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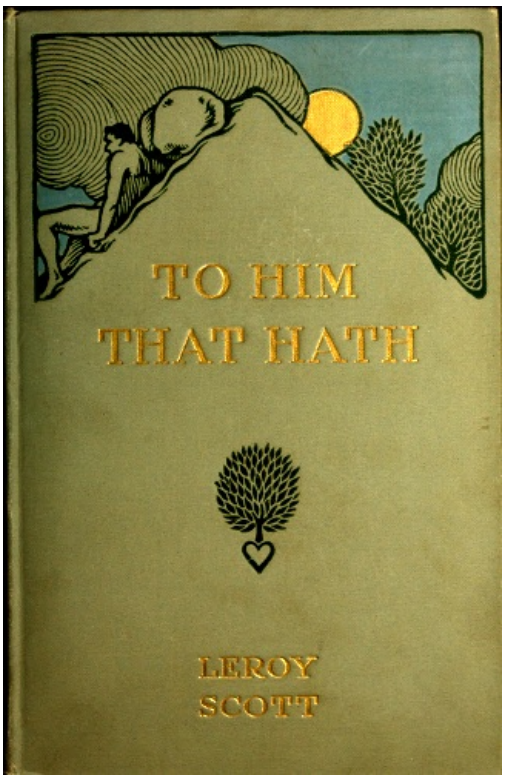

To Him That Hath

By LEROY SCOTT

Author of "The Walking Delegate"

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TO THOSE WHOM THE WORLD HAS MADE UGLY
AND WHOSE UGLINESS THE WORLD CANNOT FORGIVE

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BOOK I

THE HIGHEST PRICE

CHAPTER I

AN INJUSTICE OF GOD

The Reverend Philip Morton, head of St. Christopher's Mission, had often said that, in event of death or serious accident, he wished David Aldrich to be placed in charge of his personal affairs; so when at ten o'clock of a September morning the janitor, at order of the frightened housekeeper, broke into the bath-room and found Morton's body lying white and dead in the tub, the housekeeper's first clear thought was of a telegram to David.

The message came to David while he was doggedly working over a novel that had just come back from a third publisher. He glanced at the telegram, then his tall figure sank back into his chair and he stared at the yellow sheet. Never before had Death struck him so heavy a blow. The wound of his mother's death had been dealt in quick-healing childhood; and though his father, a Western mining engineer, had died but seven years before, David had known him hardly otherwise than as a remotely placed giver of an allowance. Morton had for years been his best friend—latterly almost his only friend. For a space the blow rendered him stupid; then the agony of his personal loss entered him, and wrung him; and then in beside his personal sorrow there crept a sense of the appalling loss of the people about St. Christopher's.

But there was no time for inactive grief. He quickly threw a black suit and a week's linen into a travelling bag, and within an hour after the New York train pulled out of his New Jersey suburb, he paused across the street from St. Christopher's Mission—a chapel of red brick, with a short spire rising above the tenements' flat heads, and adjoining it a four-story club-house in whose windows greened forth boxes of ivy and geraniums. The doors of the chapel stood wide, as they always did for whoso desired to rest or pray, but the doors of the club-house, usually open, were closed against the casual visitor by the ribboned seal of death.

David held his eyes on the fourth-story windows, behind which he knew his friend lay. Minutes passed before he could cross the street and ring the bell. He was admitted into the large hallway, cut with numerous doors leading into club-rooms, and hung with prints of Raphaels, Murillos, Angelicos and other holy master-painters. Overwhelmed though all his senses were, he was at once struck by the emptiness, the silence, of the great house—by its strange childlessness.

As he started up the stairway he saw at its top a tall young woman dressed in black. His mounting steps quickened. "Miss Chambers!" he said.

She came down the stairway with effortless grace, her hand outheld, her subdued smile warm with friendship. He quivered within as he heard his name in her rich voice, as he clasped her hand, as he looked into the sincerity, the dignity, the rare beauty of her face.

There were none of those personal questions with which long-parted friends bridge the chasm of their separation. Death made self trivial. At first they could only breathe awed interjections upon the disaster that so suddenly had fallen. Then David asked the question that had been foremost in his mind for the last two hours:

"What caused his death? I've had only a bare announcement."

She gave him the details. "His doctor told me he had a weak heart," she added. "'In all likelihood,' the doctor said, 'the shock of the cold bath had caused heart failure. Perhaps the seizure itself was fatal; perhaps on the other hand the seizure was recoverable but while helpless he drowned.'

"As soon as I learned of his death I hurried here—I happened to be in town for a few days," she went on, after a moment. "I thought I might possibly be of service. But Bishop Harper has sent a Dr. Thorn, and Mrs. Humphrey told me you were coming, so it seems I can be of no assistance. But if there's anything I can do, please let me know."

David promised. They spoke of the great misfortune to the Mission—which she felt even more keenly than he, for her interest in St. Christopher's had been more active, so was deeper; then she bade him good-bye and continued down the stairway. He followed her with his eyes. This was but the second time he had seen her since her mother's death, six months before; and her beauty, all in black, was still a fresh marvel to him.

When the door had closed upon her, he mounted stairs and passed through hallways, likewise hung with brown prints and opening into club-rooms, till he came to the door of Morton's quarters. Mrs. Humphrey answered his ring, and the housekeeper's swollen eyes flowed fresh grief as she took his hand and led him into the sitting-room, walled with Morton's books.

"The noblest, ablest, kindest man on earth—gone—and only thirty-five!" she said, between her sobs. "Millions might have been called, and no difference; but he was the one man we couldn't spare. And yet God took him!"

The same cry against God's injustice had been springing from David's own grief. Mrs. Humphrey continued her lamentations, but they were soon interrupted by the entrance of a clergyman, of most pronounced clerical cut, whom she introduced as Dr. Thorn. Dr. Thorn explained that Bishop Harper, knowing Morton had no relatives, had sent him to take charge of the funeral arrangements; and he went on to say that if David had any requests, he'd be glad to carry them out. It was a relief to David to be freed of the business details of his friend's funeral. He replied that he had no wishes, and Dr. Thorn withdrew, taking with him Mrs. Humphrey.

Alone, memories of his friend lying in the next room rushed upon him. Morton had been some kind of distant cousin—so distant that the exact fraction of their kinship was beyond computation. After the death of David's mother, Morton's father had stood in place of David's far-absent parent; and Morton himself, though David's senior by hardly ten years, had succeeded to the guardianship on his own father's death nine years before.

This formal relation had grown, with David's growth into manhood, into warmest friendship. David had given Morton the admiring love a younger brother gives his brilliant elder, and had received the affection such as an older brother would give a younger, who was not alone brother but a youth of sympathy and promise. It had been Morton who had insisted that he had a literary future, Morton who had tried to cheer him through his five years of struggling unsuccess. And so the memories and grief that now flooded David were not less keen than if Morton's blood and his had indeed been the same.

After a time David moved to a window and looked out over the geraniums and ivy into the narrow street, with its dingy, red-faced tenements zig-zagged with fire-escapes. His mind slipped back six years to when Morton had taken charge of St. Christopher's, which then occupied merely an old dwelling, and when he, a boy of twenty, had first visited the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood was then a crowded district forgotten by those who called themselves good and just, remembered only by landlords, politicians and saloonkeepers—grimy, quarrelsome, profane, ignorant of how to live. Now decency was here. There was still poverty, but it was a respectable poverty. Men brought home their pay, and fought less often. Shawled wives went less frequently with tin pails to the side entrances of saloons. It was becoming uncommon to hear a child swear.

David's mind ran over the efforts by which this change had been wrought: Morton's forcing the police to close disorderly resorts; his eloquent appeals to the public for fair treatment of such neighbourhoods as his; his unwearied visiting of the sick, and his ready assumption of the troubles of others; his perfect good-fellowship, which made all approach him freely, yet none with disrespectful familiarity; his wonderful sermons, so simple, direct and appealing that there was never an empty seat. He was sympathetic—magnetic—devoted—brilliant. Thus he had won the neighbourhood; not all, for the evil forces he had fought, led by the boss of the ward, held him in bitter enmity. But in three or four hundred families, he was God.

David turned from the window. Mrs. Humphrey had asked if she should not take him in to see Morton, but he had shrunk from having eyes upon him when he entered the presence of his dead friend. He now moved to the door of Morton's chamber, paused chokingly, then stepped into the darkened room. On the bed lay a slender, sheeted figure. For the first moment, awe at the mystery of life rose above all other feelings: Monday he had seen Morton, strangely depressed to be sure, but in his usual health; this was Saturday, and there he lay!

His emotions trembling upon eruption, David crossed slowly to the bed. With fearing hand he drew the sheet from the face, and for a long space gazed down at the fine straight nose, at the deeply-set eyes, and at the high broad forehead, the most splendid he had ever seen, with the soft hair falling away from it against the pillow. Then suddenly he sank to a chair, and his grief broke from him.

Soon his mind began to dwell upon the contrast between Morton and himself—what a great light was this that had been stricken out, what a pitiable candle flame was this left burning. In the presence of these dead powers he felt how small was his literary achievement, how small his chance of future success, how comparatively trivial that success would be even if gained. David had felt to its full the responsibility of life; he had longed, with a keenness that was at times

actual physical pain, that his life might count some little what in advancing the general good. But he realised now, as he gazed at the white face on the pillow, that in the field of humanitarianism, as in the field of literature, his achievement was nothing.

He burnt with a sudden rush of shame that he was alive, and he clenched his hands and in tense whispers cried out against the injustice of God in taking so useful a man as Morton and leaving so useless a cumbrance as himself. But this defiance soon passed into a different mood. He slipped to his knees, and a wish sobbed up from his heart that he might change places with the figure on the bed.

This wish was present in his thoughts all that evening and the next two days as he did his share in the sad routine of the funeral arrangements. The service was set for the evening so that the people of the neighbourhood could be present without difficulty or financial loss. At the hour of beginning the chapel was packed to the doors, and David learned afterwards that as large a crowd stood without and that many notables who had come at the appointed time were unable to gain any nearer the chapel than the middle of the street.

Bishop Harper himself was in charge, and about him were gathered the best-known clergymen of his persuasion in the city—a tribute to his friend that quickened both David's pride and grief. Bishop Harper was ordinarily a pompous speaker of sonorous platitudes, ever conscious of his high office. But to-night he had a simple, touching subject; he forgot himself and spoke simply, touchingly. When he used an adjective it was a superlative, and yet the superlative did not seem to reach the height of Morton's worth. Morton was "the most gifted, the most devoted" man of the Bishop's acquaintance, and the other clergymen by their looks showed complete and unjealous approval of all the Bishop's praise.

David's eyes flowed at the tribute paid Morton by his peers. Yet he was moved far more by the inarticulate tribute of the simple people who crowded the chapel. Whatever was good in their lives, Morton had brought them; and now, mixed with their sense of loss, was an unshaped fear of how hard it was going to be to hold fast to that good without his aid. Never before had David seen anything so affecting; and even in after days, when he saw Morton's death with new eyes, the picture of the love and grief of this audience remained with him, unsoiled, as the strongest, sincerest scene he had ever witnessed. The women—factory girls, scrub-women, hard-working wives—wept with their souls in their tears and in their spasmodic moans; and the men—labourers, teamsters, and the like—let the strange tears stream openly down their cheeks, unashamed. The chapel was one great sob, choked down at times, at times stopping the Bishop's words. It was as if they were all orphaned.

All through the service, one cry rose from David's heart, and continued to repeat itself while the audience, and after them the crowd from the street, filed by the open casket—and still rose as, later, he sat with bowed head in a front pew beside the coffin:

"If only I could change places, and give him back to them!"

CHAPTER II

WHAT DAVID FOUND IN MORTON'S CLOSET

David was sitting in Morton's study, looking through the six years' accumulation of letters and documents, saving some, destroying others, when he came upon a dusty snap-shot photograph. Hands and eyes were arrested; Morton sank from his mind. Four persons sat in a little sailboat; their faces were wrinkled in sun-smiles; about and beyond them was the broad white blaze of the Sound. The four were Miss Chambers and her mother, Morton and himself.

The day of the photograph ran its course again, hour by hour, in David's mind, and slowly rose other pictures of his acquaintance with Helen Chambers: of their first meeting three years before at a dinner at St. Christopher's Mission; of later meetings at St. Christopher's, where she had a club and where he was a frequent visitor; of the summer passed at St. Christopher's two years before, during the early part of which he, in Morton's stead, had aided her in selecting furnishings for a summer house given by her father for the Mission children; of two weeks at the end of that summer which he and Morton had spent at Myrtle Hill, the Chambers's summer home on the Sound. Since then he had seen her at irregular intervals, and their friendship had deepened with each meeting.

She had interested his mind as no other woman had ever done. She had been bred in the conventions of her class, the top strata of the American aristocracy of wealth; all her friends, save those she had gained at the Mission, belonged in this class; and her life had been lived within her class's boundaries. Given these known quantities, an average social algebraist would have quickly figured out the unknown future to be, a highly desirable marriage, gowning and hatting, tea-drinking, dining, driving, calling, Europe-going, and the similar activities by which women of her class reward God for their creation—and in time, the motherhood of a second generation of her kind.

But there was her character, which by degrees had revealed itself fully to David: her sympathy, her love of truth, a lack of belief in her social superiority, an instinct to look very clearly, very

squarely, at things, a courage unconscious that it was courage, that was merely the natural action of her direct spirit—all these dissolved in a most simple, charming personality. It was these qualities (a stronger reprint of her mother's), in one of her position, that made David think her future might possibly be other than that contained in the algebraist's solution—that made him regard her as a potential surprise to her world.

And Helen Chambers had interested not only David's mind. In moments when his courage had been high and his fancy had run riotously free, he had dared dream wild dreams of her. But now, as he gazed at the photograph, he sighed. In place and fortune she was on the level of the highest; he was far below—still only a straggler, obscure, barely keeping alive.

Yes—he was still only a struggler. He nodded as his mind repeated the sentence. Now and then his manuscripts were accepted—but only now and then. His English was admirable; this he had been told often. But there was a something lacking in almost all he wrote, and this too he had been often told. David had tried to write of the big things, the real things—but of such one cannot write convincingly till he has thought deeply or travelled himself through the deep places. David's trouble was, he did not know life—but no one had told him this. So in his ignorance of the real difficulty, he had thought to conquer his unsuccess by putting forth a greater effort. He had gone out less and less often; he had sat longer and longer at his writing-table; his English had become finer and finer. And his people had grown more hypothetical, more unreal. The faster he ran, the farther away was the goal.

He sighed again. Then his square jaw tightened, his eyes narrowed to grim crescents, his clenched fist lightly pounded the desk; and to a phalanx of imaginary editors he announced with slow defiance:

"Some of these days the whole blamed lot of you will be camping on my door-steps. You just wait!"

He was returning to the sifting of the letters when the bell of the apartment rang. He answered the ring himself, as Mrs. Humphrey was out for the afternoon, and opened the door upon a shabby, wrinkled man with a beery, cunning smile. His manner suggested that he had been there before.

"Is Mr. Morton at home?" the man asked.

"No," David answered shortly, not caring to vouchsafe the information that Morton was in his grave these two days. "But I represent him."

"Then I guess I'll wait."

"He'll not be back."

The man hesitated, then a dirty hand drew an envelope from a torn pocket. "I was to give it only to him, but I guess it'll be all right to leave it with you."

David closed the door, ripped open the envelope, glanced at the note, turned abruptly and re-entered Morton's study, and read the lines again:

> "You paid no attention to the warning I sent you last Friday. This is the last time I write. I must get the money to-day, or—you know!
>
> "L. D."

He was clutched with a vague fear. Who was L. D.? And how could money be thus demanded of Morton? His mind was racing away into wild guesses, when he observed there was no street and number on the note. In the same instant it flashed upon him that the note must be investigated, and that the address of its writer was walking away in the person of the old messenger.

He caught his hat, rushed down the stairs, and came upon the old man just outside the club-house entrance.

"I want to see the writer of that note," he said. "Give me the address."

"Do better'n that. I'll go with you. I'm the janitor there."

David was too agitated to refuse the offer. They walked in silence for several paces, then the old man jerked his head toward the club-house and knowingly winked a watery eye.

"Lucky they don't know where you're goin'," he said. "But I'm safe. Safe as a clam!" He reassured David with his beery smile.

The vague dread increased. "What do you mean?"

"Innocent front! Oh, you're a wise one, I see. But you can trust me. I'm safe."

David was silent for several paces. "Who is this man L. D.?"

"This man?" He cackled. "This man! Oh, you'll do!"

David looked away in disgust; the old satyr made him think of the garbage of dissipation. All during their fifteen-minute car ride his indefinite fear changed from one dreadful shape to another. After a short walk the old man led the way into a small apartment house, and up the

stairs.

He paused before a door. "Here's your 'man,'" he said, nudging David and giving his dry, throaty little laugh.

"Thanks," said David.

But the guide did not leave. "Ain't you got a dime that's makin' trouble for the rent o' your coin?"

David handed him ten cents. "Safe as a clam," he whispered, and went down the stairs with a cackle about "the man."

David hesitated awhile, with high-beating heart, then knocked at the door. It was opened by a coloured maid.

"Who lives here?" he asked.

"Miss Lillian Drew."

David stepped inside. "Please tell her I'd like to see her. I'm from Mr. Morton."

The maid directed him toward the parlour and went to summon her mistress. At the parlour door David was met with the heavy perfume of violets. The room was showily furnished with gilt, upholstery, vivid hangings, painted bric-a-brac—all with a stiff shop-newness that suggested recently acquired funds. An ash-tray on the gilded centre-table held several cigarette stubs. On the lid of the upright piano was the last song that had pleased Broadway, and on the piano's top stood a large photograph of a man with a shrewd, well-fed face, his derby hat pushed back, his hands in his trousers pockets, a jewelled saddle in his necktie. Across this picture of portly jauntiness was scrawled, "To lovely Lil, from Jack."

David had no more than seated himself upon a surface of blue chrysanthemums and taken in these impressions, when the portieres parted and between them appeared a tall, slender woman in a trained house-gown of pink silk, with pearls in her ears and a handful of rings on her fingers. She looked thirty-five, and had a bold, striking beauty, though it was perhaps a trifle over-accentuated by the pots and pencils of her dressing-table. Possibly her nature had its kindly strain—doubtless she could smile alluringly; but just now her dark eyes gazed at David in hard, challenging suspicion.

David rose. "Is this Miss Drew?"

"You are from Phil Morton?" she asked.

He shivered at the implied familiarity with Morton. "I am."

She crossed to a chair and, as she seated herself, spread her train fan-wise to its full display. Her near presence seemed to uncork new bottles of violet perfume.

"Why didn't he come himself?" she demanded, her quick, brilliant eyes directly upon David.

It was as her note had indicated—she didn't read the papers. Obeying an unformed policy, David refrained from acquainting her with the truth.

"He's not at home. I've come because his affairs are left with me."

Her eyes gleamed. "So he's run away from home!" She sneered, but the sneer could not wholly hide her disappointment. "That won't save him!" She paused an instant. "Well—what're you here for?"

"I told you I represent him."

"You're his lawyer?"

"I'm his friend."

"Well, I'm listening. Go on."

The fear had taken on an almost definite shape. David shrunk from what he was beginning to see. But it was his duty to settle the affair, and settle it he could not without knowing its details. "To begin with, I shall have to ask some information from you," he said with an effort. "Mr. Morton left this matter entirely in my hands, but he told me nothing concerning its nature."

She half closed her eyes, and regarded David intently. "You brought the money?" she asked abruptly.

"No."

"Then he's——" She made a grim cipher with her forefinger, and stood up. "If there's no money, good afternoon!"

David did not rise. He guessed her dismissal to be a bit of play-acting. "Whatever comes to you must come through me," he said, "and you of course realise that nothing can come from me till I understand the situation."

"He understands it. That's enough."

"Oh, very well then. I see you want nothing." David determined to try play-acting himself. He rose. "Let it be good-afternoon."

She stopped him at the portieres, as he had expected. "It's mighty queer, when Morton's been trying hard to keep this thing between himself and me, for him to send a third person here."

"I can't help that," he returned with a show of indifference.

"But how do I know you really represent him?"

"You must take my word for it. Or you can telephone St. Christopher's and ask if David Aldrich is not in charge of his affairs."

She eyed him steadily for a space. "You look on the square," she said abruptly; then she added with an ominous look: "If there's no money, you know what'll happen!"

David shrugged his shoulders. "I told you I know nothing."

She was thoughtfully silent for several minutes. David studied her face, in preparation for the coming conflict. He saw that appeal to her better parts would avail nothing. He could guess that she needed money; it was plainly her nature, when roused, to spare nothing to gain her desire. And if defeated, she could be vindictive, malevolent.

In her inward struggle between caution and desire for money, greed had the assistance of her pride; for a woman living upon her attraction for men, is by nature vain of her conquests. Also, David's physical appearance was an element in the contest. Her quick bold eyes, looking him over, noted that he was tall and straight, square of shoulder, good-looking.

Greed and its allies won. "Well, if you want to know, come back," she said.

David resumed his seat. She stood thinking a moment, then went to a writing-desk. For all his suspense, David was aware she was trying to display her graces and her gown. She rustled to his chair with the unhinged halves of a gold locket in her hand.

"Suppose we begin here," she said, handing him one half of the locket. "Perhaps you'll recognise it—though that was taken in eighty-five."

David did recognise it. It was Lillian Drew at twenty. The face was fresh and spirited, and had in an exceptional measure the sort of beauty admired in the front row of a musical-comedy chorus. It was not a bad face; had the girl's previous ten years been otherwise, the present Lillian Drew would have been a very different woman; but the face showed plainly that she had gone too far for any but an extraordinary power or experience to turn her about. It was bold, striking, luring—a face of strong appeal to man's baser half—telling of a girl who would make advances if the man held back.

David felt that she waited for praise. "It's a handsome face."

"You're not the first to say so," she returned, proudly.

She let him gaze at the picture a full minute, keenly watching his face for her beauty's effect. Then she continued:

"That is the picture of a girl in Boston. And this"—a jewelled hand gave him the locket's other half—"is a young man in Harvard."

David knew whose likeness was in the locket, yet something snapped sharply within him when he looked upon the boyish face of Morton at twenty-one. It was the snap of suspense. His fear was now certainty.

"She probably wouldn't have suited you"—the tone declared she certainly would—"but Phil Morton certainly had it bad for four or five months."

David forced himself to his duty—to search this relationship to its limits. "And then—he broke it off?" he asked, with a sudden desire to make her smart.

"No man ever threw me down," she returned sharply, her cheeks flushing. "I got tired of him. A woman soon gets tired of a mere boy like that. And he was repenting about a third of the time, and preaching to me about reforming myself. To live with a man like that——it's not living. I dropped him."

"But all this was fifteen years ago," David said, calm by an effort. "What has that to do with your note?"

She sank into a chair before him, and ran the tip of her tongue between her thin lips. She leaned back luxuriously, clasped her be-ringed hands behind her head, and regarded him amusedly from beneath her pencilled eye-lashes.

"A woman comes to New York about four months ago. She was—well, things hadn't been going very well with her. After a month she learns a man is in town she had once—temporarily married. She hasn't heard anything about him for fifteen years. He is a minister, and has a reputation. She has some letters he wrote her while they had been—such good friends. She guesses he would just as soon the letters should not be made public. She has a talk with him; she guessed right.... Now you understand?"

David leaned forward, his face pale. "You mean Morton has been paying you—to keep still?"

She laughed softly. She was enjoying this display of her power. "In the last three months he has paid me the trifling sum of five thousand."

David stared at her.

"And he's going to pay me a lot more, or—the letters!"

His head sank before her bright, triumphant eyes, and he was silent. He was a confusion of thoughts and emotions, amid which only one thought was distinct—to protect Morton if he could. He tried to push all else from his mind and think of this alone.

A minute or more passed. Then he looked up. His face was still pale, but set and hard. "You are mistaken in at least one point," he said.

"And that?"

"About the money you are going to get. There'll be no more."

"Why not?" she asked with amused superiority.

"Because the letters are valueless." He watched her sharply to see the effect of his next words. "Philip Morton was buried two days ago."

Her hands fell from her head and she stood up, suddenly white. "It's a lie!"

"He was buried two days ago," David repeated.

Her colour came back, and she sneered. "It's a lie. You're trying to trick me."

David rose, drew out a handful of clippings he had cut from the newspapers, and silently held them toward her. She glanced at a headline, and her face went pale again. She snatched the clippings, read one half through, then flung them all from her, and abruptly turned about—as David guessed, to hide from him the show of her loss.

In a few moments she wheeled around, wearing a defiant smile. "Then I shall make the letters public!"

"What good will that do you? Think of all those people——"

"What do I care for those people!" she cried. "I'll let them see what their saint was like!"

David stepped squarely before her; his tall form towered above her, his dark eyes gleamed into hers. "You shall do nothing of the kind," he said harshly. "You are going to turn over the letters to me."

She did not give back a step. "Oh, I am, am I!" she sneered. At this close range, penetrating the violet perfume, he caught a new odour—brandy.

"You certainly are! You're guilty of the crime of blackmail. You've confessed it to me, and I have your letter demanding money—there's proof enough. The punishment is years in prison. Give me those letters, or I'll have a policeman here in five minutes."

She was shaken, but she forced another sneer. "To take me to court is the quickest way to make the letters public," she returned. "You're bluffing."

He was, to an extent—but he knew his bluff was a strong one. "If you keep them, you will give them out," he went on grimly. "Between your making them public and going unharmed, and their coming out in the course of the trial that will send you to prison, I choose the latter. Morton is dead; the letters can't hurt him now. And I'd like to see you suffer. The letters, or prison—take your choice!"

She slowly drew back from him, and her look of defiance gave place to fear. She stared without speaking at his square face, fierce with determination—at his roused, dominating masculinity.

"Which is it to be?"

She did not move.

"You choose prison then. Very well. I'll be back in five minutes."

He turned and started to leave the room.

"Wait!"

He looked round and saw a thoroughly frightened face.

"I'll get them."

She passed out through the beflowered portieres, and in a few minutes returned with a packet of yellow letters, which she laid in David's hand.

"These are all?" he demanded.

"Yes."

A more experienced investigator might have detected an unnatural note in her voice that would have prompted a further pursuit of his question; but David was satisfied, and did not mark a cunning look as he passed on.

"Here's another matter," he said threateningly. "If ever a breath of this comes out, I'll know it comes from you, and up you'll go for blackmail. Understand?"

Now that danger was over her boldness began to flow back into her. "I do," she said lightly.

He left her standing amid her crumpled, forgotten train. As he was passing into the hall, she called to him:

"Hold on!"

He turned about.

She looked at him with fear, effrontery, admiration. "You're all right!" she cried. "You're a real man!"

As David came into the street, his masterful bearing fell from him like a loosened garment. There was no disbelieving the prideful revelation of Lillian Drew—and as he walked on he found himself breathing, "Thank God for Philip's death!" Had Philip lived, with that woman dangling him at the precipitous edge of exposure, life would have been only misery and fear—and sooner or later she would have given him a push and over he would have gone. Death comes too late to some men for their best fame, and to some too early. To Philip Morton it had come in the nick of time.

One thought, that at first had been merely a vague wonder, grew greater and greater till it fairly pressed all else from David's mind: where had Philip got the five thousand dollars for which Lillian Drew had sold him three months' silence? David knew that Philip Morton had not a penny of private fortune, only his income as head of the Mission; and that of this income not a dollar had been laid by, so open had been his purse to the hand of distress. He could not have borrowed the money in the usual manner, for he had no security to give; and sums such as this are not blindly loaned with mere friendship as the pawn.

David entered Philip's study with this new dread pulsing through him. It was his duty to his friend to know the truth, and besides, his suspense was too acute to permit remaining in passive ignorance; so he locked the study door and began seeking evidence to dispel or confirm his fear. He took the books from the safe—he remembered the combination from the summer he had spent at the Mission—and turned them through, afraid to look at each new page. But the books dealt only with small sums for incidental expenses; the large bills were paid by cheque from the treasurer of the Board of Trustees. There was nothing here. He looked through the papers in the desk—among them no reference to the money. He scrutinised every page of paper in the safe, except the contents of one locked compartment. No reference. Knowing he would find nothing, he examined Morton's private bank-book: a record of the monthly cheque deposited and numerous small withdrawals—that was all.

And then he picked up a note-book that all the while had been lying on the desk. He began to thumb it through, not with hope of discovering a clue but merely as a routine act of a thorough search. It was half engagement book, half diary. David turned to the page dated with the day of Morton's death, intending to work from there backwards—and upon the page he found this note of an engagement:

> "5 P. M.—at Mr. Haddon's office—first fall meeting of Boy's Farm Committee."

He turned slowly back through the leaves of September, August, July, June, finding not a single suggestive record. But this memorandum, on the fifteenth of May, stopped him short:

> "Boy's Farm Committee adjourned to-day till fall, as Mr. Chambers and Mr. Haddon go to Europe. Money left in Third National Bank in my name, to pay for farm when formalities of sale are completed."

Instantly David thought of an entry on the first of June recording that, with everything settled save merely the binding formalities, the farmer had suddenly broken off the deal, having had a better offer.

Here was the money, every instinct told David. But the case was not yet proved; the money might be lying in the bank, untouched. He grasped at this chance. There must be a bank-book and cheque-book somewhere, he knew, and as he had searched the office like a pocket, except for the drawer of the safe, he guessed they must be there. After a long hunt for the key to this drawer, he found a bunch of keys in the trousers Morton had worn the day before his death. One of these opened the drawer, and sure enough here were cheque-book and bank-book.

David gazed at these for a full minute before he gained sufficient mastery of himself to open the bank-book. On the first page was this single line:

May 15.	By deposit	5,000

This was the only entry, and the fact gave him a moment's hope. He opened the cheque-book—and his hope was gone. Seven stubs recorded that seven cheques had been drawn to "self," four for $500 each, and three for $1,000.

Even amid the chill of horror that now enwrapped him, David clearly understood how Morton had permitted himself to use this fund. Here was a woman with power to destroy, demanding money. Here was money for which account need not be rendered for months. In Morton's situation a man of strong will, of courageous integrity, might have resigned and told the woman to do her worst. But David suddenly saw again Morton's dead face upon the pillow, and he was startled to see that the mouth was small, the chin weak. He now recognised, what he would have recognised before had the fault not been hidden among a thousand virtues, that Morton did not have a strong will. He recognised that a man might have genius and all the virtues, save only courage, and yet fail to carry himself honourably through a crisis that a man of merest mediocrity might have weathered well.

If exposure came—so Temptation must have spoken to Morton—all that he had done for his neighbours would be destroyed, and with it all his power for future service. He could take five hundred dollars, buy the woman's silence, and somehow replace the money before he need account for his trust. But she had demanded more, and more, and more; and once involved, his only safety, and that but temporary, was to go on—with the terror of the day of reckoning before him.

And then, while he sat chilled, David's mind began to add mechanically three things together. First, the engagement Philip had had on the day of his death with the Boys' Farm Committee; at that he would have had to account for the five thousand dollars, and his embezzlement would have been laid open. Second, the certainty of exposure from Lillian Drew, since he had no more money to ward it off. Third, was it not remarkable that Morton's heart trouble, if heart trouble there had been, with fifteen hundred minutes in the day in which to strike, had selected the single minute he spent in his bath?

As David struck the sum of these, there crawled into his heart another awful fear. Would a man who had not had the courage to face the danger of one exposure, have the courage to face a double exposure? Had Morton's death been natural, or——

Sickened, David let his head fall forward upon his arms, folded on the desk—and so he sat, motionless, as twilight, then darkness, crept into the room.

CHAPTER III

THE BARGAIN

David was still sitting bowed amid appalling darkness, when Mrs. Humphrey knocked and called to him that dinner waited. He had no least desire for food, and as he feared his face might advertise his discoveries to Dr. Thorn and Mrs. Humphrey, he slipped out of the apartment and sent word by the janitor that he would not be in to dinner. For an hour and a half he walked the tenement-cliffed streets, trying to force his distracted mind to deduce the probable consequences of Morton's acts.

At length one result stood forth distinct, inevitable: Morton's death was not going to save his good name. In a few days his embezzlement would be discovered. There would be an investigation as to what he had done with the money. Try as the committee might to keep the matter secret, the embezzlement would leak out and afford sensational copy for the papers. Lillian Drew, out of her malevolence, would manage to triple the scandal with her story; and then someone would climax the two exposures by putting one and one together, as he had done, and deducing that Morton's lamented death was suicide. In a week, perhaps in three days, all New York would know what David knew.

He was re-entering the club-house, shortly after eight o'clock, when the sound of singing in the chapel reminded him that the regular Thursday even prayer-meeting had been turned into a neighbourhood memorial service for Morton. He slipped quietly into the rear of the chapel. It was crowded, as at the funeral. Dr. Thorn, who was temporarily at the head of the Mission, was on the rostrum, but a teamster from the neighbourhood was in charge of the meeting. The order of the service consisted of brief tributes to Morton, brief statements of what he had meant to their lives. As David listened to the testimonies, uncouth in the wording, but splendid in feeling, the speaker sometimes stopped by his own emotion, sometimes by sobbing from the audience—his tears loosened and flowed with theirs.

And then came a change in his view-point. He found himself thinking, not of Morton the individual, Morton his friend, but of Morton in his relation to these people. What great good he had brought them! How dependent they had been upon him, how they now clung to him and were lifted up by his memory! And how they loved him!

But what would they be saying about him a week hence?

The question plunged into David like a knife. He hurried from the chapel and upstairs into

Morton's study. Here was the most ghastly of all the consequences of Morton's deeds. What would be the effect on these people of the knowledge he had gained that afternoon? They were not discriminating, could not select the good, discard and forget the evil. He still loved Morton; Morton to him was a man strong and great at ninety-nine points, weak at one. Impregnable at all other points, temptations had assailed his one weakness, conquered him and turned his life into complete disaster. But, David realised, the neighbourhood could not see Morton as he saw him. They could see only the evils of his one point of weakness, see him only as guilty of larger sins than the most sinful of themselves—as a libertine, an embezzler, a suicide.

And they would be helped to this new view by the elements he had fought. How old Boss Grogan would rejoice in Morton's fall—how his one eye would light up, and triumph overspread his veinous, pouched face! How he and his henchmen, victory-sure, would return to their attack on the Mission, going among its people with sneers at Morton and at them!

There was no doubt in David's mind of the effect of all this upon them. The words of a shrivelled old woman who had given tribute in the chapel stayed in his memory. "He has been to me like St. Christopher, what this place is called from," she had quavered. "He holds me in his arms and carries me over the dark waters." Exactly the case with all of them, David thought. Morton, who had lifted them out of darkness, was supporting them over the ferry of life—till a few days ago by his presence among them, now and in the future by the powerful influence in which he had enarmed them. Once they saw their St. Christopher as baser than themselves [and what a picture Grogan would keep before their eyes!], they would call him hypocrite, despise his support and the shore whither he carried them; his strength to save them would be gone, and they would fall back into the darkness out of which they had been gathered.

David's concern was now all for these unsuspecting hundreds mourning and praising Morton in the chapel. Presently, amid the chaos in his mind, one thought assumed definite shape: if the people were kept in ignorance, if Morton were kept pure in their eyes, would not their love for him, the saving influence he had set about them, remain just as potent as though he were in truth unspotted? Yes—without doubt. And then this question asked itself: could they be kept in ignorance? Yes, if the embezzlement could be concealed—for Morton's relations with Lillian Drew and his suicide would come before the public only by being dragged, as it were, by this engine of disgrace.

David's whole mind, his whole being, was suddenly gripped by the thought that by concealing the embezzlement he could save these hundreds of persons from falling back into the abyss. But how conceal it? The answer was ready at his mind's ear: by replacing the money. But where get the money? He had almost nothing himself, for the little fortune from his father with which he had been eking out his meagre earnings was now in its last dollars, and he had hardly a friend in New York. Again the answer was ready: take into the secret some rich man interested in the Mission—he'd gladly furnish the money rather than have St. Christopher's dishonoured.

This idea rapidly shaped itself into a definite plan. At half-past nine David left the study and descended the stairs, with the decision to complete the lesser details of his scheme that night, leaving only the getting of the money for the morrow. The moment he stepped into the never-quiet street, he pressed back into the shadow of the club-house entrance, for out of the chapel was riling the mourning crowd—some of the women crying silently, some of the men having traces of recent tears, all stricken with their heavy loss. Yes, their loss was grievous, but, God helping him, that which was left them they should not lose!—and David gazed upon them till the last was out, with a tingling glow of saviourship.

