to have known, though, that it would be so; that my wife did not need experience to make her prized even by the most experienced of people."

I took luncheon with Miss Van Duyn yesterday. To-night Edgar and I dined with her at Delmonico's. I am tired and in a sort of maze, but have felt impelled to write while Edgar was down-stairs, smoking. I hear him coming down the corridor now. I know his step as well as his voice. This dinner to-night has affected me peculiarly. It has seemed to open to me a new life, a life that is almost as desirable as the one I have dreamed of—the life in the cottage at Thebes, with my editor and his great plans, and his greater love. It is a life of beauty and intelligence and luxury. It has impressed me strangely. I have a feeling that perhaps, in time, even I would not be

out of place there—with Edgar who would reign there. I—

A man is in the doorway. He has stood watching the woman at the table, who has written on unconscious of his presence, for a moment.

She sits with her delicate face turned half towards him, her graceful, sunny head bent over the paper, one white hand guiding her pen, the other resting on the paper.

There is a magnetism, a sweetness, a rare charm and simplicity about her. And one looks at the man in the doorway, and knows that they are man and wife, of a truth.

XIV.

Helen had no opportunity to decline Gladys Van Duyn's invitation to Dorp House, the Van Duyn summer place on the Sound, even if she had been reluctant to go thither, as, in a certain way, she was. She craved seclusion with her husband, but she also craved a fuller immersion in that life of ease and art and culture in which she had as yet only dabbled with her feet. She was a trifle appalled by her own ignorance of the ways of that life, and shrank a little from it, as one shrinks from the cold bath while still desiring its shock.

But there was no choice left to her. Gladys Van Duyn was a peremptory little lady, accustomed to have her own winning way, and moreover, the whole matter had been arranged between the elder Van Duyn and Braine before it was mentioned to Helen at all.

Dorp House was within easy reach of the city, so that no business obstacle interposed. It would be infinitely pleasanter for Helen to rest there than to swelter in a hotel; Van Duyn and Braine had need of many and prolonged conferences over the business operations in which they were engaged, and Van Duyn wished Braine to meet a number of gentlemen whose connection with that business it was necessary to conceal as much as possible. These were so often Van Duyn's guests in summer that the necessary conferences with them could be had at Dorp House without observation, whereas any meeting in town would have set tongues wagging.

Thus all arguments pointed in one way, and it only remained for Helen to discover that the change would be beneficial to Braine, on whom heat and work were beginning to have some effect, in order that she should dismiss all her little fears and hesitations.

It was not until she had grown somewhat used to the sumptuous but easy hospitality of the house that she again resumed her diary.

[From Helen's Diary.]

I have had no time to write for many days. I am living in a whirl of excitement, and yet there is no occasion for excitement, as I am made to feel that I can really do precisely as I please.

The charm of this house's hospitality is that it sets one free. I need never go anywhere, or make the least apology for not going. I need not go to bed or get up till I like. I need never appear at a meal if I wish to stay away, and I need not wonder what anybody will think. And yet I feel as if I were in a whirl of excitement, I suppose because all the people about me are so bright, and the atmosphere so intellectual. Every species of high thought is represented here. Among the guests are artists, connoisseurs, musicians, authors, statesmen, financiers, and a world of brilliant and beautiful women. Good taste seems the only law existing or necessary in this society. It never occurred to me before, but good taste seems to be a complete code of morals, whose observance renders all other statutes unnecessary.

Edgar is ever the lover,—one whose caresses and endearments are never exhausted, and there is endless delight in the thought that my life holds nothing but to-morrows with him.

Gladys is altogether such as I imagined her to be at first sight—a charming, delicate woman, full of affection that never blunders, and is never lacking in tact. She is the most graceful hostess in the world. When I see her in this capacity, a sudden longing to have such a home, and such opportunities to bring about me such men and women, comes over me. I never mentioned this to Edgar until last night, for I feared he would think me dissatisfied—and that is impossible. I must always be happy where he is.

The cottage at Thebes is not forgotten, and at times, amid all this luxury and charm, I long for it with Edgar all to myself.

Last night I said something that conveyed my thought to him, quite by accident. I was confused for a moment afterward, and wanted to turn it off; but a sudden happy light came into Ed's eyes, and he said: "You would like to live like this?" I admitted it a little reluctantly, but told him that I would be just as well satisfied, though, when we were back in Thebes. He said that he was glad to

know that this life made me happy, and that if I had not the ambition for it, at least the life would not be distasteful to me; that in another year I should entertain these same people in my own house, and that that house should be where I wished it to be.

This produced in me a strange emotion. It was one of joyous intoxication—and regret. I don't know what the regret was for, and it vanished in a moment.

Every one is very attentive to us. Edgar at once took the reins in his own hands. There seemed to be no effort on his part. He appeared to be almost unconscious of it. They are people whom he had never seen before, but people that every one hears of. There is something almost aggressively non-aggressive in Edgar's manner. It is impossible that he should appear in any company or walk through a room without impressing every one who sees him.

To-night there were some strange guests at dinner, and I was seated next to one of them, while Edgar took in Gladys. My neighbor did not understand that I was Edgar's wife, and during dinner the conversation turned on some public question, and some one referring to Edgar for his opinion, he gave it. He seemed to forget the company after a moment, he was so deeply interested in the subject, and talked on. Every one at the table seemed suddenly to cease talking, and to be listening intently to him. I forgot them, myself, everything but Edgar and his voice. There is a quality in his voice that I have never known in any other person's. It is a magnetic quality that compels one, that fascinates one.

When he stopped speaking every one was silent for a moment, and then a murmur of approval ran round the table.

The man next to me turned and said: "Do you remember the gentleman's name?" and I said, "Yes, Mr. Braine," and he said with a sudden surprise, "The man who has just—Why, he is a statesman; I had thought him only a speculator!"

He said it with a funny little snap of his teeth, and a decisive nod. I did not dare say that I was Edgar's wife. I felt that I deserved punishment for daring to be his wife. I cannot be interested in the conversation of people, unless they are talking of him. Every one seems to have discovered this, and so they all talk to me a great deal of him.

One or two of the gentlemen here I do not like particularly. I seem to afford them a certain amusement, and they endeavor to corner me on every occasion, and talk to me.

One of them said last night: "You are one of the most naïve women that I have ever known." It made me a little angry for some reason, and I told Edgar about it afterward, and he held my face in his hands and said: "Well, you certainly are," and his eyes smiled. I seemed to like it when Edgar said it.

There is a Mr. Everet coming to-morrow. Every one seems to enjoy the anticipation of his visit. Gladys talks a great deal of him. He is evidently a very superior man. We leave here to-morrow night, and return to Thebes. I have a little curiosity to meet the man, and hope that he will come before we leave.

August. We are still at Dorp House, and do not leave for some days yet. Mr. Everet came yesterday morning. He is a charming man, and reminds me of Edgar in many ways. He is a dignified man, too. I do not like men who do not impress me as earnest and grave. He is a courtly sort of man. I was very anxious to see him, for I desired to compare—impartially—Edgar and a man who is so much sought after and lauded for his brilliancy.

Well, I have seen him. Edgar is only the more magnificent. Mr. Everet and he seem to appreciate each other greatly. They smoke together and have had a long talk. They seem to have a great respect for each other's opinions—though they do not agree.

After dinner this evening, Mr. Everet came out on the piazza where I was sitting, and we had a delightful talk for an hour. I did not feel at all embarrassed. I have never felt just that since we left Thebes. I feel often that I am not the equal of many of those whom I meet, in an intellectual way, and I regret it, but I have the assurance that I am honest in doing my best for Edgar, and that they will overlook any mistake of mine, kindly, as I am his wife.

We talked of many things, and finally he regretted that we were going so soon, and hoped that he would see us in Washington—his interests are there, and he spends the winters there, and does something politically. I don't know anything about that. I told him about Thebes, and that we were to live there; that we had taken a cottage, and that I did not suppose that we could go to Washington for a long time, as I thought we should have to be quite economical.

For some reason I found myself talking very confidentially to him, and we seemed to have known each other a long time. I told him about the people at Thebes, and the *Enterprise*, and that it was just possible that sometime we could live somewhere else, and differently—a little like this.

He listened very attentively and sympathetically. There seemed to be a puzzled and surprised expression on his face at first, but soon it disappeared, and he smiled and said meditatively: "Yes, I understand."

After a while I happened to look up, and Edgar stood leaning against the railing, watching me. There was a beautiful look in his eyes, and he and Mr. Everet looked at each other and smiled.

I thought they seemed a little amused, but very much pleased. I asked Edgar afterwards, and he

said, he could never look otherwise than pleased when listening to me, could he?

I presume he can't.

It was with a little sigh of regret that Helen received the final summons for an immediate return to Thebes. She reproached herself for the feeling, and resolutely made up her mind that her one supreme longing was to begin the quiet life she had planned to lead with Braine, in the little white cottage, with the bed of sweet-williams before the door.

Gladys had solemnly promised to visit her there during Lent, when, "Society is so deadly dull, you know." (A promise which she kept, making Thebes her place of retirement and meditation in preparation for her marriage after Easter.)

Braine set out on the return journey with a peculiar buoyancy of spirits which helped to drive away Helen's little regrets.

"Never mind, dear," he said, as they took their places in the palace car, "you have not seen the last of your New York friends. You shall spend winters there before you are many years older. I have only to *emphasize myself* in Thebes, and then we shall seek larger pastures."

"But hasn't this trip cost you a great deal of money, Ed?"

"Well, it hasn't impoverished me, at any rate," he answered, with his queer smile. "Perhaps that is because I am not altogether the paymaster."

But he did not explain.

XV.

Abner Hildreth was closeted in the parlor of his bank with a grave, but eager-faced man of perhaps fifty, who sat with his left hand doubled up into a fist, while he snapped the spaces between the knuckles with the fingers of the right, making a succession of little nervous snaps, which would have annoyed a more irritable person than Hildreth.

The banker had been reading aloud to his companion, and half a dozen copies of the Thebes *Daily Enterprise* lay open on a chair by his side. Hildreth had been reading the leading articles one after the other, and had just concluded, the series.

"I don't like the looks of it, Duncan. I don't know what it all means, or how much."

"Perhaps he is only guessing, and getting things wrong. These newspaper men often do that, you know."

"Yes—" returned Hildreth, meditatively, "but Braine isn't that sort. He is apt to surprise you just the other way. When you squeeze him to see if he knows what he has been saying, you're apt to find out he knows a good deal more. He's a cautious fellow, and not too previous." [Hildreth's speech declines to reduce itself to subjection, and must be reported faithfully.] "Besides, I particularly cautioned him when he began this series on 'Thebes as a Railroad Centre,' to go slow, and deal in glittering generalities. I told him we weren't quite ready to call the hand yet."

"What did he say?"

"Not much. He said he understood the situation, and I suppose he really thought so. I'm afraid he's upset the milk pail. I wish I'd taken him into full confidence."

"I wish you had, almost. But if you had, we should have had to let him in a good deal deeper than we intend. I suppose he's keen enough to know how thick the butter is on a slice of bread, when he gets a good look at it?"

"Keen enough? Yes, he's keen enough for anything. I'm afraid he's been too keen for us. I don't know what he's up to, or how much he knows, but it looks serious. Maybe after all it would have been cheaper to let him in on the ground floor, instead of pretending. What if he's leased the ground floor himself, and made up his mind to turn us out?"

"Had he money enough for that?"

"No, I suppose not. But brains count sometimes, and he's got brains. Couldn't you find out anyway what Van Duyn means to do?"

"No. He said he was in other things, and couldn't go in with us. Of course that means whatever he wanted it to mean. With a man of his wealth and banking connections, being in one thing or twenty things, don't prevent his going into others. But whether he's up to anything or not, I couldn't find out."

"Well, it looks bad. Braine played it very sharp on me when he got that charter and ferry franchise. I didn't know he knew of their existence, or would dream of their value if he did. Then

he went to New York and got in with a lot of people there. I don't know how. Then came the sudden drop in Northern stock before we began selling short. Somebody must have been selling it quietly for days. Then when we went in to buy, you couldn't get a controlling interest at any price, and all we can make out is that a big block of it is held off the market. Now comes this series of articles."

"Read that last paragraph again."

Hildreth took up the paper and read:

"These plans are now about matured, and the hopes of Thebes approach fruition. It is yet too soon to publish particulars, but this much, at any rate, may be stated. A strong body of capitalists have secured control of the lines south of Columbia. Associated with them are the owners of the franchise for the connecting line between Thebes and Columbia. Contracts for the rapid construction of that line have been let, and the road will be in operation by the new year. Negotiations are in progress, or soon will be, for a traffic arrangement with the roads running north from Thebes, and there is now every assurance that the great tide of commerce between the North and South will speedily flow through this city."

The two sat silent for a time after the reading was done. Then Duncan said:

"Hildreth, there's more behind that; the fellow has a masked battery of some kind. Let's have the others down at once."

Hildreth rang for a clerk to whom he said:

"Telegraph to Tucker and Fanning to come down by the night express without fail, and meet Duncan here at ten in the morning. Say it's imperative."

When the clerk had gone, Duncan asked:

"What shall we do about Braine, in the mean time?"

"That's what puzzles me. On the whole, I think we'd better have him here to-night, and have it out with him some way. We may not be able to manage him, but I think we can. At all events, we'd best know how much powder he has in his magazine. Confound the fellow!"

"Don't be too hasty. He is evidently a man we want with us, and of course we can get him in some way. A very little slice of this cut will seem a feast to him. Send for him, and when we get him here we'll manage him."

Hildreth rang again, and said to the answering clerk:

"Go up to Braine's after you lock the vault for the day, and tell him to come down and see me here at eight o'clock sharp."

When this message was delivered to Braine an hour or two later the editor was quietly reading the "Biglow Papers" to his wife in the little white cottage with the sweet-williams in front. He had half an hour before received a note by messenger, which he crumpled up and threw into the waste basket. A moment later he picked it out again, went into the kitchen and placed it carefully on the fire.

When Hildreth's clerk delivered his summons, Braine quietly said to him:

"Take down my answer in shorthand and deliver it accurately. Tell Mr. Hildreth I am reading a very interesting book to my wife, and don't care to disturb myself. You may say to him, also, that after he has had a talk with Duncan, who is with him now, and Tucker and Fanning, who are to arrive by the express at ten to-morrow morning, I shall be at his service for any conference he may think necessary. Good evening, Charley."

"Why, Ed," exclaimed Helen, as soon as the clerk had gone, "this reading is of no consequence."

"I know it, dear. In fact I'm tired of it and shall read no more."

"Why didn't you go then? It may be of consequence."

"It is—to Hildreth."

"Why did you send him so—well, so curious a message, then?"

"Because I wanted him to know that I knew who was coming and by what trains."

"Didn't you get the information from him?"

"No, dear. He didn't know it himself till he telegraphed for them an hour ago, when we were at tea."

"Then how on earth did you find it out?"

"I pay for my education, dear, as I go on. The little note I burned in the kitchen brought me the information."

"But why did you treat Mr. Hildreth's message so—well, so curtly? I'm sure—"

"My dear, let me tell you a story. There was once a rich man and a poor man. The rich man

wanted to make use of the poor man, and he carefully arranged matters so as to make himself the poor man's master. When he had things all ready, he went to the poor man and told him about it. He promised to be a kind master and to pay the poor man well for serving him. But the poor man was constituted a little curiously. He didn't like to have a master, even a kind one who paid him well. He liked to be master himself, and so he carefully arranged matters so as to make himself the rich man's master. When he had matters in readiness, he sent a reply to one of the rich man's orders, which let the rich man know that the poor man was master now. That's a little fable. But fables are often true."

XVI.

It was not until noon of the next day, after two hours of preparatory conference, that Hildreth sent Braine as courteous a note as his most accomplished clerk could manufacture, asking him to meet Duncan, Tucker and Fanning in the bank parlor, "for consultation upon matters of deep interest to all of us."

A little after one, Braine appeared at the bank, and greeted the others without seeming in the least conscious that he had kept the personal representatives of a good many millions of dollars waiting for an hour.

Meantime the group had agreed upon a plan of operations, which had only the one defect of being founded upon a total misapprehension of Braine's situation, attitude and intentions. A fresh perusal of the series of articles on "Thebes as a Railroad Centre," together with Hildreth's report of the message he had received from Braine in answer to his own, the day before, had led the quartette to certain conclusions.

"He knows what we're up to," was the verdict of Tucker, a pudgy little man, with a voice at least an octave too low for his apparent bellows-power; "at least he's worked out enough of it to bank on. He's making a strike. He proposes to get in with us, and it's my opinion we've got to let him in."

"Yes, but how far?" asked Fanning, a very thin person, with a high forehead, over which the skin seemed stretched with drum head tension.

"Well, of course, a fellow like that," said Hildreth, "isn't like one of us. He'll think it a big fortune if we let him in enough to give him a little bank account, and let his wife go to some fashionable watering-place every summer. He doesn't know how much a combination of this kind means. My notion is for us to take his ferry franchise and the railroad charter—he doesn't know what that piece of paper is worth, I fancy—and capitalize the ferry at two hundred thousand dollars, and the railroad at ten millions. The road won't cost more than three millions at the outside to build, and a ferry-boat can be had, with the landing traps, for thirty-five thousand dollars. We'll assign Braine two hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock in the road, and twenty-five thousand dollars in the ferry company. The figures will knock him over. Of course, we can fix it so as to throw most of the earnings of the ferry and connecting road over to our other properties. The idea of having \$225,000 in anything will fetch him. It sounds big, that sort of thing, to a fellow that's rooted for his living as Braine has. He's sharp, but of course he doesn't know how these things are managed. He's had no experience."

"But we'll need his brains now and then, Hildreth," said Duncan, "and mustn't set him in antagonism to us. He'll find out after a while what his stock is worth, and then he'll fight us, sure. Can we afford to risk that?"

"That's a fact," said Hildreth; "well, how will it do to give him the stock and a clean cash twenty-five thousand dollars? He'll be rich on that, or think himself so. And we can help him in his political schemes, too. He is ambitious, and we shall want him in politics. I'll suggest politics after the money part is broached."

And so, when Braine entered, Hildreth was equipped.

"We've been reading your articles with interest, Braine," he began, "but we find you've been a little misled by your enthusiasm and hopefulness." A few months earlier, Hildreth had called that sort of thing "going off at half cock," but he thought it best to be more circumspect now. "After all," he continued, "I'm to blame for it, you know, because I ought to have kept you better posted."

"Would you mind telling me just wherein I have been misled?" asked Braine, without manifesting the least concern as to the seriousness of his blunders.

"Well, you see it's this way. We haven't got control of the Southern lines yet. Van Duyn disappointed us, and—"

"Yes—well?" said Braine.

"Your saying we have secured control may bother us a little in the negotiations."

"Did I say you had got control of the Southern lines? I don't recall it."

"Certainly; you say," reading, "a strong body of capitalists have secured control of the lines south of Columbia."

"I see. Well?"

"Oh, I don't know as it need be very serious. It will pass as a careless newspaper statement."

"Certainly. Call it that and lay it on my shoulders. Nobody will mind me. Well, what else?"

"Well, I ought to have told you that we haven't got a good ready yet to begin work on the new line from here to Columbia, and we haven't yet succeeded in buying a controlling interest in the Northern road," said Hildreth.

"You never told me," said Braine, but without any look of surprise at the information, "that you contemplated doing anything with the Northern road, after you shut it off the river front by the levee transfer."

"Didn't I? That must have been an oversight. Well I'll tell you now. I'll be perfectly frank, Braine, for we're all in one boat you know. Our plan was to sell Northern down to the breaking point on the strength of its being cut off from the river, and then, when the bottom dropped out of it, to go in and buy up a controlling interest, consolidate the road with the Central, and send the stock up again."

"Why didn't you carry out the plan?" asked Braine, with languid interest. "It looks like a very good one."

"That's where the trouble lies. Somebody else sold the stock short on the quiet before we began, and he must have made a pile on the operation too, for the market was sold so deep that when we touched it, it tumbled to pieces like a barrel with the hoops off. And then when we began to buy on the broken market, we found another block in our way. Somebody had quietly bought while we were selling, and now holds a big block of the stock off the market. We've bought every share we can get, till we've sent the market up to where it was before the break, and even a little higher, but we can't get enough to control."

"What do you mean to do about it?" queried Braine.

"We're waiting for the fellow to weaken, and that's where the trouble comes in. Your article will stiffen him up like thunder. You must admit that you were too previous this time, Braine."

"Perhaps so. But what do you suggest now?"

"Well, we count on you to patch things up. Can't you get up some news about the thing, to knock out the impression you've made?"

"No," answered Braine, "that would never do. The first condition of success in journalism is never to print false and misleading news."

"Confound journalism!" Hildreth could not altogether repress his irritation. "The whole game is at stake, my dear fellow, and you're one of us, you know."

"Am I? How much? You've never told me."

Here Tucker winked at Fanning, and Duncan nodded at Tucker. It was clear that Braine was "striking," and they were now getting at the marrow of the matter.

"We've just been talking that over," said Hildreth with eager confidence; "and this is what we think we can afford to do for you," handing Braine a memorandum. "It's extremely liberal, you see, but we want to be as liberal as possible with you. We haven't forgotten how you served us at the pinch, and we want your brains hereafter."

Braine scanned the memorandum carelessly. Then he handed it back, and said:

"My brains cannot be had at the price. I've been trying them a little, recently, and find they're worth more to me than you offer."

"Might I ask, Mr. Braine," interposed Duncan, snapping his fingers against his knuckles, "what is your notion of a fair arrangement between us?"

"Certainly," answered Braine; "and in order that you may not think me unreasonable, I will first explain how matters stand with me. In the first place, it seems only proper to say that it was I who, in the absence of any hint of your plans from Mr. Hildreth, made the mistake of selling Northern short in New York."

"You!" exclaimed Hildreth. "You! Why, where on earth did you get the money?"

"You lent me enough. It don't take a great deal of margin to sell short with, on a falling market. By the way, I'd like to give you my check for the amount I owe you, and take up my note before maturity, if it's all the same to you. Besides I have some friends in New York who are pretty strong—the Van Duyns and others—sit still and hear me out, please," as the others rose in astonishment at the mention of that name. "As I was saying, I sold Northern short till the collapse came, and you will be glad to know that I netted a very comfortable profit when the stock tumbled from 73 to 37—just reversing the figures, which seems to me an interesting coincidence. By that time, Van Duyn and his friends had gone in with me in some plans I had formed. We

thought, upon looking over the ground, that we could see a way by which the Northern road could force its way to the river in spite of the levee grant. In fact, I am pretty well convinced that the grant can be wholly invalidated if necessary. I hold conclusive proofs that the aldermen were bribed to make it. I thought if I asked to have it rescinded, all parties would probably consent rather than risk the submission of this proof to a grand jury."