Half an hour later he was standing before the apartment house he had visited that afternoon. A dull glow through Lillian Drew's shades informed him she was at home; and, glancing through the open basement window into the janitor's apartment, he saw his guide of the afternoon stretched on a shabby lounge. He was not proud of the part he was about to play; but for Lillian Drew to remain in town—danger was in this that must be avoided.

That afternoon he had noticed there was a telephone in the house. He now walked back to a drug store on whose front he had seen the sign of a public telephone. He closed himself in the booth, and soon had Lillian Drew on the wire.

"This is a friend with a tip," he said. "I just happened to overhear a man ask a policeman to come with him to arrest you."

"What was the man like?" came tremulously from the receiver.

David began a faithful description of himself, but before he was half through he heard the receiver at the other end of the wire click into place upon its hook. He returned to where he had a view of the entrance of the apartment house, and almost at once he saw Lillian Drew come hurriedly out. He then walked over to Broadway, asked a policeman to arrest a woman on his complaint, and led the officer to the apartment house.

He rang the janitor's bell, and after a minute it was answered by his "safe" friend. He put on his most ominous look. "Is Lillian Drew in?" he demanded.

"No; she just went out," the janitor answered, glancing in fear at the policeman.

The officer gave him a shove. "Bluffin' don't work on me. You just take us up, you old booze-tank, and we'll have a look around for ourselves."

They searched the flat, followed about by the frightened black maid, but found no Lillian Drew. As they were leaving the house David again directed his ominous look upon the janitor. "Don't you tell her we were here," he ordered; and then he whispered to the policeman, but for the janitor's ears, "I'll get her in the morning."

He walked away with the officer, but quickly returned to his place of observation. He saw the janitor come furtively out and hurry away, and in a little while he saw Lillian Drew enter—and he knew that the janitor, who had summoned her, had told of her narrow escape and of the danger in which she stood.

He wandered about, passing the house from time to time. Toward twelve o'clock, when he again drew near the house, the great van of a storage warehouse was before it, and men were carrying out furniture. Beside the van stood an express wagon in which was a trunk, and coming out of the doorway was a man bearing on his back another trunk, from the end of which dangled a baggage check. As the man staggered across the sidewalk, David stepped behind him, caught the tag and read it by the light that streamed from the entrance. The trunk was checked to Chicago.

Lillian Drew would make no trouble. One part of his plan was completed. Half an hour later David was back in Morton's study, beginning another part of his preparation. To prevent suspicion when the Boys' Farm Committee discovered the replaced money, to make it appear that the drawing of the fund was no more than a business absurdity such as is normally expected from clergymen, David had determined to surround the presence of the money in the safe with the formality of an account. At the head of a slip of paper he wrote, "Cash Account of Boys' Summer Home," and beneath it, copying from the stubs of the cheque-book: "June 7, Drawn from Bank $500"; and beneath this, under their respective dates, the six other amounts. Then at the foot of these he wrote under date of September fifteenth, the day before Morton's death, "Cash on hand, $5,000."

These items he set down in a fair copy of Morton's hand, not a difficult mimicry since their writing was naturally much alike and had a further similarity from their both using stub pens. He wrote with an ink, which he had secured for the purpose on his way home, that immediately after drying was of as dead a black as though it had been on paper for weeks. He put the slip, with the bank-book and cheque-book, into the drawer of the safe. To-morrow the five thousand dollars would go in there with them, and Morton's name, and the people of St. Christopher's, would be secure.

He had not yet disposed of the letters Lillian Drew had given him. He carried the packet into the sitting-room, tore the letters into shreds and heaped them in the grate between the brass andirons. Then he touched a match to the yellow pile, and watched the destroying flames spring from the record of Morton's unholy love—as though they were the red spirit of that passion leaping free. He sat for a long space, the dead hush of sleep about him, gazing at where the heap had been. Only ashes were left by those passionate flames. A symbol of Morton, thus it struck David's fancy. Just so those flames had left of Morton only ashes.

The next morning David had before him the task of getting the money. He had determined to approach Mr. Chambers first, and he was in the great banking house of Alexander Chambers & Company, in Wall Street, as early as he thought he could decently appear there. He was informed that Mr. Chambers had gone out to attend several directors' meetings—not very surprising, since Mr. Chambers was a director in half a hundred companies—and that the time of his return was uncertain, if indeed he returned at all. David went next to the office of Mr. Haddon, treasurer of the Mission and of the Boys' Farm Committee, and one of the Mission's largest givers. Mr. Haddon, he was told, had left the office an hour before for St. Christopher's.

David hurried back to the Mission, wondering what Mr. Haddon's errand there could be, and hoping to catch him before he left. As he was starting up the stairway the janitor stopped him. "Mr. Haddon was asking for you," the janitor said. "And Miss Chambers, too. I think she's in the reception room."

David turned back, walked down the hall and entered the dim reception room. She was sitting in a Flemish oak settle near a window, her hands clasped upon an idle book in her lap, gazing fixedly into vacancy. Her dress of mourning was almost lost in the shadow, and her face alone, softly lighted from between the barely parted dark-green hangings, had distinctness. He paused at the door and gazed long at her. Then he crossed the bare floor.

She rose, gave him her firm, slender hand, and, allowing him half the settle, resumed her seat. Now that he could look directly into her face, he saw there repressed anxiety.

"I came down this morning on an errand about the Flower Guild," she said. "I'm going back to the country this afternoon. I've been waiting to see you because I wanted to tell you something."

She paused. David was conscious that she was making an effort to keep her anxiety out of her voice and manner.

"It's not at all important," she went on. "Just a little matter about Mr. Morton. Oh, it's nothing wrong," she added quickly, noticing that David had suddenly paled. "I'm sure nothing unpleasant is going to develop. But I wanted you to know it, so that if there was any little difficulty, you wouldn't be taken by surprise."

David's pulses stopped. "Yes?" he said. "Yes?"

She had become very white. "It's about the money of the Boys' Farm Committee. Day before yesterday morning Mr. Haddon went to the Third National Bank to arrange for withdrawing the funds he had deposited in Mr. Morton's name. He found—Mr. Morton had withdrawn it."

"Yes?"

"Please remember, I'm sure nothing's wrong. Of course Mr. Haddon acted immediately. He called a meeting of the committee; they decided to make a quiet investigation at once. Father told me about it. So far they haven't found the money, but of course they will. The worst part is, the newspapers have somehow learned that five thousand dollars is missing from the Mission. The sum is not so large, but for it to disappear in connection with a place like this—you can see what a great scandal the papers are scenting? Several reporters were here just a little while ago. I sent them upstairs to Mr. Haddon."

He stared at her dizzily. His plan was come to naught. Morton's shame was about to be trumpeted over the city. The people of St. Christopher's were about to topple back into the abyss.

"What is Mr. Haddon doing upstairs?"

"It occurred to him that possibly Mr. Morton had put the money in the safe in his study. I'm certain the money's there. Mr. Haddon's up in the study with a safe-opening expert."

For a moment David sat muted by the impending disaster. Then he rose. "Come—let's go up!" he said.

They mounted the stairs in silence, and in the corridor leading to Morton's apartment passed half a dozen reporters. David unlocked the apartment with his latch-key, led the way to Morton's study, and pushed open its door. Before the safe sat a heavily spectacled man carefully turning its dial-plate and knob. On one side of him stood Dr. Thorn, his formal features pale, and on the other side gray-haired Mr. Haddon, his hard, lean face, milled with financial wrinkles like a dollar's edge, as expressionless as though he was in the midst of a Wall Street crisis.

Mr. Haddon recognised the presence of David and Helen with a slight nod, but Dr. Thorn stepped to David's side.

"You've heard about it?" he asked in an agitated voice.

"Yes—Miss Chambers told me."

At that moment the safe door swung open. "There you are," said the spectacled man, with a complacent little grunt.

Mr. Haddon dismissed the man and knelt before the safe. Helen and Dr. Thorn leaned over him, and David, still stunned by the suddenness of the catastrophe, looked whitely on from behind them. A minute, and Mr. Haddon's search was over.

He looked about at the others. "It's not here," he said quietly.

A noise at the door caused all to turn in that direction. There stood the reporters. They had edged into the apartment as the safe-expert had gone out.

"Will you gentlemen please wait outside!" requested Mr. Haddon, sharply.

"We've got to hurry to catch the afternoon editions," one spoke up. "Can't you give us the main facts right now? You've got 'em all—I just heard you say the money wasn't here."

"I'll see you in a few minutes," answered Mr. Haddon, and brusquely pressed them before him into the corridor.

When he reëntered the study he looked at them all grimly. "There's absolutely no keeping this from the papers," he said.

"But there must still be another place the money can be!" Helen cried.

"I've investigated every other place," returned Mr. Haddon, in the calm voice of finality. "The safe was the last possibility."

They all three stared at each other. It was Dr. Thorn that spoke the thought of all. "Then the worst we feared—is true?"

Mr. Haddon nodded. "It must be."

David could not speak, nor think—could only lean sickened against the desk. The exposure of Morton—and a thousand times worse, the ruin of St. Christopher's—both inevitable!

"Won't you please look again!" Helen cried, with desperate hope. "Perhaps you overlooked something."

Mr. Haddon knelt once more, and slowly fluttered the pages of the books and scrutinised each scrap of paper. Soon he paused, and studied a slip he had come upon. Then he rose, and David saw at the head of the slip, "Cash Account of Boys' Summer Home." It was the paper he had prepared to hide Morton's embezzlement.

Mr. Haddon's steady eyes took in David and Dr. Thorn. "Could anybody have been in the safe

since Mr. Morton's death?"

"It's hardly possible," returned Dr. Thorn. "Mr. Aldrich has been in the study almost constantly."

Mr. Haddon's eyes fastened on David; a quick gleam came into them. David, unnerved as he was, could not keep his face from twitching.

There was a long silence. Then Mr. Haddon asked quietly:

"Could you have been in the safe, Mr. Aldrich?"

David did not recognise whither the question led. "Why, yes," he said mechanically.

Mr. Haddon held out the slip of paper. "According to this memorandum in Mr. Morton's hand, the money was in the safe the day before his death." His eyes screwed into David. "Perhaps you can suggest to us what became of the money."

David stared at him blankly.

"The money—was there—when Morton died!" said Dr. Thorn amazedly. He looked from one man to the other. Then understanding came into his face, and a great relief. "You mean—Mr. Aldrich—took it?"

"I took it!" David repeated stupidly.

He turned slowly to Helen. Her white face, with its wide eyes and parted lips, and the sudden look of fear she held upon him, cleared his head, made him see where he was.

"I did not take the money!" he cried.

"No, of course not," returned Mr. Haddon grimly. "But who did?"

"If I'd taken it, wouldn't I have disappeared? Would I have been such a fool as to have stayed here to be caught?"

"If the thief had run away, that would have fastened the guilt on him at once. To remain here, hoping to throw suspicion on Mr. Morton—this was the cleverest course."

"I did not take the money!" David cried desperately. "It's a lie!"

Helen moved to David's side, and gazed straight into Mr. Haddon's accusing face. Indignation was replacing her astoundment; her cheeks were tingeing with red.

"What, would you condemn a man upon mere guess-work!" she cried. "Merely because the money is not there, is that proof that Mr. Aldrich took it? Do you call this justice, Mr. Haddon?"

Mr. Haddon's look did not alter, and he did not reply. The opinion of womankind he had ever considered negligible.

Helen turned to David and gave him her hand. "I believe you."

He thanked her with a look.

"It must have been Mr. Morton," she said.

Her words first thrilled him. Then suddenly they rang out as a knell. If he threw off the guilt, it must fall on Morton; if Morton were publicly guilty, then the hundreds of the Mission—

Mr. Haddon's hard voice broke in, changeless belief in its tone: "Mr. Aldrich took it."

David looked at Mr. Haddon, looked whitely at Helen. And then the great Thought was conceived, struggled dizzily, painfully, into birth. He stood shivering, awed, before it....

He slowly turned and walked to a window and gazed down into the street, filled with children hurrying home from school. The Thought spoke to him in vivid flashes. He had no relatives, almost no friends. He loved Helen Chambers; but he was nobody and a beggar. He had not done anything—perhaps could never do anything—and even if he did, his work would probably be of little worth. He had wanted his life to be of service; had wanted to sell it, as it were, for the largest good he could perform. Well, here were the people of St. Christopher's toppling over the edge of destruction. Here was his Great Bargain—the chance to sell his life for the highest price.

As to what he had done with the five thousand, which of course he'd be asked—well, an evening of gambling would be a sufficient explanation.

He turned about.

"Well?" said Mr. Haddon.

David avoided Helen's look. He felt himself borne upward to the apex of life.

"Yes ... I took it," he said.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

DAVID RE-ENTERS THE WORLD

The history of the next four years of David's life is contained in the daily programme of Croton Prison. At six o'clock the rising gong sounded; David rolled out of his iron cot, washed himself at the faucet in his cell, and got into his striped trousers and striped jacket. At six-thirty he lock-stepped, with a long line of fellows, to a breakfast of hash, bread and coffee. At seven he marched to shoe factory or foundry, where he laboured till twelve, when the programme called him to dinner. At one he marched back to work; at half-past five he marched to his cell, where his supper of bread and coffee was thrust in to him through a wicket. He read or paced up and down till nine, when the going out of his light sent him into his iron cot. Multiply this by fifteen hundred and the product is David's prison life.

It would be untruth to say that a sense of the good he was doing sustained a passionate happiness in David through all these years. Moments of exaltation were rare; they were the sun-blooming peaks in an expanse of life that was otherwise low and gloom-hung. David had always understood that prisons in their object were not only punitive—they were reformative. But all his intelligence could not see any strong influence that tended to rouse and strengthen the inmates' better part. Occasional and perfunctory words from chaplains could not do it. Monotonous work, to which they were lock-stepped, from which they were lock-stepped, and which was directed and performed in the lock-step's deadening spirit, this could not do it. Constant silence, while eating, marching, working, could not do it. The removal for a week of a man's light because he had spoken to a neighbour, this could not do it. Nor could a day's or two days' confinement, on the charge of "shamming" when too ill to work, in an utterly black dungeon on a bit of bread and a few swallows of water.

Rather this routine, these rules, enforced unthinkingly, without sympathy, had an opposite energy. David felt himself being made unintelligent—being made hard, bitter, vindictive—felt himself being dehumanised. One day as he sat at dinner with a couple of hundred mates, silent, signalling for food with upraised fingers, a man and woman who were being escorted about the prison by the warden, came into the room. The woman studied for several minutes these first prisoners she had ever seen—then the dumb rows heard her exclaim: "Why look,—they're human!" To David the discovery was hardly less astonishing. He had been forgetting the fact.

Yes, moments of exaltation were rare. More frequent were the dark times when the callousness and stupidity of some of the regulations enraged him, when the weight of all the walls seemed to lie upon his chest—when he frantically felt he must have light and air, or die;—and he cursed his own foolishness, and would have traded the truth to the people of St. Christopher's for his freedom. Prometheus must often have repented his gift of fire. But the momentum of David's resolve carried him through these black stretches; and during his normal prison mood, which was the restless gloom of all caged animals, his mind was in control and held him to his bargain.

But always there was with him a great fear. Was Morton's memory retaining its potency over the people of St. Christopher's? Were they striving to hold to their old ideals, or were they gradually loosening their grip and slipping back into the old easy ways of improvidence and dissipation? Perhaps, even now, they were entirely back, and his four years had paid for nothing. The long day carrying the liquid iron to the moulds would have been easier, the long night in the black cell would have been calmer, had he had assurance that his sacrifice was fulfilling its aim. But never a word came from St. Christopher's through those heavy walls.

And always he thought of Helen Chambers. He could never forget the stare of her white face when he had acknowledged his guilt, how she had first tried to speak, then turned slowly and walked away. The four walls of his mind were hung with that picture; wherever he turned, he saw it. He had wanted to spring after her and whisper his innocence, but there had flashed up a realisation that his plan was feasible only with a perfect secrecy, and to admit one person to his confidence might be to admit the world. Besides, she might not believe him. So, silent, he had let her walk from the room with his guilt.

He often wondered if she ever thought of him. If she did, it was doubtless only to despise him. More likely, he had passed from her mind. Perhaps she was married. That thought wrung him. He tried to still the heavy pain by looking at the impassable gulf that lay between them, and by telling himself it was natural and fitting that she should have married. He wondered what her husband was like, and if she were happy. But the walls were mute.

Long before his release he had decided he should settle in New York. Life would be easiest, he knew, if he were to lose himself in a new part of the world. But St. Christopher's, where four prison years and the balance of his dishonoured life were invested, was in New York; Helen Chambers was in New York. The rest of the world had no like attractions; it could hide him—that was all. But save at first while he was gaining a foothold—and could he not then lose himself among New York's millions?—he did not desire to hide himself.

He did not care to hide himself because the prison had given him a message, and this message he intended speaking publicly. He had pondered long over society's treatment of the man who breaks its law. That treatment seemed to him absurd, illogical. It would have been laughably grotesque in its deforming incompetence had it not been directed at human beings. It was a treatment bounded on one side by negligence, on the other by severity. It maimed souls, killed souls; it was criminal. David's sense of justice and humanity demanded that he should protest against this great criminal—our prison system. He knew it as prison reformers did not—from the inside. He could speak from his heart. And as soon as he had gained a foothold, he would begin.

At length came the day of his liberation, and he found himself back in New York, twenty dollars, his prison savings, in his pocket, the exhaustion of prison life in his flesh, and in his heart a determination to conquer the world. He knew but one part of New York—the neighbourhood of St. Christopher's Mission—and that part drew him because of his interest in it, and also because he must live cheaply and there life was on a cheap scale. He hesitated to settle in the immediate neighbourhood; but he could settle just without its edge, where he could look on, and perhaps pass unnoticed. He at length found a room on the fifth floor of a dingy tenement, seven or eight blocks from the Mission. The room had a chair, a bed, a promise of weekly change of sheets, and a backyard view composed of clothes-lines, bannered with the block's underwear, and the rear of a solid row of dreary tenements. Five years before the room would have been unbearable; now it was luxury, for it was Freedom.

After paying the first month's rent of five dollars and buying a few dishes, a little gas stove and a small supply of groceries, he had nine dollars left with which to face the world and make it give him place. If he spent twenty cents a day for food, and spent not a cent for other purposes, he could eat for six weeks. But before then rent would again be due. Four weeks he could stand out, no longer; by then he must have won a foothold.

Well, he would do it.

By the time he had made a cupboard out of the soap-box the grocer had given him and had set his room in order, dusk was falling into the gulch-like backyard and the opposite wall was springing into light at a hundred windows. He ate a dinner from his slender store, using his bed as a chair and his chair as a table, and after its signs were cleared away he sat down and gazed across the court into the privacy of five strata of homes. He saw, framed by the windows, collarless men and bare-armed women sitting with their children at table; the odours of a hundred different dinners, entangled into one odour, filled his nostrils; family talk, and the rumble and clatter of the always-crowded streets, came to his ears as a composite murmuring that was an inarticulate summary of life.

But none of these impressions reached his mind; that had slipped away to Helen Chambers. The question that had asked itself ten thousand times repeated itself again: was she married? He tried to tell himself quietly that it was none of his affair, could make no difference to him—but the suspense of four years was not to be strangled by self-restraint. The desire to know the truth, to see her if he could, mounted to an impulse there was no withstanding.

And another oft-asked question also came to him. Was the Mission still a power for good? And this also roused an uncontrollable desire to know the truth. He left his room and set out for St. Christopher's, wondering if he would be recognised. But, though often Morton's guest, he had mixed but little in the affairs of the Mission, and not many from the hard-working neighbourhood had been able to attend his brief trial; so he was known by sight to few, and no one now gave him a second look.

As he came into the old streets, with here and there a little shop that had been owned by one of Morton's followers, and here and there among the passers-by a face that was vaguely familiar, his suspense grew and grew—till, when St. Christopher's loomed before him, it seemed his suspense would almost choke him. He paused across the street in the shadow of a tenement entrance, and stared over at the club-house and at the chapel with its spire rising into the rain-presaging night. Light streamed from the open door of the chapel; on the club-house window-sills were the indistinct shapes of flower-boxes; boys and girls, young men and women, parents, were entering the club-house. Everything seemed just the same. But were the people the same? Had his four years been squandered—or spent to glorious purpose?

He slipped across the street and looked cautiously into the chapel. There were the three rows of pews, the plain pulpit bearing an open Bible, behind which Morton used to preach, the organ at which a stooped girl, a shirt-waist maker, used to play the hymns and lead the congregation's singing—all just as in other days.

The chapel was empty, save the corner of a rear pew in which sat a troubled, poorly-dressed woman, and a gray-haired man whose clerical coat made David guess him to be Morton's successor. The voice of his advice was gentle and persuasive, and when the woman's rising to go revealed his shaven face, David saw that it had strength and kindness, spirit and humility—saw that the man's vigour remained despite his obvious sixty years.

David entered the chapel and approached the director of the Mission. The old man held out his hand. "I'm glad to see you," he said. "Is there anything in which I can serve you?"

David strove for a casual manner, but prison had made him too worn, too nervous, to act a part requiring so much control. "I was just—going by," he stammered, taking the hand. "I used to know the Mission—years ago—when Mr. Morton was here. So I came in."

"Ah, then you knew Mr. Morton!" said the director warmly.

"A—a little."

"Even to know him a little was a great privilege," he said with conviction, admiration. "He was a wonderful man!"

David braced himself for one of the two great questions of his last four years. "Does the neighbourhood still remember him?"

"Just as though he were still here," the director answered, with the enthusiasm an unjealous older brother may feel for the family genius.

"He has left an influence that amounts to a living, inspiring presence. That influence, more than anything I have done, has kept the people just as earnest for truer manhood and womanhood as when he left them. I feel that I am only the assistant. He is still the real head."

David got away as quickly as he could, a mighty, quivering warmth within him. On the other side of the street, he gave a parting glance over his shoulder at the chapel. He stopped short, and stared. While they had talked, the director of the Mission had turned on additional lights, among which had been an arc-light before the great stained-glass window at the street end of the chapel. The window was now a splendid glow of red and blue and purple, and printed upon its colours was this legend:

David stared at the window, weak, dizzy. There was a momentary pang of bitterness that Morton should be so honoured, and he be what he was. Then the glow that had possessed him in the chapel flowed back upon him in even greater warmth. The window seemed to David, in his then mood, to be the perpetuation in glowing colour of Morton's influence. It seemed to throw forth into the street, upon the chance passer-by, the inspiration of Morton's life.

Yes,—his four years had counted!

Half an hour later he took his stand against the shadowed stoop of an empty mansion in Madison Avenue, and gazed across at a great square three-story stone house, with a bulging conservatory running along its left side—the only residence in the block that had re-opened for the autumn. All thought of Morton and the Mission was gone from him. His mind was filled only with the other great fear of his last four years. If she came out of the door he watched, if he glimpsed her beneath a window shade, then probably she still belonged in her father's house—was still unmarried.

A cold drizzle had begun to fall. He drew his head down into his upturned collar, and though his weakened body shivered, he noticed neither the rain nor the protest of his flesh. His whole being was directed at the house across the way. Slow minute followed slow minute. The door did not open, and he saw no one inside the windows. His heart beat as though it would shake his body apart. The sum of four years suspense so weakened him that he could hardly stand. Yet he stood and waited, waited; and he realised more keenly than ever how dear she was to him—though to possess her was beyond his wildest dreams, and perhaps he might not even speak to her again.

At length a nearby steeple called the hour of ten. Presently a carriage began to turn in towards the opposite sidewalk. David, all a-tremble, his great suspense now at its climax, stepped forth from his shadow. The carriage stopped before the Chambers home. He hurried across the street,

and a dozen paces away from the carriage he stooped and made pretense of tying his shoe-lace; but all the while his eyes were on the carriage door, which the footman had thrown open. First a man stepped forth, back to David, and raised an umbrella. Who? The next instant David caught the profile. It was Mr. Chambers. After him came an ample, middle-aged woman, brilliantly attired—Mrs. Bosworth, Mr. Chambers's widowed sister, who had been living with him since his wife's death.

A moment later Mr. Chambers was helping a second woman from the carriage. The umbrella cut her face from David's gaze, but there was no mistaking her. So she still lived in the house of her father!

She paused an instant to speak to the footman. For a second a new fear lived in David: might she not come with her father to her father's house, and still be married? But at the second's end the fear was destroyed by the conventional three-word response of the footman. David watched her go up the steps, her face hidden by the umbrella, watched her enter and the door close behind her. Then, collapsed by the vast relief which followed upon his vast suspense, he sank down upon the stoop, and the three words of the footman maintained a thrilling iteration in his ears.

The three words were: "Thank you, *Miss*."

CHAPTER II

A CALL FROM A NEIGHBOUR

The next morning David was awakened by the ringing of a gong. He tumbled out of bed in order to be ready for the march to breakfast at half past six; and he had begun to dress before it dawned upon him that he was a free man, and that the ringing was a prank a four-year habit had played upon him—a prank that, by the way, was to be repeated every morning for many a week to come.

He slipped back into bed, and lay there considering what he should first do. He had to find work quickly, but he felt his four walled years had earned him a holiday—one day in which to re-acquaint himself with freedom. So, after he had eaten, he felt his way down the dark, heavy-aired stairways, stepped through the doorway, and then paused in wonderment.

All was as fresh, as marvellous, as yesterday. The narrow street was a bustle of freedom—pounding carts, school-going boys and girls, playing children, marketing wives—no stripes, no lock-steps, no guards. And the yellow sun! He held his bleached face up to it, as though he would press against its sympathetic warmth; and he sucked deeply of the September air. And the colours!—the reds and whites and browns of the children, the occasional green of a plant on a window sill, the clear blue of the strip of sky at the street's top. He had almost forgotten there were colours other than stripes, the gray of stone walls, the black of steel bars.

And how calmly the streetful of people took these marvels!

At first he expected the people he threaded among to look into his face, see his prison record there, draw away from him, perhaps taunt him with "thief." But no one even noticed him, and gradually this fear began to fade from him. As he was crossing the Bowery, a car clanged at his back. He frantically leaped, with a cry, to the sidewalk, and leaned against a column of the elevated railroad—panting, exhausted, heart pounding. He had not before known how weak, nerveless, prison had made him.

He found, as he continued his way, that the sidewalk undulated like a ship's deck beneath his giddy legs; he found himself afraid of traffic-crowded corners that women and children unhesitatingly crossed; he found himself stopping and staring with intensest interest at the common-places of street life—at hurrying men, at darting newsboys, at rushing street cars and clattering trucks, at whatever moved where it willed. Old-timers had told him of the dazedness, the fear, the interest, of the first free days, but he was unprepared for the palpitant acuteness of his every sensation.

After a time, in Broadway, he chanced to look into a mirror-backed show-window where luminous satins were displayed. Between two smirking waxen women in sheeny drapery he saw that which brought him to a pause and set him gazing. It was his full-length self, which he had not seen these four years. The figure was gaunt, a mere framework for his shoddy, prison-made suit; the skin of his face snugly fitted itself to the bones; his eyes were sunken, large; his hair, which he uncovered, had here and there a line of gray. He was startled. But he had courage for the future; and after a few moments he said to himself aloud, a habit prison had given him: "A few weeks, and you won't know yourself."

As he walked on, the consciousness of freedom swelled within him. If he desired, he could speak to the man ahead of him, could laugh, could stand still, could walk where he wished, and no guard to report on him and no warden to subtract from his "good time." More than once, under cover of the rattle of an elevated train, he shouted at his voice's top in pure extravagance of feeling; and once in Fifth Avenue, forgetting himself, he flung his arms wide and laughed joyously—to be suddenly restored to convention by the hurried approach of a policeman.

All day he watched this strange new life—much of the time sitting in parks, for the unaccustomed walking wearied him. When he came to his tenement's door—flanked on one side by a saloon, and on the other side by a little grocery store before which sat a basket of shrunken potatoes and a few withered cabbages and beans, and in which supplies could be bought by the pennyworth—a hand fell upon his arm and a voice called out with wheezy cordiality: "Good evenin', friend."

David glanced about. Beside him was a loose bundle of old humanity, wrapped up in and held together by a very seedy coat and stained, baggy trousers frayed at the bottom. The face was covered with gray bristle and gullied with wrinkles. Over one eye hung a greasy green flap; the other eye was watery and red.

"Good evening," returned David.

"Excuse me for stoppin' you," said the old man with an ingratiating smile that unlipped half a dozen brown teeth. "But we're neighbours, and I thought we ought to get acquainted. Me an' my girl lives just across the hall from you. Morgan's my name—Old Jimmie Morgan."

"Aldrich is mine. I suppose I'll see you again. Good evening." And David, eager to get away from the nodding old man, started through the door.

His neighbour stepped quickly before him, and put a stubby hand against his chest. "Wait a minute, Mr. Aldrich. I'm in a little trouble. I've got to get some groceries, and my daughter—she carries our money—she ain't in. I wonder if you couldn't loan me fifty cents till mornin'?"

David knew that fifty cents loaned to him was fifty cents lost. He shook his head.

"Mebbe I could get along on twenty-five then. Say a quarter."

"I really can't spare it," said David, and tried to press by.

"Well, then make it a dime," wheedled the old man, stopping him again. "You'll never miss a dime, friend. Come, what's a dime to a young man like you. And it'll get me a bowl of soup and a cup of coffee. That'll help an old man like me a lot, for Katie won't be home till mornin'."

Merely to free himself David drew out one of his precious dimes.

"Thank you, thank you!" The dirty, wrinkled hand closed tightly upon the coin. "You've saved an old man from goin' hungry to bed."

David again turned to enter. He almost ran against a slight, neatly-dressed girl, apparently about twenty, who was just coming out of the doorway. Her black eyes were gleaming, and there were red spots in her cheeks. At sight of her the old man started to hurry away.

"Jim Morgan! You come here!" she commanded in a ringing voice.

The old man stopped, and came slowly toward her with a hang-dog look.

"You've been borrowing money of that man!" she declared.

"No I ain't. We were talkin'—talkin' politics. Honest, Katie. We were just talkin' politics."

"You were begging money!" She turned her sharp eyes upon David. "Wasn't he?"

The old man winked frantically for help with his red eye, and started to slip the dime into his pocket. The girl, without waiting for David's answer, wheeled about so quickly that she caught both the signal for help and the move of the hand pocketward. She pointed at the hand. "Stop that! Now open it up!"

"Nothin' in it, Katie," whined her father.

"Open that hand!"

It slowly opened, and in the centre of the grimy palm lay the dime.

"Give it back to him," the girl ordered.

Old Jimmie handed David the coin.

The girl's eyes blazed. Her wrath burst forth. "Now, sir, you will borrow money, will you!" her sharp voice rang out. "You will lie to me about it, will you!"

David hurried inside and heard no more. He made a pot of coffee and warmed half a can of baked beans over his little gas stove. Of this crude meal his stomach would accept little. His condition should have had the delicate and nourishing food that is served an invalid. His appetite longingly remembered meals of other days: the fruit, the eggs on crisp toast, the golden-brown coffee, at breakfast; the soup, the roast, the vegetables, the dessert, at dinner—linen, china, service, food, all dainty. He turned from the meals his imagination saw to the meal upon his chair-table. He smiled whimsically. "Sir," he said reprovingly to his appetite, "you're too ambitious."

He had placed his can of condensed milk and bit of butter out on the fire-escape, which he, adopting the East Side's custom, used as an ice-chest, and had put his washed dishes into the soap-box cupboard, when he was startled by a knock. Wondering who could be calling on him, he threw open the door.

Kate Morgan stood before him. "I want to see you a minute. May I come in?"

"Certainly."

David bowed and motioned her in. Her quick eyes noted the bow and the gesture. He drew his one chair into the open space beside the bed.

"Won't you please be seated?"

She sat down, rested one arm on the corner of his battered wash-stand and crossed her knees.

David seated himself on the edge of the bed. He had a better view of her than when he had seen her in the doorway, and he could hardly believe she was the daughter of the old man who had stopped him. She wore a yellow dress of some cheap goods, with bands of bright red about the bottom of the skirt, bands of red about the short loose sleeves that left the arms bare from the elbows, a red girdle, and about the shoulders a red fulness. The dress was almost barbaric in its colouring, yet it suited her dark face, with its brilliant black eyes.

There was neither embarrassment nor over-boldness in the face; rather the composure of the woman who is acting naturally. There was a touch of hardness about the mouth and eyes, and a touch of cynicism; in ten years, David guessed, those qualities would have sculptured themselves deep into her features. But it was an alert, clear, almost pretty face—would have been decidedly pretty, in a sharp way, had the hair not been combed into a tower of a pompadour that exaggerated her face's thinness.

She did not lose an instant in speaking her errand. "I want you to promise not to lend my father a cent," she began in a concise voice. "I have to ask that of every new person that moves in the house. He's an old soak. I don't dare give him a cent. But he borrows whenever he can, and if he gets enough it's delirium tremens."

"He told me he wanted a bowl of soup and a cup of coffee," David said in excuse of himself.

"Soup and coffee! Huh! Whiskey. That's all he thinks of—whiskey. His idea of God is a bartender that keeps setting out the drinks and never strikes you for the price. If I give him a decent suit of clothes, it's pawned and he's drunk. He used to pawn the things from the house—but he don't do that any more! He mustn't have a cent. That's why I've come to ask you to turn him down the next time he tries to touch you for one of his 'loans.'"

"That's an easy promise," David answered with a smile.

"Thanks."

Her business was done, but she did not rise. Her swift eyes ran over the furnishings of the room—the bed, the crippled wash-stand, with its chipped bowl and broken-lipped pitcher, the dishes in the soap-box cupboard, the gas stove under the bed, the bare, splintered floor, the walls from which the blue kalsomine was flaking—ran over David's shapeless clothes. Then they stopped on his face.

"You're a queer bird," she said abruptly.

He started. "Queer?"

She gave a little jerk of a nod. "You didn't always live in a room like this, nor wear them kind of clothes. And you didn't learn your manners over on the Bowery neither. What's the matter? Up against it?"

David stared at her. "Don't you think there may be another queer bird in the room?" he suggested.

She was not rebuffed, but for a second she studied his face with an even sharper glance, in which there was the least glint of suspicion. "You mean me," she said. "I live across the hall with my father. When I'm at work I'm a maid in swell families—sometimes a nurse girl. Nothing queer about that."

"No—o," he said hesitatingly.

She returned to the attack. "What do you do?"

"I'm looking for work."

"What have you worked at?"

The directness with which she moved at what interested her might have amused David had that directness not been searching for what he desired for the present to conceal. "I only came to New York yesterday," he said evasively.

"But you've been in New York before?"

"Not for several years."

She was getting too close. "I'm a very stupid subject for talk," he said quickly. "Now you—you must have had some very interesting experiences in the homes of the rich. You saw the rich from the inside. Tell me about them."

She was not swerved an instant from her point. "You're very interesting. The first minute I saw

you I spotted you for a queer one to be living in a place like this. What've you been doing since you were in New York before?"

David could not hold back a flush; no evasive reply was waiting at his lips. Several seconds passed. "Pardon me, but don't you think you're a little too curious?" he said with an effort.

Her penetrating eyes had not left him. Now understanding flashed into her face. She emitted a low whistle.

"So that's it, is it!" she exclaimed, her voice softer than it had been. "So you've been sent away, and just got out. And you're starting in to try the honesty game."

There was no foiling her quick penetration. He nodded his head.

He had wondered how the world would receive him. She was the first member of the free world he had met who had learned his prison record, and he waited, chokingly, her action. He expected her face to harden accusingly—expected her to rise, speak despisingly and march coldly out.

"Well, you are up against it good and hard," she said slowly. There was sympathy in her voice.

The sympathy startled him; he warmed to her. But straightway it entered his mind that she would hasten to spread her discovery, and to live in the house might then be to live amid insult.

"You have committed burglary on my mind—you have stolen my secret," he said sharply.

"Oh, but I'll never tell," she quickly returned. And David, looking at her clear face, found himself believing her.

She tried with quick questions to break into his past, but he blocked her with silence. After a time she glanced at a watch upon her breast, rose and reached for the door-knob. But David sprang quickly forward. "Allow me," he said, and opened the door for her.

The courtesy did not go unnoticed. "You must have been a real 'gun,' a regular high-flyer, in your good days," she whispered.

"Why?"

"Oh, your kind of manners don't grow on cheap crooks."

She held out her hand. "Well, I wish you luck. Come over and see me sometime. Good night."

When he had closed the door David sat down and fell to musing over his visitor. She was dressed rather too showily, but she was not coarse. She was bold, but not brazen; hers seemed the boldness, the directness, of a child or a savage. Perhaps, in this quality, she was not grown up, or not yet civilised. He wondered how a maid or a nurse girl could support a father on her earnings, as he inferred she did. He wondered how she had so quickly divined that he was fresh from prison. He remembered a yellow stain near the ends of the first two fingers of her left hand; cigarettes; and the stain made him wonder, too. And he wondered at her manner—sharp, no whit of coquetry, a touch of frank good fellow-ship at the last.

Presently a hand which had been casually fumbling in the inside pocket of his coat drew out a folded paper. It was the bulletin of the work at St. Christopher's, and he now remembered that the director of the Mission (Dr. Joseph Franklin, the bulletin gave his name) had handed it to him the night before and that he had mechanically thrust it into his pocket and forgotten it. He began to look it through with pride; in a sense it was the record of *his* work. He read the schedule of religious services, classes, boys' clubs and girls' clubs. Toward the middle of the latter list this item stopped him short:

> Whittier Club—Members aged 17 to 20. Meets Wednesday evenings. Leader, Miss Helen Chambers.

This was Wednesday evening. David put on his hat, and ten minutes later, his coat collar turned up, his slouch hat pulled down, he was standing in the dark doorway of a tenement, his eyes fastened on the club-house entrance twenty yards down the street.

After what seemed an endless time, she appeared. Dr. Franklin was with her, evidently to escort her to her car. David gazed at her, as they came toward his doorway, with all the intensity of his great love. She was tall, almost as tall as Dr. Franklin; and she had that grace of carriage, that firm poise of bearing, which express a noble, healthy womanhood under perfect self-control. David had not seen her face last night; and he now kept his eyes upon it, waiting till it should come within the white circle of the street lamp near the doorway.

When the lamp lifted the shadows from her face, a great thrill ran through him. Ah, how beautiful it was!—beauty of contour and colour, yes, but here the fleshly beauty, which so often is merely flesh for flesh's sake, was the beautiful expression of a beautiful soul. There was a high dignity in the face, and understanding, and womanly tenderness. It was a face that for seven years had to him summed up the richest, rarest womanhood.

She passed so close that he could have touched her, but he flattened himself within the doorway's shadow. After she had gone by he leaned out and followed her with his hungry eyes.

Could he ever, ever win her respect?

CHAPTER III

THE SUPERFLUOUS MAN

The next day the search for work had to be begun, and David felt himself squarely against the beginning of his new career as an ex-convict. He saw this career, not as a part to be abandoned when it wearied him, like a rôle assumed for a season by a sociological investigator, but as the part he must play, must *live*, to the end of his days. His immediate struggle, his whole future, would not be one whit other than if he were in truth the thief the world had branded him. Writing for the magazines was not to be thought of, for he needed quick, certain money. He was friendless; he had no profession; he had no trade; he had never held a position; he had no experience of a commercial value. All in all his equipment for facing the world, barring his education, was identical with the equipment of the average discharged convict.

David did not look forward into this career with resignation. There was nothing of the willing martyr in him. The life he must follow was not going to be easy; it would demand his all of courage and endurance. He longed to stand before the world a clean man, and the longing was at times a fierce rebellion. He had bought a great good, but he was paying therefor a bitter price, and every day of his life he must pay the price anew. Yet he faced the future with determination, if not with happiness. He believed that earnest work and earnest living would regain the world's respect—would slowly force the world to yield him place.

He tried to forbid himself thinking of Helen Chambers as having the slightest part in his future. She was a thousand times farther removed than four years before, when his name had been fair, and then the space of the universe had stretched between them. And yet the desire some day to appear well in her eyes was after all the strongest motive, stronger even than the instinct of self-preservation, that urged him upon the long, uphill struggle.

David had determined first to seek work on a newspaper. Some of the things he had written in that far-away time beyond the prison, came back to him. They were not bad—they were really good! If he could get on one of the papers, and could manage to hold his place for a few months without his story being learned, perhaps by then he would have so proved his worth that he would be retained despite his prison record. He would do his best! Who knew?—life might have a very endurable place for him somewhere in the years ahead. He grew almost excited as he gazed at the dimly-seen success.

Before starting out upon his first try at fortune, he gazed into the mirror above his wash-stand and for a long time studied his face, wondering if the men he was going to meet would read his record there. The forehead was broad, and about the grey eyes and the wide mouth were the little puckering wrinkles that announce the dreamer. The chin was the chin of the man of will. In health the face would have suggested a rare combination of idealism and will-power; but now there brooded over it that hesitancy, that blanched gloom, which come from living within the dark shadows of prison. No one looking at his thin, slightly stooping figure would have ever guessed that here was Dave Aldrich, the great half-back of '95.

After filling the forenoon by writing for his belongings, which his New Jersey landlady had promised to keep till he should send for them, and by dreaming of the future, David set out for the hurly-burly that seethes within and without the sky-supporting buildings of Park Row. At the entrance to the first newspaper office, his courage suddenly all flowed from him. Would he be recognised as a jail-bird? His ill-fitting prison-made suit, that clothed him in reproach, that burned him—was it not an announcement of his record? He turned away in panic.

But he had to go in, and fiercely mastering his throbbing agitation, he returned to the office and entered. The city editor, a sharp-faced young man, after hearing that David had no newspaper experience, snapped out in a quick voice, "Sorry, for I need a man—but I've got no time to break in a green hand," and the following instant was shouting to a "copy" boy for proofs.

At the next place the slip on which David had been required to write his business, came back to him with the two added words, "Nothing doing." At the third place the returned slip bore the statement, "Got all the men I need." The fourth editor, whom he saw, gave him a short negative. The fifth editor sent word by mouth of the office boy that his staff was full. It required all David's determination to mount to the sixth office, that of an able and aggressively respectable paper.

The boy who took in his request to the city editor returned at once and led David across a large dingy room, with littered floor, and grime-streaked windows. Young men, coatless, high-geared, sat at desks scribbling with pencils and clicking typewriters; boys, answering the quick cries of "copy!" scurried about through the heavy tobacco smoke. The room was a rectangular solid of bustling intensity.

The city editor, who occupied a corner of the room, waved David to a chair. Again David repeated the formula of his desire, and again he was asked his experience.

"I've had no experience on a paper," he replied, "but I've done a lot of writing in a private way."

"You're practically a new man, then." The editor thought for a moment, and David eagerly watched his face. It was business-like, but kindly. "Why, I guess I might take the trouble to lick a

man into shape—if he seemed to have the right stuff in him. Anyhow, I might give you a trial. But you're not very young to be just beginning the game. What've you been working at?"

David felt the guilty colour warming his cheeks. "Writing."

"All the time?"

He tried to speak naturally. "The last few years I have been trying to do some—manual work."

"Here in the city?"

"No. Out of town."

The editor could not but notice David's flushed face and its strained look. He eyed David narrowly, and his brow wrinkled in thought. David strove to force a natural look upon his face. "Aldrich," the editor said to himself, "Aldrich—David Aldrich you said. That sounds familiar. Where have I heard that in the last few days?"

"I don't know," said David, his lips dry; but he thought of a paragraph he had read on the ride from prison announcing his discharge.

"O-o-h!" said the editor, and his eyes sharpened. David understood. The editor had also remembered the paragraph.

The editor's gaze dropped to his desk, as though embarrassed. "I'm very sorry—but I'm afraid I can't use you after all. I really don't need any men. But I hope you'll find something without trouble."

The blow was gently delivered, but it was still a blow—one that, as he walked dazedly from the office, made his courage totter. He told himself that he had counted upon just such experiences as this, that he had planned for a month of rebuffs—and gradually, as the evening wore away, he preached spirit back into himself. However, he would make no further attempts to find newspaper work. Even should he be so lucky as to secure a place, some one of the score or two score fellow-workers would be certain to connect him with the newly-liberated convict, as the editor had done, and then—discharge. For the present, it would be better to seek a position among the large business houses.

At dawn the next morning David was reading the "Help Wanted" columns of a newspaper, and two hours later he was sitting in the office of the superintendent of the shipping department of a wholesale dress-goods house that had advertised for a shipping clerk. The superintendent scrutinised David's face, making David feel that the prison mark was appearing, like an image on a developing plate, and then demanded: "Why do you want a job like this? This ain't your class."

"Because I need it."

"Had any experience as a shipping clerk?"

"No. But I'm mighty willing to learn."

"Well, let's see your letters from previous employers."

David hesitated. "I have none." He felt the red proclamation of his record begin to burn in his cheeks.

"Have none!" The superintendent looked suspicious. "No references at all?"

David shook his head; his cheeks flamed redder.

"Who've you worked for?"

To mention here his four years of writing would be absurd. "No one," he stammered—"that is, I've had no business experience."

The superintendent's reply came out sharply: "No experience—no references—can't use you. Good morning."

David stumbled out, not noticing the relief his dejection gave the other applicants waiting outside the office. He saw the difficulty of his situation with a new, startling clearness; the superintendent had summed it up with business-like conciseness—"no experience, no references." A sudden fear, a sudden consternation, clutched him. Would he ever be able to pass that great wall standing between him and a position?—that wall builded of his prison record, of no experience, of no references?

Whether or not, he must try. He hurried to another office that had advertised for help, and to another, and to another—and so on for days. Usually he was turned away because there was really no work, but several times because to the penetrating questions he could return only his distrust-rousing answers. His courage tried to escape; but he caught it and held it, desperately.

Saturday evening an expressman delivered a box sent by his old New Jersey landlady. The charge was a dollar, and the dollar's payment was a tragedy. The box contained only a few of the things he had left behind him. His landlady, though kind, was careless, his things had become scattered during the four years, and the contents of the box were all she had been able to get together. There were a few of his books, a few photographs and prints, a few ornaments, a pair of boxing

gloves, most of his manuscripts, and an overcoat. The overcoat at least was worth having, with cool weather but a few weeks off.

The second week was an elaboration of the first few days, and the first half of the third was the same. Then he had three days' work at addressing envelopes—girls' work and boys' work, for which he was paid eighty-five cents a day. Then the search again.

At length he found a place. It was in a small department store in One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street—a store that in fifteen years had developed from a notion shop occupying a mere hole in the wall. The proprietor was one of those men who do not see the master chances, the thousands and the millions, but who see a multitude of little chances, the pennies and the dollars. He squeezed his creditors, his customers, his shopgirls—kept open later than other stores to squeeze a few last drops of profit from the day. His success was the sum of thousands of petty advantages.

When David came to him he saw that here was a man in cruel need. The labour of a man in cruel need is yours at your own price—is, in fact, a bargain. He had had enough experience with bargains in merchandise to know that when a rarely good bargain offers it is best to snap it up and not question too closely into the reasons for its cheapness. So he offered David a place in the kitchen furnishing department. Salary, five dollars a week.

David accepted. His first week's salary, minus ten cents a day for car fare and ten cents for luncheon, amounted to three dollars and eighty cents. He had begun a second month in his room, and his landlady, seeing how poor he was, again demanded her rent in advance. After paying her, David had a dollar and a quarter left. But he had a job—a poor job, but still a job.

The following Sunday afternoon, as he sat at his window, pretending to read, but in reality staring dreamily down through the spider's-web of clothes lines into the deep, dreary backyard, Kate Morgan came in. It was the first time he had seen her since her visit of a month before, though he had called several times at her flat, to be told by her father that she was away at work.

"Good afternoon!" she cried, and giving him her hand she marched in before he could speak. "Take the chair yourself this time," she said, and sat down on the bed, her feet hanging clear.

She wore a black tailored suit and a beplumed hat. Evidently she had just come in from walking, for the warm colour of the late October air was in her cheeks. There was no doubt about it this time—she was pretty. And there was a lightness, a sauciness, in her manner that had not showed on her previous visit.

"Well, sir, how've you been?" she demanded, after David had taken the chair.

He tried, somewhat heavily, to fit his mood to hers. "I can't say I've cornered the happiness market. You haven't noticed a rise in quotations, have you?"

"Nope," she said, swinging her feet—and David had to see that they were very shapely and in neat patent leather shoes, and that the ankles were very trim. "I just got back this morning. How's dad been? And how many loans has he stuck you for?"

"To be exact, he's tried seven times and failed seven times."

"Good! But dad's better now than he used to be. When I first began to go away I'd leave him enough money to last for a week, or till I'd be home again. He always went off on a spree—never failed. So now I mail him thirty cents every day. It ain't quite enough to live decent on, and at the same time it ain't quite enough to get drunk on. See? So I guess he keeps pretty sober."

"I guess he does," said David, not quite able to restrain a smile. "But how've you been?"

"Me?" She shook her head with a doleful little air. "I've been having a regular hell of a time. I've been nurse girl in a swell house on Fifth Avenue. It's built out of gold and diamonds and such stuff. The missus was one of these society head-liners. You know the sort—good shape, good complexion, swell dresses, and that's all. Somebody made the dresses, her make-up box made her complexion, and her corset made her figure. Soul, heart, brain—pst! Once every day or two she'd come to the nursery just long enough to rub a bit of her complexion on the children's faces. And she treated me like I wasn't there. Oh, but wouldn't I like to wring her neck! But I'll get square with her, you bet!"

She gave a grimly threatening jerk of her little head, then smiled again. "But what's your luck? Got a job yet?"

"Yes."

"What doing?"

David shrunk from telling this brilliantly-dressed creature how lowly his work was, but he had to confess. "Clerking in a department store."

"How much do you make?"

That awful inquisitiveness!

"Five dollars a week."

Her black eyes stared at him, then suddenly she leaned back and laughed. He reddened. She

straightened up, bent forward till her elbows rested on her knees, and gazed into his face.

"Five—dollars—a—week!" she said. "And you a king crook!" She shook her head wonderingly. "And, please sir, how do you like being honest at five dollars a week?"

"Hardly as well as I would at six," he answered, trying to speak lightly.

She was silent for almost a minute, her eyes incredulously on him. "Mr. David Aldrich," she remarked slowly, "you're a fool!"

He was startled—and his wonderment about her returned. "I've often said the same," he agreed. "But do you mind telling why you think so?"

"A man that can make his hundreds a week, works for his living at five."

He assumed such innocence of appearance as he could command. "I'm a little surprised to hear this, especially from a woman who also works for her living."

Her look of wonderment gave place to a queer little smile. "Hum!" She straightened up. "D'you mind if I smoke?" she asked abruptly, drawing a silver cigarette case from a pocket of her skirt.

The women David had known had not smoked. But he said "no" and accepted a cigarette when she offered him the open box. She struck a match, held the flame first to him, then lit her own cigarette.

She drew deeply. "To-day's the first time I've dared smoke for a month. Ah, but it's good!"

She stared again at David, and now with that penetrating gaze of her last visit. A minute passed. David grew very uncomfortable. Then she announced abruptly: "You're on the dead level!"

The queer little smile came back. "Yes, I work for my living. And I keep my flat, keep my father, dress myself, have plenty of money for good times, and put aside enough so that I can knock off work whenever I like—all on a maid's twenty a month. And how do you suppose I do it?"

David wondered what was coming next, but did not answer. A fear that had been creeping into his mind suddenly grew into definiteness.

"People around here think I've got a rich old lover," she said.

He felt a sinking at his heart. This had been his sudden fear. And she took the shame in such a matter-of-fact way!

"I let 'em think so, for that explains everything to them. But they're wrong." The queer smile broadened. "What do you think?"

"I could never guess," said David.

She leaned forward, and her voice lowered to a whisper. "You and me—we're in the same trade."

"What! You're a——" He hesitated.

"That's it," she said. "A nurse girl or a maid in a rich house sees a lot of things lying around. Or, if she wants to, she can stay for two or three weeks or a month, learn where the valuables are kept, make a plan of the house, get hold of keys. Then she gets a pal, and they clean the place out. That's me."

There was a glow of excitement in her eyes, and pride, and a triumphant sense of having startled him. For the moment he merely stared at her, could make no response.

"There, we know each other now," she said, and took several puffs at her cigarette. "But ain't you tired of the honesty life at five per?"

"No."

"You soon will be!" she declared. "Then you'll go back to the old thing. All the other boys that try the honesty stunt do. They're up against too stiff a proposition. You're way out of my class, but when you get tired, mebbe I can put something in your way that won't be so bad. By-the-by, you ain't ready for something now, are you?" A vindictive look came into her face. "Mrs. Make-Up-Box gets it next. And she'll get it, too!"

"I'm going to stick it out," said David.

She gave a little sniff. "We'll see!"

Her eyes swept the room, fell upon the little heap of photographs and prints lying on the box in which he had stacked his books. "Why don't you put those things up?"

"I don't know—I just haven't."

"We'll do it now."

She slipped to her feet, went out the door, and two minutes later reappeared with a handful of tacks, a hammer, and a white curtain. She took off her hat and coat, and for the next half hour she was tacking the pictures upon the scaling walls—first trying them here and there, occasionally asking David's advice and ignoring it if it did not please her. Then she ordered him

upon the chair, and made him, under her direction, fasten the curtain into place.

"Well, things look a little better," she said when all was done, surveying the room. Then, without so much as "by your leave," she washed her hands in his wash-bowl and arranged her hair before his mirror, chatting all the while. Hat and coat on again, she opened the door. "Mister," she said, nodding her head and smiling a keen little smile, "I give you two months. Then—the old way!"

She closed the door and was gone.

On the third morning of the new week, as David left the elevated station to walk the few blocks to the store, he noticed that a policeman's eyes were on him. David thought he recognised the officer as one who had been present at his trial, and hurried uneasily away. A block further on he glanced over his shoulder; the policeman was following. The uneasiness became apprehension, and the apprehension would have become consternation had he, a little after entering the store, seen the officer also come in.

A few minutes after he had begun to dust his tinware, he was summoned to the office. The proprietor's little pig-eyes were gleaming, his great pig-jowl flushing. He sprang to his full height, which was near David's shoulder. "You dirty, lying, cut-throat of a convict!" he roared. "Get out o' my store!"

"What's that?" gasped David.

The proprietor shook a fat fist at David's face. "Get out o' here! You came to me as an honest man! I hired you as an honest man! You deceived me. You're nothing but a dirty, sneaking jail-bird! You came in here just to get a chance to rob me! You'd have done it, too, if a policeman hadn't give me a tip as to what you are! Get out o' here, or I'll have you kicked out!"

David grew afire with wrath. It was useless to plead for his place; but there was a dollar and seventy cents due him. For that he choked his anger down. "Very well, I'll go," he said, as calmly as he could. "But first pay me for my two days."

"Not one red cent!" David's two days' pay was one of the kind of atoms of which his success was composed. "Not a cent!" he roared. "You say another word about pay, and I'll have you arrested for the things you've already stolen from me. Now clear out!—you low, thieving jail-bird you!"

A wild rage, the eruptive sum of long insults and suffering, burst forth in David. He took one step forward, and his open hand smacked explosively upon the flesh-padded cheek of the proprietor. The proprietor tottered, sputteringly recovered his balance—and again the hand smacked with a sharp report.

When the proprietor gained his balance a second time, it was to find David towering over him, face inflamed, fists clenched.

"My money, or by God I'll smash your head off!" David cried furiously.

The proprietor blanched, trembled. A fear-impelled hand drew silver from his pocket and gave David the amount. David glanced at it, and obeying an impulse that he was to regret again and again, flung the hard coins straight into the man's face. Then he walked out of the office, secured his hat from the cloak-room near by, and marched through the store. At the door the frantic proprietor, who had rushed ahead to call for the police, tried to block David's way, but David bore down upon him with so menacing a look that he stepped aside.

Fortunately the street was filled with people, and the next instant David was lost among them. For half an hour he aimlessly walked the streets with his wrath. Then the realisation of his situation began to cool him. However unjust had been his discharge, and however brutish its manner, the great fact was not thereby changed. He was discharged, and he had in his pocket less than a dollar.

Then the wearying, heart-breaking search for work began anew. That he had found one situation made him think he might find another, but at the end of a week he had met with nothing but failure. He still kept on the march, but the spirit was gone out of him. The search for work became purely an affair of the muscles: his legs carried him from office to office, at each his lips repeated their request. Muscle, that was all—muscle whipped to action by the fear of starvation.

But though his spirit was worn weak, his resentment was not. He raged—at times frantically. Why did the world refuse work to the poor beings the prisons sent back to it? Some of them were inspired by good resolutions; to them life was dear; they were worth saving. How did the world expect them to live and be honest, if it refused them means of life and of honesty? He could find but one answer to his questions: the world was selfish, heartless. He cursed the world, and he cursed the God that made it.

And he cursed himself, his foolishness that had brought him here; and he cursed Morton and St. Christopher's. At times he burned with the desire to clear his name, come what might to the people of the Mission. It is so hard for one, unfed, cold, hopeless, to be heroic. But his judgment told him that the truth from him would go unbelieved; and the great resolution behind his bargain, the long habit of silence, also restrained his declaration of innocence.

But even amid these gloomy weeks there were gentler periods. He often slipped at night into the neighbourhood of St. Christopher's, and stealthily gazed at the club-house, its windows aglow with friendliness to all but himself; at the chapel, with the Morton memorial window sending its

warm inspiration into the streets—as it did, so he had learned, throughout the night. He told himself, when he thus stood with his work before his eyes, that he should be content. His struggles were hard—yes; his suffering was great. But that his suffering, the suffering of one man, should hold these hundreds a little nearer to the plain decencies of life, to truth and purity and honour, a little nearer to God—this was worth while. Yes, the bargain was a great bargain.

And every Wednesday evening he looked forth from the shadow of a doorway upon Helen Chambers as she left the Mission. And at the moment she passed his door he each time felt the same supreme pang. Three feet away!—as far away as the stars!

CHAPTER IV

AN UNINVITED GUEST

Black day followed black day, and grudged penny followed grudged penny, till at length there came a day when it seemed the blackness could become no blacker and when his remaining pennies were less than his fingers. On this day he sat long at his window, his wasted, despair-tightened face looking out upon the patched undergarments swinging from lines and upon the boxes and barrels and bottles and papers and rags that littered the deep bottom of the yard, grimly thinking over the prophecy of Kate Morgan. One of the two months she had given his honesty was gone. By the time the second had passed——? He shiveringly wondered.

This day he ate no evening meal. For a week now one meal had been his daily ration, and that meal pitiably poor and pitiably small. He sat about his room till his nickel clock—which Kate Morgan had brought in one day and deposited upon the wash-stand with her undebatable air of finality—reported quarter past nine, when he rose and walked down into the street. It had been one of those warm days that sometimes come in mid-November—benign messages of remembrance, as it were, from departed summer—and now the people of the tenements filled the streets, for on the packed East Side the street, on warm days, is parlor to the parent and the lover, and nursery to the child.

As David stepped forth he did not notice that he was watched by a pair of keen, boyish eyes from under the rim of a battered slouch hat, and had he noticed he would not have been aware that these same eyes had watched him before. It was a Wednesday evening and David, entangled among the people, like a vessel in a sargasso sea, pursued a slow course toward the Mission, never observing that a boy in a battered hat followed him a way then turned back.

He took his place in the shadowed doorway and waited for Helen Chambers to appear. In a few minutes she came out, Dr. Franklin with her as usual. There was also a second man, gray-haired and slightly stooped, whom David recognised as an older brother of Mr. Chambers, and whom he remembered as a clear-visioned, gentle old philosopher greatly loved by his niece. As they passed, David leaned from the shadow to follow her with his eyes, and the light from the street lamp fell across his face. Dr. Franklin, chancing this instant to look in David's direction, excused himself to Helen and her uncle, who moved forward a few paces, and stepped to the doorway. David pressed frantically back into the shadow.

"Good evening," said Dr. Franklin, holding out a firm, cordial hand, into which David laid his limp fingers. "I've seen you about several times since the evening you called. I've been looking for a chance to invite you to the Mission."

David hardly heard him. He was thinking, wildly, "Suppose she should step to his side? Suppose he should draw me into the light?" It was a moment of blissful, agonising consternation.

"Perhaps I'll come," he managed to whisper. He feared lest his whisper had reached her, and lest she had recognised his voice. But she did not look around.

"I shall expect you. Good night."

Dr. Franklin rejoined Helen and her uncle, and David's hearing, which strained after him, heard him explain as they moved away: "A man who came to the Mission in Mr. Morton's time. He often stands about the Mission, looking at it, but he never comes in."

As soon as they were out of sight David, a-tremble at the narrowness of his escape, slipped from the door and hurried away. As he went, the old question besieged him. If, a minute ago, he had been drawn into the light, would she have spoken to him? And if she had, would it not have been coldly, with disdain?

By the time he reached his tenement he had regained part of his lost composure. As he slipped the key into his door, he heard a sudden scrambling sound within. All his senses were instantly called to alertness. He threw open the door, and sprang into the darkened room.

In the same instant a vague figure leaped through the open window out upon the landing of the fire-escape. David crossed the little room at a bound, caught the coat-tails of the escaping figure, dragged it backwards. The figure turned like a flash, threw something over David's head—a sack, David thought—sprang upon David, and tied the something round his neck with a fierce embrace. David staggered backward under the weight of his adversary, and the two went to the floor in the

narrow space between the bed and the wall.

Instantly the figure, with a jerk and a catlike squirm, tried to break away, but David's arms, gripped about its body, held it fast. Then it resumed its choking embrace of David's neck. The sack about his head was heavy; the air hardly came through it. He began to gasp. He tried frantically to throw the figure off, but it held its place. Then one hand fell upon a mop of hair. He clutched it and pushed fiercely upward. The embrace broke, and two fists began to beat his face through the sack. An instant later David managed to scramble to his feet and throw off the sack—and he then saw that the writhing, kicking figure he had captured reached midway between his waist and shoulders.

His right hand still fastened in his captive's hair, David lighted the gas. There, at the end of his arm, was a boy with the figure of fourteen and the face of twenty. His clothes, baggy and torn, were for the latter age; the trousers were rolled up six years at the bottom. The face was wrinkled in a scowl, and the eyes gleamed defiance. He was panting heavily. On the floor lay what David had thought was a sack; it was his own overcoat.

"Why you're nothing but a boy!" David cried.

"A boy! Nuttin'! If I'd been in form, I'd 'a' showed you!"

David locked the door, cut off escape by standing before the window, and disentangled his fingers from the boy's locks. He then saw that the boy's dirty yellow hair flowed upward from his forehead in a cow-lick.

The boy put his hands in his pockets and continued his defiant stare.

"Now, sir, what were you doing in here?" David demanded.

"What you t'ink?" the boy returned coolly. "You t'ink I come to collect de rent?"

"You tried to steal my coat."

"Gee, you're wise! How'd you guess it?"

David regarded the little fellow steadily for a minute or more. He now noticed that the figure before him was very thin, and he remembered that once the embrace had been broken the boy had been a mere child even to his own weak strength.

"What did you want that coat for?" he asked.

"It's like dis, cul," the boy answered in a tone of confidence. "I owns a swell clo'es-joint on Fift' Avenoo, an' I'm out gittin' in me fall stock."

"What's your name?" David demanded.

"Reggie Vanderbilt."

David did not try another question. He scrutinised the boy in silence, wondering what he should do with this young thief who, instead of showing the proper caught-in-the-act penitence, persisted in wearing the air of one who is master of the situation. David now took note that the boy's coat-collar was turned up and that the coat was held closed by a button near the throat and a safety pin at the bottom. The gaping front of the coat showed him a white line. He stepped forward, and with a quick hand loosened the button at the throat. It was as he had guessed—nothing but a mere rag of an undershirt that left the chest half bare—and the bare chest was rippled with ribs.

"Keep out o' dere!" the boy snapped, jerking away.

David was silent; then he said accusingly: "You're hungry!"

"Well, if I am—it's me own bellyache!"

"You tried to take that coat because you're hungry?"

"I did, did I?"

"Didn't you?"

"Oh, come stop jabbin' me in de ear wid your questions," the boy returned sharply. "What you t'ink I took it for? To buy me goil a automobile?"

He was silent for several moments, his bright eyes on David; then he threw off his defiant look. "Hungry?" he sniffed. "You don't know what de woid means! Me—well, me belly don't have to look it up in no dictionary. I ain't chawed nuttin' but wind for a mont'."

"You were going to sell it?"

"Nix. Pawn it."

David looked from the boy to the coat, and from the coat to the boy. One hand, in his pocket, mechanically fingered his fortune—seven coppers. After a minute he picked up the coat, put it across his arm, and opened the door.

"Come on," he said.

The boy did not budge. "Where you goin' to take me?" he asked suspiciously.

"Nowhere. You're going to take me."

"Where?"

"To the pawnshop," said David.

The boy gave a sneer of disgust, and an outward push with an open, dirty hand. "Oh, say now, cul, don't feed me dat infant's food! D'you t'ink I can't see t'rough dat steer? I'm wise to where—to de first cop!"

He shuffled from his place against the wall. "Well, you got me. Come on. Let's go."

He stepped through the door and stood quietly till David had the key in the lock. Then suddenly he darted toward the stairway. David sprang after him and caught his coat-tail just as he was taking three stairs at one step. David fastened his right hand upon the boy's sleeve, and side by side they marched down the four flights of stairs and into the street.

"Now take me to the pawnshop," David directed.

The boy gave a knowing grunt but said nothing. He walked quietly along till they sighted a policeman standing on a corner half a block ahead. Then he began to drag backward, and David had fairly to push him. As they came up to the officer David glanced down, and saw tenseness, alertness, fear—the look of the captured animal that watches for a chance to escape.

The officer noticed David's grip on the boy's sleeve. "What you caught there?" he demanded.

"Just a friend of mine," David answered, and passed on.

After a few paces the boy peered stealthily up, an uncomprehending look in his face. "Say, pard, you're a queer guy!" he said; and a moment later he added: "You needn't hold me. I'll go wid you."

David withdrew his hand, and a little further on the boy led David for the first time in his life into a pawnbroker's shop. David threw the coat upon the counter and asked for as much as could be advanced upon it.

A large percentage of pledges are never redeemed, and the less advanced on an unredeemed pledge the greater the pawnbroker's profit when it is sold. The money-lender looked the coat over. "A dollar and a half," he said.

"Ah, git out wid your plunk and a half!" the boy cut in. "Dat's stealin' widout takin' de risks. T'ree."

"It ain't worth it," returned the usurer.

The boy picked up the coat. "Come on," he said to David, and started out.

"Two!" called out the pawnbroker.

The boy walked on.

"Two and a half!"

The boy returned and threw the coat upon the counter.

Twenty minutes later they were back in the room, and several grocery parcels lay on the bed. With a gaze that was three parts wonderment and one part suspicion, the boy watched David cooking over the gas stove. He made no reply to David's remarks save when one was necessary, and then his answer was no more than a monosyllable.

At length the supper was ready. The table was the soap-box cupboard, so placed that one of them might have the edge of the bed as his chair. On this table were a can of condensed milk, a mound of sliced bread, and a cube of butter in its wooden dish. On the gas stove stood a frying-pan of eggs and bacon and a pot of coffee.

After the boy, at David's invitation, had blackened a basin of water with his hands, they sat down. David gave the boy two eggs and several strips of bacon, and served himself a like portion. Then they set to—one taste of eggs or bacon to three or four bites of bread. The boy never stopped, and David paused only to refill the coffee cups from time to time and to pour into them a pale string of condensed milk. And the boy never spoke, save once there oozed through his bread-stuffed mouth the information that his "belly was scairt most stiff."

Presently the boy's plate was clean to shininess—polished by pieces of bread with which he had rubbed up the last blotch of grease, the last smear of yellow. He looked over at the frying-pan in which was a fifth egg, and an extra strip of bacon. David caught the stare, and quickly turned the egg and bacon into the boy's plate.

The boy looked from the plate to David. "You don't want it?" he asked fearfully.

"No."

He waited for no retraction. A few minutes later, after having finished the egg and meat and the remaining slices of bread, he leaned back with a profound sigh, and steadily regarded David.

At length he said, abruptly: "Me name's Tom."

"Thanks," said David. "What's your last name?"

The boy's defiance and suspicion had fallen from him. "Jenks I calls meself. But I dunno. Me old man had a lot o' names—Jones, Simmons, Hall, an' some I forget. He changed 'em for his healt'—see? So I ain't wise to which me real name is."

Under David's questioning he became communicative about his history. "You had to be tough meat to live wid me old man. Me mudder wasn't built to stand de wear and tear, an' about de time I was foist chased off to school, she went out o' biz. I stayed wid me old man till I was twelve. He hit de booze hard, an' kep' himself in form by poundin' me. He was hell. Since den I been woikin' for meself."

It was now twelve by Kate Morgan's clock—an hour past David's bed-time. "Where do you live?" he asked Tom.

"In me clo'es," Tom answered, grinning. David found himself liking that grin, which pulled the face to one side like a finger in a corner of the mouth.

"Where are you going to stay to-night?"

"Been askin' meself de same question." He stood up. "But I guess I'd better be chasin' meself so you can git to bed."

"Don't go just yet," said David. He looked at his narrow bed, then looked at Tom. "Suppose you stay with me to-night. I guess we can double up in the bed there."

Tom's mouth fell agape. "Me—sleep—in—your—bed?"

"Of course—why not?"

The boy sank back into his chair. "Well, say, you are a queer guy!" he burst out. He stared at David, then slowly shook his head. "I won't do it. Anyhow, I couldn't sleep in a bed. It'd keep me awake. But I'm up agin it, an' I'll stay if you'll let me sleep on de floor."

"But there are no extra bed-clothes."

"Wouldn't want 'em if dere was. I'd be too hot."

So it was settled. Ten minutes later the room was dark, David was in bed, and Tom was lying in the space between the bed's foot and the wall, with David's coat for extra covering and with Browning's poems and a volume of Molière as a pillow. There was deep silence for another ten minutes, then a cautious whisper rose from the foot of the bed.

"Are you asleep?"

"No," said David.

"Say, why didn't you have me pinched?" the voice asked.

No answer.

The voice rose again. "Why did you gimme dat extry egg?"

No answer.

"Why did you ask me to stay here? Ain't you afraid I'll skin out wid your clo'es?"

Again there was no answer. But presently David said: "Better go to sleep, Tom."

There was a brief, deep silence; then once more the voice came from the foot of the bed. "I ain't just wise to you," said the voice, and there was a note of huskiness in it, "but say, pard, you gits my vote!"

CHAPTER V

GUEST TURNS HOST

The first object David's eyes fell upon when they opened the next morning was Tom, sitting beside the bed, a look of waiting eagerness on his pinched face. The instant he saw David was awake he sprang up, and David perceived the boy had on one pair of the boxing-gloves.

"Can you use de mitts?" Tom asked excitedly.

"A little. I used to, that is," David answered, smiling at the odd figure the cow-lick, the eager face, the baggy coat and the big boxing-gloves combined to make of the boy.

"Come on, den!—git up! Let's have a go."

David slipped out of bed, and while he was dressing Tom entertained him with an account of the

Corbett-Britt fight, kinematograph pictures of which he had seen at one of the Bowery theatres. Tom danced about the narrow space between the bed and the wall, taking the part of one man, then of the other, giving blows and receiving blows, feinting, ducking, rushing and being rushed against imaginary ropes, and gasping out bits of description: "Corbett breaks in an' lands like dis—Jimmie hands back dis poke—Corbett goes groggy—dey clinch—bing! bang! biff!—Den Jimmie gits in dis peach—Corbett kerplunks—one, two, t'ree, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—an' Corbett's a has-been!"

By this time David was half-dressed, and had drawn on the other pair of gloves. They gravely shook hands and drew apart. "Be careful, and don't make me a has-been," David cautioned.

"Oh, mudder! Fetch me a step-ladder!" besought Tom, looking upward at David's head. He spat from one side of his mouth, drew his head down between his shoulders, rushed in, and began directing a fury of blows at David's stomach, which was near the level of his fists; and it took all David's long-rusted, but one-time considerable, skill to ward off the rapid fists. He made no attempt to get in a blow himself, and this soon drew on him Tom's wrath.

"I ain't no baby!" the boy yelled in disgust. "Punch me!"

David proceeded to land a few light touches about the slender body.

"A-a-h, punch me!" Tom gasped. "Harder!"

David obeyed, and landed a chest blow that sent Tom to his back. David dropped to his knees beside him, alarmed, for the boy's face was white and dazed. But Tom rose to an elbow and pushed David away. His lips moved silently, then with sound: "Seven, eight, nine, ten." At "ten" he sprang to his feet and rushed at David again.

But David threw up his hands. "That's enough for to-day. And finish fights are against the New York law."

Tom grumblingly drew off the gloves. After their breakfast of bread and coffee David asked him what he was going to do that day.

"Look for odd jobs."

"Where will you stay to-night?"

"Dunno."

"How did you like the floor?"

"Bully!"

"Well, suppose you come back and try it again to-night. Be here at six. Will you?"

"Will I!" gasped the boy. "You can just bet your gran'mudder's suspenders dat I will!"