By this time the four bankers were reduced, as to their moral natures, to the condition of pulp. They said nothing. They simply listened.

"However, that is aside. As I was saying, we thought Northern stock a good purchase at the price, so we bought it up to full recovery."

Here Braine paused, and going to the cooler drew a glass of water, which was far from perfectly clear as he held it between him and the light for inspection before drinking.

"Now that Thebes is sure of growth, Hildreth,"—it was the first time Braine had ever spoken to the banker by his name, without the prefix of courtesy,—“we must begin to think about a water supply, don't you think so? I'll write the thing up in a few days. I'm only waiting for some books on the subject, for which I have sent to New York."

"Confound the water supply!" ejaculated Hildreth. "Go on, can't you?"

"Oh, yes; about Northern. Well, we held the block of stock you referred to just now. In fact we have a trifle over fifty-one per cent, and we don't care to sell. It ought to go to par, or above, when the Southern connection is formed. I own the ferry franchise, you know, and the Van Duyn syndicate—by the way, Van Duyn is to be here next week, as my guest. I shall have the pleasure of asking you to meet him at dinner, Hildreth, and you also, Mr. Duncan, if you're in Thebes so long."

He passed over Tucker and Fanning quite as if they had not been present. "As I was saying, the Van Duyn syndicate has a ninety-nine years lease on the lines south of Columbia. That must have been what I referred to in the article where I spoke of a 'strong body of capitalists.' Now our idea is to build the connecting link south, finish the Northern line to the river, and make one system of our properties. We've ordered, from Hambleton's yards, a ferry boat capable of transferring trains without breaking freight bulk, or disturbing through passengers. We shall be independent of the Central rivalry, of course, as that road will be dependent on us for a southern connection; but it was the general feeling in New York that consolidation is better than throat-cutting, and I am authorized by my associates to consider any propositions you gentlemen may see fit to make touching a traffic arrangement, or better still, a close alliance. It might be possible for us to get together and arrange for a consolidation of the Central with our properties, on fair terms. That is for you, gentlemen, to consider. It would save some friction, as, of course, in the event of its not being done, we should naturally not be able, with justice to our own stockholders, to offer as favorable terms on through business to a road in rivalry with a part of our line, as to a road owned by ourselves, and an integral part of our system. We shall in any case be as courteous to you gentlemen of the Central, however, as we can with a due regard to the welfare of our own properties. I think that is all I have to say, and as you gentlemen probably have business affairs of your own to discuss, I will withdraw. Good morning, gentlemen."

What passed in that bank parlor after Braine's departure, there is no means of knowing now. Braine felt no uneasiness as to the result, however. He sent a cipher dispatch to Van Duyn, and then went home to read "In Memoriam" to Helen for an hour before supper. When Van Duyn had translated the dispatch, it read as follows:

"Exploded bomb this afternoon. Effect satisfactory. Delicacy about witnessing a family quarrel prompted me to withdraw. They will ask for our terms to-morrow, and accept them. Have asked Hildreth and Duncan to meet you at dinner next week. They won't come. Engineer reports easy construction on line to Columbia. Country flat, timber abundant, and only two small bridges."

When Braine shut up the volume of Tennyson that evening, and went to supper with his arm around Helen, he stopped, imprinted a caress upon her lips and said:

"I feel this evening just as I did many years ago, on the day I whipped Cale Dodge."

But he did not explain why.

XVII.

[From Helen's Diary.]

We have been back in Thebes for several weeks. The cottage is very charming—though I certainly did not realize how small it was until I returned. It needs a great many improvements before it will be quite satisfactory. They have put a remarkably ugly paper on the walls, and the ceilings look strange without any. I think the paper cannot be the same that I selected before we left, for if I remember alright it was very pretty. I spoke to the paper-hanger about it, and he assured me that it was the same, so perhaps it is.

Something *must* be done to the ceilings. They look quite startling. I have not mentioned it to

Edgar, for I fear he might think me dissatisfied—after all, nothing matters, with him to love.

I have packed away many of my beautiful gowns. There is really no chance to wear them here. Sometimes I am seized with a longing to put one on, and one evening last week Edgar and I dined in state all alone at seven. I wore my most ravishing gown, and made him put on evening clothes. He laughed a great deal, but seemed to enjoy it. My servant was a little awkward, but I felt a strange elation at my success. I have a desire to try it on a larger scale some time. Perhaps I shall some day. Who knows but what Edgar may be able, some time, to do all he hopes! To me it is no matter whether he does or not. Every day—every hour—he grows dearer to me. I long to see him again among people who can appreciate such a man, and are his equals in some degree. I feel restless when I think of him here in such a miserably insignificant town, with all his great powers. I have no ambition for myself, but insatiable ambition to have him appreciated for what he is.

Gladys is to spend the Lenten season here. It will make a happy break for me in the dullness of my life—that is to say, in the uneventfulness of it; it is never dull where Edgar is.

I have experienced a strange emotion during the last week. It is the first real feeling of regret that has come to me since our marriage. I do not know that "regret" is just the term I should use

Braine enters the room softly, and crossing the floor takes Helen's head in his hands, and tipping her face back, kisses her softly on the forehead. Her eyes grow luminous, and she drops her pen.

"Ah! you are home early! Did Mr. Van Duyn get off at ten o'clock?"

"Yes, I came straight home from the station." He walks on through into the other room—

"Anything to eat, dear?" going on out into the kitchen. Helen follows him into the pantry, and seats herself on a cracker box, with a wave of her hand at the shelves and towards the cupboard. She goes on talking about Van Duyn's departure.

"He'll reach home Friday morning, won't he, Ed?"

"M—huh!" munching an olive. "Where are the crackers, dear?"

"I don't know—look in that box up there," pointing to the top shelf. Braine looks and finds candles, and Helen reaches a paper bag on the left, from her seat, and finds eggs.

"Shall I call Mollie?—she's in bed."

"No. Here's the bread," and he cuts a slice two inches thick on one end and a sliver on the other, while Helen continues the conversation.

"You told him to tell Gladys about the lace the last thing, didn't you—else he'll forget it."

"M—huh!" stabbing an anchovy. "I wish to heaven the slave would keep that Rocquefort in the cellar, except when we are eating it," shoving the cheese under a pan.

Helen rises—"Come on! Bring the rest in here," and she takes the light in one hand, and the bottle of anchovies in the other, while Braine is about to follow when he discovers the cracker box.

"You've been sitting on those crackers, Helen Braine," scooping up a handful wrathfully.

"Well, you've found them; come on;" and they go into the sitting-room. He sits by the open window, while she fishes out olives and anchovies for him, alternately, and talks.

After a time, the anchovies are on the table, and the olive bottle on the window sill; the crackers carpet the floor immediately around Braine's chair, and Helen is kneeling between his knees.

The conversation becomes low toned and fitful. They like it better at those times when it is fitful. Presently, Helen says in a dreamy fashion:

"We will name the children 'Edgar,' shan't we?"

She doesn't think of what she is saying. She is in a misty dream. The silence that ensues arouses her. Edgar has not replied, and is looking out of the window. Something in his silence hurts her, humiliates her. She would give up every fond hope if she could recall the words.

She cannot break the silence, and she feels her lip quiver after a moment, when he does not speak.

Presently he throws his cigar out of the window and looks at her. There is a peculiar, half-pained, half-stern look in his face, but there is an expression of resignation too—that hurts her worse than all.

He says in a voice which he tries to make calm and matter of fact, but which reveals his anxiety painfully:

"Why, what do you mean?"

This seems to arouse her, and for a moment she feels no grief; but a certain pride that is a little resentful, comes over her, and she looks at him very coolly and says:

"Nothing; I was thinking that Gladys when she is Mrs. Grayson, might ask us to stand sponsors for her—first, and she likes the name of Edgar, you know."

There is a little feeling of recklessness creeping about her atmosphere, for some reason. The look of relief on Braine's face hurts, as but one other thing has ever hurt her—his preceding look of anxiety.

He looks out of the window as though sorry that he has thrown his cigar away. After a moment he says:

"Helen, would you like to have children?"

She still feels a little cold, and answers:

"I should like children well enough, though I presume that there may be more agreeable things to do in the world than to train them."

He looks around at her in surprise, and suddenly holds out his hand. He says:

"Come here, little girl." Gravity and self-reproach are in his tone. She is suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of shame, and throws herself on her knees beside him. He smooths her hair for a moment without speaking, and then says in the one voice on earth:

"Dearest, I don't want you to interpret what I said, or looked, a moment ago. You startled me a little, and—" He pauses a moment, then goes on: "And I want to tell you why. I have had one dream since I have known you and loved you. I have dreamed of you as my wife, my very dearer self, surrounded with the refinements and sweetnesses of life; loving me, thinking with me, always near me. And to complete the dream were our children, little men and women; a part of your own dear, beautiful self; their little minds and faces reflecting you; little men and women that should enter upon life with the love of a man and woman who worshipped them for each other's sake. I have in imagination seen these little beings develop mentally, and morally, and physically, until I beheld the little woman, the model of my Helen, and the little man, a lover of his mother. I have not seemed to think of myself and these children, but of you and them. I think I should not love them because they were mine, but because they were yours. I—"

Braine pauses abruptly. His voice has been soft, wooing, monotonous. Helen is sobbing softly. After a moment he goes on:

"I have dreamed all this over and over, dear. Perhaps it will not be a vain dream, but—it *must not be fulfilled now*."

He pauses again, and draws a long breath, that is a half weary sigh.

"No, not now; not for a few years. We need each other just now, with nothing to divide our love or thought or care with. We do not want to bring beggars into the world. They would not be quite that, now, but not much better. I remember my own youth," tightening his fingers on the arm of his chair and speaking a little harshly, "I remember my own youth. My children shall never have such memories—nor such temptations—no, nor such guilt."

Helen lifts her head and stares at him. He has struck a strange note in his voice. He continues:

"If our children have ambitions that are good and true, I pray God that I may be able to allow them to live, yes and thrive. There is such a thing as moral suicide. I do not want to attend the moral funeral of my children, feeling that they have died for the reason that they have had no opportunity. I am unfit now, and for perhaps years to come, to have any hand in the moral charge of my children. I shall have no time, and you—" looking hungrily at her—"I want you. I cannot spare you just now *even* to my children—your children, our children," each time with a different, tenderer inflection on the words.

"Now, do you understand me, dear? Now, is there a little less heart-ache and reproach?"

She draws his face down until their lips meet.

XVIII.

The next few years of Edgar Braine's life were years of strenuous, almost turbulent, endeavor, but their details do not belong to this history. Their outline only concerns us.

When the consolidation of the Central road with the other lines north and south, was effected, Braine had every reason to feel as he had on the day of his battle with Cale Dodge. In the one case, as in the other, he had won a passionately coveted victory; in the one case as in the other, it was unsatisfying.

He had felt almost a savage joy in the process of conquering Hildreth and his party, and teaching them to recognize him as the master; but when the conquest was over, it seemed a very little victory after all, because the enemy was so contemptible.

"Hildreth has experience and cunning," he said, "but he has no masterful ability. As to the rest—faugh! Why should I care to match my brains against their poor headpieces? One little loving thought of Helen's is worth more than a thousand such victories."

Braine valued the wealth that was now securely his, not for any vulgar love of wealth, such as men are apt to feel who have grown up in poverty and wrought out riches for themselves, but for the liberty it secured to him to prosecute his other purposes unhampered by any bread-winning necessity.

He had enough money now, in possession and in certain prospect, to satisfy his desires in that direction, and if he afterward engaged in great financial undertakings, as he did, it was as the athlete expends his strength, not for results, but for the joy of the exercise.

Braine's mind found pleasure in forming and directing difficult schemes, and his self-love was gratified by the recognition of himself as the master mind among the strong men of finance with whom he allied himself in these schemes.

There was another reason for his continued activity in affairs. He saw in such activity vast opportunities to impress himself upon a rapidly developing country, and thus to forward his political ambition, which boldly grasped at the highest things, just as in finance he never suffered the magnitude or difficulty of any undertaking to appal him.

"We shall keep the cottage for our residence, dear," he said to Helen a few months after the events already related, "but we must live mainly in New York now. My business enterprises require it. You shall have such quarters as you want there, but I should like to keep the cottage just as it is, with a servant always in charge. It will be pleasant for us now and then to come back here for a little rest, and a little quiet love-making. Will it not?"

And so it was arranged. Braine retained control of the *Enterprise*, and even actively directed it, wherever he might be. No matter how absorbingly engaged he might become in any of his great enterprises, he found time each day to communicate by telegraph with the newspaper office and by crisp, brief commands to determine the character of every issue.

He still retained Thebes as his legal residence, and it was expected that he would represent the Thebes district in Congress, but to the surprise of every one, he chose to have himself elected to the State Legislature instead.

There his activity was ceaseless. He mastered every detail of information concerning the State, so perfectly that he could, and often did, instruct members from distant quarters concerning affairs in their own districts, about which their information was confidently inexact.

He carefully avoided accepting the leadership of his party, which might have been his for the taking, and before the session was over he was said to have won the personal friendship of every man in the Legislature.

At the next election he declined to be a candidate, and put up Mose Harbell instead. The nomination created general surprise at first, and a general laugh when surprise and incredulity had subsided; but Braine took care that his "genial" local editor should be elected.

He made himself very active in the State General Committee of his party also, though he was not a member of that body. He contributed largely to the Campaign fund, and took great pains to keep himself well informed as to the state of the canvass in every district in which there was any chance of success for his party. Whenever news came that the chance was slender in any district, Braine opened a confidential correspondence—usually conducted by Mose Harbell—with the local political leader of that district, and it was almost uniformly the case that the prospect of success in the district rapidly improved from the moment Braine's attention was directed to it.

The result of the election was a cause of general astonishment. The opposing party, which had long been in the ascendant, had carried the State ticket by about its customary majority, but the Legislature elected held—for the first time in many years—a good working majority for Braine's party, to the surprise of everybody in the State except Braine himself. He had expected precisely that result. Perhaps his anticipations had been stimulated by his carefully directed efforts to secure their fulfilment.

The fact that a United States Senator was to be chosen by this Legislature gave peculiar interest to the event. The senator whose place was to be filled had expected to be re-elected without opposition. He had made a secure bargain for re-election with the leaders of his party. But his party, being unexpectedly in the minority, was of course, unable to fulfil the contract.

The stir created by the unforeseen situation was very great. The several prominent men of the party were named one after another for the high place, and the newspapers by their advocacy of local "favorite sons" soon made the contest between them a very heated one.

Braine wrote with extreme courtesy of each of them in his newspaper, favoring none in particular, but daily pointing out the necessity of uniting upon some man who could command the hearty approval of the entire party, and emphasizing the apparent impossibility of such a union in behalf of any of those who had been named.

Mose Harbell held his peace, perhaps because he was equally impressed with the exceeding "geniality" of all the candidates.

Braine pleaded strongly for harmony in the interest of the party, and particularly for the selection of some rising man of ability, whose age had not deprived him of the energy necessary to make his ability felt at Washington.

When the Legislature assembled it was found that an extraordinarily large number of the members on the majority side were not positively pledged to any candidate for the caucus nomination, beyond the first two or three ballots, and a careful canvass showed that on the first ballot at least six candidates would be voted for, no one of whom would receive more than one fourth of the total vote.

Mose Harbell, of course, knew all the "genial" men about him in the Legislature and all of them knew Mose—mainly as a joke. Mose entered the caucus, pledged, for the first two ballots, to the least likely candidate on the list. He made his first speech in advocacy of that candidate's election, emphasizing the "geniality" of the man, and telling some stories of his own peculiar manufacture in illustration of it. With three others he voted for that man.

The first ballot in the caucus showed six candidates voted for and no election. The second ballot showed six candidates voted for and no election.

When the third ballot was ordered, Mose Harbell untwisted his long legs, removed his feet from the desk to the floor, and rose in his place to make a very brief speech.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "it is evident that we cannot nominate any of the gentlemen for whom we have been voting. Why should we not nominate the man who best represents the intelligence and integrity of the party, the man to whose earnest devotion in the late election the party owes its opportunity to elect a senator? I, for one, shall vote on this ballot for Edgar Braine!"

It will be observed that the style of this speech was wholly unlike the usual literary methods of Mose Harbell. Perhaps that was sufficiently accounted for by the fact that the slip of paper from which Mose had committed it to memory, was in the handwriting of—his master.

The burst of applause that greeted the speech, seemed to indicate that a large proportion of the members present shared Mose's view of the situation, and the third ballot showed three candidates voted for, with Edgar Braine's name leading, and within two of a majority.

On the fourth ballot, Braine was nominated amid a roar of applause.

It had all been done precisely as the editor of the *Enterprise* had planned that it should be done.

That night Edgar incidentally mentioned to Helen that she was to be the wife of a United States Senator, at the next session of Congress, and so would have only one more winter to pass in New York.

XIX.

[From Helen's Diary.]

Washington, 18—. We have been here three weeks to-day. The entire time has been occupied in settling and furnishing the house. In the meantime we have been stopping at the Arlington. We are finally settled, and have been in the house now for a week.

It all seems a glorious dream. I believe that there is no home in Washington so beautiful as ours. It is beyond everything I have ever dreamed of.

The first night we stayed here, I reviewed all our married life. Saturday night, after I went to bed, I lay there thinking of all that has come and gone in this dear time. First, our weeks in New York, where a new life opened for me. Then, our return to Thebes, where we had both known poverty, and a stern necessity for management. There has since been no such stern necessity.

After our first return, things seemed to develop in so gradual and natural a manner, that only Saturday night as I lay in bed, comparing the rose draperies, the shaded light, the faint perfume and luxurious room, with a little bedroom far away, and its cretonne curtains, its ordinary little lamp, its moderate comfort, I felt wonder and amazement, and—what? Regret? I do not know. Perhaps, for some one shared that little ordinary room with me. Some one I loved. And as I thought, I half turned, to find myself quite alone—it was no longer "the thing" to share my room. Yes, I think it was regret that I felt.

He was very near—only a little corridor between, but perhaps he was asleep, and if he slept I could not put my hand on him and feel comfort in the touch. Yes, I think it was regret.

With the new house, a new custom had been inaugurated. A custom of division. I will admit the superiority of the custom, but not its capacity to satisfy. Edgar had said: "I think it best, dear, that my apartment should be distinct from your own, for the sake of your comfort. I come in at all hours of the night, and must necessarily disturb you, and it makes me feel constantly guilty."

I think I cannot convey the hurt that this gave me, though I knew, absolutely, that this suggestion was prompted by his great love for me, and so we fell to speaking of "your room" and "my room."

I have not known one less caress, one less expression of his love, for this being so, but—it is "your room" and "my room" for all that. I shall become accustomed to it, and prefer it so—Gladys says I will. I shall become used to it of course. It is not quite so strange to me even now, but that Saturday night it was very new—and very sad; I felt then that it would never be anything else. It is hard to become used to speaking of things, or thinking of them as other than *ours*. When the material things of our lives become separate, it seems to break the unity of the intangible things—the thoughts that are mutual; the *spontaneity* of emotion, affection. Perhaps it will not seem so after a time, but it is hard to think otherwise now.

For some reason, I have a dread of a time when I shall *no longer* find the new way strange and—sad. I think of the nights in the cottage, when one of us happened to be wakeful, restless. The other always knew it instinctively, and awoke. Then, there were few troubles or causes of wakefulness that a touch of the hand, or a tone of the voice, from the other, could not banish. Then, we could always divine, without any awkward efforts to discover, if the one was happier without the other's consideration—now it is different. I should experience almost as strange a sensation in entering his room, as I should have felt before we were married. I tried it last night. I heard him come in after one. I sit up in my room if he is late, for I cannot sleep and know that he is not safe; I sit in my own room that he may not know that I wait. It would worry him, did he know.

The other night he opened my door softly, thinking me asleep, and just intending to look at me, and instead of being asleep, I was sitting by the fire, thinking of him. He seemed startled to find the room lighted, and coming to the fire and taking my hands in his, said in a tone of anxiety: "Why, dearest! You *should* not wait for me like this. If I feel that you do, I shall be unable to attend to business properly after midnight, for thinking of you here, awake, waiting wearily for me, alone."

He said it with so much of anxiety and pain in his face and voice that it suddenly filled me with a great longing to sob in his arms, but it was too late to sob then—at least in his arms, and he looked too tired and worn.

Presently, he said good night, and I sat alone—he left me that I might go at once to sleep. I decided that he should not have any anxiety of that kind again; so now I go to bed—and lie awake until I hear him come up the stairs.

He always opens the door, and I can always tell by the light from the hall, whether he is very weary, or would like to talk to me. He cannot tell from the door whether I am asleep or not, if I am quiet. If he looks very tired, and as though he had started for his room, I say nothing. If not—I say, "I am awake, dearest."

He is very anxious to have me work into the social life of the city. I understand things far better than I did a few years ago, when we took the New York trip. Far differently! I know that society in Washington means business. I am incapable of understanding the business, but I can learn certain means by which it is carried on.

I have been impressed more and more every day of my life with Edgar's greatness and my own inferiority. And every day of my life, I have taken a new resolution to be with him in his greatness, if not of his greatness.

I do not think I care much for his greatness, but for him instead—and he and greatness are inseparable. I remember involuntarily at times that night in the hotel years ago, when the feeling came over me that we had come to a fork in the road, and I must decide whether to go alone, or with him.

The time is past when I must make such a decision, but now I must keep up with him *in* the road we travel together. He must not have to wait for me—and he would not go on without me—and I know that he could not live unless he went on.

He has planned many things for the coming season in which I must not fail him. I can assist him by social success. The season is still weeks in the future. Things are at a standstill just now, socially. I have a terrible fear that I *must* fail him. This fear consumes me, agonizes me. I dare not think too much about such a possibility—until I have to. I may not have to. Just now I am torn with anxiety.

XX.

"Come in,"—Helen turns and faces her dressing room door as Braine enters.

"Not abed yet?" he says with a smile, taking her face between his hands, with the old, familiar action.

She puts her hands on his shoulders, and looks intently into his eyes, as he drops on his knees by the side of her chair. Longing, worship, anxiety, hesitancy are in her face. Braine smiles at her, and says in interrogation of her steady scrutiny:

"Yes, what is it?"

Her hands slip from his shoulders to her lap, where he clasps his own gently over them. She smiles at him a little wistfully and says nothing.

Braine is the lover in every glance, every gesture and attitude at these moments when they two are alone. Indeed, his love for her seems to have gained in intensity.

They have been in the Washington house for many weeks. Braine has been absorbingly occupied with schemes of business and politics every moment, save one like this, snatched now and then, when he seems to forget the whole universe in remembering this beautiful woman.

His love finds small expression in words, but much in a caress, a radiant joy of countenance instead.

After a long study of the face of the woman gazing so steadily at the fire in front of her, he says, anxiously, with a caress of voice and hand:

"You are not well, dearest? You look a little worn to-night."