When David returned at six, after another day of hopeless search, he found Tom sitting in the doorway of the tenement. The boy's face lighted up with his lop-sided smile; David felt a quick glow at having someone to give him a welcoming look—even though that someone were only a ragged, stunted boy in an old slouch hat that from time to time slipped down and eclipsed the sharp face.

They had dinner, and after it they set forth on a walk. David left the guidance to Tom, and the boy led the way down the Bowery, where, to the hellish music of elevated trains, and by the garish light that streamed from restaurants, pawnshops, music-halls and saloons, moved the all-night procession of thieves and thugs, cheap sports and cheap confidence men, gutter-rags of men and women, girls whose bold, roving eyes sought markets for their charms—all those whom we of sheltered morals are wont to consider the devil's irretrievable share, without thinking much, or caring much, as to why they should be his. Tom's tongue maintained a constant commentary on everything they passed; to talk was clearly one of his delights. What he said was interesting, and was given a grotesque vivacity by his snappy diction of the streets; but David shivered again and again at the knowledge he had where he should have had ignorance.

The boy was erudite in the wickedness of this part of the city. That innocent-looking second-hand store, which was run by the fat old woman in the doorway, was in reality a "fence;" that laundry was an opium den; in the back of that brilliantly-lighted club-room, whose windows were labelled "The Three Friends' Association," there was a gambling joint; that saloon was the hang-out of a gang of men and women thieves; in that music hall, through whose open door they glimpsed a dancer in a red knee-skirt doing the high kick, the girls got their brief admirers drunk and picked their pockets;—and so on, and on, missing nothing that he should not have known.

At Chatham Square they turned into the Jewish quarter and shouldered homeward through narrow streets that from wall to wall were a distracting entanglement of playing children, baby carriages, families on door-steps, promenading lovers, hurrying men, arguing groups, flambeau-lighted pushcarts whose bent and bearded proprietors offered the chaotic crowd every commodity from cucumbers to clothes. The latter part of their walk took them by St. Christopher's, through the glowing colours of the Morton memorial window; and the Mission came in for a few of Tom's sentences. It was a great place to steal women's pocketbooks. "A lot o' swell ladies from Fift' Avenoo comes down dere to monkey wid de kids—hell knows what for. Dere easy fruit. I pinched two or t'ree fat leathers dere meself."

David marvelled at the boy's intimacy with wickedness, yet he understood it. Evil was the one thing Tom had had a chance to become acquainted with; it had for him the familiar face that virtue has for children raised amid happier circumstances. The conditions of its childhood, whether good or bad, are the normal conditions of life to the child. So to Tom wickedness was normal; he talked of stealing, of gambling, of women, with the natural vivacity that another boy might have talked of his marbles.

David saw, as definitely as the calendar sees to-morrow, the future of this boy if there were no influence counter to the influence that was now sweeping him toward his fate. He saw arrest (Tom had boasted that he had been arrested once)—prison—a hardening of the boy's nature—a life of crime. He heard little of the rest of the boy's chatter, and presently he came to a decision—a very unpretentious decision, for he was poorer than poverty, and what confidence he once had in his personal influence had slipped away. But the little he could do for the boy, that he would do.

"How would you like to stay with me for awhile, Tom?" he asked when they were back in his room. "I can't offer you anything but the floor for a bed—and perhaps not that after a few weeks."

"D'you mean I can stay wid you?" Tom cried, springing up, his eyes a-gleam. "Say, dat'll be great! We'll divide on de price! An' we'll have a little go wid de mitts ev'ry day!"

"Very well. But I want to place one condition on your staying. You're to be strictly honest with me, and you're not to steal. You understand?"

The boy made a grimace. "All right—since you ask me. But say, you're queer!"

The next morning David bought Tom a red cotton sweater and advanced him a quarter with which to buy a stock of papers. Two weeks passed, every day very much like the one before it. David found no work, and Tom made but little. During the two weeks the rent fell due, and most of David's library went to a second-hand book dealer and the proceeds went to the landlady. Then, two or three at a time, the rest of the books were carried to the second-hand store.

At length there came a morning when there was not a cent, and when, to perfect the day's despair, David woke with a burning soreness throughout his body—the consequence of having been caught the day before in a cold rain and having walked for several hours in his wet clothes. He crawled out of bed, but soon crept in again. His muscles could make no search for work that day.

Tom proposed a doctor. David dismissed the suggestion; doctors required money. But, money or no money, Tom saw there had to be one thing—food. He sat gazing for several minutes at the boxing-gloves, their last negotiable possession, which his favour had thus far kept out of the pawnshop; then with a set face he put them under his arm and walked out of the room. He returned with fifty cents.

That night Tom came home discouraged. He had hunted work all day, but no one wanted him. "Dey all wanted to hire a good suit o' clo'es," he explained to David. But the next morning he seemed confident. "I t'ought of a place where I t'ink I can git a job," he said, as he started away after having prepared for David a breakfast that David's feverish lips could not touch.

His confidence was well founded, for that evening he entered the room with an armload of bundles. "Look at dis, will you!" he cried, dropping the parcels on the bed. "Bread, an' butter, an' eggs, an' steak—ev'ryt'ing. You got to git well, now! You're goin' to git fat!"

David in his surprise sat up in bed. "Why, where did you get all those things?"

"Didn't I say I'd git a job? Well, I did! In a big hardware store. I'm errand boy—ev'ryt'ing! De boss say, 'Tom do dis; Tom do dat.' I do 'em all, quick! De next minute I say to de boss, 'anyt'ing else?' He pays me six a week, I'm so quick."

"But you've only worked a day. You haven't been paid already?"

"Sure. I hands de boss a piece o' talk: me mudder's sick, an' I needs ready coin bad. So he pays me a dollar ev'ry day."

David made a mental note that later there must be a few more remarks on the subject of lying; but this was not the time to reprove Tom's fib. He took the boy's hand in his hot, weak grasp. "You're mighty good to me, Tom," he said, huskily.

Tom's face slipped to one side and twitched. His blinking eyes avoided David's gaze. "Oh, dat's nuttin'," he gruffly returned. "Nobody goes back on his pal."

At the end of the first week of David's illness Kate Morgan returned home, having given up her position, and thenceforward she prepared most of his meals, chatted much with him, and lent him ten-cent novels. One result of their chats was that Kate became strengthened in her conviction that David had been a thief of great skill and daring. Contradiction availed him nothing. "Your last haul was a big one—you told me so yourself," she would say. "And only the top-notchers have your kind of talk and manners."

One day she returned to the matter of her former prophecy. "You've had enough of this," she said. "When you get out of bed, and get your strength back, you'll be at the old game again. You see!"

During this time Tom left for work regularly at half-past seven, and returned regularly at half-past six; and each evening he insisted on turning his dollar in to David, to be spent under David's direction. One night, as Tom was giving frightful punishment to an imaginary opponent with the boxing gloves—he had redeemed them with part of his second day's pay—several coins slipped from his pocket and went ringing upon the floor. When Tom rose from picking them up David's thin face was gazing at him in sorrowful accusation. The boy paled before the look. He was silent for a moment. Then he asked mechanically, almost without breath: "What's de matter?"

"Haven't you been stealing from your employers?" David asked, in a low voice.

The boy's colour came back. "No I ain't. Honest."

"Then where did you get that money?"

"Why—why, Kate Morgan give it to me. She t'ought I might want to buy a few extry t'ings."

David was unconvinced, but from principle he gave Tom the benefit of the doubt. He had the instinctive masculine repugnance to accepting money from a woman; so a moment later, when Kate came in, he said to her: "I want to thank for you for loaning that money to Tom. I understand and appreciate—but I don't need the money. You must take it back."

"What money?" she asked blankly.

She turned about on Tom, who was sitting at the foot of the bed where David could not see him. The boy's face was very white, and he was hardly breathing. He looked appealingly at her.

Kate's face darkened. "Tom," she said sharply, "I told you not to tell that!"

When she had gone, David called Tom to him and took his hand. "I beg your pardon, Tom," he said.

Tom made no answer at all.

All these days, when David was not chatting with Kate, or reading about the love of the fair mill-girl and the mill-owner's son, he was wanly staring into his future. He longed for the day when he could begin search again—and that day was also his great fear. Often he lay thinking for hours of Helen Chambers. He thought of the lovers she must have; of her marriage that might not be far off; of the noble place she would have in life—honoured, admired, a doer of good. He would never meet her, never speak to her—never see her, save perhaps as he had been doing, from places of shadow.

Well ... he prayed that she might be happy!

CHAPTER VI

TOM IS SEEN AT WORK

It was toward four o'clock of the day before Thanksgiving—an afternoon of genial crispness. The low-hung sun, visible in the tenement districts only in westward streets, was softened to a ruddy disk by the light November haze. Before the entrance to the club-house of the Mission were massed two or three hundred children. Here was childhood's every size; and here were rags and dirt—well-worn and well-mended decency—the cheap finery of poverty's aristocracy. There was much pushing and elbowing in a struggle to hold place or to gain nearer the entrance, and the elbowed and elbowing pelted each other with high-keyed words. But, on the whole, theirs was a holiday mood; the faces, lighted by the red sunlight that flowed eastward through the deep street, were eagerly expectant.

Across the way stood a boy, near the size of the largest children in the crowd. He wore a red sweater, and his hands were thrust into the pockets of baggy trousers voluminously rolled up at the bottom. He was watching the nervous group, with curiosity and a species of crafty meditation in his gleaming, black-browed eyes. It was Tom. Had David seen him there, he might have thought the boy had paused for a moment while out on an errand for his employer; but if Tom was on an errand it was evidently not one of driving importance, for he remained standing in his place minute after minute.

Presently he crossed the street and drew up to a be-shawled girl whose black stockings were patched with white skin. He gave her a light jab with his elbow. "Hey, sister—what's de row?" he asked.

She turned to him a thin face that ordinarily must have been listless, but that was now quickened by excitement. "It's the children's Thanksgiving party," she explained.

"What you wearin' out de pavement for? Why don't you go in?"

"It ain't time for the doors to open yet."

Tom fell back and stood in the outskirts of the crowd, occasionally sliding the tip of his tongue through the long groove of his mouth, the same meditative look upon his watchful face. Soon the

door swung open and the crowd surged forward, to be halted by a low, ringing voice: "Come, children!—please let's all get into line first, and march in orderly."

Two middle-aged women, enclosed in a subdued air of wealth, appeared through the door, and marched down the three steps and among the children. The boy's eyes closed to bright slits, his lips drew back from his teeth. The next instant a third woman appeared at the top of the steps—young, tall, fresh-looking, gracefully dignified.

"Ain't she a queen!" Tom ejaculated to himself.

She paused a moment and bent over to speak to a child, and the boy discovered that the rich, low-pitched voice he had heard was hers. As she stood so, the front of her tailored coat swung open, and the boy caught a glimpse of a silver-mounted bag, hooked with a silver clasp to her belt. A brighter gleam sprang into his eyes.

She came down the steps, pushed in among the children, and with the two other women began to form the group into a double line. Tom, with quick-squirming movements, edged through to the inner circle of the excited crowd, in which she was tightly buried up to her shoulders. At intervals he gave sharp upward glances at her face; she was entirely absorbed in making ordered lines of this entanglement. The rest of the time his eyes were fastened on her belt. Presently the children were thrown turbulently about her by one of those waves of motion that sweep through crowds, and he managed to be pressed against her, the left side of his coat held open to shield off possible eyes. His right hand crept deftly forward under her coat—found the bag—loosened it.

But suddenly a child's shoulder was jammed against his closed hand, driving it against the young woman's side, and for an instant holding it captive. She glanced down and saw Tom's arm. Instantly her firm grasp closed about the wrist and jerked out the hand, which dropped the bag. Like a flash Tom delivered a blow upon her wrist. She gave a sharp cry of pain, but her grip did not break. As he struck again she caught him about the wrist with her free hand. He jerked and twisted violently, but her hands had a firm, out-of-doors strength. He was prisoner.

Startled cries of "Pick-pocket!" and "Get a cop!" sprang up in the shrill voices of the children. The young woman, very pale but composed, looked sternly down at Tom.

"So, young man, I've caught you in the very act," she said slowly.

He looked sullenly at the pavement.

"What shall I do with you?"

Tom raised his shoulders. "Dat's your biz," he answered gruffly.

"Arrest him!" "They've gone for a policeman!" shouted the childish voices.

At this the boy sent up a quick glance at the young woman. Despite its severity, kindness was in her face. He dropped his head, the sullenness seemed to go out of him, and his body began to tremble. The next instant his sleeve was against his face and he was blubbering.

"I couldn't help it!" he sobbed.

"You couldn't help it!" she exclaimed.

"No! It was because o' me brudder. I've never stole before. Honest, lady. But me poor brudder's been sick for t'ree mont's. I tried to find a job. I can't find none. Our money's all gone, an' dere ain't no one but me. What can I do, lady?"

The young woman looked at him questioningly. One of Tom's sharp eyes peeped up at her, and saw sympathy struggling with unbelief. His blubbering increased. "It's de God's trut', lady! You can send me to hell, if it ain't. Me brudder's sick—dere's nuttin' to eat, an' no medicine, an' nobody'd gimme work. So help me God!"

At this instant the cry rose, "Here's the policeman!" and almost at once the officer, pressing through the alley that opened among the children, had his hand on Tom's collar. "So you was caught with the goods on," he cried, giving the boy a rough shake. "Well, you chase along with me! Come along, lady. It's only two blocks to the station."

He jerked Tom forward and started away. But the young woman, who still held one of Tom's wrists, did not move. "Will you wait, please?" she said quietly, a flash in her brown eyes. "What right have you to touch this boy?"

"Why, didn't he nab your pocket-book?"

"I'm not saying," she said, looking at him very steadily. "You can arrest him only on complaint. I am the only one who can make a complaint. And I make none. Please let go!"

The policeman stared, but his hand dropped from Tom's collar.

"Thank you," she said.

She called one of the women to her side. "You can easily get on without me, Mrs. Hartwell," she said in a low voice. "The most important thing for me is to look into this boy's case. I'm going to have him take me to his brother—if there is a brother."

Tom overheard the last sentence. His face paled. "Please don't take me to me brudder," he begged, a new ring in his voice. "He t'inks I'm honest. He'll t'row me out when you tell him! Don't take me. What's de use? I told you de trut'."

"If there is a brother, I want to talk with him," she answered. She requested the policeman to follow at a distance, and then asked Tom to lead them to his home.

"An' see that you take us to the right place, too," said the officer, with a warning look. "An' don't try to get away, for I'll be watchin' you."

They started off. The young woman did not take Tom's arm, for the same reason that she asked the policeman to follow several yards behind—that there might be no apparent capture, and no curious trailing crowd.

Tom's body palpitated with the dread of facing David—of what David would say to him, of the way David would look at him, but most of all of the change in David's attitude toward him, when these accusers should make plain to David that for two weeks he had been lying and stealing. He thought of escape—to get away from this young woman would be an easy matter; but a glance at the officer behind assured him that to try would mean merely the exchange of a kind captor for a harsh one. He preferred his chances with the young woman. So he led them on, his dread swelling with every step that brought them nearer to David.

The policeman was left waiting at the tenement entrance. Tom guided the young woman to his door, paused chokingly there, then led her into the little, dingy room, which was filled with a deeper hue of the coming twilight. David was lying in a doze, his face turned upward.

She glanced at the bed, saw only that a man was sleeping there, then glanced about. The poverty of the room and the sick figure confirmed Tom's story. She put a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder. "Please waken your brother," she whispered.

She stepped nearer the bed, but Tom hung fearfully back. And now she saw for the first time David's face with some distinctness. She started—bent over him—stared down at the face on the pillow. She trembled backward a pace. One hand reached out and caught a chair.

Tom, seeing his chance to escape, slipped out and took refuge in the Morgan's flat. The closing door roused David from his light sleep. He slowly opened his eyes—opened them upon the white face looking down upon him. The face seemed unreal, merely the face in a frequent dream. He closed his eyes, then opened them. The face was still there.... A great, wild, dizzy thrill went through him.

Slowly his haggard face rose from the pillow and he rested upon his elbow. "Miss Chambers!" he whispered, at length.

For moments she could only stare back at him—the friend once admired, who by his own confession had stolen the money of tenement children, had gambled it away, had counted on the guilt falling upon Morton. Then her voice, straining at steadiness, came out, and haltingly spoke the nearest thing that did not require thought—an explanation of her presence.

Her words hardly reached his mind. There was only one thing, the dizzy, impossible fact—she was before him! His body was chill, fire; his mind was chaos.

"You have been sick long?" she asked.

He took control of himself by a supreme effort. "For two weeks. It's nothing—just the grip."

"The boy told me for three months."

"That's just an invention of Tom's." He was conscious that, at his words, a look of doubt flitted across her face.

She had wondered, as he had done, what her attitude toward him should be, if chance ever brought them together—what it should be if he were striving to live honorably—what, if he had slipped down and were living by thievery. At this moment, without conscious thought, her attitude was established. But, though decision was against him, he was helpless, in need.

"Is there anything at all that I can do for you?" she asked.

He shook his head. If there was one person above all others from whom he could not accept service, that person was the woman he loved and who, he was certain, beneath her courteous control, must despise him. He had always known she believed him guilty, yet he had not half fore-measured the pain the eye-knowledge of it would give him. He longed to tell her the truth, as he often had longed before, and as he often would again—but he dared not, for to tell one person was to endanger, perhaps destroy, all the good of his act. Besides, even if he were to tell, who would believe him? She? No. She would believe, as the rest of the world would believe, that his statement was a dastardly attempt to whiten himself by blackening the memory of his sainted friend.

"You are certain I can do nothing?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Pardon me for being insistent, but—" she hesitated, white with the stress of the situation, then

forced herself to go on—"the boy said that—that you had—nothing. Are you sure I can not do some little thing for you?"

At this moment David forgot that he was penniless, forgot that he had no work for the time when he left his bed, and probably could find none; remembered only how he loved this woman, and how low he was in her eyes.

"The boy was not telling the truth," he said. "We have plenty. We need nothing—thank you."

She could not speak of the past; her delicacy forbade her. She could not query into his present intentions; her judgment on him, subconsciously rendered upon circumstantial evidence, and supported by his past, made that unnecessary. And, furthermore, the whirling confusion within her made speech on both impossible. The one surface fact her emotions could allow her speech upon, that she had spoken of. She felt she must get away as quickly as she could.

She rose. His wide, love-hungry eyes gathered in every one of her last motions and expressions. He did not know when, if ever, he would see her again.

There was a sharp knock at the door. She held out her hand to him. He was not expecting this, but he laid his wasted hand tremblingly within it.

"Good-bye," she said.

Impulsively his soul reached out for some shred of her regard. "I'm trying to live honest now!" he burst out, in subdued agony.

She regarded him an instant. "I'm glad of it," she said quietly.

The sharp knock sounded once more.

"Good-bye," she repeated.

"Good-bye," he said in a dry whisper.

She turned toward the door, his love-hungry eyes gathering in the last of her.... Yes, he was utterly beyond the pale.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW ITEM IN THE BILL OF SCORN

But before Helen's hand reached the knob, the door opened gently, pushing her to one side. Kate Morgan's head slipped cautiously in, and was followed at once by the rest of her body when she saw that David was awake.

"I didn't hear an answer, so I thought you must be asleep," she said. "I looked in to see if I couldn't do something."

The same instant her eyes fell upon Helen. "Oh!" she said sharply, and her glance, as quick as a snap-shot camera, took in every detail of Helen's appearance, and besides read Helen's character and her approximate position in the world. "I thought you were alone," she said to David.

"Miss Chambers was just going," he returned. He heavily introduced the two. Kate acknowledged the introduction with a little bow and a "pleased to meet you," and turned upon David a rapid, suspicious look, which demanded, "How do you come to know a woman of this kind?"

"As Mr. Aldrich said, I was just going," Helen remarked, reaching again for the door-knob. "So I wish you good afternoon."

If David's wits had been about him, he would have seen the flash of sudden purpose in Kate's face. "You're sure I can't do anything?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing," he returned.

She turned to Helen, her manner hesitating, and in it a touch of humility—the manner of one who is presuming greatly and knows she is presumptuous. Had David been observant at this instant, he could have understood a thing over which he had often wondered—how this aggressive personality could hold positions where servility was the first requisite.

"I was just going out too," she said with a little appealing smile. "If you don't mind, I'll—I'll walk with you."

Helen could not do other than acquiesce, and Kate hurried from the room with, "I'll put on my hat and meet you in the hall in just a second."

Helen looked again upon David, and again he felt, beneath her perfect courtesy, an infinite, sorrowful disdain. "Good-bye once more," she said; and the next instant the door had closed upon her.

David gazed at the door in wide-eyed stupor ... and gazed ... and gazed. He had hardly moved,

when, half an hour later, Kate Morgan re-entered. The humble bearing of her exit was gone. She was her usual sharp, free-and-easy self, and she had a keen little air of success.

"That Miss Chambers is one of the swells, ain't she?" she asked, dropping into the chair and crossing her knees.

David admitted that she was.

"I sized her up that way the first second. I walked with her to a church-looking place, and told her a lot about myself—a maid, out of work and looking for a job, you know." She gave David a sly wink. "She didn't say much herself, and didn't seem to hear all I said. She's got some kind of a club over at that church place and she asked me to visit the club, and said perhaps later I might care to join. And she promised to see if some of her friends didn't need a maid."

Her keen little smile of triumph returned, and she added softly, "Jobs in swell houses ain't so easy to pick up."

"See here!" said David sharply, "are you planning a trick on one of Miss Chambers's friends?"

Instantly her face was guileless. "Oh, she'll forget all about me," she said easily. "But see here yourself! How do you happen to know a woman of her sort? She told me how Tom brought her up here"—she smiled at memory of the story—"but you must have known her before?"

David had foreseen the question, and his wits had made ready an answer—for to bare to Kate's inquisitive mind the truth of his one-time friendship with Helen, this for a score of reasons he could not do. "She's one of these philanthropic women. She's interested in all sorts of queer people. I'm one of them. She's tried to reform me."

If Kate discredited his explanation she did not show her unbelief. She went on to question him about Helen and his acquaintance with her, and it was a terrific strain on his invention to return plausible answers. He prayed that she would go, or stop, and when Tom crept fearfully in a few minutes later, his arms full of bundles, the boy's appearance was as an answer to his prayer. She turned upon Tom and began quizzing and joking him about his recent adventure, but the boy, hardly answering her, kept his eyes fixed upon David in guilty apprehension.

Presently, to the relief of David but not of Tom, she went out. Tom stared at David from near the window where he had stood all the while, pulsing with fear of the upbraiding, and perhaps something worse, that he knew was coming. David gazed back at him through narrow eyes that twitched at their corners.

"Tom," he said, "you lied to me about the job."

"Yes," the boy returned in a whisper.

"And you lied to me about Miss Morgan loaning you money?"

"Yes."

"And you've been stealing all this time."

"Yes. But—"

David's thin right hand stretched across the faded comforter. Tom came forward in slow wonderment and took it. David's other arm slipped about his shoulders and drew Tom down upon the bed.

"It was wrong—but, boy, what a heart you've got!" he said huskily.

A tremor ran through Tom's body, as though sobs were coming. Then the body stiffened, as though sobs were being fought down.

"Is dat all you're goin' to say?" asked a gruff, wondering whisper.

David's arm tightened. "What a heart you've got!"

The thin body quivered again, and again stiffened. But the eruption was not to be controlled. Sharp sobs exploded, then by a tense effort were subdued. Tom struggled up, and David saw a scowling face, tightly clenched against the emotion that makes you lose caste to show. The boy's look was a defiant declaration of his manhood.

Suddenly another sob broke forth. His emotion was out—his manhood gone. He turned abruptly. "A-a-h, hell, pard!" he whispered fiercely, tremulously, then snatched his hat and rushed out.

All the rest of the afternoon, and all during the time Tom, who slipped back a little later, was shamefacedly busy with the dinner, and all during the evening, David thought of but one thing—Helen Chambers. He was dizzily weak; collapse had quickly followed the climacteric excitement of being beside her, of speaking to her. Her visit had brought him no hope, no encouragement; if anything, an even blacker despair. Before, he had only guessed how thoroughly she must despise him—her disdain had been but a vague quantity of his imagination. Now her scorn had been before his own eyes. And he had seen its wideness, its deepness, even though the merest trifle of it showed upon the surface of her courtesy. A warm spring, though amid the serenity of overhanging leaves and of an embracing flower-set lawn, is full token of vast molten depths beneath the earth's controlled face. He did not feel resentful toward her. Knowing only what she

knew, she could not regard him other than she did.

Twice he had caught a look of doubt upon her face—once when he had spoken of his three months' illness as being an invention of Tom's, and again when he had declared to her that he was trying to live honestly. The looks now recurred to him. They puzzled him. He strained long at their meaning; and then it entered him like a plunging knife, and he gasped with the sudden pain.

She believed that the invention was *his*, that his honesty was a lie, that he was the master of Tom's thefts!

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORLD'S DENIAL

That night Tom confessed he had privately saved a few dollars; and from the Morgans' flat he brought David's overcoat and several of the other articles they had pawned. David's conscience demanded that the savings should not be used, and he wondered what right they had to their own property, redeemed with stolen money. But need conquered ethics. A day or two later the landlady demanded her rent, giving the choice between payment and the street; the money went to her. Hunger pressed them; the redeemed articles began to return one by one to the pawnshop.

In a few days the grip left David, and though still weak, he began to creep about the streets, looking for work. He believed success impossible—and immediately success came.

The great stores were enlisting armies of temporary employes for the holiday season, and as at this time there are not enough first-class men and women to fill the ranks, they were accepting the second-class and the third and the tenth, examining no one closely. David heard of this chance, and, quailing at heart and expecting nothing, joined the line of applicants at the big department store of Sumner & Co.

"What experience?" demanded the superintendent when David reached his desk.

"None," said David.

The superintendent glanced him over, saw that his face was good.

"Work for nine a week?"

"Yes."

He scratched on a slip of paper and handed it to David.

"Start in at once in the check-room."

David reeled away from the desk. That evening he and Tom celebrated the advent of the Impossible by eating twenty cents' worth of food; and his excited hope, fearful, daring, kept sleep from his eyes all night. He knew he was only a temporary man, but his hope reasoned that if he gave exceptional satisfaction he might be retained after the great post-Christmas discharge. If retained permanently, he might work his way up in the store; and if he could remain only a few months, at least he would then be able to say, when seeking a new place and asked for his record, "I worked last for Sumner and Company; I refer you to them." His hope told him this position might prove the foothold he sought—and he determined to exert all that was in him to make it so.

Toward the end of his fourth day here, a woman for whom he had just laid upon the counter several packages she had checked two or three hours before, declared that a small parcel containing gloves was missing. Weary and exasperated from her day among the jostling shoppers, she berated David in loud and angry voice. He suggested that possibly she had not checked the parcel, that she might have checked it in some other store, that perhaps she had ordered it delivered and had forgotten it, that possibly she had dropped it.

Nothing of the kind! She knew what she'd done with it! They'd been careless, and given it to some other woman!

David, still very courteous, suggested that possibly it had been picked up and taken to the lost-and-found desk. She might inquire there.

She would not! She had left it here! She had been robbed!

She was departing ragefully, but David followed her and by using his best persuasion secured her grudging consent to wait till he himself should inquire at the lost-and-found desk. A few minutes later he returned with the package. She could say nothing more, for on the wrapper was the stamp of the desk and the hour the parcel had been turned in. She made a curt apology—it came hard, but still it was an apology—and went out.

David had his reward. The superintendent over him, attracted by the woman's angry voice, had drawn near and looked on unseen. He now came forward. "That was well done, Aldrich," he said. "I couldn't have handled her better myself."

David grew warm. Yes, this place might prove his foothold!

A similar thought came to one of the other four men in the check-room. This man, a regular employe in the room, had recently been reproved several times for negligence and discourtesy, and he knew his hold on his place was precarious. The fear now struck him, at the great discharge might not he be sent away and this new man Aldrich be kept?

His wits set to work. He now remembered that David had evaded questions about his past. Perhaps in it there was something that would change his chief's opinion. That night he followed David, warmed by his strengthened hope, from the store, and made inquiries in the little grocery shop in David's tenement. Just a poor man who had been having a hard time—this was all he could learn. He hung around the tenement, and presently David came down and walked away. He followed. After several blocks David stopped before St. Christopher's and gazed across the street at it. The shadowing man wondered. Then it occurred to him that in there they might know something about this man Aldrich.

He entered.

The next morning David was summoned to the office of the superintendent of his department. He was still aglow from the commendation of yesterday. But the superintendent's face struck him cold.

"Are you the David Aldrich who stole five thousand dollars from St. Christopher's Mission?" the superintendent asked quietly.

For a minute David could not speak. His foothold—lost! Again the abyss!

"I am," he said. But here was a man different from the other employer that had discharged him. Here a plea might be effective. "I am," he repeated. And then he went on desperately: "But whatever I may have done, I'm honest now. As honest as any man. And I'll work hard—nothing will be too hard! I ask only a chance—any sort of a chance. A chance to earn my living!—a chance to remain honest!"

"I have not acted hastily," the superintendent returned. "I have called up the Mission and confirmed a report I had from another source. I know your whole story. Your pay is in this envelope. That is all."

David went out, dizzily falling ... falling ... falling into depths he felt were hopeless. And as he fell, in the sickened swirl of his mind one sudden thought stood forth, sharp, ironic: It was St. Christopher's that had pushed him from his foothold, that had sent him plunging back into the abyss!

Once more began the search for work. But now fewer men were needed; there was time to question. But he tramped on, and on, looking always for a man who would not question, and always rebuffed—his clothes growing shabbier and shabbier, his shoes growing thinner, his little money wasting away—foot-sore, heart-sore, gripped by despair.

He had chanced upon at intervals in the Bowery and on Broadway several of his Croton prison-mates. All of them that had tried to be honest had been conquered by the difficulties, and had gone back to their old trades. He now, on his despairing walks, met two of them again, and both urged him to quit his foolish struggle and join with them. Nothing during the three terrible months had revealed to him how his moral instincts had suffered as did the fact that he was now tempted.

During these black days he saw little of Tom. David did not want to talk, did not want to box, there were no meals; so the boy came home only to sleep. David was certain Tom was stealing again, but he had not the heart for reproof. One can hardly seek to convert a thief to honesty when one can only offer starvation for reform.

Since Helen Chambers's call David had now and then had a faint hope that he might in some way hear from her. But no word came. He understood. She scorned him for the deed of four years ago, she believed he was now regularly practising theft and was directing the thefts and lies of a boy. Her sympathy, her instinct to aid, might impel her to establish friendly relations with a repentant thief, but never with such a thief as she considered him.

On his recovery David had resumed his Wednesday evening visits to his accustomed doorway near St. Christopher's. One night he saw that which poured a new agony into the cup he had thought already overbrimming. When Helen Chambers stepped from the Mission a man he had never before seen was beside her—a tall man, of maturity and dignity. With the instant instinct of the lover he recognized here another lover; and he read, in a smiling glance she turned up as they passed the doorway, that this man had her admiration and her confidence.

The next morning—the night had held the cup constantly to his lips—he went to the Astor Library and secured a copy of the *Social Register*. The man's name, as it had come to him across the darkness in Helen's low resonant voice, was Allen. There were many Allens in the *Register*, but only one that could possibly be the Allen he had seen the night before. The *Register's* data, and deductions therefrom, informed David that Mr. Henry Allen was forty, a member of half a dozen clubs, a man of wealth and social standing, and a lawyer of notable achievement.

Just the sort of husband Helen Chambers deserved! David closed the book and crept out.

The evening of the day before he found work in the department store, Kate Morgan had told him she had just secured a new place. "Did you get it through Miss Chambers?" he had suspiciously demanded.

"No," she had answered, smiling defiantly. At parting she had said with sharp decision, standing at his door: "You've had enough of the honest life. You're going to be with me on this job. Set that down." Without giving him a chance to reply, she had stepped out and closed the door.

He did not see her again till the middle of December, when one Sunday evening she knocked, walked in and promptly sent Tom on an errand.

"I can only stay for two minutes," she said, speaking rapidly and in a low voice. "This is supposed to be my Sunday off, but one of the maids is sick, so instead of a day I get an hour and a half. Say, it's certainly a swell house. The family is just a man and his mother. Just them two in a house big enough for a town—and think of the way we rub ribs down here! They've got carloads of silver, all of it solid; and the old lady has simply got barrels of jewelry. They're going to have a big blow-out on Christmas, so none of the servants get a holiday then. But almost all of them are going to get New Year's Eve and New Year's Day out. The house will be almost empty New Year's Eve. That's when we'll clean it up."

"You seem to have no doubt that I shall join you," David said dryly.

"None at all!" she answered promptly.

"Well, I shall certainly not!"

"You may think you'll not," she returned, undisturbed. "But you will. Anybody but a fool would have come to his senses long ago. You've found you can't get a job. You've got to live. It's steal or starve. Of course you're going to be in."

"I shall not!" David returned doggedly.

The days of the second half of the month moved slowly by. David continued walking the streets, occasionally daring to ask for work. His money was all gone, and everything was in the pawnshop except his overcoat, from which he hardly dared part at this season. His clothes were now so worn and shapeless as of themselves to insure the refusal of any place but that of a labourer. A labourer's place he possibly could have found—for a labourer's character is not questioned, since usually there is opportunity for him to steal no more than the value of a pick and shovel, and the wages left behind would more than cover such a loss. But for a labourer's work David had not a labourer's strength.

He was forced down ... down; finally to those low services by which the dregs of the city's population keep a decrepit life within themselves. The odd jobs about saloons which are usually done for beer-payment he performed under the inspiration of the free-lunch counter. He peeled potatoes in Bowery restaurants where dinners are fifteen cents, his work to pay for a meal; and when the dinner, which he had seen cooked in a filthy kitchen and served in half-washed dishes, was put before him, his stomach so revolted that he often turned from the untasted food and hurried into the street.

He was at the bottom of the abyss. Light, hope, were far above—the walls were smooth and high—his climbing strength was gone. He could not last much longer. He wondered, darkly, fearfully, what would be the end. Yet he had not given up; there was still bitterness, rebellion, in him, and still an automatic, staggering courage.

Three days before New Year's Kate Morgan called again. "I'm home to stay; my father's so sick I had to throw up my job," she said with a wink. She drew a ring of keys from the pocket of her skirt and silently held them before David's eyes; then, with a sharp little smile, she slipped them back, and drew out five sheets of paper, on each of which was a rough diagram of one of the floors of her late employer's house, with the doors and stairways marked and the location of the valuables. She explained the plans to him, adding details not charted, and on rising to go she handed him the sheets that he might familiarise himself with the house.

"But I shall have nothing to do with this," he said desperately, thrusting back the papers.

"Oh, yes you will," she returned, putting her hands behind her back.

He let the sheets fall to the floor, but she went out without giving them another glance. He looked at the papers, picked them up, stared at them whitely; and then, in a sort of frenzy, as though he would annihilate temptation, he tore the sheets into a thousand flakes and thrust them into his pocket.

The next morning he set forth with the despairing energy of the man who has a new fear, who has fiercely summoned all his resources for a last struggle. But mid-winter is a season when even a skilled man of blameless reputation has trouble in finding work; for David there was no chance whatever. And then, in his extreme desperation, he determined on a new course—in asking for work he would openly tell his record. Perhaps some one, out of sympathy for the struggle he was making, would give him an opportunity. He had thought of this plan before, but he had put it aside, because, he had reasoned, to avow himself a thief was to murder his chances. But the old course had brought him nothing; the new plan held at least a possibility.

David walked the streets half the day before he could drive himself to try this plan. At length a

superintendent consented to see him and listen to his story and appeal. "I appreciate your frankness," the superintendent replied, not unkindly. "But I am under strict orders on this point; I can take only men of the straightest records. But I hope you'll find something."

David was left without courage to try the plan again that afternoon. The next day he could find no one willing to hear him. In the evening Kate Morgan called again. Everything was in readiness for their venture of the following night, she told him. Once more he declared that he would have nothing to do with the affair. But to himself his words sounded only of the lips; and his indignation did not quicken the least trifle when Kate flung a dry laugh into his face.

The following morning, the last day of December, he spurred his spent courage on to another attempt. He at length found a wholesale notion store where a packer was wanted. The head of the packing department was large and powerful, with coarse, man-driving features; but, undeterred by this appearance, David recited his story.

The superintendent stared amazedly at David, and swore. "Well if you ain't got the nerve!" he roared. "You admit you're a crook, and yet you ask me for a job! What d'you think we're runnin' here?—a reform school? Not on your life! Now you see if you can't find the door out o' here—and quick!"

David had neither the strength nor the spirit to reply to this man as he had replied to the owner of the department store in One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. When he reached the open air he walked a few paces, then paused and leaned against the front of a building. He felt an utter exhaustion—there was not another effort in him. He was like a horse, driven to the last ounce of its strength, that lies down in its tracks to die; the whip can only make it quiver, cannot make it rise. He chanced to turn his head, and saw himself in the mirror that backed the show-window—a thin, stooping figure with a white line of a mouth and a gray, haggard face. He was so numb, so spiritually spent, that this spectre of himself stirred not a single emotion within him.

That evening he swept a saloon, and ate of the cheese and corn-beef sandwiches at the free-lunch counter till the bartender ordered him out. Then he wandered aimlessly through the night, which was balmy despite the month, with no desire to return to the dingy four walls of his unheated room. He remembered in a vague way that this was the night Kate Morgan had set for the robbery; and perhaps his staying from home was due to the unfelt guidance of his conscience. He had no definite thoughts or sensations; only a vast, stunning sense of absolute defeat.

A little after eleven o'clock he found himself wandering along the East River, and presently he turned upon a dock and walked toward the water between two rows of trucks, facing each other, their shafts raised supplicatingly to the stars. He seated himself at the end of the dock, and his chin in his two hands, looked out upon the river. Save for the reflection, like luminous, writhing arms, that the few lights of Brooklyn reached toward him on the water's surface, and save for the turbulent brilliance under the Williamsburg Bridge's great bow of arc lights, the river, which the tide was dragging wildly out to sea, was as black as blindness.

He gazed forth into the darkness, forth upon the swirling water—dully, without thought, in the flat stupor of unrising defeat.... Presently a bell began to send down the hour from a neighbouring steeple. Mechanically he counted the strokes. Twelve. The number at first had no significance, but after a moment its meaning thrilled him through. This was the New Year!... The New Year!... And how was he beginning it? Penniless—friendless—without work—with little strength—with no courage—without hope. A happy New Year, indeed!

Suddenly all the bitterness that had been gathering and smouldering within him these last four months, burst out volcanically. And his passion was not alone in his own behalf; it was in behalf of the thousands of others who had made a similar struggle, and to whom the world had similarly denied the privilege of honesty. Starved and hopeless! Why? Because he could not work?—because there was no work?—because the world had decided the moral development of such as he required further punishment? No. Because the rich, powerful world was afraid!—afraid of its dollars! Because, if he were taken in, given a chance to live honestly, he might steal a bolt of cloth, or a coat, or a vase, or a shawl! There was the reason—the only reason. A bolt of cloth against a human life, begging to live! A coat against a human soul, agonising to be honest! Cloths and coats mean dollars—mean carriages, and diamonds, and wines. Cloths and coats must be guarded.

But the human life? The human soul?

In his wild rage David rose, turned his back upon the dark river, and shook his fist at the great indifferent city.

CHAPTER IX

THE OPEN ROAD

At one o'clock David, still aflame with bitterness, was entering his room when a door across the hall opened and Kate Morgan looked out. "Come into my house!" she snapped in a whisper.

David could not see her face, but her voice told him she was angry. He followed her. Actresses' photographs on the walls, a rug of glaring design, cheap red-and-green upholstered furniture that overcrowded the little room—such was Kate Morgan's parlour. She closed the door, then turned, her eyes blazing, and swore at him.

"A nice time to be getting home! I've been waiting two hours for you!"

For a moment he looked at her uncomprehendingly. "Oh, you're thinking of that robbery. You needn't have waited. I told you I'd have nothing to do with it."

"Drop that bluffing! You know you're in it!"

He started toward the door.

"Where you going?" she demanded.

"To bed."

She seized his arm, stepped between him and the door and stared wrathfully up at him. She now saw how pale and drawn his face was. Her wrath slowly left her. "You're tired—blue," she said, abruptly, but softly.

He nodded. "So I'm going to bed."

"Let's chat a minute first," she said, and drew him to the largest of the chairs, and pushed him down into it. "And we'll have something to eat, just you and me. I've made dad go to bed. It's all ready. I'll bring it in here."

She moved a little table before him and went out. Could David have seen the look she held upon him through the door, he would have been puzzled, perhaps startled. After she had made three trips into the rear of the flat there were upon the table a plate of sandwiches, a dish of olives, a pie, and two cups of coffee, all served with a neatness that, after the Bowery restaurants, was astonishing to David.

"Now, we'll begin," she said, and sat down on the opposite side of the little table. The food had a wonderful taste to David, and the coffee—it was real coffee—warmed his chilled body. For several minutes they both ate in silence, then Kate pushed back her chair, lighted a cigarette, and sat regarding him with eyes that grew very soft.

When he had finished she leaned suddenly forward and laid a hand on one of his.

"I don't like it for you to look this way, David," she said.

He started at the touch and at the "David." She saw the start and drew her hand away. "Why shouldn't I call you David? We're good pals, ain't we? I'm tired of this miss and mister business. Call me Kate."

He was still too surprised to make an immediate answer, and she went on softly, "You look very bad!"

The remark brought flooding back to him all his misery and hopelessness, all his rebellion, and he forgot his wonder at her overture. "Why shouldn't I?" he asked bitterly.

She nodded. "I understand," she said. "The world's got no use for a man that's been a crook. He's got no chance. I've seen a lot of boys come back, and swear they'd never touch another job. They tried—some of 'em hard, but none as hard as you. But nobody wanted 'em. What way was open? Only one—to go back to cracking cribs. They all went back." She paused, then added: "Now I want to ask you one square question: what's the use trying?"

David was remembering his four months' futile struggle when he involuntarily echoed, "What's the use!"

"Yes, what?" she continued quickly. "The world may not owe you a living, but it owes you the right to live. It owes you that much. If it won't let you live by working, why, you've got to live by stealing. There's no other way. You've tried the first—"

She went on, but David heard no more. His bitterness, his resentment, were making a fiercer plea. Yes, he had tried! Could any man try harder? And what had he gained? Rebuff—insult—uttermost poverty. There was no use in trying further—none whatever. There was left only the second way—the one road that is always open, that always welcomes the repentant thief whom the world refuses.

Why should he not enter this only road? He had no single friend who would be pained. He had no faintest hope of a future. All that could be lost was lost. The thief's trade promised him the necessities of life. He had offered to pay the world in work for these necessities, but the world had refused his payment. What could he do, then, but take them?—Besides, would it not be just treatment of the world—of the world that had destroyed him, of the world that cared more for dollars than for souls—if some of its all-precious wealth were taken from it?

He looked up; his face was tight-set, vindictive; his eyes glittered.

Kate's gaze was fixed upon him, waiting. "It's time we were starting," she said. "It's almost two."

He breathed deeply, almost convulsively.

"Come on," he said.

She reached across and seized his hand. "I knew you'd come in!" she cried triumphantly. "We'll turn a lot of tricks together, you and me!"

He gripped her hand so hard that she gave a little gasp, but he did not answer. For a minute or more they looked silently into each other's face.

"Come, we must go," she said.... "You have your diagram of the house?"

"No. I tore it up."

She drew some sheets from the front of her flannel waist. "Here's another, then. You may need it."

From beneath the red-and-green sofa she took a suit-case, which she threw open. In it were a full set of burglar's tools. "We really don't need 'em, for I've got keys to almost everything. But we'll take 'em along and twist the locks a bit, so they'll never suspect the job may have been done by someone who'd been in the inside—that is, by me. We'll bring the swag back in the suit-case."

She looked at David, as at a superior artist, for commendation of her plan; but he silently regarded the strange instruments in the bag. She slipped on a pair of rubbers, fastened on a little hat, and had David help her into a short jacket which had large pockets in the lining. David drew on his overcoat, picked up the suit-case, and together they crept down the black stairways and out into the street. She chattered softly all the while, as though fearing David, if left to his own thoughts, might withdraw from the adventure.

Shortly before three o'clock Kate paused, in one of the Seventies near Fifth Avenue, before a flight of broad steps leading up to a broad stoop and a broad entrance. "Here we are," she whispered.

They searched the street in both directions with quick glances. Not a soul was in sight. Then they slipped to the shadowed servants' entrance beneath the stoop, and in less than a minute Kate had unlocked a door of iron grating and a second door of wood, and they were standing in a dark hallway. She opened the grip, handed David a lantern, took one for herself, tied a handkerchief over his face so that all below the eyes was hidden, and masked herself likewise. Then with a jimmy and a wrench she hurried away.

Two minutes later she reappeared. She was inspired with the desire to impress David with her skill as a thief, as another woman might be inspired to attract male attention by the display of her beauty. "I just opened a back window and broke the latch," she whispered. "We'll lock these doors when we go out, and they'll think we got in through the window. Now, come on. But hadn't you better take off your shoes? They're pretty heavy."

David sat down upon a chair, and she turned her lantern's bar of light upon his feet, so that he could better manage the laces. When the shoes came off, there were his heels and toes gleaming whitely. In the confusion of strange sensations that had begun to flow in upon him, he had forgotten that his stockings were only tops. He quickly shifted his feet out of the embarrassing rays.

"That's all right," said Kate. "There'll be plenty of new ones to-morrow."

They went up a narrow stairway, then a broad one, stealthily following the guidance of the lantern's white finger, pausing breathless at every three or four steps to reach forth with their ears for any possible stir of life—Kate tense and alert with excitement, David giddied by a choking, throbbing, unshaped emotion. After a dozen of these pauses, when to David the rubadub of his heart seemed to resound through the house, Kate led him across deep rugs and through a broad doorway hung with tapestries.

"The drawing-room," she whispered, and slowly sweeping it with her lantern she revealed to him its gorgeous fittings. Then her lantern sought out a curio cabinet, of glass sides and gilded frame, standing in a corner. "That's what we want in here," she said. At her order David set down the suit-case he had carried, and they tiptoed to the cabinet over rugs worth hundreds of dollars a step.

"You get the good things in there, I'll go upstairs after the old lady's sparklers, and then we'll both go down and get the silver," she whispered, as she unlocked the cabinet with one of her keys. "I'll meet you here in a little while."

A sudden fear of being alone leaped up in David. He clutched Kate's arm and threw the lantern's light into her face. Of the face he saw only a narrow slit between her handkerchief and hat-brim, amid which her eyes gleamed like black diamonds.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You're trembling."

"It must be—my nerves are gone," he whispered, with an effort.

"Oh, you'll be all right when you've been fed up and done another job or two."

He watched her little figure glide out of the room behind its headlight, then he turned to the

contemplation of the miniature portraits in gem-set frames, the old hand-painted fans, the heavy old-fashioned lockets and earrings and bracelets, that lay upon the glass shelves of the cabinet.

He had no distinct thought toward the articles—there was no thought, not even a vague one, in his mind. His throat and lips were dry, his eyes were wide and fixed. His dizzy, unpowering emotion had so increased that he would not have been surprised had he slipped to the floor and spread out like a boneless sea creature. He was mental and emotional incoherence.

The intention to steal had brought him here. That intention was over an hour old, but since it had been neither fulfilled nor countermanded, it was stored energy; and presently it began to move his will-less members, as the stored energy of a coiled spring sets an automaton at its appointed task. He took from the floor the plunder-bag Kate had given him, and holding the lantern and the edge of the bag's mouth in his left hand, he swung open the plate-glass door of the cabinet. His eyes selected a golden bracelet, and his hand moved slowly forward and took it up.

Then suddenly his fingers unclosed, the bracelet clicked back upon the glass shelf, and his hand withdrew from the cabinet. The coiled spring of his intention had snapped. The touch of what was another man's had readjusted his confused senses. His blurred feelings became definite, his dumb brain articulate. He saw what he was doing, saw it clearly, as a bare act, unjustified by the arguments his bitterness had urged upon him an hour before—saw that he was committing a theft!

A chill swept through him and he sat stiffly upright in his chair and stared at the bracelet he had dropped. In the mood he had been in an hour or two hours before David would not have drawn back from theft, any more than any other normal starving man, could it have been committed quickly, upon impulse. But the hour that had passed, the deliberation which was surrounding the theft, had given opportunity to his moral being to overthrow the impulse and assert itself.

He rose, forgetting even to take the cabinet key. He would leave the house at once.

But as he passed out of the drawing-room it came to him that he could not go away without telling Kate of his purpose. Before him he saw a flight of stairs; she was somewhere above. He stealthily mounted, passed through a doorway and found himself in a library. He stood a moment with strained ears, but got no sound of her. He must go through the floor, and perhaps through the floor above; but before proceeding further he must get the lay of the house.

He moved noiselessly toward the library table, drawing out the plan Kate had given him. He set the lantern on the table beside a telephone, spread out the sheets and was sitting down when cautious footfalls sounded without. The next instant a blade of light stabbed the room's darkness.

"Kate?" he whispered.

"Yes."

They came toward each other and each threw his light into the other's masked face.

"I've got the old lady's twinklers," she said. "Where's your swag?"

"I didn't take it," he whispered. "I've changed my mind. I'm leaving."

"What!"

"I'm not going to take anything. I'm going away. I came to tell you that."

She drew a step nearer and for a space her black eyes gazed up into his in amazement. The deep night silence of the great house flooded over them.

"You mean it?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I cannot. It was a mistake, my coming."

Her eyes suddenly gleamed like knife points, she trembled with passion, and she plunged her whispered words in up to the hilt.

"So that's the kind of nerve you've got! Oh, my God!... What a damned coward you are!... Well, get out! I don't want you!"

She brushed him wrathfully by, and tensely erect, her free hand clenched, walked out of the room behind the shaft of light.

He stood motionless where she had left him, alone amid the great hush. Her words had pierced to the seat of life. He quivered with the pain—deserved pain, he realised, for it was not a noble part to leave a comrade at such a time. But he had made a mistake in coming, and the only way to correct it was to go. He wished she would go with him, but he knew the result of asking her. She would stab him again, and walk away in contempt.

He sighed, set his lantern on the table, and folded and pocketed the plans of the house. As he laid hold of his lantern to start away he saw on the table, in the lantern's ribbon of light, three or four letters that had evidently been written during the evening and left to be mailed in the morning.

He started, sank to a chair, and gazed fixedly at one of the envelopes. The name on it was "Miss Helen Chambers."

Amid all the sensations that swirled within him, his mind instantly made one deduction: Kate Morgan had, after all, secured a place through Helen Chambers, and they were now in the home of one of her friends.

For a minute or more he sat staring at the envelope. It was almost as if Helen herself had surprised him in his guilty presence here. Then, across the darkness of the room, there came the faintest of sounds.

He thought it was Kate. "Is that you?" he whispered.

There was no answer; only dead quiet. In sudden fear he sprang up and directed the lantern's pointer of light toward whence the sound had come. The white spot fell upon the skirt of a dressing-gown. He jerked the pointer upward. The luminous circle enframed the square-jawed, clean-shaven face of a man—of the man he had seen with Helen Chambers—of Mr. Allen.

Instantly the room was filled with a blinding glare, and David saw Mr. Allen standing in the doorway, his left hand still on the electric-light key, his right holding out a revolver.

"Yes, it's I," said Mr. Allen in a quiet, grim voice. "Suppose you remove your mask and give me the equal pleasure of seeing whom I'm meeting."

There was no disobeying, with a revolver's muzzle staring coldly at him. David drew the handkerchief down and let it fall about his neck.

Mr. Allen gazed a moment at David's face, thin, haggard, yet rare in its fineness. "H'm. A new variety." His gaze shifted till its edge took in the telephone on the table, and there it rested reflectively. Then he remarked, as though completing his thought aloud, "I guess it will be safer for you to do the telephoning. Will you please call up Central and ask her to give you Police Headquarters?"

Wild, contrary impulses tugged at David, but man's primal instinct, self-preservation, controlled him the first moment.

"I have been near starvation," he said, forcing his words to calmness. "I came here to steal—yes; but when I tried to steal, I could not. I—I did not steal!"

His plea snapped off harshly. The world had driven him here, and with a rush he realised the world would not forgive him for being here. Bitterness swept into him in a great wave, and the recklessness that feels that all is lost. Besides, he could not ask mercy of Helen Chambers's lover.

Mr. Allen gave an ironic laugh. "I've been hearing that sort of story for fifteen years. There never was a guilty man.—Call up Central."

The natural animal hatred of a rival flared up. David looked Mr. Allen defiantly in the face. "If you want Central, call her yourself!" he said slowly.

Mr. Allen was surprised, but his surprise passed immediately under his control. "Of course you are aware," he said quietly, "that you have the choice between calling up and being shot."

"And you are aware," David returned, "that you have the choice between calling up and shooting."

Mr. Allen was silent a moment. "The killing of a man who enters your house is justified by law," he warned grimly.

"Well—why don't you shoot?"

"Are you going to call up?"

"So then—you're afraid to shoot!" taunted David.

Mr. Allen remained silent. He gazed at David over the pistol barrel, and David gazed back at the pistol and at Mr. Allen. Their wills had locked horns, stood braced.

"I'm getting very tired," said David, throwing a leg over a corner of the table. "If you don't shoot soon I'll have to go."

At this instant David saw in the doorway behind Mr. Allen the small figure of Kate Morgan. In her right hand there shone a little pistol, in her left she held a heavy walking-stick.

Mr. Allen broke his silence. "If you make a move toward your pocket while I cross the floor, it'll be your last move."

David's will had conquered, but his exultation did not speak. He was watching Kate Morgan, fascinated. Her pistol rose, then fell, and the pistol and walking-stick exchanged hands. Mr. Allen took the first step toward the telephone. The stick came up, whizzed down upon Mr. Allen's pistol hand. The weapon went flying upon the rug, and Mr. Allen let out a sharp cry and started to whirl around. As the stick struck flesh David sprang forward, and with the skill of his old boxing-days, with all his strength and weight focussed in the blow, he drove his fist against Mr. Allen's unguarded chin. Mr. Allen fell limply upon the deep carpet.

"Come on! Out of here!" cried David, seizing Kate's arm.

She jerked away and stood tensely erect, glaring at him. "Go, you coward! I stay here!"

"But you'll get caught!"

"That's my business!" she blazed. "Get out!—I'm going to finish the job."

She whirled about, jerked the handkerchief from her face, thrust it into Allen's mouth, and tied this gag securely in place with a handkerchief which she took from the pocket of Allen's dressing-gown. Then she tied his feet with the dressing-gown's rope girdle, and his hands with one of the silken ropes that held back the hangings in the broad doorway. This done, she sprang to the electric-light key, and the room filled with blackness.

She flashed her lantern on David, who had stood watching her rapid actions in amazement. "Why don't you go? Get out!"

"See here, it's crazy to stay here. You know it. You've got to come with me."

His lantern, which he had taken up, showed a face that darted scorn and rage. "Go with you?—I'll die first!" she returned in a low, fierce whisper. And then she added, each slow word edged with infinite contempt:

"Oh, what a poor damned coward!"

He quivered, but he said quietly, "If you won't go, I'll stay with you."

"Stay with me? You'll not! I won't have you!"

She turned abruptly and left the room. He stood thinking for a space; then he went out and crept down the stairway. As he passed the drawing-room door he saw Kate bending in front of the open curio cabinet. He crept down another flight to the first floor and hid himself behind a palm in an angle of the great hall. He strained his ears for trouble, ready to rush upstairs at the first sound. After a time a wand of light was thrust down the stairway. Then came Kate, the suit-case in one hand, feeling her way with the wand like a blind man with a cane. For a moment the searching light pierced through the palm into his face, and David thought he was discovered; but she glided on and down the basement stairs. He let several minutes pass; then he too slipped out into the street.

Perhaps it was chance, perhaps it was the direction of the subconscious, that led David in his circuitous homeward journey, past St. Christopher's Mission. He was walking slowly along, the caution of the first part of his flight forgotten in the mixture of despair and shame that now possessed him, when he waded into pools of coloured light that lay upon the sidewalk and the street. He looked up. There, aglow with its inspiration, was the window to the memory of Philip Morton. He involuntarily stepped back a pace or two, and leaning against a stack of bricks designed for repairs in the Mission's basement, alone in the deserted street, he gazed steadfastly at the luminous words.

He had often looked at that tribute, as he had upon the whole Mission, with a sense of thankfulness that his life was counting. But now there was no thankfulness within him. Anger began to burn, revolt to rise. That sainted man there was the cause of all his misery, all his degradation. The shame of his trial, the loss of his four prison years, the refusal of work, his insults, his lost strength, his lost character, his ragged clothes, his starving, his uttermost poverty, his uttermost despair—all these rushed upon him in one hot turbulent flood of rebellion. Of all these inflictions that man was directly the cause! And more—that man had made him a thief! And yet that man was worshipped as a saint—while he, he was a starving outcast!

His resentment culminated in a wild impulse. His right hand clutched one of the bricks on which it rested, and he took a quick step forward. The brick crashed through Morton's glowing name.

BOOK III

TOWARD THE LIGHT

CHAPTER I

THE MAYOR OF AVENUE A

Three or four blocks east of the Bowery and lying north of the Jewish quarter is a little region somewhat less crowded, somewhat quieter, somewhat more clean, than the rest of the tenement

country that lies about it. It is held by Germans—Americanised Germans. But Poles and Magyars, Jews of Roumania, Hungary and Russia, are edging their way into it; such frequent signs as "*Gyogyszertár*," which, evil as it strikes the eye, signifies nothing more malignant than "drugstore," announce this invasion even to casual passers-by. Some day the region will know the children of Germany no more; it will be a Babel of the tongues of central Europe. But as yet, if you walk along its four avenues, A, B, C and D, all lined with little shops, or lounge about its shady Tompkin's Square, you will see many a face that will carry your memory back to Berlin and Cologne and the beer-gardens and Sunday promenades of their work-people and petty bourgeois.

It was the evening after David's adventure with Kate Morgan. From the snowy air of broad Avenue A a good-natured crowd was turning into a gilded entrance, over which incandescent lights pricked the words "Liberty Assembly Hall." The crowd was chiefly German, but in it were many of the newer peoples of the neighbourhood. There were broad husbands and broad wives; children led by hand, babies carried in arms; young people in couples and in hilarious groups; solitary and furtive men and women. Most were in their finest, and some of the finery would not have made the opera ashamed; but many were dressed in shabbiness—though they, too, wore their best.

David, who had wandered into Avenue A, as he often did in his aimless night walks, paused momentarily and listlessly watched the in-going stream of people. A New Year's ball, he decided; but the word "Mayor" recurred so often in the bits of conversation he overheard that his inert curiosity prompted him to draw near a friendly-looking man who stood without the entrance.

"What's going on in there?" he asked.

"Installing the Mayor of Avenue A," the man returned.

David had vaguely heard of the "Mayors" who exercise an unofficial authority in several districts of New York. "How's the Mayor chosen?" he asked. "By election?"

"No. Carl Hoffman's the most popular man on the Avenue; he's got coin and influence; we all want him. That's how it is."

"What does he do?"

"If you need a dollar, and ain't got it, you go to Carl. If a poor woman ain't got any coal, she lets Carl know and she's got it. If you're dispossessed or in trouble with the police, Carl fixes you up. If you can't get work, you go see Carl. He's the poor man's friend—everybody's friend."

For several moments David was silent. Then he asked abruptly, "Is this a private ceremony?"

"Oh, no; go on in, if you want to."

David joined the entering crowd, mounted a broad flight of stairs, passed through a short hallway, and came into a large hall. Every chair was taken and people stood in the aisles and along the sides. Three electric-light chandeliers, wound in bunting and loaded with glass pendants, were each a glittering sun. The maroon walls were relieved by raised gold-and-white scroll work, and by alternate mirrors and oil-paintings set into the plastering. These paintings were Tyrolean scenes, cascades and moon-lit seas—such as the art-fostering department store supplies at a dollar or two, golden frame included.

At the further end of the hall was a stage, draped with American flags. At the stage's back a band, in purple and gold braid, was blowing out its brass instruments; and at the stage's front, beneath "*OUR MAYOR*" in evergreen letters that hung from the proscenium arch, sat four rotund men in a row.

David slipped into a corner at the rear, where his shabbiness saw more of its own kind. A moment later "The Watch on the Rhine" thundered from the stage and rolled among the Alps and the cascades and over the moon-lit seas. Then "The Star-Spangled Banner" sent forth its reverberations, and when its last echo had been lost far down an Alpine gorge, the most rotund of the four rotund men—they were the Mayors of Avenues A, B, C and D, a neighbour told David—stepped to a table and rapped for order. He assumed his most impressive attitude, gazed slowly over the polyglot audience, drew a deep breath, and began in a sonorous voice that, now swelling, now softening, was the perfect servant of his eloquence.

"It is not within the power of human speech to express how much I, as Mayor of Avenue B, feel the great honour of acting as master of ceremonies on this brilliant and distinguished occasion, graced by so much fairness of the softer sex, made by the Creator as the greatest reward and adornment of life, when your honourable Mayor is to be installed to serve his eleventh successive and successful term." But despite the impotence of speech, the Mayor of Avenue B filled ten minutes in an attempt to suggest faintly the contents of his prideful breast. Then he swept onward into a eulogy of the Mayor of Avenue A, ending with, "And now, Carl Hoffman, rise and receive the oath of office."

Cheers and hand-clapping echoed through the Alps. The tallest of the four Mayors stepped forward. The applause doubled and the band thundered into "Hail the Conquering Hero." The Mayor of Avenue A bowed and smiled and smiled and bowed, and swept his arm, now to this side, now to that, in magnificent salutation. His face was inflated with good feeding, and was as smooth as a child's balloon; a few hairs lay in pencil lines across his shiny head; from pocket to pocket athwart his snow-white vest hung a heavy golden chain—in lieu of a hoop, one could

fancy, to hold fast the bulging flesh. It was well that his face was broad; a thin face would have cramped the wide, shining smile he held upon his uproaring constituency.

When the tumult had somewhat abated, the master of ceremonies, his portly dignity replaced by portly lightsomeness, caught the Mayor's arm. "Here he is, ladies and gents!" he shouted. "Look at him! The champion heavyweight, catch-as-catch-can philanthropist of New York. I am authorized to challenge any other philanthropist of his class in the city for a match, the gate receipts to the winner, and a thousand dollars side bet!"

The crowd again broke loose. A deep, gruff, joyous voice rose from the Mayor's interior. "Moxie, get your wife to sew a button on your mouth!"

The hall was one gleeful roar at this sally.

"Raise your right hand," said the Mayor of Avenue B, when there was partial quiet. "Now repeat after me: I, Carl Hoffman, do hereby promise to the best of my ability—"

"Why, sure!" approved the deep voice.

"To be a friend to any man, woman or child that needs a friend. So help me God!"

"Sure thing!" responded a hearty rumble.

The crowd once more applauded, and David noted that the hands which clapped longest were feminine.

The Mayor of Avenue A beamed upon the audience. "That's me," he said, with a grand upward sweep of his right arm. "I don't need to tell you what I'm goin' to do. I been doin' it for ten years. I guess my record'll do all the talkin' that's needed. But this much I'll say for myself: If anybody durin' this new year needs a friend and he don't chase himself around to the Pan-American Café and ask for Carl Hoffman—well, he deserves a lot more trouble than he's got!"

He went on and told how glad he was to see his friends, and how proud he was to be their Mayor, but through it all David was hearing only the oath of office and the Mayor's first few sentences; and when later the ushers began to clear away the chairs for dancing, and David slipped down to the street and walked homeward through the swirling snow, he still thought only of the Mayor's offer to the man who needed a friend.

The next day at eleven o'clock—he had figured the morning rush would be over by then—David approached the Pan-American Café. On the café's one side was a delicatessen store, displaying row on row of wurst to entice the Germans within, and on the other side a costumer's shop, its windows filled with suits of armour, night-mare masks, and gorgeous seventeenth-century court gowns of sateen, spangles and mosquito netting. The long glass front of the café was hung with holiday greens, among which appropriate signs informed the street that a Hungarian orchestra played nightly, that real German beer and indubitable Rhenish wine were purchasable within, and that a superlatively good dinner was to be had for only thirty cents.

David came to a pause at the café's storm-door. Doubts and fears that had been rising now stampeded him: the Mayor's talk was only platform talk; the Mayor was doubtless like all others who had refused him, insulted him. He walked up and down the avenue, passing and repassing the café and the narrow little shops that edged the sidewalk. Then he told himself that he had nothing to lose; another refusal would be merely another refusal. He summoned back his courage, delivered himself into its hands, and entered.

He found himself in a wide, long room, whose green walls were hung with signs of breweries and with placards announcing the balls of "The Carl Hoffman Association," "The Twin Brothers," "The Lady Orchids," and a dozen other social organisations of the neighbourhood. Six rows of tables, some marble-topped, some linen-covered, with chairs stacked upon them, stretched the length of the room. Among these black-jacketed waiters, armed with long mops, were scrubbing the linoleum-covered floor.

One of the waiters quickly cleared the chairs from a table and came forward to meet David. "Nothing to eat, thank you," David said. "I want to see Mr. Hoffman."

"Sorry—he's out. But he's likely to be in any minute. Just sit down. No, wait—there he is now."

David looked about. Coming in from the street was the ample form of the Mayor of Avenue A, his cheeks pink with the cold. "Got four discharged and paid two fines," the Mayor announced to the waiters who had all looked up expectantly. "And when I got 'em out o' the court-room I lined 'em up and gave 'em gentle hell. They'll keep sober for awhile—yes, sir!"

He turned to David. "Why some decent men ain't never sure the New Year's really begun till they've poured themselves neck-full o' whiskey—mebbe the God that made 'em understands, but Carl Hoffman certainly don't."

David admitted that no more did he, and then asked for a few minutes' talk—in private.

"Hey, John, take these things," and the Mayor burdened David's waiter with overcoat, muffler and hat; and David saw that a waistcoat of garlanded silk had replaced the white one of last night. "And, say, boys," he shouted to the others, "suppose you let the rest o' that scrubbin' go for a bit and get busy at somethin' out in the kitchen."

He led David to a rear corner where, enclosed by heavy red ropes, was the platform from which the Hungarian orchestra administered its nightly music. They lifted the chairs from a table and sat down facing each other.

"Well, now, what can I do for you?" the Mayor asked.

David did not give his courage time to escape. "I was at your inauguration last night," he began, quickly, "and I heard you say that if any man needed help—"

"The poor man's friend—that's me," broke in the Mayor with a quick nod, folding his plump hands, on one of which burnt a great diamond, upon the table.

"And the poor man—that's me," said David.

"Well, you've come to the right doctor. What's ailin' you?"

The Mayor's eyes became sharp, and his face became as stern as its pink fulness would permit. "But one word first. Some people think I'm an easy mark. I ain't. I've got two rules: never to give a nickel to a man that don't deserve it, and never to give the icy mitt to the man that deserves the warm hand. I guess I ain't never broke either rule. A grafter ain't got no more chance with me than a lump o' lard in a fryin' pan. I ain't sayin' these things to hurt your feelin's, friend. Only just to let you know that if you ain't all on the level you're wastin' your precious time. If you are on the level—fire away. I'm your man."

This was rather disconcerting. "I can only tell you the truth," said David.

"It wouldn't do you no good to tell nothin' else," the Mayor said dryly. "I can generally tell when the chicken in a chicken pie is corned beef."

David gathered his strength. "I shall tell you everything. To begin with, I've been a thief—"

"A thief!" the Mayor ejaculated. He stared. "Tales o' woe always begin with the best thing a fellow can say about himself. If you start off with bein' a thief, Lord man, what'll you be when you get through!"

"I'm beginning with the worst. I'm out of prison about four months. I was sent up for—for stealing money from a mission—from St. Christopher's Mission—four or five years ago."

Again the Mayor stared, and again his face took on its stern look. "So you're that man!" he said slowly. "I remember about it. The Mission ain't far from here. Well, friend, one o' my waiters'd fire me out o' here for disorderly conduct if I told you in plain English what I think o' that trick. But it was a dirty, low-down piece o' business, and what came to you is only a little part o' what you should 'a' got."

David rose. It was as he had expected—another refusal. "I see you care to do nothing for me. Good morning."

"Did I say so? Set down. You're talkin' the truth—that's somethin'. At least it don't sound much like one o' them fancy little lies a fellow makes up to make a good impression. Well, what d'you want from me?"

David sat down. He spoke quickly, desperately. "I came back from prison determined to live honestly. I've been trying for four months to get work. No one will have me. I won't tell you what I've been through. I must have work, if I'm to live at all. I've come to you because I thought you might help me get work—any kind of work."

For a minute or more the Mayor silently studied David's thin features. Then he said abruptly: "Excuse me for leavin' your troubles, but I been out in this cold air and I'm as empty as my hat. I've got to have a bite to eat, or I'll all cave in. And you'll have some with me. I don't like to eat alone.

"Oh, John!" the deep voice roared out. "Say, John, fetch us some eggs. How'll you have your eggs? Scrambled? Scrambled eggs, John, bacon, rolls and coffee for two.

"Now back to your troubles, friend." He shook his head slowly. "You're up against a stiff proposition. There ain't much of a demand for ex-crooks right now."

He once more began to scrutinise David's face. "Don't let this bother you, friend; I'm just seein' what's inside you," he said, and continued his stare.

One minute passed, two minutes, and that fixed gaze did not shift. David grew weak with suspense. He knew he was on trial, and that the next moment would hear his sentence.

Suddenly the Mayor thrust a big hand across the table and grasped David's. "It ain't the icy mitt for you. Jobs are scarce, but—let's see. What kind o' work have you done? I remember readin' about you; wasn't you a professor, or somethin' in that line o' business?"

David swam in a vertigo of vast relief; his hand instinctively clutched the edge of the table; the Mayor's face looked blurred, far away.... "I was a writer ... for magazines."

"My pull wouldn't help a lot with the literary push." The Mayor's eyes again became keen. "And I suppose you now want somethin' o' the same sort—somethin' fancy?"

The dizziness was subsiding. "Anything—so it's work!"

The Mayor meditated a moment. "Well, I only know o' one job just now, and you wouldn't have it."

"What is it?" demanded David, tensely.

"The agent o' the house where I live told me a couple o' days ago he wanted a new janitor."

"I'll take it!"

"Sweepin'—scrubbin'—sortin' rubbish—everybody cussin' you—twelve dollars a month."

The wages made David hesitate. He calculated. "I'll take it—if the agent will have me."

"He'll have you. Rogers's got a special interest in chaps that're makin' the fight you're makin'."

David half rose. "Hadn't I better see him at once?" he asked, anxiously. "The job may be taken any minute."

"Set down, young man. That job ain't goin' to run away. Here comes breakfast. I'll go with you when we're through. Gee, I could eat a house."

David made no boasts, but when he rose from his first meal since the midnight supper with Kate Morgan thirty-three hours before, he had effaced his share of the breakfast. He noted that the Mayor's portion had hardly been touched, and the Mayor saw he observed this. "I had a sudden turn o' the stomach," the Mayor explained. "I never know when it's goin' to let me eat, or when it's goin' to say there's nothin' doin'."

They walked away through a deep cross street of red tenements with fire-escapes climbing the walls like stark, grotesque vines. David was filled with dread lest he might find the position already occupied. He wanted to run. But despite his suspense he had to notice that the Mayor was smiling at all the women on both sides of the street, and that every pretty one who passed was followed by a look over the Mayor's shoulder.

At the end of five minutes they turned into a tenement of the better sort, on the large front window of whose first floor David read in gilt letters, "John Rogers—Real Estate."

"Here's where I live—on the floor above," said the Mayor. "You just wait here in the hall a minute or two while I have a chat with Rogers."

The Mayor entered the office, and David paced the narrow hallway. Would he get the job? No—this Rogers would never hire a thief. Anyhow, even if Rogers would, someone else had the job already. It couldn't be true that at last he was to gain a foothold—even so poor a foothold. No, this was to be merely one more rejection.

At length the Mayor came out, carefully smoothing the few hairs that lined his crown like a sheet of music paper. "Rogers is waitin' for you; go right in. See you soon. Good-bye." He shook hands and went out, cautiously replacing his hat.

David entered, palpitant. The office was bare, save for real estate maps on the walls, a few chairs and a desk. Mr. Rogers turned in his swivel chair and motioned David to a seat beside him. "Mr. Hoffman has told me about you," he said, briefly, and for a moment he silently looked David over; and David, for his part, did the same by the man whose "yes" or "no" was about to re-create or destroy him. Mr. Rogers was a slight, spectacled man with dingy brown hair and a reddish pointed beard; and his plain wrinkled clothes were instantly suggestive of mediocrity. His face had the yellowish pallor of old ivory, and its apparent stolidity would have confirmed the impression of his clothes, had there not gleamed behind his spectacles a pair of quick watchful eyes.

"Do you mind if I ask you about yourself?" Mr. Rogers said, quietly.