She slowly withdraws her gaze from the coals, and turns her face towards him. There is an abstraction in the action. She says in a tone that indicates that her thoughts are on something else:

"Not well? Oh yes—yes," looking back at the fire. After a while he says, still watching her face:

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. It is not in the regularity of your features, but in the soul that radiates from even the tips of your fingers," touching the white, passive hands reverently.

"What woman so made for honor and glory! In a little year or two!"

He pauses, then continues in a low, passionate tone: "In a little year or two you shall have all in your hands. Women shall envy you and men shall reverence you. This first season shall make the road to success clear and direct. This winter will decide all. If it were not for you, I should be helpless, powerless, absolutely without belief in myself or the future. My ventures, so far, have been gigantic; I do not know that I could have taken one step without your presence, and the thought of you to stimulate me, and banish all fear of failure. My schemes for the future are desperate—and I shall win."

He is quivering in every limb. There is a fierce energy in his low tones. The nervous fire of this man's nature seldom flames save in these moments, with this woman. He has spoken the last words looking confidently in her face.

She listens without making any sign. Her lips are pressed tightly together. Braine goes on in his monologue—his words spoken with a clearness of utterance which has made him remarkable in public speech, and has an awesome impressiveness about it.

"It will be *you* who will have done it all. I shall look at you, commanding the homage of these people, and think great thoughts. I shall look at you, and be able to speak them. You will be ever at my side, thinking with me; both working for a common end.

"This social and political debut means all. It is by our mutual desires—the sympathy of each in every thought of the other—our cooperation—that we shall win the fight. I thought I loved you years ago, that you were necessary to me. It was true; but I worship you now, and without you all would be over. I am appalled when I think of what this year holds for me to accomplish; it is only the knowledge that you are by me that makes it possible. I have never needed you—never can need you—as I do now, as I shall in those immediate months to come. I—"

Helen turns her face towards him. She checks him with a sudden, imperative gesture. Her face is as white as death. For a moment she does not speak. Braine grows white, too, at the expression he sees. He dares not break the silence, but waits for her to do it. Presently she says, in a low voice, with apparent effort:

"I—I have something to tell you."

She stops abruptly for a moment, then begins again, looking steadily in his face:

"I have something to tell you. I—I fear it will make a difference; that it will cause you regret, and perhaps—if you meant what you have just said—failure. I—"

She stops as though unable to continue. Braine looks at her in amazement. He sees her suffering, and involuntarily lays his hand, with a sudden, assuring movement over hers.

It seems to arouse her, and she clasps her fingers around his with a despairing little action, half imploringly. She goes on in a hurried voice, tremulous and choked now and then:

"I have tried to tell you for a long time—a week. I—I—when I remembered and thought of all that it would mean to you—of the disappointment, just now, I could not speak, but—but—but—"

She stammers with emotion and excitement, and pauses to recover herself an instant. She does not take her eyes from his face. It can have no expression that she does not see. She says convulsively, with a pitiful effort at calm and control:

"I beg of you not to let this misfortune at this time kill your love for me. Oh, I have never wanted

your love as I do now. I, too, have never known the necessity for you and your help as I do now. I —"

Braine is staring at her. She has spoken so rapidly that he could not interrupt her. He does not know what to expect. He tries to calm her panic by caresses. He says:

"Helen! Helen!"

She motions him to be quiet.

"If you reproach me, it will drive me mad. I am not to blame. Oh, I beg of you not to remember the desire I expressed long ago, and think that I have—have sacrificed your wishes—your commands, to satisfy myself. I am not to blame."

Braine takes her hands firmly between his own. She is beyond self-control, and is sobbing hysterically, but never looks away from his face. He says almost sternly:

"Be quiet, Helen. There is nothing on God's earth that you could be guilty of that I could reproach you for. Now, be perfectly calm and tell me about it. And remember that I love you."

He says it all in a very matter of fact tone, and it has an immediate effect on her. She ceases sobbing. After a moment, she says:

"You remember a conversation we had years ago, at the cottage in Thebes? You told me of the dearest wish of your heart—and said it must not be fulfilled then—"

She stops speaking. She loses no expression of his face. He says quietly:

"Yes; well?"

His voice tells nothing, but her hands are in his, and he forgets it and suddenly tightens his fingers. She says slowly, in a mechanical way:

"Yes."

She knows that he has understood. He knows by her reply that she knows it.

He puts his arms about her, and draws her gently to him—but she has seen an expression in his face that she never forgets.

XXI.

The time has passed in a whirl. Helen feels constantly dazed. She is ill; at times, terribly ill. Braine does not know it. He is with her almost constantly. His tenderness is extreme. He divines and gratifies her desires almost before she knows of them herself. Every glance, every touch, every word is a caress, and a love message. But there is the never-to-be-forgotten expression of rebellion and resignation. She has never by word or action alluded to it. He will never know that she has seen it—indeed, he is not conscious that his face has ever worn such an expression. He knows what his heart felt in the moment of disappointment, but he does not know that his emotion was expressed in his face.

He tells Helen of his plans, his work, for she seems to have a mania for "helping" him. He manufactures writing for her to do, when he accidentally discovers that it delights her to do it. At night, when he comes home late, she stands in her door as he ascends the stairs, draws him into the room, and makes him lie on the divan and tell her how things are going.

Since the first time, he has never protested against the procedure, though he feels that she is often worn out. He would never have protested but for her sake, and she seemed so uncontrollably grieved on the one occasion when he tried to reason about her late hours, that he has thought it best to indulge her.

He thinks it is an intense interest and desire to be pushing things with him which prompts her. He does not know that she has hours of madness over the thought that in the months to come, she will be forced out of his life, because of his hurry and her necessity—to be passive in it all; that she is a monomaniac on the subject; that she is afraid of the responsibility of his failure; that she has grown to be a madwoman on the subject of "interest."

She has but one thought: that she must appear interested in everything concerning him, in order to keep her place in his life. He does not know that night after night, hour after hour, as she sits with her face eager, questioning, offering suggestions with a woman's quick intelligence, which he accepts with readiness and gladness, and which are often of practical service to him, she is suffering tortures.

He plans a speech and tells her, as she insists, the arguments on either side, and the value of her interpolations amaze him. He is a logical man; she, a woman of intuitive perceptions only. The combination is capable of accomplishing much.

Braine finds himself deferring to her judgment in the smallest thing. He is amazed at his sudden dependence on her. She has developed a quality which would never have been developed under

other circumstances, and the strain is terrible in its effects upon her. She is frantic with the necessity she feels for effort of some kind in his behalf.

She works like a demon when he is not present, and is "interested" to the verge of insanity when he is near.

He knows nothing of her state, mental or physical. He has no conception of her suffering. He is constantly solicitous about her health, and she is always "Well; perfectly well!"

Gladys Grayson is now in a whirl of social excitement. She brings to the Braine mansion all the news of society's doings. Helen goes out only in her carriage.

Once, Mr. Everet calls. She is seized with an aversion to seeing him, and sends word that she is engaged. Many other people call. She seldom sees any of them. Few have other than a vague idea of the reason. They have heard from Gladys and some others, of her exquisite charm and beauty, but forget about her in the attending to her husband.

Braine's first great effort in the Senate was a magnificent one. All that day Helen walked the floor of her room, saying to herself: "If he fails, I am to blame. If he fails, I am to blame."

When Braine came home she was temporarily a lunatic, and his enthusiasm of success was forgotten in an agony of apprehension for her safety. When she finally understood that he had suddenly become of interest to thousands of people, she accepted the triumph almost passively, the strain for days had been so great.

She now thinks constantly of the time she is losing. She thinks with terror of being left in the rush, and finally—not of Braine stopping for her, but of his rushing on without her.

Braine himself has become sternly calm—to all but his wife, the only person who understands him. To her the atmosphere is electric. She has constantly in her ears the whirr of the wheels of the political machinery. Braine is lovingly impatient for her to share it all, to be in it all, and says with an eager smile, full of tender happiness:

"When this is over, dearest, and I can have you with me in all this!"

And she smiles back as eagerly and says:

"Yes, when this is over!" And sometimes her hands are clasped beneath the table where he sits to write. She thinks constantly:

"I must keep up. I must impress him with my strength. I must make him feel that I am to be depended on; I must lose none of my power to charm; for fear my face grow unattractive, I must cultivate my mind,"—and her face is the face of a seraph.

Then she falls to planning how the child shall be effaced so that in these years of endeavor that are to come, Braine may find nothing to impede him, nothing to annoy him. If her child should weary him, would not the responsibility be hers, and would he not grow to look upon her with aversion?

She no longer thinks of the child as his, or "ours," but as "mine." It is a responsibility that she alone must bear. He must never find it a burden. She plans constantly how she shall accomplish this, and yet do all her duty to the child. She thinks she will not love it. It will only be hers. What is there to recommend it? No, she will not love it, therefore she must be over-careful in the matter of duty towards it. She will instil into it all those traits of character and qualities that Braine loves and admires most, if she can. She will keep it from its father's knowledge as much as possible; as soon as practicable, she will send it away to school, that Edgar may forget it as nearly as may be, until some day, perhaps, when the hurry and anxiety are past, and that time has come when he can pause, she will be able to bring the child—man or woman, if it must be years from now—before him, and not be ashamed of her work, and perhaps it will find favor in his eyes. Perhaps the old feeling will come back, when he has nothing else to think about, and he will even love the child a little because it is hers. She has longed so to love it, and *cannot*—because it is only hers.

Braine never hears a complaint, nor sees an expression of pain or suffering on her face. He knows nothing of her monstrous, morbid imaginings, and cannot set things right. He only says eagerly:

"When it is over!" And she responds in the same tone:

"Yes, when it is over," and thinks:

"Then I must catch up. Then I must make up this lost time. I must not be left; I must not be left!" She sobs away the night on her knees.

The months have rushed by. The time is long enough for the suffering—very short for so many agonies to be crowded into. Braine loves her as he has never loved her before. Sometimes he experiences a momentary emotion of gladness and desire for this child—but not often.

He seldom thinks of all that her condition means; and sometimes almost forgets that anything unaccustomed is or will be,—made forgetful by Helen's beauty and charm and brightness. He seldom thinks of her condition save as a cause that has had the effect to make him love her more.

And so, the winter wears away—and Helen with it.

XXII.

Braine's carriage stops at the door, and he gets out and runs hurriedly up the steps. It is three o'clock, and at a quarter past he has an appointment. He has come home for important papers which he had forgotten.

As he enters the door, Dobson says with some little excitement in his tone:

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Braine. Mrs.—"

"Mrs. Braine?" Edgar suddenly takes the words out of his mouth. He remembers that he did not see Helen in the morning, and that when he went to her door, her maid said she was sleeping.

Dobson replies apologetically and with anxiety:

"She would not let us send for you—"

Braine springs up the stairs. He is suddenly seized with a nervous trembling, and stands for a moment in the hall to recover himself. He opens Helen's door. She lies on the divan, and Susanne, her maid, is moving quietly about the room, adjusting things.

At one of the windows a strange woman sits reading unconcernedly. Helen is apparently asleep; but when he enters, she opens her eyes and makes a quick attempt to get off the divan.

The two women leave the room, and Helen holds out her hand with a smile, and says eagerly:

"Well, how are things going?"

She is deathly pale, and even while she speaks, there is anguish in her face, though she controls her voice perfectly. Even in the supreme moment she will try to be "interested."

Braine is surprised, relieved. He does not know just what he expected, but he knows that he experiences an almost terrible relief. Helen! her usual lovely, eager, smiling self. Suddenly she sways a little, and Braine throws his arms about her. He says anxiously:

"You are ill. Why did you not send for me, Helen?"

She certainly is ill; so ill that her smile is ghastly, but she is conscious of having done her duty, and of having appeared "interested."

She sits down upon the divan, and Braine sits beside her with his arms about her. She replies as carelessly as the situation permits:

"Oh, no, I'm not ill—that is, nothing special is the matter, you know. There is no need to take you from the Senate."

Braine replies almost sternly:

"If you have even a headache it is sufficient to 'take me from the Senate.' You have been suffering all day, and have not given me the dear privilege of being near to help you bear it. It hurts me. It suggests a lack of—of faith in my sympathy—"

She puts her hand over his mouth. Though her words do not indicate it, her expression is one of a happy sort of despair. She would not ask for such an expression of love as this, but it is very dear, very grateful to her, just now. It was not expected; not that he is ever other than tender and loving, but she finds herself surprised and grateful for every expression of his love. She does not know why she no longer expects it, or why it is a surprise, but it is so. She catches her breath softly, but does not indicate her emotion in any other way. She has an idea that he will be impressed with her weakness and his responsibility if she shows him how much this means to her. She only says carelessly:

"Yes, I know, but there was nothing the matter, you see. Mrs. Case is here because Susanne thought she ought to have a few weeks in which to get accustomed to the house—"

"A few weeks—I don't know, Helen—" He looks anxious and doubtful. She says quickly:

"Yes, yes, Ed. A—few weeks—I know," decisively and encouragingly. She has not been honest with him as to the time of her coming peril. She has had one wild desire to have him away, out of town, anywhere, that he may not be worried or annoyed by her; that the approach of the crisis may not interrupt his work.

Her tone reassures him, and he remembers his appointment, and that he will be late. He says, tenderly:

"I will be home soon, dear. I have an appointment with Grayson now, but will come home as soon as we are through."

She nods cheerfully, and says:

"All right! don't neglect anything for me, Ed—it is not necessary. Isn't to-night the affair at Dalget's?"

"Yes, but I'm not going."

She lays her hand on his arm appealingly:

"Go, Ed. Please go. I want you to. I—"

Suddenly she stops. Braine thinks, by the expression of her face that she is dying, it is so drawn and old, in a moment. She draws a long, quivering sigh of agony. Her fingers clutch his arm convulsively. She makes no sound, not the least moan, nothing but that sigh that goes to his heart.

Braine watches her, holding his breath. She has slipped to her knees, and is clinging with the grip of a strong man to him. He is panic stricken, horrified, and cries in an awful voice:

"Helen—Helen!" And she lies limp and white in his arms. He is quivering in every limb. He covers her moist hand with kisses. There are tears in his eyes, and he cries aloud with a groan: "Great God!"

Helen hears him and opens her eyes. She smiles dreamily, and makes a weak little movement to touch his face. She says in a faint, comfortable voice:

"It's over now, Ed. Go to Grayson."

His face grows harsh, and he says in a sudden fury:

"Damn Grayson!"

She smiles. There is a certain comfort in that ebullition. She lies on the divan, and Braine wanders around the room, aimlessly. The languor she feels is possessing him almost. He is oppressed with a sense of impending disaster and his utter helplessness in face of it.

The situation seems to become actual to him for the first time. He feels some frantic desire to avert this horrible something that must happen. He feels suddenly like a weak, helpless child, and is seized with a desire to throw himself at her feet, and weep and be comforted.

In another moment, he feels like a great, strong man, with a desire to throw his arms about her, and prove his power to avert every agony of hers. The next moment he is on his knees beside her, imploring forgiveness in an incoherent, frenzied way, for this guilt that suddenly oppresses him! He feels like a criminal, and keeps saying brokenly:

"Oh Helen, forgive me! forgive me!"

She is half asleep, and opens her eyes to smile at him. She says, dreamily:

"I—I never loved you as I do now. If it had not been for your wretchedness, I could have exulted in that agony."

Braine covers her hands with kisses. He dares not kiss her face. She looks like a beautiful white saint. He touches her hands reverently. He draws the folds of her gown closer about her.

Presently she says:

"Ask Mrs. Case to come here. You go down-stairs now, if you won't go out. I will call you if I want you."

He protests, but resistance seems to excite her, and he obeys. He does not go down-stairs, however. He stays in the corridor just outside her door. For hours he walks tirelessly back and forth. Once in a while he hears that terrible sigh of suffering, and he leans heavily against the wall. The sweat springs out on his forehead in great drops. His suffering seems, for the moment, as terrible as hers. Once he groans aloud, and at once remembers that she has not made the faintest moan, and says between his teeth:

"Good God! A man could not endure that."

The nurse comes to the door now and then, sometimes calling him in, and then he kneels by the still, white woman, who gives his hands little weak, responsive pressures, and smiles at him. He remains until she motions him away, imperatively.

Night has settled. The lights are ablaze through the house. Dobson has spoken to him, and said that dinner was ready, and he has not heard him. He walks back and forth, back and forth, in the corridor. The heavy sighs sob more frequently through the half open door. Once Mrs. Case comes and tells him to send for the physician, and he gives the order, incoherently saying:

"Dr. Frame, and tell him to bring some more with him."

At this, Mrs. Case smiles quietly. The time passes fitfully. He looks at his watch once, and it is 8:30, and all is quiet in Helen's room.

In what seems to him but the next moment, he hears her make some moaning exclamation, and a slight rustling and moving about occurs. The agony lasts for what he thinks is three quarters of an hour, but when he looks at his watch again, it is only 8:40.

Helen's dog comes to the foot of the stairs, and looks up, and Braine leans over the balusters, and looks down at it. Once, he whispers down to it, as though it were a human being:

"It's terrible, isn't it?" and walks on, back and forth, through the hall again.

The physician came an hour ago. Braine knows that the nurse has been to her dinner, and feels a sudden violent disgust and aversion for her that she can eat.

Dr. Frame did not bring "some more," but after a time he comes into the dressing-room, where Braine now is, and sends for a colleague. Braine turns pale, but asks no questions, as he gives the order.

How the time drags! He pauses now and then in his walk, and leans weakly against something. He suddenly realizes that his brows are drawn, and his forehead scowled, and his hands clenched, and his teeth set. He is made conscious of it by hearing himself groan aloud, and then he relaxes for an instant until he hears a sound in the next room, again, and he finds himself experiencing so sharp an agony that he throws himself on the divan with his head in the cushions where she has lain.

He is in her dressing-room now and there is an odor of her presence in all the atmosphere. Her gown lies on a chair; in front of the dressing table lies a twisted handkerchief that tells the story of a moment of agony. He looks about at these things, and says under his breath:

"Oh, my God!"

The other physician has been in the next room for a long time now. Braine looks at his watch. It is past three. He tries to think how long this has lasted. He cannot remember whether it was to-day or yesterday that he came in here.

He stands in a half-daze in the middle of the floor, trying to recollect when. Suddenly an unearthly shriek comes from the next room. He stiffens like a wooden man. He puts his hands to his throat, and makes a peculiar metallic sound.

There is silence in the next room. He stands staring at the closed door. He thinks nothing. In a moment he hears another scream that causes his heart to give one wild bound, and then to seem pulseless. The silence in the room is intense. He stares fixedly at the door. The stillness is terrible. Gradually he becomes impressed that the woman—Helen, his wife, is dead.

He does not move. His mind begins to work. He sees a face like the dawn, a primrose face, with eyes as clear and untroubled as a child's; her hair a sunny glory in a little dismal room.

He feels the touch of a cool, soft hand, a touch as comfortable and calm as that of an angel's wing. Then comes to him the memory of a time when the touch of that hand thrilled him as no other touch on earth or in heaven could do; of the time when the sweet, loving girl became a glowing woman, intoxicating him, making him drunk with joy: and he again experiences that first sensation of proprietorship and possession.

And suddenly there appears to him the figure of a woman with a ghastly, drawn face, a face that he does not know, with staring eyes that gleam glassily, and accuse. He feels the touch of a rigid hand, cold and unresponsive. His eyes seem starting from his head.

The door opens, and one of the physicians stands looking at him in a startled way. There is something frightful in this man, with clenched hands, the veins like whip cords on his neck and forehead, and his ghastly face.

Braine says in a strange voice:

"Helen—"

"Lives; the child is dead."

XXIII.

[From Helen's Diary.]

In the mountains near Mauch Chunk, August, 18—. This is the first time for months I have felt like writing. We have been here since June. After my illness I had a great longing to get away, away, away; anywhere out of the excitement, away from the furniture, the servants, the surroundings that seemed to have become so hateful to me that if I looked upon them I must shriek. It seemed as though I should never be strong enough to go.

Edgar was as anxious to get away with me as I was to go. A great change has taken place in him. He has ever been good and thoughtful, but it is impossible to describe the lengths to which his affection drives him now. If his business has been pressing, these last months must have been disastrous to him, for he has hardly left my side for an hour. There is a new expression in his eyes when he looks at me. He seems to feel as if he were guilty of some terrible crime against me, and to be ever trying to expiate it. Sometimes this amuses me a little, but his earnestness makes me almost feel unhappy at times.

Once in a while, if we have been sitting quietly alone, he will look at me silently for a time, and then say with almost a groan:

"Oh, if you only knew, Helen! If you only knew all that I suffered in those weeks!"

I was very ill for a long time. He seems hardly to realize that I am again well and safe. I would never dare let him know the agony of mind as well as body, that I endured so long.

I feel differently, too, about some things. I think that whatever regret Edgar felt at first, and before my confinement, he suffered a keen disappointment and unhappiness at the loss of the child. He has made but one allusion to it, but he betrayed his deep feeling then, unconsciously.

It is strange; but after all my longing for the child, before it became a longing likely to be gratified, the relief that I experienced when I knew that I had none is indescribable.

At first I would burst out sobbing for very joy and relief. I cannot understand my feeling. I sometimes think if circumstances had been different, and Edgar had had the same emotions in regard to it that he has now, perhaps I should have felt differently. I am impressed, for some reason, that this aversion I have is abnormal. But it is so strong that it has decided one thing: I have had my last child. Nothing on earth can ever bring back the old feeling. That is something for which women in my position have no time. The horrible feeling of lost time and opportunity that I experienced in those months will never be forgotten. I will never live through it again. If I ever find it likely to become a necessity, I will kill myself at the outset, without a moment's hesitation. So this is settled for ever and ever.

I intimated as much to Edgar, involuntarily, the other night, and I think he felt a little hurt. I regretted that I had betrayed the feeling when I saw that it made him unhappy. I thought he would feel as I did about it. I presume he does, in some degree. I made some remark to the effect that people in our position could not afford to lose time in that way, and he said:

"But, dear, what would become of the people if all thought so?"

I told him that there were plenty whose talents lay principally in that direction, and that that part of life's work should be apportioned to them, and strictly confined to the lesser people.

He began a little argument, but saw that it did not please me, and changed the subject. But he said something that impressed me with its truth, for all that.

He said something to the effect that the "industry" was already confined too strictly to "lesser people;" that what the country needed to save it was high-bred, fine and *greater* fathers and mothers, instead of *lesser*; that if there was ever an "industry" that *should* be confined to the superior of the land, it was child-rearing. Perhaps this is so—I felt so too, once, and determined to do a duty in this direction that would be a loved duty. It is different now. It will never happen again—and I live through it. The suffering is not what I flinch from. I'm not cowardly. It is not that. But *it will never happen again*, if there is a means on earth to prevent it, even though the means be suicide.

I wonder if my character is degenerating? Am I as good a woman as I was when I married Edgar? I do not know. I only know how I feel now, and it is not so comfortable to feel in that way as to feel in the old way. Am I deteriorating? If so, what is the cause?

XXIV.

The Braines have been back in Washington for a month. Politics recalled Braine, and Braine recalled Helen. When she began to think of returning to the Washington house where she had endured one year of absolute wretchedness as an initiation, she was overwhelmed with distaste for the move, but she resolved to keep her repugnance to herself, and fight the feeling down.

She wondered once if she had rather return to the cottage in Thebes, but dismissed the idea quickly and impatiently. She knew that the meagre, provincial life would be intolerable to her now. She wanted the luxuries of the Washington house, but shrank from the thought of having to go thither to find them. She made up her mind to the inevitable, however, and they returned as late as business would allow.

The night of her return when she first entered the house she felt faint and weak for a moment, as a host of wretched memories arose, connected with every portion of the place. But she brought her will to bear, and Braine did not notice her distress.

He seemed affected differently. He seemed almost like a boy in his enthusiasm over their return, and went from room to room, showing her certain changes he had made surreptitiously during the summer for her surprise.

He pauses in the library, and suddenly takes Helen in his arms. He says:

"I cannot analyze the feeling that I experience; the peculiar gladness I have at returning here with you well and happy. Though I suffered agony in sympathy with the suffering you endured here, the experience seems to have endeared the place to me. You will never know what your

counsel and help during those months meant to me. Our achievements shall now begin in earnest. Oh, Helen, Helen, the joy of striving and accomplishing for you is the dearest one of my life. To see you honored and admired and envied, and to know it comes through my exertions will be my supreme happiness."

"Am I not your supreme happiness?"

"Yes, and therefore less than all for you would mean supreme wretchedness for me."

There has been a wistful note in his voice, and he is tender beyond all imagining. They seem very near to each other this night of their return, and this new marriage somehow lessens Helen's feeling of disquietude, and reassures her. She finds herself looking forward with a certain delight and satisfaction to this winter when she will establish her social supremacy, that she may stand beside this man who is just becoming supreme in another field, and seem worthy to share some of the honors accorded him.

They have sat below by the library fire, far into the night. They have discussed the situation. They have planned the details of the campaign, and their confidence in each other, and the feeling of each that the advancement of the other is in his or her hands, has already won the fight.

The servants are in bed; the silence of the great house has not been broken for hours, save by the low, earnest, wooing tones of the man and woman in the soft light of the rare room. The woman in a half-dream of delight, as rosy visions of the future are conjured up by the man whose voice of the lover always intoxicates her senses; a dainty woman, a regal woman, a woman whose least motion suggests the patrician, morally, mentally, physically; a woman subtle in her frankness and simplicity, dignified in her naïveté; a woman perfectly matched with the man. And he, a man whose very presence suggests power and grace of mind; a temperament wherein reverence predominates, if audacity dominates; a man who must lend good, even to the worst, and make the worst seem not tolerable, but acceptable. And none in looking on him can decide whether his mind is responsible for his charming person, or the reverse.

All the room is in shadow save where they two sit, and as he takes the soft, shaded light in his hands, and conducts the woman to her door, my imagination plays a sudden trick; the room is one of statelier times, and one becomes a "bold, brave knight," the other one, "my lady."

XXV.

"Do you see Bogart and Mrs. Stevens?"

Gladys Grayson drops the question into Helen's ear as she stands listlessly leaning against the conservatory entrance.

Everet is looking away for the moment. Gladys has come up with Dalzel, the young congressman.

Helen looks at her inquiringly:

"Bogart and Mrs. Stevens? Where?"

Mrs. Grayson gives a silvery little laugh, and just lifts her eyebrows.

"Everywhere," with a comprehensive wave of her pretty hand.

Everet and Dalzel are talking together. Helen looks a little bewildered, and Mrs. Grayson looks a little amused, and a good deal contemptuous—or shocked, perhaps. She nods towards the conservatory, and at the moment a man and woman come from the shadow of a palm, towards the quartette, engrossed in conversation—at least, Bogart is. Mrs. Stevens is engrossed in looking charming. Gladys continues in little spasmodic asides:

"Every one in the room—" they are nearer, and she lowers her voice, "is talking about it. It is disgraceful."

"What?"

"Why, the very apparent *affaire* between them."

Helen stares—then looks at Mrs. Stevens. Gladys says under her breath, between her teeth:

"Don't stare at her in that way, you goose. She will come over here in a minute, and ask if the enamel on her neck is chipping."

Helen lowers her eyes. Gladys continues:

"Things are so *very* apparent, you know."

Mrs. Stevens is coming leisurely toward them. "There is a story of a little dinner." Mrs. Stevens is here. Gladys bows with her accustomed hauteur, with which she meets every one but the initiated, and without the suspicion of discourtesy in her manner, turns away on Dalzel's arm.

Mrs. Stevens begins to talk volubly to Helen and Everet. Helen is disconcerted. She has none of the studied, courteous rudeness that is her friend's stock-in-trade, with which to carry off a thing

of this kind gracefully. She replies a little helplessly to Mrs. Stevens, and moves away as quickly as she can.

Mrs. Stevens perceives the slight—it amuses her a little. Later, when she is alone with Bogart, she mentions it, and remarks that "these *ingénues* try one's patience terribly."

Bogart says "Yes;" and thinks, "but they are delicious to teach."

Everet seldom leaves Helen's side. When he is not with her, he is watching her. The house is too crowded for comfort, and Helen has not had enough experience yet to enjoy it. She always feels a little bewildered after one o'clock, and remarks to Everet as he stands by her while she leans back in a chair, wearily, that she always feels as though she ought to be in bed after eleven. She laughs, a sweet, excited little laugh as she looks up at him. He wonders how long so charming a child will retain her naïveté in such an atmosphere.

She delights him. There is a simplicity about her manner and expression that fascinates him—and yet she is a polished woman of the world. She is surely that, but the difference between herself and other women of the world is—that she is not a worldly woman.

Once, during the evening, Braine is near her, and says with suppressed elation:

"You are charming to-night, Helen. I have never seen you more beautiful. Everet is strongly attracted."

Helen looks up quickly. She says with a little deprecation in her tone, and a little entreaty in her eyes;

"He only admires me as he does other nice looking women, Ed. Indeed, you need not mind. I will keep out of his way, if you don't like it."

Braine listens at first in surprise, then bursts into a low, happy laugh. He covertly presses her hand, and says, as he moves away to make room for Everet, who is coming with an ice for Helen:

"I don't mind, I assure you. You needn't take pains to keep out of his way. I am perfectly satisfied with my wife. I am delighted that this man is so interested as he is—only be cautious, dear; don't let it be too obvious to others—you understand?"

Helen does not understand, but Everet is at her side, and she has to turn to him, and say something, or listen to him.

Her mind runs on Braine's few words, and they trouble her. While she answers the questions of this one and that, and makes trite, witty, serious, politic, or straightforward little speeches, as one case or another demands, she is turning over Braine's words in her mind.

Perhaps Everet is one who can be of service to Edgar, and he thinks it as well for her to be civil. She is a little piqued at his last words—"be cautious, don't let it be too apparent to others—" as though she were likely to permit an aggression on Everet's part more quickly in private than she would in public. It wounds her a little that he should have said so thoughtless a thing. It would be terrible if he *thought* so *horrible* a thing.

As she sees Braine from time to time in the crowd, she notices that the worried, anxious expression she has noted for the last week, is no longer on his face. He is charming to-night. His personality has never so strongly impressed her, or apparently other people either.

Everet notices how her glance follows Braine's flexile figure, that is full of strength and dignity, and once, remarks with a smile, and a little amusement in his tone:

"You are a great admirer of your husband?"

She looks up at him, and says quite innocently,

"I love him."

Everet's smile becomes one of approval, almost of tenderness.

At last she is near Braine again, and says a little wistfully:

"May we not go home soon?"

He looks at the flushed, weary face, beautiful in its ennui and excitement, and says:

"At once if you wish it," and suddenly the desire possesses him to have her in the carriage, alone, quite to himself, in his arms, and he seems a little impatient while Everet folds her wrap about her, and is asking which is her "day."

Helen says with an airy little informality that she has no day for her friends—the *days* are theirs.

As they step out into the cold air, Braine draws Helen's furs still closer about her throat. There is a tenderness and passion in his action that she has missed these last weeks. It delights her, and causes the hot blood to surge over her face and neck, leaving her in a quivering little ecstasy, for a moment after she is in the carriage.

Braine, standing outside, is pushing her gown about her, and pulling the rug over her lap as he directs the coachman. And Helen is saying in husky little trebles, so that only he hears:

"Ed.—Ed."

Some one at this moment runs down the steps to say some nearly forgotten thing to Braine, and as he talks he is acknowledging Helen's little appeals by covert pressure of the hand that is inside the coupé. Finally he gets in, and closes the door.

As they roll away, Braine draws her into his arms. It seems to both that they have been waiting all night for this moment. After a time, Braine says:

"I have never loved you more than at this moment. I believe until to-night I have never fully realized how magnificent you are. You are not where you belong. You are not where you shall be. I want to see you there," nodding his head in the direction of the White House.

Helen does not understand, but she is glad.

He is excited. Every fibre of his being is responsive. He holds her hand in his, and kisses it repeatedly, passionately. She laughs in a nervous, hysterical way, and leans her head against him. She half sobs:

"I want to be here, Ed. This satisfies me."

He presses her to him and answers:

"I am not satisfied *for* you. A little patience, and you shall have all. There is nothing that we cannot accomplish together. I am ambitious. There is no reason why I should not be. Ambition is a worthy sentiment. Yes, I am ambitious for myself, but it whets my appetite for the great things of earth, when I see you as you have been to-night, when I hold you as I do now. Sometimes it half angers me when I see you lacking appreciation of yourself. You do not know your own value, child; other people know it. You could be a power, if you would. You must. I—"

He leans back to look at her. He has imparted something of his enthusiasm and intensity to her, and her fingers play nervously with the cords of her cloak. Her eyes gleam in the dusk.

Braine notes every little detail about her—how the flash from an electric light makes the tiara in her hair sparkle; how white her hands look as they lie buried in the fur of the rug; how the little tendrils of hair cling to her neck. He thinks vehemently: "How I love this woman! How I love this woman!"

They stop in front of the house, and they go silently up the steps. Both are thinking. Woollet opens the door for them, making a vain endeavor to appear dignified and wide awake. But it is sufficiently evident that he has been asleep in the hall.

Helen goes directly up the stairs, and Braine passes on to the library, saying:

"I have a little work to do—I will be up in five minutes—wait for me."

Susanne is asleep with her head on the dressing-table. Helen says kindly, as the little, plump thing makes an effort to wake up:

"Go to bed, child. I will look after myself to-night."

Susanne goes, and Helen stands a moment, looking at her reflection in the glass. She smiles at it. She says half aloud:

"Yes, I am very beautiful. I love beautiful things"—with a nod at herself. She unfastens her gown, and it slips to the floor; she steps out of it. She takes the pins from her hair and it falls over her shoulders with a little swish. Braine taps at the door. She calls: "One moment, Ed."

She throws about her the negligée on the chair and calls, "Come in," adding, "You didn't have much to do," as Braine enters the room.

"If I *did*, I didn't do it," with a little laugh. He throws himself into a chair by her dressing-room fire. After a moment he says:

"Come here, dear."

Helen is brushing her hair at the mirror. She puts down the brush and goes over to him. He pulls her down beside him. For a moment they sit silently, cheek to cheek, looking into the fire together. Finally, Braine says in a low voice:

"I want to talk to you, dear, about—about a business matter." He pauses.

Helen smiles a little mistily. She does not know anything about business matters, but she will like to hear about anything if he tells it. She says:

"Well?"

Braine hesitates a moment, and then says, with a little effort to appear quite natural:

"I don't want to trouble you with details, dear, but I must, a little. I want you to help me in a difficult task—to help *us*, for this means everything to both. You believe in your husband, do you not, Helen?"

"I will not answer that question, Ed. You can answer it yourself." She caresses his head gently, and waits for him to go on.

"Well, I meant the question seriously enough. You know I can do much, but I wonder if you believe me capable of all I can do? You know how the newspapers talk of me as 'the wizard,' because I have achieved very quickly things that most men find it difficult to achieve at all. They believe in me, but they would think me insane if I were to tell them of the plans I am going to tell you of. I wonder if your belief in me is enough firmer than theirs, to let you share my ideas without distrusting my ability to make them facts?"

He receives sufficient answer in a caress which has tears of joy in it. He muses a while, and then takes up his discourse at a different point.

"It *is* rather a dramatic story, I suppose, as ordinary people look at things. I was rolling barrels on the levee at Thebes not many years ago. I got my fingers in on the *Enterprise* with my mind set on making myself felt, and I made the *Enterprise* a power. I was not easily appalled, as I showed when I set out to make the noblest woman in the world my wife, to take, as all my own, the one perfect example of what God meant when he created woman"—Here a long pause occurs in the monologue.

"When Hildreth thought to make me a serviceable tool for him and his millionaire partners to work with, I whipped out the combination in six or eight weeks, and I taught them once for all who was master by virtue of superior intellect, when they and I had occasion to work together in any matter. I was poor and needed wealth for the sake of the opportunity it gives. I set to work to achieve wealth, and in three months my name was good enough to stand alone in any bank from New York to San Francisco. I planned the systematizing of the railroad lines centering at Thebes, and created almost a new West by the operation, enriching a whole people. I decided to be a Senator, with my party in an apparently hopeless minority, and I achieved the result with as much precision as if it had been merely the drawing of a straight line with a ruler. I have not been taking wine, dear, and I am not running over these things to boast of them. I care nothing whatever for what is behind me. I only say all this to show you what I mean when I say that from the earliest time I can remember, I have never in my life made up my mind to accomplish anything, without succeeding in the attempt. I want you to bear that in mind when I tell you that I have made up my mind to be—well, to place you in the highest position possible to any American woman. With your help I can accomplish that, as I have accomplished everything else."

"Oh, Ed, you frighten me. I am content as we are. Your ambition is eating you up. For myself, life has brought me—no, it is you that have brought me all, and more than all. I only want—this!" clasping her arms about him, and pressing him close. "I would give up everything for you, Ed, and it is for your sake that I want you to give up all further ambitions for me. You do not care for these things, dear, except for my sake, and I care for nothing except to have you love me. You are great and good. You do not need honors. Let us let them alone."

"I cannot, Helen. I might but for you. I do not know; it is my nature to go forward; I cannot stand still: but I might if it were not for you. How can I rest when I remember that there is one woman in Washington whose place is so exalted that she is held exempt from the duty of returning calls, and that woman is not my Helen! I tell you I must work out the plans I have formed, and I need your help. Now let me explain. I'll spare you every detail I can, and keep to the bare outline."

"Go on," she says, "I like you to tell me stories, Ed, and you haven't told me many of late. Your business has taken you away so much, till I have almost come to hate business."

Braine feels a little sting in this reminder, which Helen has not meant to put there, but he is too intent upon his purpose to pause for its removal.

"I have worked already at this thing, dear, night and day for months. I have made alliances in all directions, in every quarter of the country. I have set every force at work which can be in any way controlled. The next step is to produce a break here. This administration is the obstacle in my way, and I mean to break it down!"

"Oh, Edgar!" exclaims Helen, less in protest against a proposal which startles and shocks her a little, than in admiration of the superb audacity of the man who sits holding her hand while he announces a purpose seemingly so stupendous. Braine continues, scarcely noticing the interruption:

"Yes, and I have that practically arranged, too, except for one thing. I must produce the break by getting the coming presidential appointments—the most important of the whole term, in some respects—rejected by the Senate. There are three men in the Senate who must make the fight their own in order to make the break in the party irreparable, except by the retirement of the President from the contest for nomination at the end of the term. These men are privately interested in the whiskey tax bill, which is certainly lost in committee unless I force its passage. I've been working at that for two months, and have not yet succeeded. I *want your help in that.*"

"But, Edgar, you know I don't understand politics, or—"

"It's not necessary that you should. Heaven forbid that you ever shall! The only obstacle is Everet. He is chairman of the committee that has the bill in charge. He can report it favorably, and if I could induce him to do it, I could manage the rest. But I cannot. I have exhausted my resources of argument and persuasion, and he will not yield. It has worried me more than I like you to know, dear. I have said nothing, because I didn't want to trouble you. But you can help me now, if you will."

Helen looks up, elated:

"I can help? I'm glad of that, Ed, but it seems funny to think of my helping in *business*, doesn't it?" with a little laugh.

Braine is so intent on the matter that he only replies by a pat of the hand. He continues:

"Yes, you can help. I will tell you what I want you to do. Everet is fascinated with you. He hardly left your side to-night, and when he did, his eyes followed you. Everet is the only one whose support I must have now. You must get this for me. You can do it—"

"Why, Ed?—" She stares at him inquiringly. "What could I do, dear?"

For a moment Edgar looks annoyed. This is becoming a little awkward—for a husband. He starts to speak, then hesitates for a moment, then begins:

"Your woman's cleverness should prompt you, Helen. You understand little politic devices to a considerable extent; it is only necessary that you enlarge upon it in a smaller field. Everet will call, of course. There is—no reason why he should—" she is looking at him—"not call as often as he chooses, nor why he should not choose to call often—nor why you—should not use your influence to our advantage—to the end of gaining his support for me. Do you understand?"

He ceases. There is absolute silence. Helen is still looking at him. It is not comfortable for one's wife to look at one under *all* circumstances. She speaks hesitatingly:

"You—you mean for me to—to try and attract Everet—in order to cajole him into doing your will in this?"

There is bewilderment, disgust, astonishment expressed in her voice. She looks somewhat scandalized. Braine laughs a little uneasily:

"Yes, that—is *about* it."

She remains on her knees, looking at him for a moment—then slowly rises. There is indignation expressed in every movement of her body. She looks hurt, humiliated, insulted. She says excitedly:

"You don't know what you are saying. This miserable business—whatever it is—has gone to your head. I—I—I—"

She stammers in excitement. Braine rises and speaks entreatingly:

"No, I know what I am asking of you. It is not pleasant, to be sure. It hurts me worse than it can you, but, Helen—" with a desperate impulse—"Helen, this has *got* to be done. I *must* have Everet's support. Things have come to a desperate pass. There is no other way. When I saw you controlling his every thought to-night, it seemed like a sudden interposition of Providence. All the care and worry, that have gripped me like a dragon those late weeks, seemed to slip from me. I knew if you would do this, I was secure. I appeal to you, child. If you love me, you *must* consent to aid me in this. It is *your* happiness, *your* advancement as well as my own, that I ask you to achieve—"

"I am satisfied. I don't want to advance."

Her eyes flash ominously.

"Helen—Helen—" Braine holds out his hands to her, "you don't understand all you say. You *do* want it. If you were deprived of all this luxury and position, it would ruin your happiness—and yet, a few years ago you said as you do now—'I don't want it.' Could you live without it?"

"No. Not now. But I could if I had never known it—I—"

"You *had* to know it. You *should*. Of all women in the world you are the one best fitted for command, and for all that I am straining every nerve to gain for you. I do not sleep an hour, uninterruptedly. I wake, to plan and contrive after this end. I eat mechanically. I speak so, except under circumstances when my words will count. I make no acquaintance, no friend save that I may turn him to account. I deny myself honest affection in every association, that sentiment may never interfere at a critical hour—all this that I may see you where you deserve to be. I ask but one little thing of you. I implore it. This one effort on your part, and we have gained all. Helen—"

He is quivering with excitement. His eyes burn like coals of fire, and grow dark and scintillating.

The woman opposite him stands like a statue. There is not a vestige of color in her face. She turns slowly, and motions him from the room without a word.

XXVI.

[From Helen's Diary.]

February, —. Breakfasted this morning in my own room. Could not entertain the thought of ever seeing or speaking to Edgar again.

I looked haggard when I got up. I did not sleep an hour all night. While I was making a sorry attempt to eat some breakfast, and strengthening my determination never to speak to Edgar again, Woolet brought up a note, saying that Edgar told him to give it to me as soon as I was up.

I was like adamant and determined not to look at it. I should have sent it down to him immediately, but for the curiosity such a thing would have aroused among the servants.

As Woolet was going, he said:

"Mr. Braine said Madame would please forward all his mail that came to-day."

I was thunderstruck. *Forward* his mail! I snatched up the note, all my determination gone.

It was but a few lines, saying that he took the 9:10 train for New York, on business, and would return on Friday—this is Tuesday.

I felt like a baby. I sent Susanne away, and burst out crying. It seemed to me that I *must* see him, and soften the situation a little.

I could never have consented to this thing that he proposed, but it does not seem terrible enough to justify such severity—this morning.

It seems to me that I cannot endure the time until Friday—but when he returns I shall treat him with proper dignity, of course. It is my *duty* to make him feel that I judge his conduct severely. And yet, I will be forgiving and affectionate—to an extent. Only to an extent. (This will be very hard for me.)

I felt so wretched that I thought a drive would do me good, so at two, I went out. I became so tired and disgusted with meeting people and bowing to them, that I turned around and came home. There is nothing that makes a miserable person feel more miserable than to see people happier than herself.

I felt as though I was ready to drop when I got up the steps, and who should be in the reception-room but this very bone of contention, awaiting my return. I felt like flying up the stairs and locking myself in my room, but instead of doing so childish a thing, I walked into the room with admirable dignity.

I intended to see that he made his call very short; but after a moment we got talking of the new minister and his funny little wife, and in the gossip I seemed quite to forget my wretchedness for a while, and we went into the library, where it is cosier, and sat down by the fire and had a delightful afternoon.

Mrs. Hetherington called—as she pays no attention to days, but runs in promiscuously—and I sent word, "Not at home." I felt a little shocked at myself, and hardly knew what Mr. Everet thought—for it is a little unusual, of course, to keep a man whom you have met so seldom, gossiping a whole afternoon in your library, and denying yourself to all other callers—devoting yourself exclusively to him. And I shouldn't have done it—though there was really no harm in it—if Ed had not said what he did, last night.

I didn't encourage Mr. Everet to call again, nor *try* to be agreeable at all, but was just usual and everyday, just as I shall always be when he calls.

He seemed quite at home, and we had tea in the library, and he left just in time for me to dress for the English Minister's reception—where we met two hours later.

He—Mr. Everet—is more interesting than any of the men I have met. There is a dignity about him that I like, and that I have never found in anyone else but Edgar. I did not know what he would think of my letting him stay as I did, but he accepted it most naturally, as a matter of course—and it *was* a temptation, for I was so miserable that anything seemed acceptable that enlivened me a little.

He noticed my mood, I think, for he was not flippant and tiresome, but sympathetic—though we only referred to the most commonplace subjects. He remarked that I looked weary and pale. It does a woman good to have these little things noticed. It seemed quite like Edgar—as he used to be.