"Ask anything you please."

"Mr. Hoffman has told me of your—unfortunate experience of the last four or five years. Since coming out you have made a real effort at finding work?"

David outlined the struggles of the past four months. Mr. Rogers heard him through without show of emotion other than an increased brightness of the eyes, then asked: "Have you not, under such hard circumstances, been tempted to steal again?"

David paled, and hesitated. A reformed thief who had attempted theft no later than yesterday, would certainly not be employed. He saw his chance, so near, fade suddenly away. But he had determined upon absolute frankness.

"Yes," he admitted in a low tone. Then his voice became tremulous with appeal: "But I yielded only once! I was in the act of stealing—but I stopped myself. I could not. I took nothing!—not a thing!"

David expected to see the yellow face harden, but it did not change. "You know the character of the work," Mr. Rogers resumed. "It is not pleasant."

David's hope rushed back. "That makes no difference to me!"

"And the pay is small—only twelve dollars a month and your rent."

"Yes! Yes! That's all right!"

"Then," concluded the low, even voice, "if it's convenient to you, I should like to have you begin at once."

CHAPTER II

THE SAVING LEDGE

David, in a kind of trance, followed Mr. Rogers over the six-story house, hardly hearing the agent's discourse upon his duties and the tenants. Twenty-four families and a considerable number of boarders lived in the tenement—in all, close to a hundred and a half souls. They were mostly Germans and Jews—tailors, furriers, jewellers, shop-keepers; people who were beginning to gain a fair footing in their adopted country. David's work was to be much as the Mayor had outlined. The halls were to be daily swept and frequently scrubbed, minor repairs to be executed, the furnace to be attended to, and ashes, waste-paper and kitchen-refuse to be separated and prepared for the city's ash and garbage wagons.

The tour of installation ended, David started for his old home to begin the removal, armload at a time, of his few belongings. As he walked among the school-hurrying children, over snow grimed by ten thousand feet, he felt dazed for fear that this world of hope he had entered might suddenly vanish. Failure had been his so constantly that this beginning of success seemed unreal. He dared allow himself to feel only a tentative exultation.

At the entrance of his old tenement he met Kate Morgan coming out. He had not seen her since she had glided past him through Mr. Allen's hall, suit-case in hand. He stopped, at a loss what to do or say, wondering how she would receive him.

"Good afternoon," he said, heavily.

She paled, looked him squarely in the face and passed without a word. With a pang he watched her walk stiffly away. Her friendship, save for Tom's, was the only friendship he had known since he had left prison. Now it was lost.

An hour later, as he was coming from his room with his last armload, he met her again. She sneered in his face. "Coward!" she snapped out and brushed him by. He called after her, but she marched on and into her door without looking back.

David had thought his "rent" would be a single room, but it had proved to be a five-room flat in the basement. In the front room of this, during the odd moments his afternoon's work allowed him, he arranged his belongings, to which Mr. Rogers had added a bed, a table and a couple of chairs. When all was in order he found the room looked bare, beyond his needs. After all, his "rent" might as well have been but a single room. Little good to him were the four rooms behind, locked and vacant.

Darkness had fallen and he was sitting in his room wondering how he would live through the month that must elapse before his salary would be due, when Mr. Rogers came in.

"It has occurred to me that perhaps you could use a little ready money," Mr. Rogers said in his low voice, and he laid several bills upon David's table. "There's one month's wages in advance." And before David had recovered from his surprise, Mr. Rogers was out of the room.

While David was still staring at this money, there was another knock. He opened the door upon the Mayor of Avenue A. The Mayor walked in and lowered himself into the one rocking-chair.

"Well, I see you've landed with Rogers," he called out, as though David were a block away. "You'll find Rogers quiet, but the real thing. He's got a heart that really beats."

He looked about. "Just usin' this one room, I see. What're you doin' with the others?"

"Nothing."

"Why don't you rent 'em?"

"D'you think I can?"

"Can? You can't help it. Why, only yesterday a family was askin' me to help 'em find a cheap flat. Le's see how much them four rooms would be worth. I pay thirty a month up on the second floor; this might fetch sixteen or eighteen. You've got the best room; take that off and say—well, say twelve a month. How'd that suit you?"

"If I could only get it!"

The Mayor drew out a fat wallet. "That fixes my family up, then. Here's your twelve."

"You're in earnest?" David asked, slowly.

"Sure. The family'll be in to-morrow."

"But I can't take the money in advance—and from you."

"It ain't my money. It's theirs. And advance!—nothin'! Rent's always in advance. And if I don't cinch the bargain now, somebody'll come along and offer you thirteen, and then where'll I be? Here, stick this in your pants and shut up!"

David took the money. "Mr. Hoffman, I don't know how I can ever thank you for your favours—"

"Oh, this ain't no favour. This's business. But if you think it's a favour—well, some day I may be on my uppers. Remember it then." A pillowy hand drew forth his watch, lit up with diamonds. "Well, by George, if I don't chase right over to my joint I won't even have any uppers. My blamed waiters's always forgettin' to water the soup!"

When he was alone David sat with eyes looking at his fortune, which he had heaped upon the table, and with mind looking at the situation in which he now found himself. Five years before he would have regarded this janitor's position much as a man on a green, sun-lit bank of a cliff-walled torrent would regard a little bare ledge below against which the water frothed in anger—as something not worth even a casual thought. But he had been in that stream, which sweeps its prey onward to destruction; his hands had slipped from its smooth walls; and just as he had been going down he had caught the little ledge and dragged himself upon it—and now this bare rock to him was the world. He did not think of the green fields and the sun above, toward which he must try to climb; he could only, as it were, lie gasping upon his back, and marvel at the miracle of his escape.

He was still sitting so when there was still another knock. He had asked his landlady to send Tom over when the boy returned, and as he crossed the room he hoped he would find Tom at the door. Sure enough, there stood the boy. He came in quietly, with hesitation, for during the past week and more the two had hardly spoken—they had merely been aware of one another's existence.

"What's all dis mean?" he asked slowly, looking round in amazement.

In a rush of spirits David clapped his hands on Tom's shoulders. "It means, my boy, that we're going to begin to live! See this room? The rent's paid for as long as we stay here. And look at the table!"

Tom looked instead at David's face. "Gee, pard, if you ain't got a grin!" he cried. Forthwith a grin appeared on his own face. He turned to the table—and stared.

"Say, look at de bank!" he gasped.

"That's something to eat, Tom. And new clothes. There's twenty-four dollars in that pile, and twenty-four coming in every month, with no rent to pay."

"Don't say nuttin, pard. If dis is a dream, just let me sleep. But what's de graft? How did you get next to all dis?"

David related his day's experience. When he had ended Tom did a few steps of a vaudeville dance, then seized David's hand.

"Well, ain't dis luck! It's like God woke up. But what you goin' to do wid all de coin?"

"Oh, buy railroads and such things!"

David held on to the hand the boy had given him and took the other. "Tom," he said gravely, looking down into the boy's face, "I've got an idea neither of us is very proud of all the things he's done lately. D'you think so?"

The boy's eyes fell to the floor.

"I shouldn't care to tell you all I've done. Should you care to tell me?"

The tangled head shook.

"Well, from now on we're going to be straight—all on the level. Aren't we?"

Tom looked up. "I guess we are, pard," he said in a low voice.

They looked steadily into each other's eyes for a moment. Then David gave Tom a quick push. "On with your hat, my boy! Let's see if the grocery man won't take some of this money."

After their dinner had been bought, eaten, and the dishes cleared away, David began to tack up prints. Tom meditatively watched him for several minutes, then suddenly announced:

"I seen her to-day."

David turned sharply. He knew the answer, but he asked, "Saw who?"

"You know. De lady what I fetched up. I seen her on de street."

David tried to appear unconcerned. "Did she say anything?"

"She asked how you was."

"What did you tell her?"

"I didn't know what to say. I was afraid o' queerin' somet'ing you might 'a' told her. I just said you was better."

David tacked up another print, during which time Tom again watched him thoughtfully. Then Tom asked, abruptly:

"She's a friend o' yourn, ain't she?"

"No."

"I t'ought she was!" His voice was disappointed. "Why ain't she?"

"Well—I guess she don't like me."

"Don't like you!" cried Tom indignantly. "Den she's had a bum steer!" He thought. "I wonder what's queered her agin' you?"

"Oh, several things," David answered vaguely. Then obeying an impulse, born of the universal craving for sympathy, he went on: "For one thing, she believes I put you up to stealing."

"She t'inks you knew anyt'ing about dat!" he cried, springing up excitedly.

"She believes you were stealing regularly, and that it was all done under my direction."

"Is dat de way she sizes up de facts? Well, ain't dat just like a woman! Wouldn't it just freeze your eyeballs, de way goils do t'ings!

"But see here, pard. Swell friends can do a guy a lot o' good. Why don't you hang on to her? Why don't you put her wise?"

"She wouldn't believe me. My boy—" the tone tried to be light—"when the world is certain to regard your truth as a lie, it's just as well to keep still."

David went on with his tacking, and a minute or more went by before Tom asked, quietly: "But wouldn't you like her to know de facts? Wouldn't you like her to be your friend?"

"Oh, yes—why not?" David responded in his voice of affected unconcern.

Tom gazed steadily at David's back, his thin face wrinkled with thought. At length his head nodded, and he said to himself in a whisper: "So she t'inks he put me up to it, does she?"

CHAPTER III

A PROPHECY

At the end of the afternoon, a few days later, a fierce battle was being waged in the basement room that was the Aldrich home, when a knock made David lower his defensive fists.

"Ah, don't stop, pard," Tom begged of his cornered enemy. "Let 'em pound. It's just somebody else kickin' about de heat."

"We'll only stop a second. Ask what they want, and say I'll attend to it at once."

Tom, grumbling fiercely, opened the door. "What's de matter?" he demanded. "Ain't you got no heat?"

But it was not an angry tenant who stepped in from the darkness of the hall. It was Helen Chambers. She was flushed, and excitement quivered in her eyes. She looked from one pillow-fisted belligerent to the other, and said, smiling tremulously:

"I had thought there was no heat, but after looking at you I've decided there's plenty. Is this the way you always receive complainants?"

Tom glanced guiltily at David, then darted behind Helen and through the door. David gazed at her, loose-jawed. Suddenly he remembered his shirt-sleeves.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and in his bewilderment he tried to thrust his huge fists into his coat.

"Perhaps you can do that"—again the tremulous smile—"but I really don't think you can."

"I should take the gloves off, of course," he stammered. He frantically unlaced them, slipped into his coat, and then looked at her, throbbing with wonderment as to why she had come.

She did not leave him in an instant's doubt. She stepped toward him with outstretched hand, her smile gone, on her face eager, appealing earnestness.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness," she said with her old, direct simplicity. "I believed that you and the boy were—pardon me!—were stealing together; that you were letting yourself slip downward. This afternoon the boy came to me at St. Christopher's and told me the real story. I could hardly wait till I was free so that I could hurry to you and ask you to forgive me."

"Forgive you!" David said slowly.

"Forgive me for my unjust judgment," she went on, a quaver in her voice. "I judged from mere appearance, mere guess-work. I was cold—horrid. I am ashamed. Forgive me."

Her never-expected coming, her never-expected words, rendered him for the moment speechless. He could only gaze into her fresh face, so full of earnestness, of appeal.

"You do not forgive me?" she asked.

David thrilled at the tremulous note in her voice. "I have nothing to forgive. You could not help judging as you did."

Her deep brown eyes, looking straight into his face, continued the appeal.

"I forgive you," he said in a low voice.

"Thank you," she said simply; and she pressed his hand.

"And I came for something else," she went on, "I came to assure you of my friendship, if it can mean anything to you—to tell you how much I admire your brave and bitter upward struggle. I'd be so happy if there was some way I could help you, and if you'd let me."

"You want to help me!" was all he could say.

"Yes. Won't you let me—please!"

He throbbed with exultation. "Then you believe I am now honest!"

"You have proved that you are—proved it by the way you have resisted temptation during these four terrible months."

His eyes suddenly sank from hers to the floor. Her words had brought back New Year's eve. She had come to him with friendship because she was certain of his unfallen determination to make his new life an honest life. If she knew of that night in Allen's house, would she be giving him this praise, this offer?

The temptation to say nothing rose, but he could not requite frankness and sincerity such as hers with the lie of silence—he could not accept her friendship under false pretenses. He looked up and gazed at her steadily.

"I am innocent where you thought me guilty, but"—he paused; the truth was hard—"but I am guilty where you think me innocent."

She paled. "What do you mean?" she asked in a fearing voice.

"I have not resisted temptation."

He saw that his words had hurt her, and there was a flash of wonder that a lapse of his should give her pain. An appeal, full of colour, of feeling, that would justify himself to her was rising to his lips, but before it passed them he suddenly felt himself so much the wronged that his confession came forth an abrupt outline of his acts, spoken with no shame.

"I had been starved, rebuffed, for over three months. I grew desperate. Temptation came. I yielded. I entered a house—entered it to steal. But I did not steal. I could not. I came away with nothing."

He paused. His guilt was out. He awaited her judgment, fearful of her condemnation, with resentment ready for it if it came.

"Is that all!" she cried.

Vast relief quivered through him. "You mean then that—" He hesitated.

"That you have been fiercely tempted, but you are not guilty."

"You see it so!"

"Yes. Had you conquered temptation on the outer side of the door, you would certainly have been guiltless. Since you conquered temptation on the inner side of the door, I cannot see that those few more steps are the difference between guilt and innocence."

They were both silent a moment.

"But don't you want to tell me something about yourself—about your plans?" she asked.

The friendship in her voice, in her frank face, warmed him through. "Certainly," he said. "But there's very little to tell."

He now became aware that all the while they had been standing. "Pardon my rudeness," he said, and set a chair for her beside the table, and himself took a chair opposite her.

"There is little to tell," he repeated. "I am what you see—the janitor of this house." As he spoke the word "janitor" it flashed upon him that there had been a time when, in his wild visions, he had thought of winning this woman to be his wife. He flushed.

"Yes, I know. But you have other plans—other ambitions."

"A week ago my ambition was to find work that would keep me alive," he returned, smiling. "I have just attained that ambition. I have hardly had time to dream new dreams."

"But you will dream them again," she said confidently.

"I had them when—when I came back, and I suppose they will return."

"Yes. Go on!"

He had thought, in his most hopeful moments, that some day she might regard him with a distant friendliness, but he had never expected such an interest as was shown in her eager, peremptory tone. "There were two dreams. One was this: I wondered, if I were honest, if I worked hard, if I were of service to those about me, could I, after several years, win back the respect of the world, or its semi-respect? You know the world is so thoughtless, so careless, so slow to forgive. And I wondered if perhaps, after several years, I could win back the respect of some of my old friends?"

"I was sure that was one dream, one plan," she said, quietly. "For myself——" She gave him her hand.

"Thank you!" he said, his voice low and threaded with a quaver.

"And though the world is thoughtless, and slow to forgive, and though the struggle will be hard, I'm certain that you are going to succeed." Her rich voice was filled with quiet belief. "And the other dream?"

"It's presumptuous in me to speak of the other dream, for to work for its fulfilment would require all the things I've lost and many things I never had—a fair name, influence, some money, a personality, ability of the right sort. Besides, the dream is vague, unshaped—only a dream. It is not new, and it is not even my own dream. Thousands have dreamt it, and many are striving to turn it into a fact, a condition. Yes, it would be presumptuous for me to speak of it."

"But I'd like very much to hear about it—if you don't mind."

"Even though it will sound absurd from me? Well, if you wish me to."

He paused a moment to gather his thoughts. "One thing the last four months have taught me," he began, "is that the discharged criminal has little chance ever to be anything but a criminal. Many come out hardened; perhaps the prison hardened them—I've seen many a young fellow, who had his good points when he entered, hardened to irreclaimable criminality by prison associates and prison methods. These have no desire to live useful lives. Some come out with moderately strong resolutions to live honestly, and some come out with a fierce determination. If these last two classes could find work a large proportion of them would develop into useful men. But instead of a world willing to stretch to them a helping hand, what do they find? They find a world that refuses them the slightest chance.

"What can they do? They persist as long as their resolution lasts. If it is weak, they may give up in a few days. Then, since the upward road is closed against them, they turn into the road that is always open, always calling—the road of their old ways, of their old friends. They are lost.

"A week ago I was all bitterness, all rebellion, against the world for its uncaring destruction of these men. I said the world pushed these men back into crime, destroyed them, because it feared to risk its worshipped dollars. I feel bitter still, but I think I can see the world's excuse. The world says, 'For any vacancy there are usually at least two applicants; I choose the better, and let the other go.' It is a natural rule. So long as man thinks first of his own interest that rule will stand. Against such a rule that closes the road of honesty, what chance does the discharged convict have? None!—absolutely none!

"Since the world will not receive back the thief, since there is no saving the thief once he has become a thief, the only chance whatever for him is to save him before he has turned to thievery—while he is a child.

"Have you ever thought, Miss Chambers, how saving we are of all material things, and what squanders, oh, what criminal squanderers! we are of human lives? How far more rapidly the handling of iron, and hogs, and cotton, has developed than the handling of men! The pig comes out meat and soap and buttons and what not, and the same rigid economy is observed with all other materials. Nothing is too small, too poor, to be saved. It is all too precious!

"There is no waste! But can we say the same about the far more important business of producing citizens? Look at the men in our prisons. Wasted material. Had they been treated, when they were the raw material of childhood, with even a part of the intelligence and care that is devoted to turning the pig into use, into profit, they would have been manufactured into good citizens. And these men in prisons are but a fraction of the great human waste. Think of the uncaught criminals, of the stunted children, of the human wreckage floating about the city, of the women who live by their shame!—all wasted human material. And all the time more children are growing up to take the places of these when they are gone. Why, if any business man should run his factory as we conduct our business of producing citizens, he'd be bankrupt in a year!

"This waste *can* be saved. I do not mean the men now in prison, nor the women in the street, nor those on whom ill conditions have fastened disease—though even they need not be wholly lost. I

mean their successors, the growing children. If the production of citizens were a business run for profit—which in a sense it is, for each good citizen is worth thousands of dollars to the country—and were placed in the hands of a modern business man, then you would see! Had he been packer, steel manufacturer, goldsmith, not a bristle, not an ounce of steel, not the infinitesimal filings of gold, escaped him. Do you think that he would let millions of human beings, worth, to put a sordid money value upon their heads, ten thousand dollars apiece, be wasted? Never! He would find the great business leak and stop it. He would save all.

"And how save? I am a believer in heredity, yes; but I believe far more in the influence of surroundings. Let a child be cradled in the gutter and nursed by wickedness; let wickedness be its bedfellow, playfellow, workfellow, its teacher, its friend—and what do you get? The prisons tell you. Let the same child grow up surrounded by decency, and you have a decent child and later a decent man. Could the thousands and thousands of children who are developing towards criminality, towards profligacy, towards a stunted maturity, be set amid good conditions, the leak would be stopped, or almost—the great human waste would be brought to an end. They would be saved to themselves, and saved to their country.

"Nothing of all this is new to you, Miss Chambers. I have said so much because I wanted to make clear what has become my great dream—the great dream of so many. I should like to do my little part towards rousing the negligent, indifferent world to the awfulness of this waste—towards making it as economical of its people as it is of its pigs and its pig-iron. That is my dream."

He had begun quietly, but as his thought mastered him his face had flushed, his eyes had glowed, and he had stood up and his words had come out with all the passion of his soul. Helen's eyes had not for an instant shifted from his; her's too were aglow, and glow was in her cheeks.

For several moments after he had stopped she gazed at him with something that was very like awe; then she said, barely above a whisper: "You are going to do it!"

"No, no," David returned quickly, bitterly. "I have merely builded out of words the shape of an impossible dream. Look at what I dream; and then look at me, a janitor!—look at my record!"

"You are going to do it!" she repeated, her voice vibrant with belief. "The dream is not impossible. You are doing something towards its fulfilment now—the boy, you know. You are going to grow above your record, and above this position—far above! You are going to grow into great things. What you have been saying has been to me a prophecy of that."

He grew warmer and warmer under her words—under the gaze of her brown eyes glowing into his—under the disclosure made by her left hand, on which he had seen there was no engagement ring. Her praise, her sympathy, her belief, thrilled him; and his purpose, set free in words, had given him courage, had lifted him up. As from a swift, dizzy growth, he felt strong, big.

A burning impulse swept into him to tell her his innocence. For a moment his innocence trembled on his lips. But the old compelling reasons for silence rushed forward and joined battle with the desire of his love. His hands clenched, his body tightened, he stared at her tensely.

At length he drew a deep breath, swallowed with difficulty. "May the prophecy come true!" his dry lips said.

"It will!"

She studied him thoughtfully for a minute or more. "Something has been occurring to me and I'd like to talk to you about it." She rose. "But I must be going. Won't you walk with me to the car, and let me talk on the way?"

A minute later they were in the street, from which the day had all but faded and into which the shop-windows and above them the tier on tier of home-windows, were stretching their meagre substitute. David's blood was leaping through him, and in him were the lightness and the all-conquering strength of youth. The crisp winter air that thrust its sting into many of the stream of home-coming workers, tinglingly pricked him with the joy of living.

"Have you thought again of writing?" she asked.

"About as much as a man who has leaped from a house-top to try his wings, thinks again of flying."

"I am speaking seriously. If the impulse to write should return, would you have time for writing?"

"I think I could manage three or four hours a day."

"Then why not try?"

"The ground where one alights is so hard, Miss Chambers!"

"But perhaps you did not soar the other time because you had over-worn your wings. Perhaps they have grown strong and developed during their rest. Many of us used to believe they would carry you far up. Why not try? You have nothing to lose. And if you succeed—then the dream you have told me of will begin to come true."

For several paces David was silent. "I, too, have thought of this. As you say, there is nothing to lose. I shall try."

"Why not take an idea in the field of your dream?" she pursued eagerly. "Why not write a story illustrating how the criminal is to be saved?—say, the story of a boy amid evil surroundings that urged him toward a criminal life; the boy to come under good influence, and to develop into a splendid citizen."

"That may be just the idea," said David.

They discussed the suggestion warmly the remainder of their walk to the car. A little farther on, as they were coming out upon the Bowery, the Mayor of Avenue A swayed into view. Astonishment leaped into his pink face when he saw who David's companion was. His silk hat performed a wide arc, and David had a sense that backward glances over the Mayor's shoulders were following them.

"And you really believe in me?" David asked, as Helen's car drew to a stop.

"I do—and I believe all the other things I have said." She gave the answer with a steady look into his eyes and with a firm pressure of her hand.

"I hope you'll not be disappointed!" he breathed fiercely, exultantly.

He retreated to the sidewalk and standing there, the clanging of the elevated trains beating his ears, he watched the slow passage of her car through the press of jostling, vituperating trucks, volleying over the cobble-stones, till it disappeared beyond Cooper Union. Then he turned away, and strode the streets—chin up, shoulders back, eyes straightforward—powered with such a hope, such a determination to do, as he had not known since his first post-college days. Perhaps he would conquer the future. He would try.

Yes ... he *would* conquer it!

CHAPTER IV

PUCK MASQUERADES AS CUPID

David had suggested school to Tom, but the boy would none of it.

"What, set in one o' dem agony seats, biffin' your brain wid books, a skinny lady punchin' holes t'rough you wid her eyes! Not for mine, pard!"

A job was what he wanted, and David at length concluded that after Tom had been tamed by the discipline of a few months of regular work, he would perhaps be more amicable toward education.

There were but two men of whom David could ask aid in finding a place for the boy, Mr. Rogers and the Mayor of Avenue A. Mr. Rogers was beginning to be something of a puzzle to David. One thing that made David wonder was the smallness of Mr. Rogers's business compared with his ability. They had had a few short talks and David had discovered there lurked behind that reserved exterior a sharp intelligence which now and then flashed out unexpected poniards of bitter wit. David contrasted him with another rental agent he had met, doing several times Rogers's business, and the second man seemed a nonentity. Yet Rogers was the agent of but half a dozen tenements, and made no effort to extend his clientage.

David also wondered at what he could regard only as idiosyncrasies. The dingy brown of Rogers's hair seemed to him hardly a natural colour; he guessed hair dye. But hair dye he associated with vanity, with the man who would falsify his gray hair to extend his beauship, and vanity Rogers apparently had not. And one day, while sweeping out Rogers's office, David had tried on Rogers's spectacles, which had been left on the desk, and had discovered he could see through them as well as with his naked eyes. The lenses were blanks. Why should the man wear blank spectacles, why should he dye his hair? Mere idiosyncracies of course—yet rather queer ones.

Rogers was always kind and courteous to David, and David heard from tenants and neighbours many stories of the agent's warm heart—of rent advanced from the agent's own pocket when a tenant was out of work, of food that came covertly to fatherless families, of mysterious money and delicacies that came to the sick poor. Yet he was invariably cold and distant to David, and cold and distant to all others; so much so that to try to thank him was an embarrassment. Sometimes, when musing about Rogers's business restraint, his colourless dress, his reserve, his stealthy generosity, it seemed to David that Rogers sought obscurity and anonymity with the zeal that other men seek fame and brass tablets.

It was the reserve of Rogers and the constraint David felt in his presence, and even more the knowledge of the greater influence of the Mayor of Avenue A, that made David choose to ask the latter's aid in seeking work for Tom. So about four o'clock of the afternoon following Helen's call, he walked into the Pan-American Café. At a large table in a front corner sat the Mayor, two other men, and half a dozen women, all drinking of coffee and eating of cake, and all shaking with full-voiced laughter that bubbled straight from the diaphragm. David was in no hurry, so he sat down in the opposite corner of the almost empty café to wait the departure of the Mayor's friends.

The ladies about the Mayor were hearty beauties of from ten to twenty years' acquaintance with womanhood; and among them there was an abundance of furs and diamonds. Most of them were misses, David learned from the way the Mayor addressed them. The Mayor, David soon perceived, was the center of their interest. Their pleasantries, their well-seasoned smiles, their playful blushes, were all directed at him, and now and then one of his sallies was reproved by a muff's soft blow upon his mouth. The rôle of target seemed to please him; he bent now to this one, now to that, made sweeping flourishes, made retorts that drew upon him more of the same pleasant missiles. It began to dawn upon David that his saviour was very much of a gallant.

Presently the Mayor, rising to greet a newcomer, noticed David. After a few moments he excused himself and took a chair at David's table. A silk vest that was a condensed flower garden made the mayoral front a gorgeous sight to behold.

There was a new respect in the Mayor's manner. "I see you're flyin' in high society these days," he began, in a whisper.

"You refer to Miss Chambers? She's merely interested in me as you are—in my reform." David said this quietly, as though the subject was closed.

His dignity was not lost on the Mayor. "Say, you've taken an all-fired brace to yourself in the last ten days, ain't you! As for your lady friend—well, if the way she was talkin' to you is the way reformers talk, gee I wish some one like her'd try to make a man out o' me! She's all right, friend. I've seen her before and I've heard a lot about her. But her old man—Lord, but I'd like to set for a week or so on his windpipe! Real estate is one o' his thousand lines, you know. He owns a lot o' tenements in this part o' town—none near St. Christopher's, o' course—and as a landlord, say, he's just partic'lar hell!"

"I've come to ask another favour of you," David cut in, quickly. "You've seen the boy that stays with me. I want to get him a job if I can. I thought possibly you might be able to help me."

"I've seen the kid, yes. Somethin' of a sleight o' hand performance, ain't he?—now he's there and now he ain't. Where'd you pick him up?"

"We just fell in with each other a couple of months ago. There's a man in him."

"I see. And you're trying to dig it out. You'll have to do a little blastin' on the job, don't you think? As for gettin' him work"—he shook his head slowly—"there's about five thousand families on Avenue A, and each family's got five boys, and about once in so often the street out there is blockaded with their mas beggin' me to get 'em jobs. There's how I'm fixed."

"You can't help me then?"

"You've sized it up. Sorry. Wish I could."

After a moment David asked hesitantly: "You couldn't use a boy here, could you?"

"Here! Nothin' I could use a boy for."

"Help in the kitchen, carry things up from the cellar, clean up," David suggested.

The Mayor shook his head.

"It would be great for the boy if he could work a while for some one like you that would understand him, make allowances, and break him in properly," David went on eagerly. "He's never held a job, and a stranger wouldn't have much charity for his shortcomings, wouldn't keep him long. You don't need him, but still you can make things for him to do. In three or four weeks I'll have found another job for him, and by then you'll have him worked into shape to hold it. Of course I'll pay his wages myself—say three dollars a week; only he must think it's coming from you."

The Mayor's look changed to that sharp, penetrating gaze with which he had searched David's interior on his first visit. "Yes, you're in dead earnest," he grunted after a few seconds.

He raised a fat forefinger. "See here, friend. You're cuttin' into my business. I'm an octopus, a trust—you understand?—and any man that tries any philanthropic stunts in my part o' town, I run him out o' business. See? Now you send the kid around and I'll let him bust things here for a while. But keep your coin. I reckon three dollars ain't goin' to put Carl Hoffman on the bum."

David thanked him warmly. "But you don't need the boy," he ended in a determined voice, "so I can't let you pay him."

The Mayor regarded David steadily for a moment. "Have it your own way," he said abruptly; and suddenly his big fist reached across the table, and to David it was like shaking hands with a fervent pillow. "Friend, I've sized you up for the real thing. You made your mistake, and it was a bad one—but we all make 'em. You belong 'way up. I'm proud to know you."

David flushed and was stammering out his appreciation, when the Mayor interrupted with, "Oh, a friend that's good enough for Miss Chambers is good enough for me."

He glanced over his shoulder at the group he had left, then leaned confidentially across the table and asked in a whisper: "What d'you think o' the bunch?—the ladies I mean."

"Why, they seem to be very fine," David answered, surprised. "And they admire you."

"Friend," said the Mayor with an approving nod, "you certainly ain't been lookin' on with your blind eye. They do that! And every afternoon it's the same—either them, or some other bunch. And d'you know what they're after?"

"No."

"Me. They want to marry me. And there ain't a girl on the avenue between fifteen and seventy that ain't tryin' to do the same. Friend, I can't help bein' pop'lar with the ladies. I like 'em—God bless 'em! But when you've got a whole avenue tryin' to marry you, it's hell!"

He shook his head with an air of sadness. "I don't want to marry. I was married once for about a year. It was when I was a kid. I guess she was a pretty nice girl, but she was too much like her mother, and when she went I swore I'd keep out o' that kind o' trouble. But they're closin' in on me. One of 'em's sure to get me. I don't know which one, or mebbe I could head her off. I ought to keep away from 'em, but I can't leave 'em alone, and they won't leave me alone. Oh, hell!"

He rose with a groan. "Well, send round the kid," he said, and carefully pulling down his vest and smoothing his dozen hairs, he rejoined his friends. As David left the café he heard a deep roar from the Mayor, and had a glimpse of a fair suitress of forty rebuking the Mayor's mouth with her muff.

David sent Tom to the Mayor, and walked over to a hardware store on the Bowery to order some new ash cans. As he was returning through the Bowery a man stepped to his side with a quiet, "Hello, pal." Startled, David looked about. Beside him was a wiry, gray man, with deep-lined face and a keen, shifty eye. It was a man David had known in prison—a cynical, hardened gentleman who had been running counter to the law for thirty years, during which time he had participated in scores of daring robberies and had known most of the country's cleverest criminals. Bill Halpin was his name—at least the most recent of his dozen or two.

Halpin had taken a fancy to David while they were prison-mates, why David could not understand; and his greeting was warm to come from one of his contemptuous nature. The two walked on together, and David, in response to Halpin's queries, told that he had gone to work with the determination to live honestly. Halpin gave a sneer of unbelief—he sneered at all things save the frankly evil—but said nothing. When they reached David's tenement, David asked him in, but he said he had an engagement with a pal, and went away after promising to come around some other time.

David shovelled the furnace full of coal and was beginning his preparations for dinner, aglow with his new hopes and with the thought that he had regained Helen for his friend, when there was a knock at his door. He opened the door, expecting his usual caller—a tenant with a grievance. Kate Morgan stepped into the room.

David had seen her in finery before, but never in such finery as now. There was a white velvet hat with two great black plumes that curled down upon her back hair; a long black coat, through whose open front glowed the warm red of a gown; a black fur scarf round her neck and a black muff enclosing her white-gloved hands.

She stepped into the room and her eyes—brighter than ever were the eyes of the furs' original owners—gleamed over the scarf with hard defiance.

"Good evening, *Mister* Aldrich."

David flushed. "Good evening." He drew his one rocking-chair toward her. "Won't you sit down?"

She sank into the chair, threw open the coat so that the full glory of its white satin lining and of the red dress were displayed, and thrust out a little patent-leathered foot.

"I saw you with Miss Chambers last night," she said, her brilliant eyes darting contempt at him. "Of course you told her all about that Allen affair. You're not only a coward. You're a squealer."

David was standing with his back to his mantel, and Kate had to see the erectness, the confidence, the decision, that had come to him since the night of their adventure. "I don't know why you're saying these things," he returned quietly, "but if saying them pleases you, go on."

"Well, ain't we got high and dignified since we became a janitor!" she sneered. "A janitor! Sweeping—scrubbing—listening to the kicks of dirty tenants—digging with your hands in the garbage to separate paper, tin cans, greasy bones. Lord, but ain't you high up in life!"

"Go on," said David.

She drew out her cigarette box—she knew he disliked to see her smoke—lighted a cigarette, and blew a little cloud toward him.

"A janitor! What a poor, weak, miserable soul you've got. Think of a man turning from excitement, an easy life, good things, and taking up this! But you're not a real man. You'd rather do dirty work for a year than earn a year of good times by a night's work. Wouldn't you like to know what I cleaned up the other night after you sneaked out?"

"What you wanted, I suppose."

"That's it—I got all I went after! I'm on Easy Street for a year. And I'm enjoying life, too. You set that down. While you clean up other people's dirt, and live in a basement, and cook yourself

three-cent dinners!"

All her fierceness, all her scorn, were in her words, gave them a jagged edge; and she thrust them in deep and twisted them vindictively. David, very white, looked steadily down at her, but made no reply.

"And besides, you're a squealer!"

He continued silent.

She sent out a puff of smoke, her eyes blazing at him, and thrust again:

"And a damned coward!"

David grew yet paler, but he continued his steady, silent gaze.

She sat looking up at him for several moments, without speaking again. Then slowly something of the fierce scorn, the wild desire to pain him, went out of her face.

"And so you're going to stick to honesty?" she presently asked, abruptly, her voice still hard. "As tough as it is?"

"Yes," said David, quietly as before.

"And nothing can change you?"

He shook his head.

She continued staring up at him. For an instant faint twitches broke her face's hard surface, but it tightened again. Suddenly, to David's astoundment, she whirled about in her chair, presenting him her back; and he saw a white hand clench and her little body grow rigid. Then suddenly she sprang up, hurled her cigarette box across the room, and turned upon him with a deep gasp, her face convulsed.

"Here I am!" she cried, stretching out to him her open hands. "I tried to get you to come to my way. You wouldn't come. I've come to your way. Here I am!"

This whizzing from one pole to the other was too great a speed for David. "What?" he gasped.

"I lied about New Year's night! I took nothing—not a thing! You wouldn't let me. I've acted to you like a devil. You're not a coward. You did not leave me in Allen's house. I saw you waiting behind the palm. I've tried to keep away from you. I didn't want to give in. But I've come! I've give in! I'll be whatever you want me to be, David!—whatever you want me to be!"

David was not yet at the other pole. "Whatever I want you to be?" he said dazedly.

"Yes! Yes! I'll be honest—be anything!" she answered, breathless. She moved a quick step nearer, and went on in an appealing, breaking voice: "But don't you see, David? Don't you see? I love you! Take me!"

David was there. A wave of pain, of self-shame, of infinite regret, swept through him. For a moment, while he tried to get hold of himself, he looked down into the quivering, passionate, tear-lit face; then he took the hands outstretched to him.

"Kate," he said imploringly, "I'm so sorry—so sorry! Forget me. I am nobody—nothing."

"I love you!"

"Think how poor I am, how far down."

"I love you!"

The low tensity of that iterated cry shamed out of existence all evasive reasons—drove David straight to what he thought his uttermost answer. "Forgive me," he said, sick with loathing of himself. "But you've forced me to say it.... I don't love you."

"I love you!"

She had paled at his words, and her cry was only a whispered gasp; but her fixed upward gaze, passionate, appealing, mandatory, did not waver an instant. David had but one word left—and that, he had thought, was to be forever unspoken. But it had to be spoken now. After a moment, in which her face seemed to swim before him, he said, huskily:

"I love someone else."