Mr. Everet said it was refreshing to find a natural, unaffected, candid woman in Washington. I *do* think it must seem a relief to men. If women did as Edgar wishes me to do, the men would be in a terrible plight. They would have to hate all the women in self-defence.

I couldn't help observing the interest Mr. Everet seems to feel in me—though I really should not have thought of it if Edgar had not suggested it. For a moment there *was* a certain fascination in the idea of making a strong, dignified man do just what a helpless insignificant little woman like me wants him to do.

As a sort of experiment, I made him go to Gladys Grayson's after the affair at the minister's although he had said that he had an important appointment at eleven, and that a great deal depended on his keeping it—but he went to the Graysons'. Of course, I didn't care a fig whether he went or not; only, as I say, it was a kind of experiment.

I'm frightfully tired, and here it is three o'clock and I still up.

Edgar will be at home on Friday, and this is Wednesday morning. I shall be glad to tell him again, how I scorn his proposition—I shall tell him that Mr. Everet noticed my pallor, and I *think* he will feel a little ashamed of himself. He ought to.

XXVII.

[From Helen's Diary.]

February —. Arose, breakfasted, and went for a drive; stopped at Gladys's on the way home; had tea with her in her boudoir.

Mr. Grayson wanted to come in too, but Gladys wouldn't let him. She says he is really a terrible bore; that she has to keep him down or he would run right over her. I wish Edgar would run right over me. She says that Mr. Grayson never seems to remember that after a woman has discharged all her duties, she is absolutely too worn out for the little et ceteras and asides of life. I think she is right. She is one of those women who carry conviction with all they say; but I always feel in some way that Edgar is a duty instead of an et cetera and an aside. I dare say I shall get over this in time. Gladys assures me I will.

She said to-day that I was "just cut out" for a successful diplomat; that I am so sincere and straightforward in my manner that I am the last person on earth to suspect. She says it will be my "trump card" when I know how to play it.

I presume I am lacking in fine appreciation, but in some way this seemed to cheapen sincerity. It does not, of course, for of all women in the world, Gladys would be the last to endure cheap sentiment or cheap lace. Of all the spotless, high-bred, delicate, forcible women I have ever seen, she is the most so.

I blushed to think of the cold contempt she would feel for me should she even know that I had heard such a proposition. I represented to her a case like mine, as though it were something I had heard of, and asked her what she could think of such a thing. Her haughty indignation was superb, inspiring. It did me good. I feel just so myself. I wanted to blush for even having made Mr. Everet go there the other night.

Well, nothing else of any account happened to-day.

I met Mrs. Stevens and looked the other way, at the pug of the wife of the Secretary of the Navy. It *is* so strange that she has no better taste than to wear a blue gown with a brown dog.

I chatted a moment with Senator Stacy's wife, and told her that her second child was a picture—(it is—of ugliness). I felt it a duty to say this, however, as the only thing false about it was the impression it conveyed to her—and the Senator's good will is quite necessary to Edgar's plans.

Then I went to the Talbots', and wound up with the Farringtons' reception.

And now, thank heaven, I am going to bed, and Edgar will be at home in the morning. I shall go nowhere to-morrow night, for he will be glad to have me at home—unless he should treat me coldly. I won't even *think of that*.

XXIII.

[From Helen's Diary.]

February 16, 18—. To-day Edgar came into the library after dinner—I dined alone, and was taking my coffee there, cosily, by the fire. He stood in the door a moment, looking at me, before he entered the room. The first thing he said was:

"Good Heavens! What should not a woman like you be able to accomplish—"

This, after having been out of town *three days!*

He said it as though wholly engrossed with that one thought—that my beauty and charm are valuable to him as a means by which to accomplish, instead of being things dear to him for their own sake, because they belong to him.

I daresay I am foolishly sensitive about this. I know he adores me. He proved the injustice of my thought a moment later—while the impression was yet in my mind. He hurried across the room and threw himself on his knees by my chair. I had not risen to meet him, as my heart and first impulse had prompted, because his greeting had repelled me, but I felt humiliated and reproached myself for my pettiness afterwards.

I was thankful that he was so engrossed with seeing me again as not to notice it. He threw himself on his knees by me and kissed my hands.

He looks tired and worn. It impressed me for the first time as he knelt there with his arms about

my waist. He said, in a tone that brought the tears to my eyes:

"I have thought of you almost constantly, dear, since I have been away from you."

He said it wistfully. I knew his mind had been on the scene we had, here, in this room where I am writing, before he left.

There was a sort of dreary surrender in his tone; but every inflection of his voice, and every glance, conveyed passionate love for me. I should have felt no reproach or misgiving had it been otherwise, but his apparent giving up, and hopelessness, touched me.

I do not know that I have done right. I have not mentioned the subject, nor has he referred to it in any way since he got back this evening. I don't know that it is anything sufficiently out of the usual order of things to justify my decision. That Edgar is cruelly disappointed is certain. That he does not reproach me is certain. That he loves me better than he ever has done before, is certain.

Two months ago, had I greeted him after a twenty-four hours' absence as indifferently as I fear I did to-night, he would not have forgotten it in a month, but he was so thoroughly engrossed in his own happiness in getting home to me to-night, that he did not even notice my manner.

I feel my purpose suddenly shaken. The memory of his face, its resignation, its weary expression, haunts me. One moment I am impelled to say "I will do anything you ask," and the next, I am seized with repulsion at the thought of accomplishing anything by such a means.

The idea of a woman's receiving adulation from another man than her husband, seems a scandalous thing; but the idea of her courting it—setting out with a deliberate purpose to win it—seems monstrous.

And yet, if Edgar doesn't rebel, I don't really see much excuse for obstinacy on my part. It does seem a little "far fetched" in me when I come to consider the circumstances. If it were a *usual* thing, a thing that would be considered as a matter of course, I should feel less strongly about it, but it is so extraordinary—at least it seems so to me.

I can imagine Mrs. Hetherington exclaiming: "Disgraceful!" and see Gladys's look of cold surprise, tinged with her ironical expression that she preserves for the little, unconventional escapades of A, B and C. This kind of thing is intolerable to me. When I think of this, every fibre of my body resents the possibility of such a thing. And when I remember his face to-night, I can no longer think on the other side of the question.

He is over at the Arlington at this moment, engaged in heaven knows what, that will send him home to me looking more depressed and miserable than ever.

Some one taps lightly on the door, and opens it without ceremony, and Helen throws down her pen as Braine enters.

It is as she has expected. His face and manner indicate fatigue. He brightens up and says with a show of gayety so evidently forced that Helen's lips tremble a little:

"Well, dearest!"

She goes slowly to him, and takes his hands which he is holding out to her. She looks at him wistfully, with a half sad little smile on her face. She says softly:

"Well?"

"You are all alone to-night? No receptions, nor 'affairs'?"

The glimmer-smile deepens a little, and she draws him towards the fire. She says—pushing him into the chair:

"Oh yes—plenty of them—Gladys gave a dinner to the Stones to-night."

"And you are not there?" with a little surprise in his voice, but an expression half-eager, half-pleased on his face.

She brightens as she notes the look, and says softly:

"No, I like this better."

She leans against him, and rubs her cheek carelessly against his shoulder.

The gratified expression deepens an instant; then Braine says a little hurriedly, with a touch of anxiety in the tone:

"You must not neglect anything for me, dearest. Social duties are everything here. Don't mind me. I sha'n't feel neglected."

Helen slowly raises her head. She stares at him for a moment. He is looking abstractedly into the fire, and patting her hand in a mechanical way. He does not see her face. The expression of pleasure and gratification has died out of it. Expressions of astonishment, humiliation, resentment and *hauteur* replace each other there successively. Now she says in a cold tone:

"I did not remain on that account, of course. I had a slight headache—a mere nothing—" as Braine looks up anxiously—"But I felt that the crush there to-night would not help it."

She finishes a little less coldly. Braine has not noticed the tone. When she has said that the headache is a "mere nothing," he at once goes back to his meditations—but the sudden look of anxious sympathy has at once touched her, and caused another revulsion of feeling in his favor.

She crosses the room and picks up a book from the table.

Suddenly Braine says, as though thinking aloud:

"If this should go any farther it would be a bad thing for Grayson."

Helen looks up from her book:

"Why? What is it?"

Braine arouses himself, and speaks interestedly:

"This land grant bill! Gladys has been trying to run things, it seems, and has made a botch of it. She has gone too headlong, and compromised herself to such an extent with the committee chief, that when she was prepared for a *coup de grace*, the congressman turned the tables. It is a bad thing for Grayson. The man has her in his power, and swears that unless Grayson will actively uphold the counter-policy, he will make it uncomfortable for his wife. Grayson has just been telling me all about it, and is almost helpless in the matter. Something must be done."

Helen is on her feet. Her eyes are wide with astonishment, and something like horror. She stammers:

"What—what—what?"

Her tone startles Braine. He looks around:

"Why Helen! What is the matter, child, I didn't imagine it would startle you so. Of course you feel anxiety for Gladys—friends as you are—but she is a clever woman, and I have no doubt she will get out of it in some way."

He speaks reassuringly. She comes to his side. She says hoarsely, with excitement expressed in every movement;

"Has—has—has Gladys been working through Mr. Dalzel for this scheme?"

Her fingers twist nervously. Braine cannot understand her. He looks at her in bewilderment:

"Working for it? Why certainly, dear. Why shouldn't she—her husband's interests are hers. Yes. She has been doing what she could, of course—she has done her best, and isn't to blame for such a *faux pas* as this; but it seems a little stupid in her. There would be no danger of such a thing on your part!"

He makes the remark more to himself than to her, and leans back, watching her through his half-closed lids. How proud he is of this woman! How he loves her!

Helen stands quietly by his side, looking intently at the coals in the grate. Presently she says in a low, calm tone of conviction, elation, irrevocable decision:

"No, I should make no mistakes."

A silence. After a moment:

"I have been thinking over the little conversation we had before you left, Edgar. I have changed my mind. I think I will see—Everet."

Braine rises from his chair. He stands looking at her for a moment. He takes her in his arms.

XXIX.

[From Helen's Diary.]

February, 18—. Well, I really cannot express my feelings. It seems to me that in twenty-four hours I have been metamorphosed and am some one else living in another world.

Now that I have undertaken this, I have no idea of failing. I will succeed, if it costs every thing. I suddenly feel that I am made for this.

Gladys called to-day. Everet had just made a short call and gone.—He did not know whether he left by the front steps to the street, or was making a descent from heaven into the other place—and yet, I made only the least exertion to please, imaginable. It made me feel superb, magnificent, inspired, when I thought of what I can do if I really try.

I felt a mad exultation over Gladys. She was as pale as a ghost, and hardly seemed to know what she was talking about. I should never betray *my* defeat or difficulty if I should meet with it. I felt

such a superiority that I almost felt like shrieking it at her, when remembering how she has deceived me all this time. I was secretly delighted, though, at my astonishing self-control, for she never noticed a thing. She said:

"How I envy your freedom from care and anxiety, and your innocence of all the wire-pulling that some have to do."

She looked fagged out when she said this, I should not have known her. She never spoke in this manner before.

I smiled and said, "I presumed it must be wearing—especially if one was not clever enough to succeed."

She looked at me sharply, and with some surprise. Yesterday I would have shrivelled all up under the look. To-day I just smiled calmly.

If nothing else urged me on—if I were not doing this for Edgar's sake—I should be wild to attempt it just to prove my power and ability superior to Gladys's. To think how completely she has deceived me all this time!

Edgar almost wearied me with affection to-night. One can't be always troubled with sentiment, when one has matters of so much importance on hand.

Of course, I did nothing to wound his feelings but he understood by my manner that I was preoccupied.

He tried to coach me. Coach *me!* How stupid men are sometimes! He was determined that I should grasp Everet by the collar and hold him while he consented to do as I wished. I gave him to understand that I must be absolutely let alone in this matter; that in an affair like this there was nothing for him to teach me. Such a proceeding would ruin all. Everet would jump out of the window, and never be seen any more. It is my innocence and unworldliness that have attracted him, and it is that that must fascinate him. I must appear to gain nothing by strategy, even in the end, but by pure uncalculating innocence. He must be absolutely under my control before one other step is taken.

If argument would have accomplished his yielding there would be no need of effort on my part. It would have been accomplished long ago. If I am to be mistress of the situation I must work entirely with personal allurements.

To-night, at dinner I made him drink "to my success." It was delicious. He had no more idea of the import of it than of the way my back hair was done. This one little incident so delighted me that I had to laugh and talk incessantly to keep myself within bounds.

Ed dined at home, with us, and when I looked across at him as I made the suggestion, my eyes were fairly dancing at the supreme irony of it, but Edgar did not seem to see its deliciousness, and looked as grave as an owl.

Afterward he said: "Women *are* incomprehensible. Now—there was no necessity whatever for that little scene at dinner. Absolutely none."

Of course there was none. If there had been, the point would have been lacking.

To-morrow night I give a theatre party—Everet goes—*and comes home with me.* Heigho!

XXX.

[From Helen's Diary.]

March, —. It has been days since I have written in this diary. There has been a good deal to record, but I have had neither the time nor desire to do it.

I see Everet every day. He lunches and dines here quite as though it were home to him. Edgar is seldom here, but when he is, he is discretion itself. There is always a severe dignity preserved between them.

Everet has the entire run of the house, and drops into my boudoir for tea in the afternoons, as a matter of course.

I manage matters in such a way that we are never seen together in public, except as we casually meet. It required some diplomacy to get out of making one of his theatre party last week, for it would never do for me to appear conscious of any wrong in our public association while I admit him so intimately in private; it would betray a depth of discernment and worldliness that he does not dream exists.

Our relations are those of intimate friends, good comrades, but there is always a dignity preserved. Nothing occurs that the most scrupulous could find fault with—if they knew all; it would never do for them to know a little. It is enough to keep him where he sees me constantly and listens to me.

The ease with which I charm and achieve, astonishes myself. There is never a word of business. He does not know that I know the House from the Senate—I *don't* when it comes to that, but I can accomplish when I am told what to work for.

Everet, himself, does not know how essential I am to him. I discover from time to time the progress I am making by being "out" two or three days in succession when he calls. I can judge much from the manner of his greeting when he next finds me at home.

To-day I did a master-stroke. He has some vague idea of his danger. He begins to understand in some degree what my presence means to him. He was inclined to break loose, and to-day he announced that he was going north for a time.

I started, and—I think I turned a little pale. I intended to, and for some reason, I felt so. I said quite carelessly: "Yes?" after he had noticed the start.

He turned white. He came up to me and took my hands in his, and said in a low tone:

"Would you mind?"

I looked up in surprise (apparently)—though the success was in making the appearance apparent—and said: "One always dislikes to lose old friends." I said it quite as a matter of course. I got up and staggered a little, as I went towards the door.

He was terribly frightened. I said it was "nothing;" that sometimes I had those slight "attacks" if I became a little excited. The last appeared to be a slip of the tongue. I did not say what the "attacks" were, nor what excitement had caused this particular one, but it was quite unnecessary. It frightened him, and made him suffer a little.

He remarked that his "business at the north might be postponed for some time yet." I thought so too!

There seemed something mean in all this, but a wife who has any affection for her husband, *must* feel that his interests are hers.

Gladys looks terrible. The last time I saw Ed—four days ago, at breakfast—he said things were narrowing to a focus; that he was afraid there was no loop-hole left her. Either Grayson must go over, or Gladys is lost. He'll go over, of course—and stay over, until he gets an advantage.

This constant separation from Edgar is telling on me. I don't realize it save at moments of relaxation, for I am generally as hurried and preoccupied these days as he. But there is a lack that I sometimes feel must be supplied. I have not even seen him since Thursday, and I—

Braine comes hurriedly into the library, and speaks quickly while tossing over the papers on the desk by Helen:

"Have you seen a bundle of papers bearing the stamp, Helen? I thought I left them here."

She shakes her head.

"What have you to do to-night, Edgar?"

"To-night?" absently. He pauses and continues his search for the papers.

"Well?" She speaks a little coldly this time. She dislikes to be ignored.

"Eh? Oh! Yes! What am I going to do to-night? I can't tell you, child, I have more on hand than ten men could do. I don't know. Oh!"—facing her suddenly—"about this matter with Everet! What are you accomplishing, Helen? Matters are moving too slowly. Something must be done at once."

She has not had more than ten minutes conversation with Braine in a week. This is the manner in which this opportunity is improved. She bites her lip. After a moment she replies carelessly:

"Really, Edgar, you expect a great deal. I could hardly be expected to gain you the Presidency in six weeks, with nothing to aid me but my own efforts."

"Hardly; but this is not exactly what is required of you. It seems to me that you might hasten matters a little more."

She does not reply.

As Braine is leaving the room, he asks:

"Can you bring matters to a focus in a week?"

"No—in two weeks," continuing her writing without looking up.

Braine goes out. As the curtain falls behind him she drops her pen, and rising, begins to pace the floor restlessly. She is suddenly wretched. She hates Everet. She has a mad desire to rush after Braine, and throw herself into his arms. With it all, she feels herself rebuffed, humiliated.

She seems to have entirely dropped out of Braine's life, save so far as she contributes to his success and advancement—for this is not the only matter she has been handling successfully in

the last two months.

She leans her head wearily against the mantel, and sobs softly to herself. She is so wrapt up in her own wretchedness that she is oblivious of everything else, and does not hear Everet as he crosses the floor.

He stands a moment looking at her in surprise. Then the expression on his face becomes one of anxiety, pain, tenderness. He approaches her softly, and says in a low tone:

"Mrs. Braine!"

Helen starts and raises her head. She does not look up, but stands with her back to him as she dries the tears, and tries to control her voice. She says—for want of something better:

"I did not hear you come in."

Everet is silent a moment, then lays his hand on her arm. His touch is delicate. There is a subtle tenderness about it.

She suddenly starts, and turns ghastly. She looks up at him with something like fright and appeal in her face, and he does not comprehend the look. She flings his hand away with a fierce movement.

Everet steps back. He looks at her now flushed face in astonishment. She says hoarsely:

"Never do that again. Do you hear? Never touch me again!"

Everet feels that there is a little injustice in her tone. He has been a constant visitor at this house for weeks. He has done no more than any acquaintance, who knew her more than slightly, might have done under the circumstances. He steps back, and says coldly:

"I beg your pardon," and turns toward the door.

The necessity of the occasion comes to her quickly. He must not go in this way—what would Braine say.

She calls: "Chester." She has never used Everet's first name before.

He turns swiftly and stands regarding her. There is eagerness in his face.

She drops her eyes. She holds out her hand and says:

"I can't tell you why I have spoken in this way. I want you to come back. Believe me when I tell you that it was not because you offended me—I offended myself. I—I can explain nothing. I beg you to come back."

He is at her side. He grasps her hands. He says—his voice husky with emotion:

"I will not go if you would have me stay—Did you wish it, I would never—"

He breaks off suddenly. Her sweet, innocent face is raised inquiringly—its innocence is what forbids.

She motions him into the chair by the fire, and sits down near the window. She keeps that distance between them while he stays.

He wants her to go to the theatre with him and a party of friends. He pleads that she is too tired for anything that will require more of effort, that night.

She refuses in a semi-desperate tone. She is going to a cabinet affair! She *wants* to go! She would not miss it for anything! He leaves the house, and she goes upstairs slowly.

Braine's valet is just entering his master's dressing-room as Helen goes by. She pauses, and tells him to ask Mr. Braine to come to her boudoir before he goes out.

She hurries to her room, and throws on a loose negligée; stirs the fire; darkens the room; lights the candles. The scene is charming, seductive—perhaps irresistible. She throws herself negligently into a chair, and puts her pretty feet on the fender. She smiles a little grimly. The scene might have been prepared for Everet—so carefully has she arranged it.

After twenty minutes, Braine taps. She calls "Come in," and half turns in her chair with a smile. She holds out her hand:

"You will come to the fire?"

Braine nods, and steps just inside the door:

"You wanted me for something?" buttoning his glove—he speaks pleasantly, but hurriedly.

She says calmly; "I was not going out to-night."

There is the most imperceptible pause before her next words. Braine makes no remark. She continues;

"And I thought if you had any work to do in the way of writing, I might as well do it."

She finishes, and turns back to the fire.

He replies: "If you are not going out, you might draft a reply to Carson's letter. It must be carefully done. There must be enough in it to satisfy him, but not enough to commit me. You understand about what I want, I think."

"Yes. I think so," drily.

"So—I'm off, dear. Good-bye."

The door closes. The woman at the fire rises and looks slowly about the room. The expression in her face is an ugly one. She rings her bell, and mutters, "H'm!" as she unties her gown.

She is passive while Susanne dresses her. She does not leave the house for an hour and a half yet. She finishes her toilet, and goes back to the library to prepare the letter to Carson. It is a masterpiece when finished, and she studies it with satisfaction.

She put on her wraps and waits a moment for the carriage, then drives off to the "Cabinet affair."

She has her wits about her—she has a business affair here, too. She remains until she knows she has accomplished all she can, and then sends for her carriage.

She keeps up the farce until she finds herself in the night air, and then is so silent that a man who has been violently in love with her for two entire days, is heart-broken as he takes her to her carriage.

As she comes within range of the window, she sees the form of a man inside the carriage, and instinctively knows who it is. She steps ahead, and stands before the door as the groom opens it, filling it as completely as she can, and saying an abrupt good night. She leans in front of Everet as she pulls the rug over her, and they drive away.

She turns to him and looks at him inquisitively, and a little coldly. She says, "How is this?"

Everet seizes her hand.

"I do not know. I waited for you in the carriage. That is all. I could not help it. I *had* to see you again to-night."

Her hand is still in his. Perhaps her fingers cling as well as his. There is a deep frown between her eyes. She says with distress in her voice:

"You should not. You should not. How could you? I—I—I—"

She pauses helplessly. It seems to Everet the helplessness of innocence. He leans near her an instant; then, with an effort at self-control, drops her hand.

She leans her head against the side of the carriage. She says under her breath, "Oh, my God!"

He hears it, and thinks he has distressed her, shocked her, and begins an apology, his voice emotion-choked. He feels that he has been a brute to intrude on her in this way.

She does not answer. He can feel that her body is quivering as though with cold. He attempts to draw the rug more closely about her, but she winces and says with a wail:

"Don't, don't, don't!"

He desists, and sits watching her helplessly. She does not speak again until they have reached home. When he touches her hand for a moment as he helps her from the brougham, it is hot and feverish.

She says, as he turns to follow her up the steps:

"Don't come in to-night." She hesitates a moment, and then adds with a rush,

"I *must* be with my husband. To-morrow—I will see you to-morrow."

She hurries up the steps, and Woolet opens the door.

"Is Mr. Braine in yet?"

"In the library, madame."

She hurries through the hall, untying the cords of her wrap as she goes. She pushes open the door, enters, closes the door, and stands with her back against it, looking at Braine who is writing at the desk.

As she enters, he glances up hastily, nods, and returns to his writing, remarking absently:

"Home?"

She does not answer. She stands watching him, listening to the hurried scratch of the pen.

Presently she says:

"Edgar!"

"Yes?" without looking up.

She repeats in a loud, emphatic voice:

"*Edgar!*"

He raises his head in surprise. He looks at her.

"Well?—Are you ill, Helen?"

Her peculiar expression has arrested his attention, and he lays down his pen. Her face is flushed. Her eyes are strangely brilliant. Her long, nervous fingers twist in the cords of her wrap. She leaves her position at the door, and advancing into the room, throws herself into a chair. She replies in a hard voice:

"Ill? No, oh no!"

Braine looks at her inquiringly. She is looking straight into his face. He says presently, with eagerness:

"Oh, you have something to tell me about Everet?"

"I have nothing to tell you about Everet," in the same inscrutable tone.

Braine looks annoyed, and says a little quickly:

"You want something of me?"

There is silence for a moment while they look into each other's faces. Then she bursts out excitedly:

"Yes, I want something of you. I want you to take me in your arms. I want you to forget that you are a United States Senator for an hour. I want you to forget that any one lives but you and me. I want you to say, 'Helen, I love you.' I want convincing demonstration that I am your wife as well as your lobbyist."

There is a sting in every word. She is on her feet, flashing her emotion at him with her beautiful eyes.

Braine half rises from his chair, and then sinks back. His face grows tender. He says kindly:

"Come here, dear. I *do* love you. I know I have been cold and preoccupied lately, but you should understand that I love you, Helen, better than my life. This is not like you, dear. You are tired and nervous. All this business is new to you. I am proud of you, little one. I have unlimited confidence in you. There—there," as she sobs violently in his arms; "you are worn out, dear. You must not sit up. To-morrow we will talk it all over. Kiss me good night, dear—"

She suddenly tightens her arms around him. She sobs:

"Not good night, Ed. Not good night. I *must* not be put off so to-night, dearest. I—I love you so."

She is kissing his hands and face excitedly, and is speaking in little broken phrases. All her blood seems to have become a quivering flame.

Braine soothes her gently and says:

"You shall not be put off. I said good night, dear, out of consideration for you. You look so exhausted, dear child. I must do a little more work, and then I will stop. Go up and get off your tight, uncomfortable gown. I will not be long."

He touches her forehead with his lips. She moves toward the door. She says brokenly, through her smiles:

"It is good of you, Ed."

He smiles and replies:

"Good to *myself*."

She hurries through the hall and up the stairs. She is trembling with happiness. She has not had so intimate a conversation with Braine for three weeks. She pushes open her dressing-room door. Susanne has been asleep, but rises quickly to assist her. She undresses Helen deftly:

"Is Madame going at once to bed?"

Helen shakes her head. Susanne brings her a negligée. Helen pushes it away:

"No, the new one—the one sent home yesterday."

Susanne's eyes sparkle. She brings it at once. She remarks:

"Madame has enjoyed herself?"

Helen's face is wreathed in a constant, misty smile. She looks inquiringly at Susanne and answers:

"Yes—no—you may go now. Good night."

For a moment after Susanne is gone, Helen stands thoughtfully before the mirror. She looks at

her reflection carefully. She says half aloud:

"How beautiful I am! I never was so glad to be beautiful, before. I feel like a young girl again."

She studies the tall, lissome figure before her. The folds of her gown cling to her limbs, emphasizing every sumptuous curve. She says in a little tone of elation:

"How glad Edgar must be that you belong to him," nodding at herself.

She hears the library door open below, and goes to the door. She opens it cautiously. There is in her manner, the delicious shyness of a young girl with her first lover. She listens a moment, and hearing no step, goes softly to the stairs. The hall door below is just closing.

Braine has gone out.

XXXI.

Susanne comes into the room, saying to Helen who lies in bed, listlessly staring out of the window into the frosty morning:

"Madame's bath is ready."

Helen rises and goes toward the bath-room. Her movements are languid, spiritless. Her face indicates a sleepless night. When she takes her seat at the dressing-table, she remarks briefly:

"Make me look my best this morning. I am *particularly* anxious this morning."

"Yes, Madame."

The maid works deftly, and soon Helen, perfectly equipped, opens her door. She gives a furtive glance down the hall.

Braine's room door stands open, and she gets a glimpse of Sherry brushing a dress coat within. She knows that Braine is up, and thinks he has probably gone out. She goes collectedly down the stairs, and enters the breakfast room.

Braine sits in the alcove, reading the morning papers. As she enters, he looks up and says:

"Listen to this, Helen," and he begins reading a sensational article implicating the Graysons in a scandal so thinly disguised in the telling, that the disguise serves only to emphasize what lies beneath it, as a veil often accentuates the face it pretends to conceal.

After a few words touching this affair, Braine says, as though suddenly remembering the matter:

"I was sorry to disappoint you last night, dear—"

Helen interrupts him, raising her eyebrows, and saying, curiously:

"Disappoint me?"

"By not joining you as I promised."

"Oh!" in a calm, indifferent tone, as though she had quite forgotten the circumstance.

"I happened to remember at the last minute that Weldon was to leave on the early train for the north, and I *had* to see him without fail before he left, so I ran down to his hotel. We talked until three o'clock, and I knew you were so tired that you would be asleep by then."

She replies calmly:

"Oh yes, I was asleep by then. It was quite as well, I was very tired."

Her indifference is so apparent that it amounts to scant courtesy.

This piques Braine a little, and he involuntarily looks up, and says in a tone just a trifle acid:

"Had I known that it was 'just as well,' I should have had my breakfast thirty minutes ago, and been down town. Perhaps I was justified, however, in making the mistake and losing valuable time. You were last evening—somewhat—impulsive, if I remember rightly."

He is annoyed this morning. He smiles a little indulgently.

Helen has been looking into his eyes while he has spoken. She rises with an indescribable air. She says in an icy tone of reproof:

"You are intolerable, sir," and leaves the room.

Braine bites his lip. He sees his mistake—the first of its kind he ever made—and how unpardonable it must seem to a delicate woman like Helen! He is surprised and annoyed at himself, and finishing his breakfast quickly, hurries away.

The day drags slowly. Helen does not leave her room again. Everet calls, and she sends him word that she has a headache—to call in the evening, about half-past eight.

She means to get this matter off her hands at once. The situation—under the circumstances—is becoming unbearable. She can neither read nor write to-day, and time drags heavily.

When she recalls last night, and Braine's affront this morning, she feels her face tingle with mortification. That she should humiliate herself sufficiently to sue for Braine's caresses, and then be ignored, neglected, forgotten, was bad enough; that he should refer to the matter as *her* disappointment was worse; but that he should remind her of her part in it, is not to be endured.

She finds herself biting her lip or clenching her hands until the pain reminds her of what she is doing.

Toward evening, she throws herself on the bed and sleeps.

XXXII.

"Be quick! Don't move so slowly."

Helen pulls the little curls about her temples, with an impatient twitch. Susanne does not reply, but seems to be a little more deft in her movements.

Helen is pale, and her face looks a little haggard; there is a peculiar brilliancy in her eyes; there is something vaguely pathetic in the droop of the corners of her mouth.

She sits quietly in her chair for a moment, evidently exerting herself to be calm. Susanne works intently at the heavy coils of her hair, and the gold pins she is skewering through it.

Presently, Helen leans forward to look at herself more closely in the mirror, and upsets a bottle of toilet water that deluges powders, brushes, toilet creams and the rest of the array on the low, French table.

She rises with an angry exclamation. She is quivering in every fibre. She says in a low voice, hoarse with irritation, nervousness, excitement:

"You may go. Get me a negligée first. I shall not dress to-night."

Susanne stares at her.

"Monsieur Everet, Madame!"

Helen turns slowly and looks at her. She says, in the same peculiarly low voice of a moment ago:

"Never speak of him again. Remember!—or you leave my service."

The girl steps back and murmurs something apologetic. Some one knocks on the door. Helen motions to Susanne, with her finger on her lips, and starts towards the bedroom.

Susanne moves slowly to give Helen time to leave the room; but the door opens and Braine steps in before Helen has reached the curtains.

He says hurriedly:

"Pardon, Helen! You are dressing? May I see you alone for a moment? I won't detain you long."

She nods slightly, and makes a gesture of dismissal to Susanne, as she comes slowly back to the dressing-table.

Her shoulders are bare: she had just thrown off her dressing-gown; she pulls about her the scarf that lies over the chair back, Braine leans against the chiffonnière watching her absently.

"How beautiful you are, Helen!"

"You wanted to speak to me of something particular?"

"Oh, yes," arousing himself. "Yes. Now, about this affair with Everet! Things *must* come to a focus to-night. You understand all it means to me. Success in the scheme means advancement in every way—politically and socially—you understand as well as I. Failure,—well, we will not consider failure. Make him—"

She makes a sudden gesture of the hand:

"I cannot!—not to-night. I am not well—I—"

Braine straightens himself. He says coldly, with a flavor of reproof in his tone:

"You will not see him! This is hardly the time to indulge caprice. Of course you will see him, and do what you can. If you fail then, it will be nothing for which you are to blame; but I insist that in this crisis you make what effort you can for our mutual benefit. My advancement is yours. I shall count on you. You cannot fail if you exert yourself ever so little," with a touch of tenderness and some pride, and a great deal of confidence in the tone.

"Ed!"

Helen rises suddenly and comes towards him. She holds out her hands with a little appeal. Her face is very white, and her lips are quivering.

He takes her hands kindly, and laughs lightly:

"There! You need not be anxious or become excited. I know; you realized how much depends on this, and became a little discouraged and fearful. I don't want you to feel so; just do your best. If you fail, surely I could not blame you. But you will not fail. You are gloriously equipped for the wife of an ambitious man," in a tone of elation.

He is, nevertheless, preoccupied, and though he still clasps her hands, the pressure has grown very slight, and indeed her hands remain in his only because she holds them there. He seems to forget her, and is studying the carpet. She stands looking at him. Presently she says:

"Kiss me—will you?"

He stoops and brushes her forehead lightly, with his lips. She lets her hands fall inertly at her side. She, too, stands studying the carpet. He says, brusquely:

"I will leave you now and let you finish dressing. I am to meet Austin at the Arlington at nine. It is after eight now," looking at his watch and turning hastily to the door.

"I shall count on you, Helen. Things must come to a focus to-night."

She stands a moment looking at the closed door where he has gone out, and then walks back to the dressing-table. She stands fingering some of the manicure apparatus lying on it, disorderly, with the rest of the table's contents. Once, she puts her hand to her throat as though she were choking. She gets a sight of her face in the mirror, and holds her breath for an instant. She is ghastly. There are deep rings under her eyes. She nervously rubs a hare's foot over her cheeks, and they blush a little—for the evening.

She slowly crosses the room and rings her bell; then returns to her chair and sits down.

Susanne appears, uncertain in manner, in the doorway.

"You may finish dressing me, Susanne."

Susanne looks a little anxious, and sets about her business.

Helen attentively watches all she does. She holds out one of her small feet to be slipped. One of the pair brought is put on. She is dissatisfied and demands another pair.

Susanne takes Everet's violets from the water, and fastens them on her corsage.

"Madame is finished."

No, oh no, she is not—not for two hours yet.

Helen goes slowly down the stairs; in the hall below she stops a moment to give an instruction to a servant passing through. She speaks in her natural tone, perhaps a little more coldly because she is more excited than usual. She is quivering. She passes on to the library. She looks about the room reflectively. She rings the bell. The servant to whom she spoke in the hall, appears.

"When Mr. Everet comes, ask him to come in here, to the library. Say that I will be down in a moment. You understand? He is to come in *here* and wait for me. You are not to *show* him here—he knows the way."

The man bows and goes from the room.

She looks at the clock. It is nearly half-past eight. Everet is to come at half-past.

She walks to the cosy chair by the fire, and stops thoughtfully.

She turns to the divan, and says aloud:

"The light is better there. It is more effective."

She crosses to the divan, and drawing the cushions together in a fashion that pleases her, sinks into them—half sitting, half reclining. The light from the rose lamp-shade casts a faint glow over the apartment. She looks across the room to her reflection in the long mirror opposite. She scans herself critically, draws another cushion under her arm, and leans her head on her hand. She adjusts her gown to her fancy, and her attitude is perfect. She is apparently satisfied with herself, for she remains as she is. Her face indicates nothing.

The minutes tick by.

Some one is standing in the doorway—she can see from under her half-closed lids in the glass across the room.

Everet stands, silently, watching her. She is evidently asleep. He crosses the floor softly and stands over her.

His glance takes in every detail of the entrancing picture; the whiteness of her arm on the pale blue of the pillow; the lace petticoat; the half-exposed foot; the curve of her neck.

He forgets that she may wake, and stands looking at her. His usually pale face flushes slightly, and his nervous fingers seem a little more nervous than usual.

The woman on the divan wakes at the right moment,—the moment could not have been more propitious had it been carefully selected.

She opens her eyes dreamily and looks at him. Then, with a little start of confusion sits erect, and murmurs something about "the heat of the room and the drowsiness of the dim light."

Everet is still flushed, and there is some emotion in his voice.

"The servant told me to await you here—that you were not down yet."

"I have a very stupid servant—I always have to give him the most explicit instructions; and then he does not always comprehend. Will you sit here by the fire?"

They draw near the fire together. She seats herself on a low ottoman; he sits in the cozy chair.

"It must be very cold to-night. I have shivered all the afternoon, notwithstanding the hot fire we have kept."

She leans toward him, and makes an attempt to reach the scarf she threw with careful carelessness on the chair when she entered the room a while ago. She is compelled to lean very near him—and yet cannot quite reach it.

He places it about her shoulders—the lace catches on a pin in her hair, and Everet carefully disentangles it. When he has succeeded, he makes the remark that she is not well—that she is feverish. She laughs a little nervously:

"I—I am very well."

Her tone belies her words. Everet looks at her anxiously:

"You are not well. Tell me what it is."

He lays his hand over hers. Suddenly there are tears in her eyes—at the same time she is watching him furtively.

"What is it?—nothing—nothing!"

"There is something. Something is annoying you—troubling you. You must tell me what it is."

There is sudden command in his voice. She clasps her hands. Her excitement is intense, but she does not forget the business in hand for an instant. Even when she clasps her hands in an excess of agitation, she remembers to make the action effective. It is effective.

"Helen,"—he speaks under his breath,— "I want to know what troubles you. Has it anything to do with business?"

She starts a little.

"Has it anything to do with business affairs?"

He repeats it.

She does not answer.

"Is it about this measure Braine is working for?"

She holds her breath for an instant, and then slowly nods.

Everet looks at the fire thoughtfully:

"How can that worry you?"

"Ed is anxious. It means—Ah!" throwing out her hands with a helpless, childish gesture, "it means everything. I cannot tell you why I am personally anxious."

"I understand that it can mean much to you in one way—but in a way that I did not suppose was of any moment to you. I understand all it means to Braine, but I am not in sympathy with it. I could not uphold it—it is a dishonest affair."

He looks at her. Her lips are pressed tightly together. Suddenly she says in a despairing little wail:

"Oh! it don't matter."

"What?"

"Whether it seems dishonest to you or not. It will fall through."

"Why?" looking at her sharply.

She ignores the glance.

"Why?" impatiently. "Why? Because the one man whose approval and assistance is needful will not approve nor assist."

A pause. "Who is it?" watching her.

"Who is it? I don't know. How do you suppose I know? I know nothing of politics. I hear Ed fret and look anxious. Now and then he condescends to drop a word—but I can't understand if he does. I don't know who it is. I only know it is some one."

Everet looks back at the fire. She has not flinched once. She speaks with the ring of truth in her voice. He has been in this woman's society almost constantly for weeks, and she has never mentioned anything pertaining to politics or "business." He believes that those subjects are beyond her comprehension.

He looks back at her. He wonders if it is possible that Braine has not told her that *he* is the needful man. As he looks at her sweet, troubled face, he decides that it is possible; that she is innocent.

"Would you like to know the man? Would it be of any interest to you?"

She turns to him with a sudden excited movement. She impulsively lays her hand on his knee, and leans lightly against him.

"Would it? Ah! I would go to him; I would say: You do not know all that this means to me—how madly I want this thing to succeed. I would implore him to listen to me. I—"

Her intensity of emotion is contagious, and Everet listens to her, scarcely comprehending her words, but realizing two facts, both new to him, that he loves this woman, and has loved her all these weeks without knowing it, and that the one present, overmastering desire of her soul is to accomplish this end of winning him to second Braine's scheme. His conscience would forbid if it were awake, but his passion for this woman—the wife of his friend—has drugged it to sleep.

"Helen," he cries, "I will do what you ask. I would do anything, everything for you. I would commit a crime, if you did but ask it. I will support the measure."

"You will do this for *me*?"

"*For you.* I would not do it for any other in the world."

"Write it then—whatever it is. Say in writing that you will do it," pushing him to her open desk.

He scribbles a few lines and throws down the pen.

"You have done this for *me*?" she asks again.

"For *you*, Helen."

"Then I am yours."

She falls, half stifling, into his arms, and he clumsily tries to soothe her as he places her on the divan, and kneels beside her.

She presently says, still almost frantically:

"You do not know! I came to this room to-night with one deliberate purpose—to accomplish what I have done; to compel you to support this measure. I have loved you more and more every day of these last weeks. God forgive me! I could not help it. I realized my helplessness, and tried to keep away from you. I made excuses. I was ill, incapable, anything. I tried to tell him the truth. If he is not a madman he must have known my condition and my attitude toward you. He did not care. He wanted *success*. He only cared for me so far as I was of use to him in satisfying his ambition. He gave no thought to me. I have not seen him more than once in twenty-four hours for the last three months, and that was when he had some instruction to give me. He has pushed me over a precipice. Ah! I am mad, starving for that which he denies me—affection. He thinks of me as a machine to do his work; with no feeling, no emotion, nothing human about me. I have tried to do my duty. I did not forget myself until I had accomplished his work. Now—now—no matter!"

She buries her face in the pillows of the divan, while Everet looks on appalled.

Some one stands between the portières. Helen staggers to her feet. Everet involuntarily puts his hand on her shoulder.

Braine comes slowly to the middle of the room. His face is livid. He stops. He articulates hoarsely:

"Take away your hand!"

Everet does not move, but looks Braine in the face. Helen leans heavily against him. She is fainting, perhaps.

Braine stands motionless a moment, with his hands clenched. He makes a sudden move toward the pair. He is trembling with fury. He raises his clenched fist. Helen rises and steps toward him. She seems suddenly to have recovered herself. She says in a strange, tense voice:

"Stop!"

Braine takes a step backward—it is something in her face that prompts the action.

She stands looking at him a moment. The room is very still:

"I love this man. I am disloyal."

She crosses the room with a swift movement, and catches from the desk the paper Everet has written on. She holds it out:

"He has taken me from you. In return—we give you this."

She holds out the paper. Braine is staring at her stupidly, and does not take it. She drops it at his feet. She is very quiet in her manner and tone, but she is intense.

Everet is suffocating. Both men watch her in a kind of dream. She goes on swiftly:

"I have done what I could for you. A reasonable man would be quite satisfied; I presume you will be; but my usefulness, so far as you are concerned, is at an end. I have lived for you these last years—now I am going to live for myself. I am going away with this man. Have you anything to say?"

A pause, during which they hear every little sound in the house and in the streets.

Finally, Braine comes toward her. He stretches out his hands appealingly:

"Helen—"

His voice sounds strange and hollow. She does not move. She says:

"Go on."

He repeats again:

"Helen—"

He stops again; then suddenly staggers against the wall. He moans:

"Oh, my God!"

She does not speak. Everet is under a spell. Even the shadows cast by the chairs seem to grin grotesquely.

Braine tries to recover himself:

"Helen! on my knees I implore you to forgive me. I see it all—the fault is mine. You are justified; but you are mad. You don't know what you say. I love you! Oh God! I have never loved you as I do this moment. Come back to me. I will forgive—"

"Forgive!"

The pose of her head is regal.

Braine staggers toward her, and drops on his knees. For an instant, there is a faint glow of tenderness in her face, but it flits across and does not stay. There is an added coldness in the iciness of her tone:

"I understand that I am not without value—as a wifely politician. I understand that you will suffer some inconvenience in my loss. I trust you can fill the vacant situation in time. I must resign—or perhaps 'give warning,' is the proper phrase. I go, at once."

She turns to Everet. He mechanically takes the hand she is stretching to him. She now ignores Braine. She loses her calm. She hurries toward the door, drawing Everet with her.

Braine follows. He is trying desperately to speak. His tongue refuses to obey his will. He can only utter some incoherent, inarticulate sounds. But the situation is perfectly clear to him. With a force that is rendering him powerless and dumb, every incident in the last five years is crowding upon his memory: his preoccupation; his mad struggle for power and political supremacy; his persistent requirements of this woman, who, he did not know, needed love instead of position; this woman, who starved on ambition, and cried for tenderness and affection; this woman he has loved better than honor—for has not she been uppermost in his mind when planning for advancement? She is leaving him! She is already unfaithful! She is gathering about her the wrap she has snatched from the hall-stand.

Everet is mechanically helping her. She opens the door. Everet's carriage is waiting for him at the foot of the steps. She has forgotten Braine. She grasps Everet's arm convulsively, and hurries down to the street. The door of Everet's brougham closes behind them and the carriage moves rapidly away.

Braine is staring into the dark. The stupefied servant touches him on the arm:

"Your breath is freezing on your mustache, sir."

"Is it?"

Matters have 'come to a focus,' at the time he appointed.

XXXIII.

Helen sits erect in the carriage, her lips pressed tightly together, her hands clasped in her lap.

Everet is very pale, and still seems to be acting half-irresponsibly. He watches her face. There is no change in its expression. He can draw no conclusion from it. Presently he touches her hand:

"Helen."

She turns her face and looks at him. There is no inquiry in the expression. It is merely an action indicating that she has heard him.

He pauses. After a moment, he asks in a low tone:

"Where do you want to go?"

An expression of surprise flits across her face for a moment.

Everet looks out of the window. After a moment:

"Where? To your rooms."

"You are acting under a great strain and excitement now, Helen. Would it not be better to wait a little, until you can think more calmly? Suppose I take you to the Arlington, and you remain there to-night. In the morning, whatever decision you have reached shall be carried out. Would not that be better, dear?"

"You do not want me to go with you?"

She speaks monotonously. He does not reply. She repeats it:

"You do not want me to go with you?"

Everet slips his arm about her. There is something pitiful about this woman sitting by him so white, and speaking in so hard a tone.

"Yes, yes, I want you. I was only thinking of you. I would have you do nothing you will repent, that is all. I—"

"I am going to your rooms. I have decided."

Still the same expressionless voice.

Everet lowers the window, and calls to the coachman:

"Go home."