She drew suddenly back, there was a sharp indrawing of the breath, the face hardened, the eyes above the fur neckpiece gleamed fiercely.

"Who?"

He shook his head.

"Who?"

"I cannot say."

The eyes narrowed to slits, and she looked him through as on the day she had guessed he was just from prison—only now her intuition was quickened a hundred fold. They stood motionless a few seconds, he trying to parry her instinct; then from her came a low, sharp "A-a-h!" and, after a second, "So it's her!"

He shivered. There was another moment of tense silence. Then she said, abruptly:

"It's Miss Chambers?"

He did not move an eyelash.

"You love Miss Chambers!" she announced decisively.

Her hands clenched. "I hate her! Why shouldn't she stay in her own world! Why should she come mixing in my affairs! Oh! I could——!" She finished with a tensing of her whole figure.

She glared silently at David for a moment; then a harsh, mocking laugh broke from her.

"So, you're in love with Miss Chambers! Miss Chambers—a janitor. What a lovely match! Of course you've told her, and she's said yes!"

"I shall never tell her," David said quietly.

The bitterness and mockery began to fade slowly from her face, and meditation came in their stead; and when she spoke again her tone was the tone of argument. "Don't you know that she's far, far above you? You're a fool to think of her! Why, you can never get her—never! You see that, don't you?"

"Yes." He raised a peremptory, entreating hand. "Please!—let's not speak of her."

Her whole body quickened. "After her, do you like any woman better than me?" she demanded.

He shook his head. "No."

"She's out of the question for you—she doesn't live!" She crept slowly toward David, her eyes burning into his. "There's no one between us," she said in a low, choked voice. Then her voice blazed up, her words rushed out. "You do not want me now, but you will! I'll make you love me. I'll be anything you like—I'll be honest!—I'll work! Yes, yes, I'll make you love me, David!"

Her hands had clutched his, and she now held up her quivering face. "I'm going to be honest for your sake, David. Kiss me!"

David was agonised with the pang of her tragedy, with the shame of his own great part in it. "Forgive me," he whispered huskily; and he stooped and pressed his lips to hers.

She gave a little cry and flung her arms about his neck and held him tight. Then breathing against his cheek, "You'll love me yet, David!" she abruptly withdrew her arms, and the next moment was out of the room.

CHAPTER V

ON THE UPWARD PATH

Kate's last sentence, "You'll love me yet, David!" recurred to him constantly during the next two days. He would not, of course—yet he could but muse upon the possibility. We are all creatures of change. Our views of to-day may not be our views of to-morrow, our dislikes of this year may be our desires of next. Since, as Kate had said, Helen Chambers did not live for him, might there not take place within him such a change as would make him yearn for the love he now could not accept?

David looked forward with dread to his next meeting with Kate. He feared another such scene, so painful to them both, as the one they had just passed through. But his fear was needless. Kate's nature was an impetuous one, little schooled to control, but her will was strong and she was capable of restraint as well as of abandon. She knew enough of character to see that David could be eventually won to be more than friend only by now asking and giving no more than friendship; and she was strong enough to hold herself to this course.

When she came in three evenings later, both manner and dress were sober, though her eyes showed what was behind her self-control. They greeted each other with constraint; but she at once said abruptly, "I'm going to behave," and went on to tell David that, after two days' searching, she had found a position in a department store and had begun work that morning.

"I'm a soap saleslady," she said. "Lace-box soap, a three-cake box for nine cents, takes off skin and all—you know the kind. I get five dollars a week. That's two hundred and sixty dollars for a year's work. I've made that, and more, in a night. Oh, it pays to be honest!"

She had broken the constraint, but nevertheless David was grateful for the entrance of Rogers who just then chanced in. David introduced the two, and after a few moments of chat Rogers invited David and Kate to dine with him at the Mayor's café, where he had all his meals; and a

little later they set out for the Pan-American.

The restaurant was filled with diners—fair Germans sitting behind big glass steins, olive-skinned Jews and Hungarians, and women in plenty of both hues. Most were more or less Americanised, but many announced by the queer cut of their clothes that they were recent pilgrims. Some tables were quiet with a day's weariness, some buzzed with business, some (and most of these were Jewish) were eager with discussion on music, literature, politics, religion. Above the buzz of four tongues rose a wild, wailing air of the Carpathians that the orchestra, in red velvet jackets, were setting free with excited hands from their guitar, mandolin, xylophone and two violins.

The Mayor, in vest of effulgent white, was circulating among his guests, joking, wishing good appetites, radiating hospitality from his glowing face. His well-organised kitchen and dining-room apparently ran themselves, so during the dinner hours there was nothing to interrupt his being merely host. He beckoned Rogers's party, who had paused at the door, toward him with a grand wave of his jewelled hand, and led them to a table at the rear of the room.

"Well, friends, if your appetites are as good as my dinner, you've certainly got a good time comin'," he said, and moved on to other guests.

On the way over Kate had announced that she was going to do some studying at home—reading was one of David's interests, so she had decided it must be one of hers—and had asked for advice; and this now led to a discussion upon books between David and Rogers. David discovered that his employer had no use for poetry, had a fair acquaintance with fiction, and in history and philosophy was much better read than himself.

Rogers, in his unexcitable way, talked well. At times his remarks were brilliant in their analysis, and at times there came those quick, caustic thrusts of wit that pierce like a sword to the heart of pretense and false ideas. He expressed himself with ease in a wide vocabulary, though many of the less common words he mispronounced—a fault that to David was elusively familiar. He spoke always in a quiet, even tone, that would have led a casual hearer to believe that he was merely a cold mentality, that he had not the fire of a soul. But David had the feeling now, as he had had before and as he was often to have again, that in looking into those glowing eyes he was looking into the crater of a volcano.

During this play of wits Kate could only look silently on. She had known that David was in education above the level of her friends, but the side of himself he was now showing she had not before seen. His richness where she had nothing seemed to remove him to an impossible distance. Her face became drawn with sharp pain.

But presently the talk shifted from books to life, and she forgot her despair. Here she was at home. She knew life, her impressions were distinct and decided, and her sentences seemed pieces of her own vivid personality. The presence of the two men inspired her. David, who thought he knew her, found himself being surprised at the quickness and keenness of her mind, and Rogers watched her little sparkling face with more and more interest. She was surprised at herself, too; talking on subjects of broader interest than personalities was a new experience to her, and she discovered in herself powers never before called out.

As they were sipping their coffee to the frenzied music of a gypsy waltz, Tom, who had spied them from the kitchen, darted in to their table. His appearance was much improved by a haircut and a complete new outfit which a small amount in David's cash, and a larger amount in the Mayor's credit, had enabled him to purchase on the instalment plan. He shook hands all around, unabashed by Rogers's habitual reserve.

"How'd you like de feed?" he demanded eagerly. "If anyt'ing's wrong, I'll fix it. Nuttin'? O' course not. Say, de grub here's swell, ain't it? T'irty cents is a lot for a dinner, but it's wort' it. We buys only de best, we cooks it right, an' we serves it proper, wid table-clot' an' napkins. D'you take notice o' dem? It ain't many places you gits table-clot' an' napkins!

"Was your waiter all right? Shall I call him down for anyt'ing? No. Well, I'm glad I don't have to say nuttin' to him, for he's a friend o' mine. Say, mebbe you t'ink it's easy to run a place like dis. T'ink again! First, dere's what're we goin' to have to-day, den dere's gettin' it ready, den dere's servin' it, an' de dishes, an' washin' 'em, an' everyt'ing. It's hustle, an' worry, an' t'ink from when you gets up till when you goes to bed."

And on he went, picturing the responsibility under which he tottered, till they told him goodnight and went out.

Kate was in a glow of spirits when David and Rogers left her at her door. She whispered appealingly to David as they parted, "Please talk with me this way again, David." It had been in his mind that, under the circumstances, it would be better for Kate if they should cease to meet; but he frankly realised he was the only link which held her to her new honesty, and to break their friendship would be to snap that link. And so he answered, "Yes—often;" and this was in fact the first of many such hours spent together, in which they were often joined by Rogers. It seemed to David that Kate's cynicism and sharpness were beginning slowly to wear away.

Since his talk with Helen David's hope of conquering the future had been constantly high. He did not underestimate the struggle before him, but strength and courage had been flowing into him since food and shelter had ceased to be worries, and he now felt that under Helen's inspiration he could do anything. One of his aims he had already achieved, Helen's respect, though how still

seemed to him a miracle. His heart yearned even more eagerly than ever for something higher than friendship, but he knew this desire to be, as always, unattainable. He could not hope for a second miracle, and one that would sink the first to a commonplace.

Her suggestion that he should write a story of the man-making of a boy whom surroundings had forced toward destruction, laid immediate and powerful hold upon him. He saw, as she had said, that a story of the right kind might contribute in some degree to awakening the public's sympathy for, and responsibility toward, the hundreds of thousands of children that are going to waste. And he saw, too, that such a book might lift him toward the world's respect, where he would be happier, more effective. Selfishly, altruistically, the story was the thing for him to do.

During the days after their talk, all his spare time, and even while he went about his work, his imagination was impassionedly shaping characters and plot. He had a note from Helen saying she wanted to see him the following Friday, and he could hardly wait for it to come, he was that eager to ask her judgment on his story's outline. When Friday afternoon did finally arrive, he began to look for her an hour before she could be expected, excitedly pacing his room, and every minute glancing through his window up to the sidewalk.

When Helen, after leaving her club of schoolgirls that afternoon, entered the reception room on her way out, she found Mr. Allen waiting for her in the Flemish oak settle.

"You were not expecting me, but I hope you're not displeased," he said in his grave, pleasant voice, and with the ease of long-accustomed welcome.

She could not wholly restrain a little air of vexation as she gave him her hand. "Of course I'm glad. But I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you if you've come to go home with me. I've promised to make a call—in the neighbourhood. Of course you can walk with me there, if you like."

"Oh, the neighbourhood!" He gave a humorous groan of mock complaint, but down in his heart the complaint was very real. The neighbourhood was coming too often between her and his desire to be with her. "Very well. I'll take what I can get."

She threw her sable scarf about her throat and they stepped forth into the narrow street, paved with new snow that the day had trodden to a dirty glaze. He had talked with her before about his ambitions, for his future had been part of his offering when he had offered himself. He now told her that he had just been appointed chief counsel of the committee of the legislature for investigating impure foods. She knew how great a distinction this was, how great a token of the future, and she congratulated him warmly.

"If these good things you see really do come, you know I don't want to share them alone," he said in a low voice, when she had finished.

She shook her head slowly. "The more I think, the more I see how unsuited I am for you. Our ideas are so different. You face one pole, I another. We would never pull together; we could only achieve the deadlock of two joined forces that struggle in opposite directions."

"But you know my hope is that we shall not always face in opposite directions."

She turned upon him a smile that was touched with irony. "You mean you expect some day to look toward my pole?"

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "You know I mean you will some day see the futility of such work as you are doing, and the wrongness of many of your ideas—and then you will turn to the true pole."

"Your pole? No. I do not believe, as you do, that only the fit should survive. I do not believe, as you do, that the hard conditions of life are necessary as a kind of sieve, or a kind of civil service examination, to separate the fit from the unfit. I do not believe, as you do, that the great mass who have failed to pass the meshes of this test, who are down, have by the mere fact of their being down proved their unfitness, shown that they are worthy to be neglected. Your belief, summed up, is that the world is made for the strong—for the rich man born to opportunities, and for the poor man born with the superior brains and energy to create them. To that belief I can never come. I believe the world is made also for the weak. Rather, I believe all should be made strong."

With a sweep of her hand she indicated the two rows of tenements whose dingy red walls stretched away and away till they and the narrow street disappeared into the wintry twilight.

"All these people here—they are weak because they have never had a chance to be otherwise. Give them a fair chance and they will become strong—or most of them. That is what I believe—a fair chance for all to become strong."

"And I believe the same. Only I believe that chance exists at present for all who are worthy. If there is good stuff in a man, he rises; if not, he belongs where he is. The struggle is selective, it develops. Make it easier and you lower the quality of your people."

"Ah, yes, I know you are an unalterable individualist," she sighed. "When I realise the great part you are going to have during the next twenty or thirty years in shaping the conditions under

which we all must live, I wish you could be brought to a broader concept of the human relationship."

"If I am to play such a part, my own concept is quite broad enough."

"But in ways it is so hopeless! It consigns all these people to outer darkness. It holds no chance for the man whom circumstances are pressing down, no chance for any of those helpless people who are reaching vainly upward, or those who would be reaching upward if their consciousness were roused." They were drawing near to David's house, and the sight of it prompted a specific instance. "No chance for the man who has stolen, who repents, who struggles to reform."

"The repentant thief!" He gave a low laugh. "The one that repented on the cross is the eternal type of the thief that repents. If he repents, it's at the last minute—when he can steal no more!"

His words half angered her. "I wish you could talk with the one I'm going to see now!"

He looked at her in surprise. "That Aldrich fellow you were telling about!" he ejaculated.

He felt a further astonishment—that she should be calling upon a man, and evidently in his room. He did not put this into words, but she read it in his face. It angered her more, and she answered his look sharply:

"To have him call at my house or to see me at the Mission would be embarrassing to him. I feel that I can be of some service, and since I must choose between an uptown convention and helping save a man, I have decided to sacrifice convention. It seems strange, doesn't it?"

He did not reply to her sarcasm, but he still disapproved. There were so many things of which he disapproved that even had he been free to criticise he would have felt the futility of striking at any single fault. He prayed for the eradication of all this part of her life, and her restoration to normal views; first, because he honestly disbelieved in the work that interested her; second, because he reasoned that while she gave so much interest to the poor she was likely to have little interest left to give to his suit.

They paused before David's window. David, glancing out, saw Allen not ten feet away and heard Helen say, "I wish so much you would talk with Mr. Aldrich." For a moment his heart stood still. Then he sprang toward the door, intending to escape the back way, but it occurred to him that perhaps Allen might not come in, and that to avoid him by running away was also to miss Helen. He left the door ajar, to aid a quick flight if Allen started in, and peered through the window at the couple, as alert as a "set" runner waiting the pistol-shot.

They were a splendid pair, David had to admit to himself—both tall, she with the grace of perfect womanhood, he with the poise and dignity of power and success. She was a woman to honour any man's life; he—David now knew of Allen's brilliant achievements and brilliant future—had a life worth any woman's honouring. Yes, they were a splendid pair.

Presently Allen bowed and went away, and the next moment David opened the door for Helen. He was grateful to the dusk for muffling his agitation; and doubly grateful to it when she said, after giving him a firm pressure from her hand:

"I've been trying to arrange with a friend—Mr. Allen—to have a talk with you some day. I hope you may soon meet."

"Thank you," said David.

She suggested that they walk, and a few minutes later, David reciting the outline of his story, they entered Second Avenue, the East Side's boulevard, always thronged with business folk, shoppers, promenaders, students. They forgot the crowds through which they wove their way, forgot even that they walked, and it was a surprise to both when they found themselves, just as David finished, before her home.

She looked at his erect figure, at his glowing, excited face. "I think it's going to be splendid!" she cried.

"I think so myself," he returned, with an exultant little laugh. "So a man always feels at first. But when the cold and clammy days have come, when your fires have all gone out and there's nothing but ashes left in your imagination——"

"Then," she broke in quickly, "you must just keep going.

> '——tasks in hours of insight will'd,
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.'

That's worth remembering. But let's walk on for a few minutes. There's something I want to say."

She was silent for the greater part of a block. "One of our friends that we see much of is a publisher. He tells me that, though a novel may not sell enough to pay for the type-writing, it is pretty certain, if it has any merit, to yield several hundred dollars. If it has an active sale it may yield several thousand, and if it gets to the front of the big sellers it may yield a small fortune. I was thinking that if your book should go even moderately well, what a great deal it would help—toward—I mean what a great deal it would help you."

She looked at him expectantly. Her voice and her manner had had a background of constraint,

and David vaguely felt that her meaning was not in her words, but was lurking behind them.

"Yes?" he said, wonderingly.

The constraint was more marked as she continued, with an effort: "Perhaps you might get—five thousand dollars for it."

"Yes?" he said, his wonderment rising.

The constraint and effort were even greater as she replied: "Well, that would do so much toward clearing your name!"

Her meaning leaped forth from its lurking place. For a moment he was completely stupefied.... She wanted him to repay the stolen money to St. Christopher's!

He felt her eyes upon him, waiting. "Yes—it would help," he said, mechanically.

They turned back. She saw he was far away. She did not speak. First came to him the absurdity of his trying to repay with his present earnings—fifty years of utmost saving. But he pressed down the bitter laugh that rose. She was right; if he was ever to clear his name he must refund the money to the Mission. Perhaps the book would repay it; perhaps years and years of work would be required. But repay it he must. There was no other way.

He looked up as they paused again before her house. "Yes—I will repay," he said.

She reached out her hand. Its grasp was warm, tight.

"I knew it," she said, with a directness, a simplicity, that thrilled him. "I'm so glad!"

CHAPTER VI

JOHN ROGERS

David flung himself at the story as though it were a city to be taken by storm. He was full of power, of creative fury. His long-disused pen at first was stubborn, but gradually he re-broke it to work; and he wrote with an ease, a surety of touch, a fire, that he had never felt before. He had half-a-dozen separate incentives, and the sum of these was a vast energy that drove him conqueringly through obstacle after obstacle of the story.

These early days of the story were high days with him. He forgot, when writing, his basement room, his janitor's work, his dishonour. Infinity lay between the end of December and the end of January; in a month his spirits had risen from nadir to zenith. The world was his; nothing seemed beyond him. He even dared dream of passing Allen upon some mid-level and winning to the highest place in Helen Chambers's regard. The exhaustion of spirit at the end of each day's writing quenched this dream; but it was nevertheless enrapturing while it lasted, and at times David came near believing in it.

David had asked both Rogers and the Mayor to aid him in securing Tom a *bona-fide* position, and after the boy had been running the Pan-American Café for a month, a place was found. Tom's wages had been a heavy drain upon David's meagre income, and it was with a feeling of relief that David announced the coming change one night as they were preparing for bed.

"I've got some great news for you, Tom," he began.

"What's dat?" asked the boy, dropping the shoe he had just taken off.

"A new job!" cried David, trying to infect Tom with enthusiasm. "Delivery-boy on a wagon. You're to get four dollars a week—a dollar more than you're getting. Think of that! You're in luck, my boy—you're getting rich!"

But David's enthusiasm did not take. There came no sparkle into the boy's eyes, no eagerness into his manner. He looked thoughtfully at David a moment, then shook his head.

"I don't t'ink I'll take it."

"What!" cried David. The possibility of refusal had not occurred to him. He plunged into a fervent portrayal of the advantages of the new place.

"Mebbe you're right," Tom said, when the picture had been painted. "But I'm gettin' used to t'ings at de Pan-American; I likes de boss an' I likes de woik. An' I don't need de extry dollar. No, I don't want no better job dan what I got. It suits me right up to de chin."

He walked, in one shoe and in one stocking, across to David and held out his hand. "But, pard"—a note of huskiness was in his voice—"pard, I appreciate dat you was tryin' to do de fine t'ing by me. Shake."

There was nothing more to be said. Tom went back to the Mayor, and David continued dropping in Saturdays an hour before pay-time.

One evening in early February, just after David had coaled the furnace and settled down to his story, he had a call from Bill Halpin, whom he had not seen since their first meeting. Halpin leaned against the door, after it had been closed, and silently regarded David, a sneering smile upon his face.

"Honest!" he shot out at length, with a short, dry laugh. It was his first word since entering.

David stared at the sarcastic, saturnine figure.

"What do you mean?"

"Honest! And I half believed you!" Again the short laugh. "You almost fooled Bill Halpin—which is sayin' you're pretty smooth." He jerked his head upward. "What's your game?—yours and this man *Rogers*?"

"See here, Halpin, what are you talking about?"

"Oh, I suppose you'll say you don't know him. But since I met you on the Bowery I've been around here twice, and both times I saw you two with your noses together. You're a smooth pair. Come, what's your game?"

"I don't understand you!"

"Don't try to fool me, Aldrich," he drawled. "You can't. But don't tell me the game unless you want to. You know I wouldn't squeal if you did. All I want is for you to know you can't throw that honesty 'con' into me."

David strode forward and laid sharp hold of Halpin's shoulders.

"See here, Bill Halpin, what the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

Halpin looked cynical, good-humoured disbelief back into David's eyes, and again let out a dry cackle.

"Drop that actor business with me, Aldrich. I don't know what your game is—but I know there is a game. If you want to find out how much I know, come on. Let's go out and have a drink."

An hour later David stepped from the rear room of a Bowery saloon, and walked dazedly through the spattering slush back to his house. He paused before it, and looked irresolutely at Rogers's office window, whose shade was faintly aglow. He began to pace up and down the block, his eyes constantly turning to the window, his mind trying to determine his honourable course. At length he crossed the street, entered the house, and knocked at Rogers's door.

Rogers admitted him with a look of quiet surprise and led the way across his office into the living-room behind, whose one window opened upon the air shaft. In this room were two easy chairs, a couch on which Rogers slept, a table with a green-shaded reading-lamp, two or three prints—all utterly without taste. Everything was in keeping with the surface commonplaceness of the man except a row of shelves containing a couple of hundred well-selected books.

Rogers motioned David to a chair and he himself leaned against his table, his hands folded across the copy of "Père Goriot" he had been reading.

"I'm very glad you came in," he said, in his low, even voice.

David gazed at Rogers in his attitude of waiting ease, and he suddenly felt that to speak to this unsuspecting man was impossible. It did not occur to him that perhaps Rogers had caught his strained look, and that perhaps this ease might be the mask of an agitation as great as his own. He dropped his eyes. But it was his duty to speak—and, in a way, his desire. He forced himself to look up. Rogers had the same look and attitude of quiet waiting.

"Mr. Rogers," David began, with an effort, "I have just been told something that I think I am bound to tell you. You hired me, befriended me, in the belief that I knew nothing about you. I feel it would not be honourable in me to remain your employe, in a sense your friend, if I concealed from you that I know what may be your secret. And there is another reason why I want you to know that I know: if the story is true, I want to tell you how much I sympathise."

"Go on," said Rogers in his even voice.

"It's doubtless all a mistake," said David, hurriedly, feeling that it was not. "I've just had a talk with a man I knew in prison—Bill Halpin. He's called to see me several times. He happened to see you. Something about you struck him at once as familiar, but he could not recognise you. He saw you again, and he thought he placed you. He called here, had a talk with you, and on going away purposely shook hands. There was no grip in your little finger—you could only half bend it. He said he placed you by that."

Rogers still leaned against the table, his figure quiet as before—but David could see that the quiet was the quiet of a bow drawn to the arrow's head. The tendons of his hands, still holding the book, were like little tent-ridges, and his yellowish face was now like paper.

"And who did he say I am?" his low voice asked.

"He told me that fifteen years ago you and he were friends, pals—that you were a famous safe-breaker—that you were 'Red Thorpe.'"

Instantly Rogers was another man—tense, slightly crouching as though about to spring, his eyes blazing, on his face the fierce look of the haunted creature that knows it is cornered and that intends to fight to the last. A swift hand jerked open a drawer of the table, and stretched toward David. In it was a revolver.

David sprang to his feet and stepped back. Rogers glared at him for a moment, and for that moment David expected anything. Then suddenly Rogers said, "What a fool!—to be thinking of that!" and tossed the pistol into the open drawer.

Defiantly erect, he folded his arms, his fierce pallor suggestive of white heat, his eyes open furnace-doors of passion.

"Well, you've got me!" he said, with strange guttural harshness. "I've been expecting this minute for ten years. What're you going to do? Expose me, or blackmail me?"

David got back his breath. "I don't understand. Halpin told me he didn't think the police were after you."

"They're not. I don't owe the State a minute."

"Then why do you talk of exposure?"

"You understand—perfectly!" His words were a blast of furnace-hot ferocity. "You know what would happen if my clients learned I'm an ex-convict. They'd take every house from me—I'd again be an outcast. You know this; you know you've got your teeth in my throat. Well—I'll pay blood-money. I have paid it. A police captain found me out, and for five years sucked my blood—every cent I made—till he died. I'll pay again—I can't help myself. How much do you want?—blood-sucker!"

These hot words, filled with supremest rage and despair, thrilled David infinitely; he felt the long struggle, the tragedy, behind them.

"You mistake me," he cried. "I've told you what I have because I thought to tell was my duty to you. Betray you, or accept money for silence—I never could! Surely you know I never could!"

"For ten years I've touched no man's penny but my own," he said fiercely. "In money matters, I've been as honest as God!"

The rage was dying out of his face, and despair was growing—the despair that sees nothing but defeat, failure. He looked unbelief at David.

"But what difference does that make to you?" he asked bitterly. "Well—how much is it to be?"

The piercing brothership that had been surging up in David for this desperate, defiant, suspicious man, swept suddenly to the flood.

"Don't you see that we're making the same fight?" he cried with passionate earnestness. "I admire you! I honour you! Your secret is as safe with me as in your own heart."

David stretched out his hand. "I honour you!" he said.

For several moments Rogers's gaze searched David's soul. "You're speaking the truth—man?" he asked in a slow, harsh whisper.

"I am."

He continued staring at David's open face, flushed with its fervid kinship. "If you're lying to me—!" he whispered. Then he held out his hand, and his thin fingers gripped about David's hand like tight-drawn wires.

"During the month I've known you, you've seemed a white man. I think I believe you. But, man! don't play with me!" he burst out with sudden appeal. "If there's any trick in you, out with it now!"

"If there was, now would be my time, wouldn't it?"

They stood so for a moment, hands gripped, eyes pointed steadily into eyes.

"Yes, I believe you!" Rogers breathed, and sank into a chair and let his head fall into his hand. David also sat down.

Presently Rogers looked up.

"I guess I was very harsh," he said weakly. "But you can't guess what I was going through. It was the moment I had feared for ten years. It seemed that the world had fallen from beneath me."

"I understand," said David.

"But you cannot understand the ten years of fear, of suspense—of fear and suspense that walk with you, eat with you, sleep with you."

He sat looking back into the years. After a space, the hunger for sympathy, the instinct to speak his decade of repressed bitterness, prompted him on.

"I was one of those thousands and thousands that never had a chance when boys. I had no very

clear idea between right and wrong; there was no one to show me the difference. I was full of life and energy, and I had brains. I could easily have been turned into the right way—but there was no one. So I turned into the wrong. About that part of my life Halpin told you."

"He said you were the cleverest man in your line."

Rogers seemed not to hear the praise. "A man may begin to think while he is still a boy; if he has spirit and animal energy, he doesn't begin to think till later. I was twenty-seven. I had been two years in Sing Sing and had three more years to serve. It wasn't the warden's words that started me thinking, nor the chaplain's sermons. Chaplains!—bah!—frocked phonographs! It was two old men I happened to see there—mere cinders of men. The thought shot into me, 'There's what you're going to be at sixty-five!'

"I couldn't get away from that thought. My mind forced me to study my friends; there was not one old man among them who was living a peaceful, comfortable life. That burnt-out, hunted old age—I revolted from it! I did a lot of thinking. I decided that, when I got out, prison gates should never have reason to close on me again.

"Finally, I was discharged. I knew it was hard for an ex-convict to get work, but I thought it would be easy for me. I was willing, clever, adaptable. But—oh, God! you know what the fight is, Aldrich!"

"I do!" said David.

Rogers was on his feet now, his eyes once more glowing. He began to pace the floor excitedly.

"Your fight was easy to mine. But I'll skip it—you know what the fight's like. It's enough to say that I found the world would not receive me as my old self. I changed my name; I grew a beard; I began to wear glasses; I dyed my red hair brown; I smothered down my spirit. I became John Rogers.

"A friend of mine in a Chicago real estate office, in which I once worked for a couple of weeks as a clerk, sent me an envelope and a sheet of paper of the firm. On the paper I wrote a letter of recommendation from the firm. I had told my story to the Mayor of Avenue A—it was because he knew I would sympathise with you that he brought you to me—and he helped me. I got my first job.

"Think of that, Aldrich!" He held a trembling fist in David's face, and laughed harshly. "I had to become a disguise, I had to lie, I had to commit forgery, to get a chance to be honest! Oh, isn't this a sweet world we're living in!

"And ever since, my life has been one great lie! A lie for honesty! But the lie has done for me what truth could not do. I'm respected in a small way. I'm successful in a small way. But, man, how that smallness chafes me! How I am shackled! I should be respected, be successful, in a large way. I'm cleverer than most of the men in my line. I have brains. I see big business opportunities. But I dare not take them. I must always be pulling back at the reins. If I let myself out, I should become prominent. Men would begin to ask, 'Who is that fellow Rogers?' and pretty soon some one would be sure to find out. And down I'd go! I must keep myself so small that I'll not be noticed—that's my only safety!"

He paused. David could say nothing.

"And always the lie that saved me is threatening to destroy me," Rogers went on, in a lower voice. "God, how I've worked to get to this poor place! How I want to live peacefully, honestly! But some day someone will find out I'm an ex-convict. A breath, and this poor house of cards I've worked so hard to build and protect will go flat! And I cannot begin all over again. I cannot! I haven't the strength. This is going to happen—I feel it! And how I fear it! How I've feared it for ten long years! Man, man, how I fear it!"

He dropped exhausted into a chair, and almost at once a cough began to shake him by the shoulders.

"And this disease"—a hand pressed itself upon his chest—"it's another prison gift!" he gasped, bitterly.

There was not a word in David. He reached out and gathered one of Rogers's thin hands in both of his; gathered it in the clasp of his soul. The cough ceased its shaking and Rogers looked up. He gazed at the tears, at the quivering brothership, in David's face. Thus he sat, silent, gripping David's hands; then, slowly, his own tears started.

"Man, dear," he whispered brokenly, "I think I'm going to be glad you found me out!"

CHAPTER VII

HOPE AND DEJECTION

A week or two later Rogers cut out all qualifying words and said from his heart, "I'm glad you

know!" He and David quickly became comrades; and many an hour they sat in the room behind the office talking of life, of philosophy, of books. David now learned that Rogers had done a large part of his really wide reading while in prison; and he now understood Rogers's frequent mispronunciation—Rogers had acquired his less common words entirely from reading, and never having heard them spoken, and lacking such fundamentals of education as rules of pronunciation, he had for fifteen years been pronouncing his new words as seemed to him proper.

David was surprised to find that Rogers, for all his occasional bitter flashes, was an optimist. He often marvelled how Rogers had retained this hopefulness for the world's future; he could explain it only by a great natural soundness in the man. Rogers believed the world was marching forward, and he often said, his eyes illumined with belief: "The time is coming, Aldrich—I shall not see it, and you may not, but it's coming—when there will be no human waste, when the world will have learned the economy of men!"

Frequently they discussed society's treatment of the criminal, and David learned that Rogers burned with an indignation as great as his own. If ever Rogers's obsessing fear should be fulfilled, if he should be found out, then his one desire, a desire always with him, was to speak out his bitter accusation in the world's face.

One warm, exuberant Sunday toward the end of February, they walked northward through Riverside Park, the broad, glinting Hudson at their left. When they reached the height crowned by Grant's tomb, Rogers, who had been silent for several minutes, now and then slipping meditative glances at David, laid a hand on David's arm and brought him to a pause.

"Look across yonder," he whispered, pointing to the Palisades that lifted their mighty shoulders from the Hudson's farther edge.

"Wonderful, aren't they," said David, letting his eyes travel northward along the giant wall till it dimmed away.

"Yes—but I didn't mean the view."

Rogers drew nearer, and went on in a whisper, while the crowd of Sunday promenaders sauntered by their backs:

"I told you I saw many big business opportunities, and that I had to let them all pass. Over there is one I did not let pass. Several years ago I saw that some of the people who were being crowded off Manhattan island would in the future live over there. The land was cheap then; I saw it would some day be immensely valuable. After a great deal of manœuvring, in which Mr. Hoffman helped me, I secured an option for four years on five pieces of ground that lie together. A few months ago I renewed the option for three more years; each time I paid the owners a thousand dollars for the option. Under its terms, I guarantee them a big price, and they are bound to sell the land only through me. So you see I am, in effect, the head of a small land syndicate. Over there is my big venture—my big hope."

"And has the development you expected come?"

"It is coming. I have learned that a big company is buying all the land over there it can get hold of. They're going to establish a new suburb. They're buying secretly and through several agents; they want to keep the different holders from guessing what's up, so they can get the land at their own price. Well, for my land they'll have to pay me *my* price!"

That evening they called on Kate Morgan. Once, shortly after that first dinner together in the Pan-American Café, when David had dropped in to see her he had found Rogers there, and he had discovered on Rogers's controlled face a look he thought might betoken more than a commonplace interest. Since then Rogers had often called, and that which David had at first seen as a possibility he now saw developing toward a fact.

Old Jimmie was sleeping off the effects of a "loan" in a back room, so they had Kate and the little parlour to themselves. Kate was in the depth of the blues. David asked her what was the matter.

"Soap!" she cried fiercely. "My life's nothing but soap. It's 'That kind's nine cents for a box of three cakes, ma'am. Three boxes? Twenty-seven cents, please.' Or it's 'this variety is thirteen cents a box—regular value twenty-five.' That's all. It's just that, and only that, nine hours a day, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year—soap!—soap!—soap! Oh, I'm going soap-mad! I can't stand it! I won't stand it!"

She gazed rebelliously at the two men.

"You must try something new," said David.

"And please, sir, what'll that be?" she demanded, sarcastically.

"Something that will use your energy and intelligence. How would you like to be a stenographer? A few months in a business school would fit you for a position. You would develop and advance rapidly, and soon have a responsible place."

"I'd like that," she said, decidedly. "I've thought of it—I know I could do the work. But how about the months while I study? I did have a little money on hand, but I couldn't live and keep my father on that soap-counter's five dollars, so I've had to use some of it every week. It's all gone. I must live—and I'm broke. No, I've got to stick to the soap!"

"Can't you and your father take two cheap rooms, sell most of your furniture, and live on the proceeds while you study?" David persisted.

"Everything here was bought on instalment. It's about half paid for. If sold, it'd bring about enough to pay off the balance. I might as well just give it back to the dealer."

Rogers, who thus far had been silent, now said quietly: "You leave the settling with the instalment dealer to me. I'll guarantee to get enough out of him to keep you going till you're through school."

She laughed. "You'll be the first that ever got anything out of an instalment dealer!"

"I'll get it," he assured her. "If I don't get quite enough from him, I'll borrow the rest for you."

She looked at him sharply. "That means you'd loan it all. You're mighty kind. But I could never pay it back—to take it would be the same as stealing. I've never stolen from friends, and I'm not going to begin now."

But in the end Rogers prevailed; and when they left it had been settled that Kate was immediately to enter a business school.

Two days before—after Tom had gratefully refused a second better-paying job—David had had a conference with the Mayor. "I been doin' my best talkin' to get him to go," the Mayor said despairingly, "but he says I was good to him when he needed a job and now he's never goin' to leave me. Say, if I don't get rid o' him pretty soon, I got to start my own dish factory. And here's an interestin' point for you, friend: since he's had them better offers he's been hintin' at a raise."

When David entered his room, after telling Rogers good night, he found Tom, who had avoided him the night before and all the day, sitting far down in the rocking-chair, wrapped in dejection. He understood the boy's gloom, for he had suggested a plan to the Mayor.

Tom dropped his eyes when David came in, and answered David's "Hello there," with only a mumble. But at length he looked guiltily up.

"Is dat job you was tellin' me about took yet?" he asked.

David tried to wear an innocent face. "Why? What's the matter?"

"De boss told me yesterday he was losin' money, dat he'd have to cut down his force, an' dat he'd have to let me go."

"Yes?"

"I told him he'd been a friend to me when I was hard up, an' I was goin' to stick by him now't he was up agin it. I said I was goin' to work for him for nuttin'."

"Oh!" said David.

"But he wouldn't let me. So I'm fired. How about dat odder job?"

"I'm afraid it's taken, Tom."

David pulled a chair before the boy and for ten minutes spoke his best persuasion in favour of entering school.

"Yes, de Mayor handed me out de same line o' talk. He told me what a lot you'd done for me. He was right, too. An' he told me how much you wanted me to go to school."

He looked steadily, silently, at David. "D'you really want me to go as much as all dat, pard?"

"There's nothing I'd rather have you do."

"An' you won't miss de t'ree a week I been fetchin' in?"

"I don't think we'll miss it much."

There was an inward struggle. "Dere's nuttin' I'd not sooner do, pard," he said, huskily. "But since you want me to—all right."