He then puts the window up again, and resumes his erect attitude and the study of the face of the woman beside him. He feels as though he were acting in his sleep. All has occurred so quickly.

Helen's face seems to have changed in the last hour. The expression that has seemed to him one of innocence and helplessness, is impressing him now as one of determination and perhaps calculation. He is suddenly recalling many details of their acquaintance which coincide with this new impression she is producing—but she is a beautiful woman. Nothing can change that fact.

They do not speak again until they have reached Everet's rooms.

Everet opens the door with his latch-key, and Helen passes in as he holds the door open for her. She stands quite still in the centre of the room, abstractedly.

Everet turns the gas higher and stirs the fire in the grate. He goes about the rooms apparently taking no direct notice of her, for a moment, feeling a certain humiliation for her and himself in the situation.

She still stands with her wraps on, and finally Everet comes to her. He takes her hands in his. He says gently:

"Helen, you do not regret?"

She lifts her eyes and looks at him inquiringly:

"Regret? Why should I regret? I have your love?"

Everet catches his lip between his teeth. He replies hoarsely:

"Yes."

"Then why should I regret?"

She unfastens her cloak, and it slips to the floor, leaving her in evening dress, with white bare neck and arms. There is a difference in the atmosphere. Her own house is a degree warmer than

Everet's rooms.

He notices the tremor that seizes her, and throws her fur cape about her shoulders. He takes her hand and leads her to a chair by the fire. He places her gently in it, and stands by the side of her. After a moment he says:

"I want to think for you, dear, if you will let me. Whatever I say, remember it is for your own good, because I—I love you. You have become so unhappy that you are not responsible just now for your actions. I want to put things before you plainly. You are here, in my rooms to-night—but you can return home and no one will be the wiser. You are a woman prominent in society. Your husband's name is famous throughout the country. No breath of calumny has ever touched you. If you remain with me, it will be known from here to San Francisco within forty-eight hours. Then, regrets will be useless. You will have lost everything forever but—my love; home, position, fortune, everything that is essential to the happiness of such a woman as you. You can return to-night, no one—"

"*Every one* knows," in a hard tone—"my servant witnessed all—*every one* knows."

Everet is silent a moment. Then he speaks slowly:

"Well, if that be true, at least you have nothing to reproach yourself for, yet. Though they know, you will have the knowledge that you are an—honorable woman if you return at once—"

She stops him with a gesture:

"What is that to me? The world will not know it. What I have done is irrevocable, I tell you. I have been in your rooms for fifteen minutes, and three people beside ourselves know it,—your servant, and mine, and my husband. It is possible that I might have done differently if I had been a little more deliberate,—I think not, but it is possible. However, I was *not* more deliberate—and there is nothing to be done. When a woman scorns conventionalities as I do, all is over."

She speaks proudly. She is in earnest.

Everet feels a sudden tenderness and compassion for this strange woman who speaks with such conviction of her scorn for conventionalities when her respect and reverence for them is what is about to ruin her and deprive her of all peace.

The mere thought that she has stepped aside never so little from the beaten path has paralyzed her capacity of reasoning, and she will wander about in the wood forever, having lost the power to find her way back.

He has done what he could. Now he stands staring at the fire. After a moment he feels a soft hand on his. Helen is looking at him with appealing eyes. She murmurs like a grieved little child:

"I have nothing but you now. If you do not fail me, I shall not miss the rest."

He stoops and clasps her in his arms.

XXXIV.

Braine rings his bell and sends the envelope he has been addressing. Woollet answers the bell and takes the note. Braine says laconically:

"Send by messenger."

Woollet leaves the room—his master's manner is oppressive. The silence of the house is oppressive. Ruin and catastrophe seem to pervade the atmosphere. The sombre looking clock on the mantel strikes solemnly.

Helen's dog sits dejectedly by the fire, now and then going to Braine and poking its nose into his hand. Braine watches it mechanically. He has not left his seat since last night at ten o'clock. The room looks neglected, as all rooms look if not lived in for twenty-four hours.

He has sat silently in his chair during all these hours, with his arms on the desk before him, and his head on his arms. Now he looks calmly about the room. On a chair is Helen's scarf. He rises and going over to it picks it up. It breathes the perfume peculiar to the woman. He folds it in his hands and carries it about the room as he moves aimlessly here and there. Her handkerchief is under a chair. He takes that up and carries it about with the scarf. Helen's dog follows at his heels.

Braine's face is ghastly. There are great rings under his eyes, and furrows in his cheeks that were not there last night. He pauses in the middle of the floor. A scene of long ago comes vividly to him. A little dingy office, in a far off Western town; an "editorial sanctum;" a little half rusty, half white-washed stove set in its box of sand; grimy walls; a man at a rickety desk with improvised pigeon-holes of collar boxes. Not a very inspiring picture? Well, no, but he would give his house with its art treasures, his fame, his wealth, for that little dingy office, with its obscurity—and Helen. Helen, with the sunny eyes. Helen, with the hair where you sought for missing sunbeams; Helen's heart, that sought for nothing—because it was satisfied with what it had found. Helen,—

the lost Helen!

He goes to the desk and looks among some old papers. He shades his eyes with his hand—though the light is not strong. He pulls out a long-folded newspaper clipping that reads:

"There died in this town to-day, a young man much esteemed by his fellow-citizens," etc., and as he finishes and lays it by, something near him mutters, "Juggernaut!"

He sits staring into the dead fire—no one has dared intrude upon him to replenish it.

After a time there is a knock on the door. Braine calls: "Come in."

He does not move. Everet comes to the fireplace and stands silently waiting till he shall speak.

Braine looks at him and rising, says slowly:

"Good evening—Everet. You will be seated?"

The poor voice trembles in its effort at courtesy and usualness. Everet sits. He says, after a moment:

"You wanted me, Braine?"

His tone is kind, and trembles a little too. This handsome, dignified statesman is a sorrowful sight to see.

"Yes. It was kind of you to come," with his eyes fixed on the black grate.

Everet glances at the little crumpled bunch held so tightly in the man's hands.

Braine seems to recover himself with an effort, and tries to speak formally; this is more pitiful than before. He says evenly, as though repeating a lesson:

"I thought perhaps you would come. I felt that it was better to see you first—I thought—I thought—"

He pauses and looks helplessly at Everet. Evidently he cannot keep the thread of his ideas.

Everet says quietly:

"You thought I could tell you about—Helen—your wife? Perhaps—advise you?"

Braine nods.

"That is a strange thing to expect of me, under the circumstances."

"Yes, I know," in an apathetic tone; "I know—but these are not ordinary circumstances. You—you were not to blame—"

Everet suddenly stretches out his hand. There is an eagerness in his tone. He says:

"Thank you for that, Braine. I—I—" He pauses.

Braine continues:

"No, you were not to blame—nor she—Oh, Everet!" rising and speaking excitedly, "she was not to blame. You do not know. She is as good as the angels. The crime is mine. Though she sank to the gutter, mine would be the responsibility, not her's. Six months ago she was as true in thought and deed as a child. I forced her to this. I—I—I—"

He lays his head on the mantel, and sobs shake him from head to foot. No one cares to see a strong man weep. Everet walks to the window and stands, doing something with his handkerchief.

Braine becomes quiet. Everet crosses to him, and lays his hand on his shoulder.

"Braine,"—he speaks in a deep, earnest voice,—"God only knows how I have suffered in twenty-four hours. My suffering has been small compared with yours, but it has been enough. There is nothing to explain. All is as clear to me as the day. You think I should feel contempt for you? I cannot feel that, though your crime has been against me too,—and you will never know how great it was until you know how I believed in and revered the woman who wrought for you. I feel nothing but the deepest pity for you. Since the first time I heard your name in connection with the great schemes of the West, I have revered your ability, though not always the account you turned it to—as in this dicker with the whiskey ring. But that you are a great man and a great statesman—not politician, statesman—your bitterest enemies must admit. I am an ambitious man. I cannot say, nor prove even to myself that I would not have done as you have done, had I had the power, the ability. I think now that I would not—but perhaps that is because I know that I cannot. If you have done dishonorable things, you have also done great things. If you have toiled for yourself, you have also toiled for others. You have been a power for good. Last night I pleaded with your wife, Helen, to return here. She refused. I implored her to go to a hotel until the day came, and she could think more collectedly. She said: 'Do you mean that you do not want me?' I took this woman to my home. She was weak, sorrowful, undone. I am a man—I have loved her—nay, I *do* love her—you could not expect me to do differently. To-day, at the risk of wounding her, I proposed that she let me make some other arrangement for her. She would not listen. Her will must be mine. I am ready to give you any satisfaction you demand."

Braine makes a gesture of his hand. He says hoarsely:

"I have committed crimes enough. There could be no satisfaction for me—except to kill you—and—" He looks in Everet's face and finishes—"I should be taking the life of one of the few men I can respect."

Everet takes his hand, and these two men, strangely enough, make a silent compact of brotherhood, never to be broken—and one of them has taken the other's wife. But strange things happen in this complex world of ours.

Everet says in a gratified voice:

"I am forever in your debt for the weight you take from my heart. All night, all day the expression of your face last night has followed me. I have had no happiness for thinking of your grief."

Braine is now and then shaken by a nervous thrill. He says:

"May I go to her?"

Everet looks at him for a moment, then says slowly:

"It would do no good, Braine. She is obdurate. She will never return to you, and I could not receive you unless she wished it. You understand me, do you not? She is now under my roof and my protection. I must respect her wishes. I must protect her even against her husband, if she commands—until her husband take measures to punish me. You understand, do you not?"

Braine looks a little dazed.

"Yes, I understand."

He speaks so hopelessly that Everet's face contracts with sympathy and pain. He proposes:

"You might write to her, Braine. I could not take it, you know. But I will be there when she receives it. I will prevail upon her to read it, should she refuse."

Every word that is spoken only in kindness and from the heart, cuts Braine like a knife. He feels no jealousy, that this grave friend has an influence over his wife which he no longer possesses, but the thought hurts terribly.

He grasps eagerly at the suggestion.

Everet says as Braine begins to write:

"I will go now, Braine. Send the note at once by the messenger—and—"

He hesitates. Braine looks wistfully at him.

Everet comes close to him. He says, in a solemn, impressive tone:

"From this hour, your wife's honor shall be as sacred to me as it is to you. I will protect her, even against myself, though she remain in my house. And I do this—not for her, but for you."

He leaves the room before Braine can speak.

Braine says under his breath: "This is more than I deserve."

He writes:

"Helen:"—then sits staring at the word. "I dare not come to you until you send for me. I throw myself at your feet, and implore you to forgive me. So miserable a man as I does not live. Helen, child, wife of my heart, who has known the good of my life as well as the bad, come back to me. My life from this hour shall attest my love for you, my sorrow and repentance. Helen, by the memories of those first years, when we lived but one for the other, I implore you. We will go away together. I forswear this life forever. I have wealth. My last penny shall be used for your happiness. The world is all before us. Command, and your least wish shall be fulfilled. My sin is great, my punishment is more than I can bear. Come back, sweet wife, and help me by your presence, your word of approval, to right my terrible wrong if I can. Oh, Helen, the memory of those days filled with your love and goodness crowd upon me, making my despair more hopeless; making my loneliness grimmer. That which you have longed for shall be yours. No more of this hurry and striving! No more of this frenzied living! Come back, Helen, wife, come back—"

The pen slips from his fingers. The paper is all blotted with his tears. He rings the bell, and hands the message through the door. It is gone. And now he waits.

He goes to the seat by the dead fire. He waits with Helen's neglected things in his hands—with Helen's dog at his feet.

An hour goes by, and still he waits—a little longer, and a note is handed through the door.

His note—unopened.

"Then you refuse to accept it?" Everet is speaking.

"Yes. I refuse." Helen speaks decisively and walks away to the window.

"Helen."

Everet comes close to her. He speaks hesitatingly.

"You know that I am your true friend, that when I urge this upon you it is through no lack of desire on my part to supply you with all your heart could wish. You know that when I urged you to return to Braine, I thought of your happiness. You know this. As long as you are satisfied, this house and everything in it is yours, and all your wishes shall be fulfilled so far as I am able to do it; but I feel that there is a day coming when you will not be satisfied, living in this way; and then—in *money* will be your only hope. I *must* speak plainly, dear. It is for this reason that I entreat you to accept this provision which Braine offers. All that I have is at your disposal, but I have little in comparison with the wealth Braine wishes to place in your hands."

She turns and looks at him. She says slowly:

"I do not want your wealth, or his. I want what you will not give me—love. Wealth will not take its place. If you cannot give me that, there is but one thing that can in any degree make it up to me—power. One or the other I must have. One or the other must help me to forget my ruined life—the life that *he* has ruined, and now thinks to pay for with money."

"You are wrong. He has sinned, but if ever a human being suffered and has tried to rectify his mistakes, he is the one. He has implored you to return. You have refused all overtures. You have returned his letters unopened. You have been unwilling to listen—"

"*Listen?* You talk like a child. This man has done me the greatest wrong that a woman ever suffered. These last two months with him have been one great insult, one monstrous indignity and affront. *Listen?* It is too late. Once I begged him to listen to me. I humiliated myself before him, begging for one little expression of love—the next morning he mocked me. It is too late."

And Everet knows that she speaks the truth.

He says sorrowfully:

"Very well. You cannot return to him? Then be merciful, let him make the little reparation in his power. Accept this money from him."

She shakes her head:

"Never!"

Then, with a burst of emotion, "Why do you torment me in this way? Once you would have given half your life for my favor; now you are as unresponsive as a block of wood."

Everet's face grows troubled:

"Not so," he says; "don't accuse me of this, Helen. Don't call me unresponsive. You are very dear to me—but I may not have you for my wife, and I cannot accept you in another relation. I *cannot* do that. My position has been a terrible one. I don't think you can understand—"

"His crime was directed toward you—"

"And do you not see that this compels me to be generous? I cannot do that thing. This man has discovered his wrong and is repentant. I should be a dog if I refused to recognize the fact. He has converted everything he possesses in the world into money, and begs you to accept it. He leaves his home, and takes himself away from his fellows to live—this man who has swayed thousands with his eloquence, who has commanded the homage of all the country, who has held the affairs of the nation in his hands. This man has humbled himself, has forsworn it all, has buried his strength and his greatness and his talents in a little forsaken wilderness. God! I am an honoring man; I despise his crime, and my own; and yet, I doubt if I should be great enough for this. After all, he was guilty of nothing but what his associates are guilty of every day of their lives, and will continue in uninterruptedly and with less excuse; the difference—that one has met with retribution and the others have not. To-day I have more respect and reverence for this man who has been overtaken and repents, than for Grayson who has braved it through and is about to step into his place—"

"He would not be repenting in sackcloth and ashes if he had *not* been overtaken."

There is a touch of wormwood in her voice.

"Perhaps not; but he is repenting, with an humbler repentance than I believe even the Lord cares to accept."

Helen's eyes gleam a little, and her lips are firmly pressed together. Everet's defence of the man who has tried to wrong him, and whom she has loved, cannot convince her.

After a time Everet rises to go. He holds her hands in his for a moment:

"You are decided?"

"Decided."

Everet says good night. Helen turns wearily back into the pretty rooms. She looks about, almost contemptuously. Her face is not the face of the Helen of six months ago. To-night it expresses weariness, hopelessness, bitterness, longing. She clasps her hands a little wildly. She has not found what she sought. Since the night in Everet's house, he has been the friend, not the lover. The old life sometimes comes over her as it has to-night. The old sweet life, the old sweet love—and yet, the old love would not satisfy her now, if it must be linked with the old life. That is an unacknowledged reason for her obduracy. Love without money? Yes. Love without power, excitement, intrigue? No. If this has poisoned all her days, yet it is a delicious poison.

At times she is consumed with a sense of the mortification and indignity of those last months with Braine. She feels a bitter desire for some sort of revenge. What would she have known of longing and ambition, and falsehood and madness, but for him?

She has fallen into a morbid state. She now sees no one. She is without the social pale of her old acquaintance among whom she ruled. The thing for which she has been in training for years is denied her. That which nature intended her for—the life of a loving woman—has been made tasteless to her. Her natural appetite is ruined; her acquired taste is ungratified. She thinks:

"Could I be occupied! Could I forget, a little while!"

She throws herself upon the divan with a little moan. She lies so for an hour, perhaps. A card is brought her—she reads "*Dalzel*."

She rises with a curious expression on her face. She stands expectant.

An hour later as he is leaving, he says:

"Of all the women able to accomplish the thing, you are the best fitted." And watching him go, she thinks:

"This is the clever man who was cleverer than my friend. What better incentive could a woman want?"

XXXVI.

"Well, dear fellow, I'm glad to be with you."

Braine turns to him with the grave, sad smile that is now the only smile his face knows. He walks slowly. There is none of the energy and spring in his step that belonged to Braine the statesman. The face is still handsome—it will always be that. No expression can entirely change his features, but it is a sombre face. His figure stoops a little. Mental burdens are apt to bow the shoulders far more quickly than physical ones.

Braine has grayed at the temples; it will be but a little time before the brown of his hair will have disappeared.

Everet has got off the train just now, at the tumble-down little station, and as he and Braine walk leisurely down the country road, he covertly notes every detail of his friend's appearance.

There is still a dignity in Braine's figure and movement. No stoop, no length of time can deform that, any more than it can change the attraction of his face. These things were not the ornamentations but the substance of the man. All thought of dishonor in this man was acquired—and it was a hard thing to learn. Honesty and uprightness of mind were innate. It is his natural self that has remained by him in the crisis.

With the woman, things were different.

The two men stroll on through the mellow glow, the setting sun lending its fiery touch to the hedge-rows, turning the gray of the road to a more cheerful yellow. A bob-white calls from the wood on the left; a wood-pecker is warily at work in an apple-tree in the orchard on the right. Sweet evening odors, evening sounds, evening winds, surround the men like a benediction.

Braine stops once in the road and looks off over a yellow field—a field of grain half cut. A man still works there among the sweet-smelling sheaves. A comely woman has just passed through the bars beyond, and is crossing to the man who works. There is a leisurely vigor in his movements that only strong men know at resting time. He sees the woman and stands erect, awaiting her, his rugged, positive form outlined against the flushing sky, that seems to terminate the whole earth in the field behind him. He does not meet her. She comes to him. If there is anything save the rabbits in the grain to see, the man and woman do not know. The man must be a poet—for he does not kiss her lips. The man who binds the sheaves instinctively knows that passion and the hour are incongruous. He takes her face between his hands and looks into her eyes, and as the sun with one last peep sinks below the hill into nothing, he lends to the two the brightest ray left him, and they stand in a rosy sea for a little minute—these two! And the day is done.

Braine stands with shaded eyes. The strong hand, slightly browned, trembles a little. As they walk on, he breaks the stillness gently:

"I could be happy here." There is a wistfulness in his voice.

Everet touches the hand at his side. There is the peculiar gentleness in the touch that some men have. The two go on, hand in hand. The greatness of friendship lies in its simplicity. Neither speaks again until they turn into a worn foot-path at the right, and follow it to a small white house beyond.

Braine lives here. A little house set in a patch of orchard, a flower-bed here near the door—an old-fashioned bed where sweet-william reigns supreme—that shows the conscientious care of some one who loves—something. On the step, Helen's dog. Very little things? Yes. Magnificent in their commonplaceness. These things that are the care and companions of a great mind—a lonely man, who has controlled by his intellect the thought and act of millions, directly or indirectly! Who would not be a flower—or a dog?

With old time courtesy Braine enters and stands in the narrow little doorway to welcome Everet. He makes no apology. He sees nothing to demand it, though the cane chairs are not the poems in upholstery that are in Everet's rooms; though the bench at the side serves in place of luxurious divans. There are no carpets on the floor, but the shining whiteness of the boards is seductive.

There is a desk in one corner—there is something familiar in its look. It has collar boxes for pigeon-holes. It has an atmosphere of industry about it. Evidently the lonely man is not an idle man.

Braine says to the clean boy in the next room:

"We will have some supper now—I do not dine any more," with a smile and a nod at Everet.

Everet makes no remark. The scene is impressing him strangely. The odors of the orchard waft through the door; a cricket under the window keeps up a drowsy tune.

The two men sit side by side on the door-step while their supper is made ready for them. Neither says very much.

"Are you not lonely here, dear fellow?"

Braine looks up, and he ceases to stroke Helen's dog. He replies gently:

"Yes, I am often lonely."

"Do you have nothing to occupy your days?"

"Oh, yes. The days are not bad." He nods in the direction of the desk; pats Helen's dog; glances at his flowers.

"And the nights?"

Braine smiles and does not reply. There are tears that cause heart-ache, but there are smiles that cause heart-break.

After a time they go in to supper. It is a frugal one—suggesting how adequate the food of the mind may be.

There is wine for Everet—who keeps his friend company, however, in drinking water.

After a time they sit together in the twilight. There has been a long silence between them. Presently Everet says:

"Do you want to hear?"

Braine nods.

"She does not live in the house where I established her. She is independent of my care. She no longer comes to me for sympathy. She no longer needs me as a friend. She is rich, powerful, beautiful, cold, commanding. She has a salon. The brilliant men of the country may be found there, a few of the women. She rules the statesman, the poet, the pagan, the minister—all but the Christian and the conventional. If her life is not irreproachably virtuous, now, no one suggests the doubt, because whenever they decide to acknowledge the truth they may no longer visit her. Conventional women know her. They never acknowledge her. They never repudiate her; they never mention her; they are afraid of her. Their husbands' interests are too often in her hands, sometimes their own—or their lovers'. She rules, she reigns. She lifts her finger and great men obey, and she lifts it only for those who pay. She has two sources of income—her wits and a lover. She acknowledges the wits and not the lover; consequently her satellites do the same. How long this state of things will continue, depends on the wits and the lover."

He ceases to speak. He looks at Braine. His sombre face is gray. Everet says:

"Do you know why I am telling you this? Because I am going to drag you from this place where you have buried your greatness and your talents. I am going to show you that this woman you mourn is not worth it, that—"

Braine raises his hand:

"Don't say that." There is firmness and meaning in the tone. "Perhaps this woman is not worth it—but Helen is. I have not buried my talents. I am not an idle man. I am trying to accomplish something that will in some degree indemnify those I have wronged. I do not mourn for the woman alone, but for my sin. My sin was in making my Helen the woman you tell me of. She has no sins to answer for. *I* am responsible. Some day she will come back to me—"

He speaks dreamily, looking into the purple dusk,

"Some day she will come back, and I will take her in my arms and have my wife, my Helen, Helen of the old good days again. She shall not live so—" looking, about the little room. "All my wealth is being saved for her. She shall not live like this, but amid the surroundings that Helen loves, and with me. She will be so grateful for the rest and peace, after the strife and hurry. We may both be old," wistfully. "I am old now; but it will happen—she will come back."

He stops and seems to continue the thread of his thought to himself.

Everet says nothing. His face is turned the other way—though the dusk would hide its expression. After a time the two men say good night.

XXXVII.

It is another summer evening, like that of four years ago, and Everet is again with Braine at the little cottage. He is impressed less with the sorrow than with the rugged strength of the man who rises from his flower-bed to greet him.

"Work is good for you," he says, scanning the face of his friend; "and the work is good, too. I did not believe it possible that the man of action, relinquishing action as you have done, could become a power as the man of thought. But you have wrought that miracle."

"The work is effective, then?"

"More. It is inspiring. Your printed words do not draw men to you as your eloquence did, and you take no personal part in directing human endeavor, but you are influencing others to action as you never did before, and instead of one great Edgar Braine, filling the eye of the public, we have thousands inspired by him to do his work for the betterment of the land and the time. My friend, I once tried to draw you from the solitude in which you were wasting yourself, as I supposed; I have no wish now to draw you from a seclusion in which you are doing a nobler work than in your most active days."

"Thank you, Everet—and thank God! I have atonement to make, you know, and it is encouraging to know that I am making it."

And so the two talk on of public matters, with no further reference to the more sensitive matters of personal feeling, until the clean boy has served the supper, and they have finished it. Then, as they sit together in the open air, Braine says:

"And now, Everet?"

Everet understands, and takes a preparatory long breath. He begins:

"I told you I had come from New York instead of Washington?"

"Yes."

"Well, she is there."

"Yes?" as Everet pauses.

"Yes. She could not remain in Washington any longer. She has been in New York for six months now."

"What is she doing?"

Everet does not reply for a moment; then he continues:

"The last year she was there was a disastrous one for her. The old set were enraged by certain of her desperate exploits in finance, and she did not get on with the new. It was impossible for her to remain there any longer, so she sought a new field in New York."

He is reluctant to say more, and pauses again.

"Well?" Braine speaks obstinately. "Go on."

"She went to New York and began living on a large scale—she still lives on a large scale—but Helen is a fine-grained woman to her finger tips, no matter what she has done. The Washington politician is bad enough, but the New York politician is a good deal worse—to a woman. When Helen sinks to the street commissioner and the sheriff, she is to be pitied. And it will come to that. Now that she has left the field that she was so long mistress of, she will not be able to reach the superior villains—no: that is hard on them. I'll call them men—we're all men."

He looks meditatively into the darkness.

"No, Helen cannot carry on transactions with her kind any more, and she must use these others." Then, continuing grimly, "How she will bring herself to assimilate with—"

"Everet—you—you are speaking of Helen."

There is no anger in the tone. It is a tone rather of tenderness and surprise.

Everet bites his lip, and says:

"Forgive me, Braine. I—forgot it."

After a time, Braine asks:

"Do you think it would be of any use to go to her, Everet? I would tell her that I loved her just the same, you know, and want her back; or do you think I had better wait awhile,—until she is ready to return of herself?"

He speaks with the old, wistful intonation.

Everet replies earnestly:

"No, Braine. It is better for you to—wait. It would do no good for you to go. There is no use in your putting yourself in the way of affront—"

"I should not mind that," quickly.

"No—not if it would do any good. But it would be useless. I know what I say, Braine. I—I have seen her. She would not return—she would not see you."

Braine sighs heavily.

After a time, he leaves Everet to smoke a last cigar, and goes to his work at his desk, from which he does not rise till morning.

XXXVIII.

A year later.

"How do you feel to-day?"

"The same."

Helen keeps her eyes fixed on the handle of the cracked wash-pitcher.

The physician looks at her curiously for a moment. After a little he says:

"Have you no friends?"

"None;" without ceasing to study the cracked pitcher. As usual, the woman leaves no chance for further questions.

As he rises to go, the physician says gravely:

"I think if you could force yourself to arouse, you could throw off this—this—disease that is sapping your vitality. It is more a disease of the mind, I think, than the body."

"Doubtless."

The physician says:

"Well, good-day," lingering a moment longer.

"Good-day," from the bed.

He has attended this woman, who is on his charity list, for two months, and he has never heard her utter more than one sentence at a time—and seldom a sentence of more than one word. She has looked in his face once. He will never forget that look. Since then, she has studied the wall, or the broken window, or some other object. He may speak for five minutes at a time, and she makes no sign that she hears him unless he asks a question.

He cannot decide what is the matter with her. She lies here day after day, apparently unattended—indeed he is not certain but that she is starving, though she has said, "Nothing," when he has inquired if there was anything that she needed, anything he could do for her.

He has made inquiries of the Irish woman below, of the Dutchman across the hall, and the Italian above, but he only hears below that she's "wan av yer foine ladies," and across the hall and above he has heard—no matter what.

He has discovered that the daughter of the old-iron man in the cellar goes in once a day, and is paid ten cents for it—or used to be; now she goes for sweet charity. He can learn no more. He calls only occasionally now. He can do nothing for her. He does not know what is the matter with

her.

As she lies here alone after he has gone, she clasps her thin hands, with a weak movement, and gives a little moan indicative of weakness, of pain, of sorrow perhaps—perhaps all three. After a time she says aloud:

"*He* is to blame for it all."

The old gleam is in her eyes. The old relentless expression in her tone.

She turns her face to the grimy wall, with a smothered groan. She lies with her eyes shut, while the dusk closes in. The night-sounds in the street reach her through the open window. The room is hot and stuffy; the odors are intolerable. They are intolerable in their suggestions. It is not the subtle perfume that arouses an emotion—but what the perfume suggests; it is not the fume that disgusts—but what it suggests. *These* fumes suggest a Chinese restaurant, an unclean bedroom, a garbage barrel, a swill cart, and the stale memory of bad tobacco. All this is tinctured with the Dutchman's cheese over the way.

A child is bawling in the street. The Italian above is beating his monkey; a coal-heaver is cursing his wife, and has just thrown a bottle at his brat, which accounts for one less sound,—for one more silence suddenly occurring. And Helen lies on a bed assorting these sounds and smells. Helen! Patrician Helen! Helen of dainty habit! Fastidious Helen! Braine's wife! Braine's Helen!

"D'y'e want anythin'?" The old-iron man's daughter thrusts her kindly, dirty face inside the door.

"Nothing."

XXXIX.

Everet and Braine are walking down the road from the station. Everet is talking earnestly. Braine is listening eagerly. Disappointment is written on his face.

"You have found *no* clew?"

"None." Everet speaks hopelessly.

"Don't speak in that tone. A woman like Helen cannot drop out of existence without leaving some trace. What was the last you discovered?"

"I found a place where she had lived—a comfortable flat. She had lived there—" He hesitates.

Braine says quietly:

"Say it."

"With a man called McPhelan—you know who he is, I presume."

"Good God!"

Braine stops in the road and looks helplessly into Everet's face. He moans:

"Don't say that, Everet! Don't say that! Not Helen! It was not she. It was some other."

"And after all, dear Braine, what is the difference? A Sixth Ward politician, or a member of the cabinet."

He has thrown his arm across Braine's shoulders. His tone is one of tenderest sympathy, but there is a certain sternness in it.

Braine's strong body trembles like a weak child's. He says, hoarsely:

"I must go and find her. I *must*, Everet."

"No, no. No one could do more than I can in such a matter. I will look until I find her, or know that she is dead. I will obey your least direction, your slightest wish in this, but grant what I ask of you. Don't go to find her. Think, Braine! Think what it would be to learn such things from strangers; think what it would be to learn the details of so pitiful a life from those who cared nothing for your grief. It is right you should know them—but hear them from me. I love you. I loved Helen—the Helen *you* have known. You surely can bear these things better from me."

"Yes, yes. God bless you, Everet. You're the truest friend a man ever had. But promise me, promise me you will leave no stone unturned?"

"I promise."

XL.

Helen lies staring out of the window. There is no curtain to shut out the glaring sunlight, which is causing the fumes to rise from the broiling humanity below.

Metropolitan poverty suggests to me sounds and smells. I could endure sights. What one sees, one knows. There is no longer room for the imagination—that is capable of so much that is more horrible than reality. But a sound!

A woman in the room below us cries, "Don't!" She may be speaking excitedly to her child—or that brute, her husband, may have her by the hair preparing to cut her throat.

Just now, Helen hears a chair knocked over in the dark hall outside her door. It does not occur to her that someone has stumbled in the darkness; she thinks someone has knocked someone down in the hall. There is no more noise, and she carries on the thought still farther. She says, "One of them is being strangled, and that is why it is still." With this thought, a face she has seen once in the doorway opposite comes to her mind; an evil, loathsome face. She at once associates it with the silent murder that is being done in the hall. She has not the slightest doubt that this is a fact. She does not stir. She would not if the evil man with the loathsome face came in to strangle her. She would be perfectly quiet because she would know of nothing else to do.

Some one raps on her door. It is the man with the loathsome face, she knows. She does not speak. Her eyes are fixed in a sort of fascination on the door. The knob turns; she still stares as the door opens. There is an eeriness in watching a slowly opening door when one knows nothing of the one who is impelling it.

A man enters. It is not the man of the evil face. It is Everet; but the outward effect is the same, upon her. She does not speak. She watches him as he comes toward the bed. He does not speak to her. He stands at the bedside looking down at her. She lies motionless, looking up into his face.

Slowly his eyes fill with tears. He takes the slim, transparent hand that lies inert on the grimy quilt, and bowing over it lifts it to his lips. He kisses it as though it were the hand of a princess. There is a reverence, a homage in the act that he never showed to Helen Braine in her proudest days,—the homage that helplessness and misery command.

Helen makes no sign. Everet walks to the window and looks down into the fiery street. There is a woman, half-clothed, drunk in the gutter. He turns away with a shudder. He stands in the middle of the floor for a moment, looking at the figure in the bed. She does not speak. After a moment of indecision, he hurries from the room. He sends a telegram; gets some wine and other things his judgment suggests may be useful, and hurries back to the room he has left.

He knocks off the neck of the bottle—having no more convenient means of opening it. He finds a cracked tea cup in a cupboard, and pours a little of the wine into it. He goes to Helen and raises her a little by slipping his arm under her shoulders. She is as light as a little child. His hand trembles as he holds the cup to her lips. She drinks and lies back on the pillow without speaking.

After a time she eats a little of what Everet has brought. He looks about the bare room uncertainly. He has a desire to make it more habitable while she is in it. Nothing can be done. He draws a chair to the bed and sits in it. Taking Helen's hand he speaks for the first time; he says:

"You have been very ill?"

She does not reply.

After a pause, he says gently:

"You do not want to talk, dear?"

She shakes her head. Everet remains quietly by her, holding the shadowy little hand.

As evening comes, the sounds in the street become less collective and more individual. They seem more aggressive.

There is no candle, no lamp to light. He does not go out for candles because he does not want to leave her. He sits on in the darkness. Now and then when one sound comes more sharply or loudly than another, the thin fingers tighten over his. He holds the hand close, and murmurs:

"Poor child! And you have endured all this alone."

There is no response, and silence falls again.

After an hour they hear a step in the hall. Helen knows the step. If it were not for the darkness Everet would see the relentless gleam that springs into her eyes. The door opens and Braine hurries into the room.

He stands, bewildered at finding darkness. He can only see objects dimly through the gloom. Everet throws his arm around him, and leads him to the bed. He leaves him standing there, and hurries from the apartment.

Braine sinks on his knees beside Helen. He throws his strong arms about the frail figure, and lifts her to his heart.

There is not a sound, there in the darkness, save the heavy, tremulous breaths drawn by Braine.

He holds her so. He gives her no caress, says no word of endearment. His emotions have carried him beyond such forms. He only holds her close to his heart, tightening his arms about her from time to time, as though in a sudden terror lest she be spirited from him.

That she is utterly unresponsive he does not note. If he did he would not care now. He has but one thought: "This is Helen, Helen, Helen."

Everet finds them so when he re-enters the room. He brings candles with him and lights them. He first notices the expression on Helen's face. It paralyzes him for the moment; then he looks fearfully and furtively at Braine. He is oblivious of Helen's expression. He knows only *Helen*.

"And now?"

Everet looks about and pauses. He forgets that Helen has not spoken since he entered the room in the morning. Of course he does not know what has passed between the two.

Braine seems utterly helpless, and looks at Everet in reply. Everet says quietly:

"You remembered to bring things as I wired you?"

Braine nods and points to the package on the chair.

Everet had asked Braine in his telegram to bring something that Helen could travel in. He knew that in a certain room, in a certain little white house, were certain beautiful belongings of Helen's; treasured for what? Such a time as this, perhaps.

Everet unrolls the things. Braine has been fortunate enough to select something suitable.

Everet says in a business-like way:

"She must leave here, at once—a hotel, or home?"

"Home."

"Very well; she must be dressed, you know. You had better assist her while I see about a carriage in which to get her away from this place."

He points to the garments, saying:

"There they are, Braine."

He is impressed with the conviction that Braine does not comprehend much now.

He leaves the room. Braine goes to the bed, and says, in a voice too full of tenderness, joy, love, to be very comprehensible:

"Can you be dressed now, dear?"

She looks at him without replying. He thinks she has not heard, and repeats the question. She does not answer. He says, lovingly, with a caress:

"You shall not be annoyed, dearest. You need not talk. I will help you."

She is absolutely passive. She assists herself very little. She does not make any instinctive motion that will help, but obeys Braine's least suggestion like an automaton.

The gown is of a style worn more than five years before, and hangs oddly on the attenuated figure, that once filled out its graceful curves. Its richness contrasts strangely with the dingy room.

Is there a trace of the old Helen? Very little. The beauty of her eyes will never disappear; the grace of her least gesture will remain—but the hard bitterness, the desperate expression is hers too.

Braine does not notice it. He only sees that other trace of Helen.

She seems to be in no pain, but utterly exhausted as he lays her back on the pillow, while they wait for Everet. Her eyes never wander from his face. He interprets their expression by his own emotions, and smiles back at her in response. There seems nothing peculiar in her silence. Even he finds it an effort to speak.

They hear Everet spring up the stairs. He knocks and comes in, as Braine bids him. He says, with a smile:

"You are ready to go?" looking at Helen.

Braine replies:

"Yes."

Helen makes no movement to help herself. Braine takes her in his arms and carries her, with no resistance on her part, to the carriage below. She is but a feather-weight. He draws her to him so that she rests with the utmost ease against his shoulder.

Everet sits opposite. He appears oblivious of everything but the lamp-posts in the street, but he furtively watches Helen's face. Its expression is terrifying him. He is thinking of the future of the

friend who sits opposite. He does not dare interpret this changeless expression.

At the station he suggests that he remain in the city. Braine grasps his hand in mute appeal:

"I—I feel so helpless, powerless in some way, Everet."

Everet presses his hand, replying:

"Just as you wish, old fellow—I was only thinking of you."

And so this friend goes with them.

He enters this man's house with this man's wife—the wife whom five years ago he took away.

On the journey, Everet is seldom near them: when he is, he is bright, helpful, tender. Helen has never once spoken. She helps herself in no way. Braine cares for her like a child. She is perfectly passive.

Her continued silence has at last forced itself upon Braine's mind. Now that he stops to think, he knows that he has not heard her voice. He is amazed at first. He looks up at her in a startled way, as the thought comes to him. She is looking vacantly out of the window. He asks her a question. She turns her head and looks in his face. She makes no reply. There is no inquiry expressed in her countenance.

For the first time he realizes the expression of her deep, beautiful eyes. He feels an icy hand clutch at his heart. He is speechless for a moment; then he leans near her. With a world of anguish and appeal in his voice, he says:

"Helen!"

She does not reply; she only looks in his face. Her expression never varies; and it is no look of insanity. It is the only expression Braine will ever see there, and in that instant he is aware of the fact.

He turns to the window and sits staring out. Once he draws a long, quivering breath, that escapes again, flutteringly. In the sigh all the anguish of a lifetime is expressed.

Was there a change for an instant in the expression of the woman's face? If so, it was the shadow of a smile that flitted across it—the old, sphinx-like smile. But perhaps it was not there. If so, it was only suggested.

For the rest of the journey there is silence between the two men. The woman is the same.

When they leave the train at the little station there is a conveyance waiting to take them to the cottage. Braine carries Helen as he has done before.

The three drive silently down the road in the twilight. The two men are thinking of a scene years ago, in which the same characters figured, but oh, so differently!

As Everet glances at the silent figure through the dusk, he feels his whole body shaken by some powerful emotion. That woman, ominously still, with white face, deeply brooding, relentless eyes, haggard, shadowy and worn, is the woman he once admired as the most perfect type of what womanhood was meant by God to be; now she is what sin alone can make a woman, and he remembers with exquisite remorse that the sin which wrought this ruin was in part his.

The two men are thinking of that lost time. The woman—who can guess what the woman is thinking?

They drive through the lane to the house. Apparently neither scene nor time, nor circumstance is impressing her. She looks off over the purple hills into nothingness.

Braine lifts her out and carries her within the cottage, placing her gently in a chair. He says eagerly, while unfastening her wraps:

"Things will not be like this, you know, dearest. In just a few days it will be different."

He speaks hurriedly as though anxious to convey to her that she is not to live in poverty; as though to reassure her; as though to ward off reproach.

Everet stands apart. After a time, when Braine has gone into the next room, he approaches the woman in the chair. He stands by her side. She looks up at him. The relentless look leaves her eyes; her expression, aside from that, is the same. She does not speak. He takes her hand in his and holds it for a moment; then says gently:

"Good-bye, Helen."

No answer. He lays her hand tenderly in her lap, and leaves the room. He never sees her again.

In the next room he grasps Braine's hands, saying in a husky voice:

"I am going, dear Braine. I shall not return. God bless you."

Braine looks in his face, and Everet sees that he has acquired a new expression, one that will be constant. The old restlessness, wistfulness, hope, feverishness are gone. Patience is there, instead.

The men stand with clasped hands for a moment; then Everet goes out the door, carrying with him the memory of two faces, a man's and a woman's; one tragic in its patience; one tragic in its gloom. They are the faces of the only man and the only woman he has ever loved.

These three who have sinned and been sinned against! These three with a common guilt! Two, with a mutual repentance. The other—a woman!

Helen, sitting alone, her eyes rest on the desk with its collar-boxed pigeon-holes. Does it suggest something to her? Perhaps. The same, shadowy, enigmatic smile crosses her face, and is gone.

XLI.

The cottage is still the old familiar white cottage at the foot of the lane. The dog on the step is Helen's dog. The bed of sweet-williams is still tended by Braine. The same old desk sits in the corner, at which the same earnest, grave man works, but all else is different.

There is no longer the seductiveness of shining cleanliness alone, but there have been added the proper settings of the Helen of long ago.

The cottage is dainty within;—rich with soft carpets and heavy hangings. It impresses one as a little incongruous at first, on entering with the impression of simplicity gained outside; but the feeling quickly wears off, and one is satisfied with the charm.

All was done in a week's time. She did not have to wait.

She apparently has been unimpressed with the change. She has accepted the luxury as she did the apparent poverty. Braine has no way of knowing whether it pleases her or not; whether she has a desire that he may make himself happy by gratifying her or not.

She sits always in one place—on a luxuriously soft, roomy chair in the window, with the flower-bed just in front of her. She sits half reclining here, from morning till night.

Braine attends to every want. He dresses her as deftly as a woman, in the morning; at night he assists her again.

She requires no waiting on. He stands for moments beside her sometimes, longing to hear her signify a desire that he may fulfil it. She wants nothing.

Sometimes her presence drives him nearly mad. He sits at the desk hour after hour, feeling her dark, brooding eyes fixed upon him. He endures it until he feels his senses swimming, and then sometimes looks up with a smile, terrible in its effort and pathos. He looks up to meet the relentless gaze that follows him from morning till night. Never a word, never a motion. Silence, passivity always.

She looks at one other thing—the sweet-williams in front of the window. Her expression may not change; it may be the relief that he experiences, when he knows that her eyes are not upon him, but he fancies that the gaze is less terrible, less forbidding when she looks at the flowers. For this reason, he brings her a fragrant little bunch each morning, each evening. He lays them in her lap. He never sees her touch them, but she never rejects them. She accepts them as she does everything else, in utter silence, passively.

Those brought in the morning are withered at night, and those brought at night, faded by day—but he never throws them away. They have been near her. They have touched her gown—possibly she has touched them with her hands. It is possible she has touched them with her lips—those lips he never dares kiss. At any rate he keeps the withered flowers. He puts them away, each little faded bunch, in a drawer in the strange little desk.

Sometimes he raises his head from his writing to speak. He meets her glance, and is dumb. Sometimes he thinks she must be lonely, and reads to her,—reads until the fascination of her eyes draws his glance from the pages, and he looks up with the feeling of horror and oppression that now possesses him. Sometimes he longs for the sound of her voice. Indeed, sometimes the longing becomes so intense that he clenches his hands, and the perspiration stands in great beads upon his forehead.

Sometimes he sits in the twilight, the silent figure near, and thinks of the tones of a voice long ago. He tries to recall the intonation she gave to his name, and certain phrases she used. He wonders if the tones are just right in his memory.

At these times he thinks every moment:

"Will she speak? She is about to speak now. In a moment she will speak my name." And he sits breathlessly, with his head partly turned. There is never a word, never a sound, never a motion.

He is working in his flower-bed. He puts down his trowel and hurries in, suddenly possessed with the idea—"She may feel like speaking, and I not be there." Or while he is at work among the flowers he looks up to find her looking at him.

Her dog is at her feet. She never notices him, never touches him. Braine can no longer find a

trace of Helen, his wife, in this woman. He tries in vain to recall her expression.

This evening he is standing at the little gate leading to the lane. He leans on it in the sweet silence, that the birds are emphasizing. He is looking off into the far-away, his white hair touched by the setting sun.

Is it the effect of the dying light, or is his face different? His dark eyes have grown dreamy with their absent look. There is a half smile on his firm, tender lips; an expression of resignation, which is not dogged but cheerful; an expression that impels the squirrel on the rail of the fence to stay where he is, and the dog to poke his black nose into his master's hand.

He turns toward the house, stooping over the sweet-williams to gather the accustomed bunch. He goes into the cottage with them in his hand, the same half-smile on his lips.

In the doorway he pauses. He stands gazing at the figure in the chair by the window. What has come over him? He brushes his hand slowly across his eyes. Helen sits by the window. Where is the terrible face that has haunted him all these months?

He goes nearer. She is asleep. The setting sun burnishes the gold of her hair until it is like the aureole of a saint. It frames the face not of the woman who has sat in silence so long, but of the woman who loved him in his youth. The same sweet mouth with its tender smile. The wife of his youth, of his love, of his happiness, of his poverty, of his eminence, of—

He is at her side. The sun has lowered a little, and the delicate flush on her face is going with it.

He bends near her till his lips touch her tender ones that seem to invite.

He leans heavily against her chair. He lays the sweet-williams gently in her dead hands, as the sun sets behind the hill.

Juggernaut has passed over his soul and Helen's.

THE END.

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