The next morning he started to school. At the end of the day he informed David that he was in a class "wid kids knee-high to a milk-bottle," that his teacher was "one o' dem t'inks-she-is beauts dat steps along dainty so she won't break de eart'," and "de whole biz gives me de bellyache." He was miserable for weeks—and so was his teacher—and so were his class-mates. But he gradually became adjusted to school life, and when some of the rudiments were fixed in his head, he began to make rapid progress. He had become great friends with Helen Chambers, whom he often saw at the Mission, and his desire to please her was another incentive to succeed in school.

One day David had a note from Dr. Franklin inviting him to call at the Mission, and a day or two later Helen explained the invitation. Dr. Franklin had learned that David was living in the neighbourhood; knowing that Helen had once been friends with him, he had spoken of David to her; she had told of David's struggle and his purpose—and the invitation was the consequence. Helen advised David to accept, and one evening he called. The gray old man received him in such a spirit of unobtrusive forgiveness, referred only vaguely and hastily to the theft, praised him so sincerely for his struggle, and spoke so hopefully of the future, that David could take none of it

amiss. He had to like the man, and be glad that such a one was Morton's successor.

When he left he gazed long at the glowing memorial window, which was now restored. What resentment there continued in his heart was for the moment swept out. He was glad that Morton's memory was clear—glad it was his dishonour that kept the memory so.

All this time David worked hard upon his story—becoming closer friends with Rogers, frequently seeing Kate, who was studying with all her energy, occasionally meeting Dr. Franklin, and now and then walking with Helen from the Mission to her car, or part of the way to her home. Most of the time his belief in the story was strong, and he worked with eagerness and with a sense that what he wrote had life and soul. But at intervals depression threw him into its black pit, and all his confidence, his strength of will, were required to drag himself out.

Several times Helen Chambers rescued him. Once she took him to visit her Uncle Henry, whom she had told of David's struggle. The old man's genial courtesy, and genuine interest in the book, were an inspiration for days. And once she forced him to come to her home and read to her a part of what he had written; and her eager praise lifted him again into the sunlight of enthusiasm.

So, working hard, the winter softened into spring, the spring warmed into summer, the summer sharpened into early autumn—and the book was done. He immediately sent it, as he had promised, to Helen, who was then at one of the family's country places. Three days afterward there came a note from her. It told how the story had gripped her, and how it had gripped her Uncle Henry, who was visiting them—how big it was just as a story—how splendid it was in purpose; it told what a great promise the book was for his future; and finally it told that she had sent the manuscript to her publisher friend.

But the flames of enthusiasm enkindled by this note sank and died away; and he was possessed by the soul-chilling reaction, the utter disbelief in what one has done, that so often follows the completion of a sustained imaginative task. His people were wooden, their talk wooden, their action wooden, and the wires that were their vital force were visible to the dullest eye. Helen, he told himself, had judged his work with the leniency of a friend for a friend. Hers was not a critical estimate. He knew that the publisher's answer, when it came after the lapse of a month or two months, would be the formal return of his manuscript. Success meant too much to him to be possible—his promotion to more pleasant work, a rise in the world's opinion, the partial repayment of his debt, a higher place in Helen's regard, the beginning of his dreamed-of part in saving the human waste.

No, these things were not for him. He had failed too often with his pen for success to come at last.

CHAPTER VIII

ROGERS MAKES AN OFFER

The October day was sinking to its close as David, who was walking southward through Broadway, came to a pause at Thirty-fourth Street to wait till a passage should break through the vortex of cabs, trucks, and street cars, created here by the crossing of three counter-currents of traffic.

As he stood waiting he saw a woman in disarranged dress, about whom there instantly seemed to be a vaguely familiar air, step from the crowd and walk unsteadily into the turbulence of vehicles. A policeman called a sharp warning to her, but she went on, and the next second the shoulder of a horse sent her to the pavement, and only the prompt backward jerking of the driver saved her from the horse's feet. The policeman dragged her out of danger, and David joined the curious group that ringed the pair.

"That'll be your finish some day if you don't leave the bottle alone," he heard the policeman say severely.

Her answer was a reckless, half-fearful laugh. Her voice roused again in David the sense of vague familiarity. Presently she turned her face. It was the face of Lillian Drew.

He stared at her a moment, then, careful to hide himself from her eyes, he hurried through the passage that had opened, and on down crowded Broadway. The sight of her had startled him deeply. His one meeting with her flashed back into his mind, and all the horrible business of his discovery of Morton's guilt, his own accusation, his trial, his sentence—and he lived them through again with sickening vividness.

Presently he began to study if there was any way in which Lillian Drew might affect the future. Morton she could not injure. Morton was too long dead; she had sunk to too low a level for her unsupported word to have belief, and the letters which were her only power had been ashes these five years. As for himself, him she could not touch. No, Lillian Drew was harmless.

And yet he could not wholly rid himself of a feeling of uneasiness.

When David reached home he found Tom waiting at the head of the little stairway that led down

into the basement. The boy had grown much in the last nine months, and the pinched look had given place to a healthy fulness. But he was still the same boy: his cow-lick still was like a curling wave; his clothes would not stay in order, nor his hands clean, despite his desire to please David and Helen Chambers; and the vernacular of the street, notwithstanding his efforts to "talk schoolroom," still mastered his tongue.

He stopped David with an air of subdued excitement. "Say," he whispered, "de owner o' de house here, he's downstairs waitin' for you. And say!—but ain't he mad!"

The owner of the tenement, who had recently moved into another house he owned in the neighbourhood, had before shown an irascible disposition to interfere in the tenement's management, so Tom's news was no surprise to David.

"What's he want?"

"I dunno. But he's swearin' like he'd like to eat you alive."

The owner, drawn by their voices, came out of David's room and mounted the steps. He belonged to that class of men whose life is a balance between gratification of appetite and the relentless pursuit of small gain, and his coarse, full-lipped, small-eyed face bore the family likeness.

"Ain't you this fellow Aldrich?" he demanded aggressively, blocking the head of the stairway.

"You know I am," said David.

"Yes—but I wanted to hear you confess it with your own lips. I have been hearin' about you from St. Christopher's Mission. Ain't you the fellow that stole that money from there?"

David saw the brink of a new disaster. But the owner's manner made him bristle.

"Well?"

"Well, no crook can be janitor in my house! Take your things out o' that room, and git!"

David wanted to seize the owner by the shoulders and shake his mean little soul out upon the sidewalk. "I take my orders from Mr. Rogers," he returned, controlling himself.

"And Rogers takes his orders from me. See? Now you git!"

"Rogers is my employer."

He swore fiercely at David. "Get too fresh, you dirty thief, and I'll punch your face in!"

"Please try!"

He looked into David's gleaming eyes, at the shoulders that promised too much strength, and his threatening attitude subsided.

"Well, if you won't go for me, we'll see what you'll say to Rogers!" he snorted. "You come with me to his office."

"If you want me, you'll find me in my room."

David brushed roughly by the owner and went down the stairway. A minute later, the owner and Rogers entered the room.

"Now you fire him," the owner ordered Rogers. "I ain't goin' to have no jailbirds around."

"But he's given most excellent service for almost a year," Rogers protested in his quiet voice.

"I ain't to be fooled by that trick," sneered the owner, with a wise look. "I ain't one o' them muckheads that believes because a thief's been straight for nine months he's always goin' to be straight. No sir! He's nine months nearer his next crooked stunt! Now fire him."

"But—"

"Cut out your 'buts'!" he roared, savagely. "Fire him or"—he looked threateningly at Rogers—"there's agents that will!"

Rogers turned slowly upon David who was standing beside his table with burning eyes and clenched face.

"I think you'll have to go, Aldrich," he said, after a moment.

Without a word David picked up his hat and, followed by Tom, walked out of the room. As he tramped hotly through the streets—the boy, pale and silent, beside him—his bitterness was at first directed even against Rogers. But in a little while he remembered Rogers's situation, and that Rogers could not have saved him—and the bitterness ran out of him. In its place came the sharp realisation that he was again in the abyss—stronger, better able than a year before to make his way from its smooth-walled depths—but nevertheless in the abyss. What should he do? how should he get out?—these questions were constantly begging answers till, two hours later, wearied from walking, he came again into his room.

Rogers rose from his table as he entered and looked questioningly at him.

"You understand?—I had to do it?"

"Yes," said David, taking the hand he held out.

Rogers sent Tom out on an errand. After the boy had gone, anger slowly lit its fires in Rogers's thin white cheeks.

"The hardest part of it all is, I dare not be a man, be myself!" he burst out fiercely. "You don't know how heavy and revolting this mask of discretion, of control, of subserviency, becomes at times! He should have been kicked out, stamped on! Ah, to be unafraid!—that's the greatest thing in the world!"

He stood leaning on his tightened fists, which rested on the table, his eyes blazing across at David. But after a moment the red and flame began to die from his face and eyes.

"Come, sit down," he said abruptly. "There's something I want to say to you."

They both took chairs. "I've been thinking of a plan for several weeks, and I guess this is the time to tell you," Rogers began. "As you know, the land syndicate that's been secretly buying in land up along the Palisades has been sending its agents to me. The syndicate is still keeping itself in the dark, but I've learned that it's called the New Jersey Home Company, and that Alexander Chambers is its president. The active work of making a deal with them has just begun, and the deal ought to come to a head in a month or six weeks."

He paused and gazed steadily at David, his thin face drawing with despair. Then he said in a low voice:

"Haven't you noticed—during the last year—I've been losing strength?"

David nodded.

"Yes—these prison lungs!" he breathed, with fierce bitterness. "I saw my doctor last week. He told me in this climate I might last a year—a little more, a little less. If I went to Colorado or New Mexico I might last several years, might even get well. That's what I want to do—finish up this deal, then drop everything and go West.

"He told me I must do no work, and keep away from excitement. I knew that already. Yet this deal's going to mean a lot of both. I simply haven't got the strength to see it through. I must have someone to help me—and I want that someone to be you."

"Me!" cried David. "Why, I don't know the first thing about real estate."

"You don't need to. The chief thing will be just to stick to the price I set. There'll be a lot of stiff talking—you can do that. And Mr. Hoffman will help some; he's got a little interest in the deal."

"But my record. They'll doubtless learn about it. Aren't you afraid that may endanger you?"

"I count that they'll say I've taken you in to give you a new chance in life—and perhaps think no more about it. As for the danger, I'd rather have a man I can trust whose record they may find out, than have near me a man who may find out *my* record—and tell."

David nodded. "I see your point."

"You'll be with me, won't you?"

"Can a drowning man refuse a rope thrown him?"

They shook hands.

"The financial situation is like this," Rogers went on. "In my option I guaranteed the owners to sell the land for one hundred and fifteen thousand; I had to guarantee high to keep the land. I am to have half of all I get over that amount, and in addition, an agent's commission of five per cent. of the sale price. I am demanding from the syndicate a very much larger price than it has been paying for similar tracts. And I'll get my price, too—for they must have the land; and besides, the price is fair, much less than the land is worth to the syndicate. I'm asking one hundred and fifty thousand.

"That makes my share twenty-five thousand. And I shall have earned it. Several times in the last five years the owners—they're a pretty weak lot—have wanted to sell at insignificant prices, but I wouldn't let them. And if I hadn't been holding them together, they would have sold out months ago to the syndicate at the syndicate's price—eighty or ninety thousand. So you see I'm doing a mighty good thing for the owners.

"Now as to terms between you and me. Twenty-five thousand is more than I'll need even if I live longer than the doctor has promised me. Now I know what you want to do about that Mission money. If the deal comes off as I expect, five thousand will be your share."

"Five thousand dollars!" gasped David. "For a month's work? I can't take it. I shall not have earned the smallest fraction of it!"

"Yes, you will take it. Without your help, I'll fail—so you'll earn it all right. Besides, even if you didn't earn it, with whom should I divide the money I don't need if not with you?"

David still objected, and at length Rogers cried out:

"Oh, take it as a loan, then, and pay off the Mission! You'd rather owe me than it, wouldn't you?

You can pay me back when I need it. The proposition is the same either way, for I'll be dead before I need it, and I'll make you a present of the amount in my will."

In the end David consented. Rogers went on with the other details of his plan. David should live with him, and Tom could sleep on a cot in the office. It would be wise, with this big deal on, to make a more pretentious office show; Kate Morgan (he spoke of her calmly, but David surmised the quality of the calmness within), who had recently finished her business course and was looking for a better place than her present one, should be their stenographer. For the sake of the help it would be to her, and to try the effect of the work-cure upon him, old Jimmie should succeed to David's place as janitor, and of course he and Kate should have the basement flat as their home.

When Rogers had gone David walked up and down his basement room—his last night there!—and looked excitedly into the future. The book—he expected nothing of that. But here only a month away, almost within his hand, was the sum which, as far as money alone could pay for it, would buy his fair name. He felt an impulse to write Helen of the great promise the next month held, but the memory that her father was engaged on the other side vaguely prompted him not to do so; and then came the second thought that it would be better to surprise her. Yes, he would wait till he had repaid the money to St. Christopher's, and then go to her with the receipt in his hand.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAYOR AND THE INEVITABLE

At the end of a few days Jimmie Morgan had been settled into David's place, and David was established in Rogers's room and thoroughly drilled into his part. Finally, toward the last of the week, a rented typewriter was installed in the office and Kate Morgan installed before it.

"As I told you, there'll be little for you to do," Rogers said to her the afternoon she began work. "When anybody's about you can make a show of being busy—but the rest of the time do as you please."

He went into his room and closed the door. Kate turned to David, who sat at a desk beside her looking a very different man in the well-tailored suit Rogers had made him buy.

"Isn't he fine!" she said in a low voice.

"He certainly is," David returned warmly.

"The way he pretended to get all that money for our furniture! But I'll pay him back some day—you see. I didn't think I could, but I know now that after a little experience I'll be making good money. They told me at the school I was the fastest girl on the machine they'd had for years. Some day I hope my chance'll come to do him a good turn."

David wondered if she guessed, as he had, the kind of turn Rogers, in his dreams, would like best for her to do him. She had guessed, and she guessed too what was running that instant in David's brain, for she shook her head and whispered meaningly:

"You know I don't care for him that way."

David looked abruptly back at his desk, and her machine began a whizzing tattoo that fully corroborated the statement of her teachers. But Kate as he had first known her a year before came into his mind, and his eyes slipped surreptitiously up to view the contrast. She wore a white cotton dress, its folds as smooth as the iron's bottom, in which she looked very fresh and girlish. The hardness and cynicism had gone from her face, and her exaggerated pompadour had subsided into a dressing which allowed the hair to fall loosely about brow and ears, lending an illusion of fulness to her rather thin face. She was a far softer, far more controlled Kate Morgan than the Kate Morgan who had been his first post-prison friend. But the control, he knew, had not extinguished her old personality. It was there, ready to flame forth when occasion provoked it.

That evening, in response to a request sent down by the Mayor of Avenue A, David went up to the Mayor's flat. The sitting-room was a chaos of chairs, newspapers, clothes and photographs of feminine admirers—the confirmed disorder of an unmarried man of forty-five. The Mayor, standing amid his household goods in evening clothes, noted that David was observing the quality of his housekeeping.

"You've seen this before, Aldrich," he said brusquely, "so don't turn your nose up so much, or you'll spoil the ceilin'."

He glanced about the room. "It does look like I was boardin' a pet hurricane, don't it," he admitted. "Sometimes I've been on the point o' askin' Mrs. Hahn (who attended to the three-room flat) to clean up a bit—but, oh say! I can't boss a woman!"

Early in their friendship the Mayor had discovered that David had some acquaintance with the social customs of Fifth Avenue, and he had gradually adopted David as his social and sartorial mentor—though in the item of vests he grumbled against David's taste as altogether too

conservative. So David was not now surprised when the Mayor said, "I sent for you to look me over," stepped into the best light, pulled down his vest and coat, and demanded complacently: "Well, friend, do I look fit to be two-steppin' with the ladies?"

David's gaze travelled upward from the broad, but not broad enough, patent-leather shoes, past his large, white-gloved hands, to the white vest girdled with a heavy gold chain, across the broad and glistening area of his evening shirt, and upward to the culminating glory of his silk hat.

"You certainly do!" said David.

"I thought you'd think so," said the Mayor, nodding. "When I get into my dress suit I ain't such a slouch, am I. But since you made me quit wearin' them handy white bows that hooks in the back o' the neck, my ties always look like I'd tied 'em with my feet. Here, fix this blamed thing on me right."

When David had complied, the Mayor lowered himself into a chair, taking care to pull up his trousers and to see that the bending did not crumple his shirt bosom.

"It's the first fall affair—at the Liberty Assembly Hall—very small crowd—very select," he announced to David in a confidential voice that could have been heard in the street. "If only the dear ladies—oh Lord!—leave me alone!"

He sighed, and shook his head.

"I may look like a happy man, friend, but I ain't. I'm gettin' near my finish. Yes, sir! The bunch after me is narrowin' down to a few—the rest has sorter dropped out o' the runnin'. And them few is closin' in on me—closin' in on me. They're in earnest, every one of 'em. Oh, you can't count the chances I have to set alone with 'em in their parlours, walk home alone with 'em at night, and all them sort o' tricks. And me"—he groaned, and despair made a vain effort to wrinkle his smooth face—"me, I like it. That's the hell of it!

"Yes, one's goin' to get me sure. I wish I knew which one'd win out. I'd be almost willin' to put my money on Carrie Becker. I guess she's as good as any of 'em. She's just had a row with Mrs. Schweitzer. You know Mrs. Schweitzer sets in one corner o' Schweitzer's café every afternoon, and holds a kind o' reception with the people that drop in. Carrie Becker wants to marry me and do the same thing in my café, which is ten times as good as Schweitzer's. She wants to snow Mrs. Schweitzer under. Oh, I'm onto her! That makes two reasons she has for marryin' me. Yes—if I was bettin', I'd bet on Carrie Becker."

He heaved a great sigh and rose. "Well, I'd better be goin'. You're sure, are you, that I look all right?"

"Perfect."

The joy of living spread over his face. "Yes, I guess I do."

They walked together to the stoop. David watched the Mayor's progress down the street, saw the heads turn to stare at his effulgent amplitude, and he guessed how the Mayor's gratification was chirrupping to itself beneath the Mayor's waistcoat.

David had ceased cooking his own meals since he had moved from his basement room, and had become a boarder at the Pan-American Café. When he, Rogers and Tom appeared at breakfast the next morning the Mayor, pale and agitated, yet striving to look composed, hurried over to their table.

"I want to see you as soon's you're through eatin'," he whispered in David's ear.

"All right," said David.

The Mayor kept an impatient eye on David, and the moment breakfast was done he was at David's side, hat in hand. "We can't talk in here," he said. "I've got a key to the Liberty Assembly Hall. Let's go over there." And excusing themselves to Rogers, he led David out.

The big ball-room, scattered about with the débris of the previous night's pleasure, had in the cold light of morning a look of desolation which even the mural cascades and seas and mountains could not dispel. The room was a fit setting for the despairing face the Mayor turned upon David when the hall door was locked behind them. The Mayor did not speak for several seconds, held his gaze straight on David; then he shouted, his mask of self-control flung aside:

"Well, you see me! What d'you think o' me?"

"What's up?

"It's all up! I've gone and done it!"

"Done what?"

"What?—I've done *It*!—I'm engaged!"

There was frantic hopelessness in the Mayor's voice and in the Mayor's face.

"You don't say so!" David ejaculated.

"I did say so!"

David could hardly restrain a laugh at the Mayor's desperate appearance. "Engaged! You don't look it!"

"A-a-h! quit your kiddin'!" roared the Mayor fiercely. "This ain't nothin' to laugh at. It's serious."

"To which one?" David queried, with the required gravity.

"Carrie Becker. I knew she'd get me. Oh, she's a slick one all right! Say, friend, if you want a job kicking me at five dollars an hour, get busy!"

He began to pace wildly to and fro across the room, then let himself drop with a groan into a chair beneath an Alpine cascade, so that it seemed the water was splashing upon his polished head.

"It was last night—in this damned hall—in that damned corner there—that it happened," he burst out to David, who had taken a chair beside him. "The hall was all fixed up fancy. There was a line o' them green, shiny, greasy-lookin' perpetuated palms across each corner. What's anybody want a hall fixed like that for!—ain't the old way good enough, I'd like to know?

"Them palms made little holes, with settees inside, that the women could rope you into. Cosy and invitin'—oh, sure! And about how many unmarried females in the bunch d'you think missed tryin' to lead me in? Nary a blamed one! But I was wise to their little game, and I says to myself, 'None o' them palms for mine.'

"I balked every time they led me that way—till that last dance with Carrie Becker. I was prancin' along with her in my arms, comfortable and thinkin' nothin' about danger, when she says her shoe's untied and won't I fasten it. I'll bet my hat she undone it herself, and on purpose! Well, in I went behind her, doubled myself up and fastened her shoe. I held out my arm to her, but she said she was out o' breath and didn't I want to rest a minute, and she throwed me up a smile. You know she's got a real smile, even if it has been workin' forty years. Right there's where I ought t've run, but I didn't. I set down.

"The window was open, and outside was a new moon. Well, she leaned over close to me—you know how they do it!—and began to talk about that moon. It looked like a piece o' pie-crust a man leaves on his plate. I knew it was time for me to be movin', and I started up good and quick. But just then her hand happened to fall on mine—accident, oh, sure!—and what d'you think I done? Did I run? No. I'm a fool. I set down. And it was good-bye for me.

"When a woman gets hold o' my hand she's got hold o' my rudder, and she can steer me just about where she likes. Outside was the moon, there behind them palms playin' goo-goo music was the orchestra, and there beside me a little closer'n before was Carrie Becker. Well, I ain't no wooden man, you know; I like the ladies. I began to get dizzy. I think I enjoyed it. Yes, while it lasted I enjoyed it.

"She said a few things to me, and I said a few things to her—and pretty soon there she was, tellin' me how unpleasant it was livin' with her brother's family. I was plumb gone by that time. 'Why don't you get married?' I asked her. Oh, yes, I was squeezin' her hand all right. 'Nobody'll have me,' she said. 'Oh, yes,' I said, and I named half a dozen. 'But I don't care for any o' them—I only care for one man,' she said. I asked who. She give me that smile o' hers again and said, 'You.'

"I was dizzy, you know—way up in the air, floatin' on clouds, and—oh, well, I asked her! I ain't goin' to deny that. I asked her! And you can bet she didn't lose no time sayin' yes and fallin' on my shirt-front. As for me—well, friend, I won't go into no details, but I done what was proper to the occasion. And I enjoyed it. Yes, while it lasted I enjoyed it.

"She didn't give me no chance to back out. Not much! As soon as we come from behind them palms she told, and then come the hand-shakin'. The ladies shook my hand, too; but cold—very cold! And soon they all wanted to go home. Understand, don't you? And everybody's been shakin' hands this mornin'. They think I'm happy. And I've got to pretend to be. But, oh Lord!"

He glared despairingly, wrathfully, at the corner wherein had been enacted the tragedy of his wooing, then looked back at David.

"There's the whole story. Now I want you to help me."

"Help you?" queried David. "What do?"

"What do!" roared the Mayor, sarcastically. "D'you think I'm chasin' down a best man!"

"If I can help you that way——"

"Oh, hell! See here—I want you to help me out o' this damned hole I'm in. You ought to know how to get me out."

"Oh, that's it." David thought for a moment, on his face the required seriousness. "There are only three ways. Disappear or commit suicide——"

"Forget it!"

"Break it off yourself——"

"And get kicked out o' this part o' town!"

"Or have her break it off."

"Now you're comin' to the point, friend. She must break it off, o' course. But how'll I get her to?"

"Isn't there something bad in your past you can tell her—so bad that she'll drop you?"

"Oh, I've tried that already. As soon as I got outside the hall last night and struck cool air, I come to. I began to tell her what a devil of a fellow I'd been—part truth, most lies. Oh, I laid it on thick enough!"

"And what did she say?"

"Say? D'you suppose she'd take her hooks out o' me? Not much! Say? She said she was goin' to reform me!"

They looked steadily at each other for a long time; then David asked:

"You really want my advice?—my serious advice?"

"What d'you suppose I brought you here for? Sure I do."

"Here it is then: Marry her."

David expected an outburst from the Mayor, but the Mayor's head fell hopelessly forward into his hands and he said not a word. David took advantage of the quiet to speak as eloquently as he could of the advantages of marrying in the Mayor's case. At length the Mayor looked up. Hopelessness was still in his face, but it was the hopelessness of resignation, not the hopelessness of revolt.

"Well, if it had to be one o' them, I'd just as soon it was her," he said, with a deep sigh.

CHAPTER X

A BAD PENNY TURNS UP

David found a keen pleasure in the business on which he was now engaged. For four years he had talked to no one, and for a year he had talked to but four or five. Now he was actively thrown among men of the world—Jordon, the general agent of the New Jersey Home Company, his assistants, and the attorneys of the company. He instinctively measured himself beside them, and he exulted, for though they were the shrewder in business, he felt himself bigger, broader, than they.

The deal progressed hopefully. David discovered the five owners in Rogers's syndicate to be five ordinary men, with no particular business courage and no courage of any other kind, and whose interest in their own welfare was their only interest in life. However, they had confidence in Rogers's success, and stood solidly behind him—which was all that could be desired of them. From his first meeting with Jordon, David, too, was confident of success. Jordon held off, talked about preposterous prices—but David felt surrender beneath the grand air with which the general agent brushed Rogers's proposition aside. The company had to have the land, so it had to meet Rogers's terms. And after each subsequent meeting David felt that much nearer the day of surrender.

One morning, two weeks after he had entered upon his new duties, he was looking through some papers in the living-room relating to the land, when Kate knocked and entered.

"There's a woman out there wants to see you," she said, with a sharp glance.

"What's she want?"

"She wouldn't tell me. She said you'd see her all right—she was an old friend. If she is, I think some of your friends had better sign the pledge!"

David followed Kate into the office. A tall woman rose from his chair and smiled at him. It was Lillian Drew. The life went out of him. He stood with one hand against the door jamb and stared at her.

When he had seen her five years ago she had had grace, and lines, and a hardened sort of beauty—and she had worn silks and diamonds. Now the face was flushed, and coarsened, and lined with wrinkles—the hands were gemless, the hair carelessly done—and in place of the rich gown there was an ill-fitting jacket and skirt. It was evident that for her the last five years had been a dizzy incline.

"What a warm welcome!" she said, with a short laugh.

David did not answer her. Kate's quick eyes looked from one to the other.

"Wouldn't you just as soon our talk should be private?" Lillian Drew asked, with a smile of irony. "You'd better run out for awhile, little girl."

Kate glanced at her with instinctive hatred. Lillian Drew, whom the five years had made more ready with vindictiveness, glared back. "Come, run along, little girl!"

Kate turned to David. "You'd better leave us alone for a few minutes," he said with an effort.

Kate jerked on her hat, jabbed in the pins, marched by Lillian Drew with "you old cat!" and passed out into the street.

"Well, now—what do you want?" David demanded.

"Oh, I've just come to return your call. May I sit down?—I'm tired." And smiling her baiting smile she sank back into David's chair.

David crossed to his desk and looked harshly down upon her. "How did you find me?"

"Surely you thought I'd look you up when I got back to town! I asked at the Mission. A girl in the office there wrote your address down on a card for me. And told me a few things." She narrowed her eyes—almost all their once remarkable brilliance was gone. "A few things, mister."

"Please say at once what you want," he asked, trying to speak with restraint.

"Just to see an old acquaintance."

"Come to the point!" he said sharply.

"Well, then—I'm broke."

"I don't see why that brings you to me."

"Because you're going to give me money—that's why."

"I certainly will not!"

"Oh, yes, you will—when I get through with you. You wouldn't want me to tell all I know of Phil Morton, now would you?"

"Tell if you want to." Anger at her as the cause of his five hard years was rising rapidly. He pointed savagely to a mirror that Kate had put up behind the door. "Look at yourself. Who'll believe your word?"

"But I won't ask 'em to believe my word," she said softly, her eyes gleaming triumph at him.

Her words and manner startled him. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I'll show the letters, of course."

"Letters! What letters?"

"Morton's letters."

"Morton's letters!" He stared at her. "You gave them to me."

"Part of them." She laughed quietly, and ran the tip of her tongue between her lips. "Oh, you were easy!"

David choked back an impulse to lay vengeful hands upon her. "You're lying!" he said fiercely.

"Oh, I am, am I?"

She slipped a hand into the pocket of her skirt, paused in the action, and her baiting smile turned to a look of threat. "If you try to grab them, if you make a move toward me, I'll scream, people will rush in here, and the whole thing will come out at once! You understand?"

The tormenting smile returned, and she slowly drew from her skirt a packet of yellow letters held together by an elastic band. She removed the band, drew one sheet from its envelope, and held it up before David's eyes.

"You needn't bother about reading it. You've read one bunch—and they're all alike. But look at the handwriting. I guess you know that, don't you? And look at the signature: 'Always with love—Phil.' That's one letter—there are fourteen more. And look at this photograph of the two of us together, taken while he was in Harvard. And look at this letter written five years ago, saying he'd send me five hundred the next day—and at this letter, written two days before he died, saying he hadn't another cent and couldn't get it. I guess you're satisfied."

She coolly snapped the band over the bundle and returned the letters to her pocket. "I guess I'll get some money, won't I?"

"I see," David remarked steadily, "that I must again call your attention to the fact that there are such things as laws against blackmailing."

She looked at him, amusedly. "That worked once—but it won't work twice. Arrest me for blackmail, and there'll be a trial, and at it the truth about Morton will come out. You told me five years ago you didn't care if the truth did come out—but I know a lot better now!" She laughed. "Please send for a policeman!"

He was helpless, and his face showed it.

"Oh, I've got you! But don't take it so hard. You scared me out of town—but I've got nothing against you. I really like you; I'm sorry it's you I'm troubling. I've got to have money—that's all."

There was an instant of faint regret in her face—but only an instant. "Yes, I've got you. But I haven't showed you all my cards yet. Mebbe you'll tell me you won't pay anything to keep me still about Phil Morton, who's been dead for five years. All right. But you'll pay me to keep still about yourself."

David looked at her blankly.

"You don't understand? I'll talk plainer then. I've been doing a little putting one and one together. You didn't take that five thousand dollars from the Mission. Phil Morton didn't have a cent of his own—he told me that when he was half crazy with trying to beg off; he said I was driving him into crime. He took that money, and I got it. Well, for some reason, I don't know why, you said you took it, and went to prison."

Wonderment succeeded to hardness and sarcasm. "You're a queer fellow," she said slowly. "Why did you do it?"

"Go on!"

"I don't understand it—you're a queer lot!—but I know you've got your reason for wanting to make the world think it was you that took the money and not Phil Morton. And I know it's a mighty strong reason, too—strong enough to make you willing to go to prison and to keep still while people are calling you thief. Well—and here's my ace of trumps, mister—if you don't hand out the cash I'll tell that *you didn't take the money*!"

David sank slowly into Kate Morgan's chair, and gazed stunned at the woman, whose look grew more and more triumphant as she noted the effect of her card. His mind comprehended her threat only by degrees, but at length the threat's significance was plain to him.

If he didn't pay her, she would clear his name, He must pay her money to retain his guilt.

"I guess I'll get the money—don't you think?" she asked.

He did not answer. Temptation closed round him. Temptation coming in its present form would have been stronger in his darker days, but even now it was mighty in its strength. Why should he bear his disgrace longer? This woman could clear him; would clear him, if he did not pay. And he had no money—almost none. He had merely to say "no"—that was all.

In these first dazed moments he really did not know which was the voice of temptation and which the voice of right. One voice said, "To refuse will be to destroy hundreds of people." And the other voice said, "To pay blackmail is wrong." Desire took advantage of this moral disagreement to order his reply.

"I shall not pay you a cent!"

"Oh, yes you will," she returned confidently.

"I shall not!—not a cent!" he said, with wild exultation.

"You know what'll happen if you don't?"

"Yes. You'll tell. All right—tell!"

She studied his flushed face and excited eyes. "You're in earnest?"

"Don't I look it! I shall not pay you a cent! Understand? Not a cent!"

He had risen, and she too now rose. "Oh, you'll pay something," she said with a note of coaxing. "I'm not as high as I once was. Fifty dollars would help me a lot."

"Not a cent!"

"Twenty-five?"

"Not a cent, I said."

"Well, you'll wish you had!" she said vindictively, and turned and walked out of the office.

He dropped back into his chair. So he was going to be righted before the world!—at last! Vivid, thrilling dreams flashed through his brain—dreams of honour, of success, of love!... Then, slowly, his mind began to clear; he began to see the other results of Lillian Drew's disclosure. His five years would have been uselessly spent—lost. And the people of the Mission—Quick visions pictured the consequence to them.

He sprang up, holding fast to just one idea among all that confused his brain. He must stick to his old plan; the people must keep Morton. He must find Lillian Drew and silence her. But where find her? He had not asked her address, he had not even watched which direction she had gone. Perhaps even now she might be telling someone.

He seized his hat, and hurried from the room. As he came out upon the sidewalk, a tall woman who had been standing across the street, started over to meet him. At sight of her he stopped, and gave a great sigh of relief.

"You're looking for me, aren't you?" she asked, when she had come up.

"Yes."

"I knew you'd be changing your mind, so I waited," she said with a smile of triumph. "I knew you'd pay!"

CHAPTER XI

A LOVE THAT PERSEVERED

Lillian Drew, as she had said, was not as high as she once was; so David, after making plain to her his poverty, managed to put her off with fifteen dollars—though for this amount she refused to turn over the letters. Before giving her the money he asked if she had kept secret her knowledge of Morton, and her answer was such as to leave him no fear. "This kind of thing is the same as money in the bank; telling it is simply throwing money away."

After he had paid her, and she had gone, he fell meditating upon this new phase of his situation. She would soon come again, he knew that—and his slender savings could not outlast many visits. When his money was gone and she still made demands, what then, if the ending of the deal was not fortunate?

And, now that he was quieter, the irony of this new phase of his situation began to thrust itself into him. Here he was, forced to pay money that the world might continue to believe him a thief! He laughed harshly, as the point struck home. He and Rogers were a pair, weren't they!—the great fear of one that he might be found out to be a thief, the great fear of the other that he might be found out not to be a thief. What would Helen Chambers think if she knew that not only was he trying to pay a debt he did not owe, but that he was paying to retain that debt?

Presently Rogers came in and they started for lunch, first leaving a note that would send Kate Morgan on a long errand so as to have the office clear for a conference with the Mayor in the afternoon. As they passed through the hall they brushed by Jimmie Morgan, who hastily slipped a bottle into his pocket. The experiment with Kate's father had not been successful. David had advised Rogers to discharge him, but Rogers, while admitting that to do so seemed a necessity, said that it would be as well to wait two or three weeks, when the end of the land deal would send them all away. David needed no one to tell him that what kept the father in his place was the fear of the daughter's disappointment.

An hour later David and Rogers, accompanied by the Mayor, re-entered the office, and the three plunged into a discussion of matters relating to the deal. After a time the Mayor asked:

"Chambers ain't showed his hand in this thing at all yet, has he?"

"No," said Rogers.

"I s'pose he's savin' himself for the finishin' touches. He's like this chap Dumas that wrote them stories I used to like to read. He's got so many things goin' on together, he's only got time to hand out the original order and then take the credit when it's done. But say—did you see the way the Reverend What-d'you-call-him jumped on him this mornin' in the papers? No? You didn't. Well, it was about that hundred and fifty thousand he's tryin' to give to help found a seminary for makin' missionaries. The preacher ordered his church not to cast even one longin' look at the coin. He said it was devil's money, and said it was diseased with dishonesty, and mentioned several deals that Chambers had got people into, and left 'em on the sandy beach with nothin' but the skin God'd give 'em. Oh, he gave Chambers what was comin' to him! Me, I ain't never seen a diseased dollar that when it come to buyin', wasn't about as able to be up and doin' as any other dollar—but, all the same, I say hurrah for the preacher."

The dozen or more times David had been with Mr. Chambers he had met him socially, and he remembered him as a man of broad reading and interest, and of unfailing courtesy. David could not adjust his picture of the man to the characterisations he sometimes saw in the papers and magazines, and to the occasional vituperative outbursts of which that morning's was a fair example. So he now said with considerable heat:

"I certainly do not believe in the centralisation of such vast wealth in one man's purse, but, the rules of the game being as they are, I can't say that I have much sympathy with those persons who call a man a thief merely because he has the genius to accumulate it!"

"And neither do I, friend," said the Mayor soothingly. "If there's any gent I don't press agin my bosom, it's a sorehead. But I know about Chambers!—you set that down!" He paused for a moment, then asked meditatively: "I suppose Miss Chambers don't believe any o' them stories?"

"She believes the stories spring either from jealousy, or vindictiveness, or from a totally mistaken impression of her father."

"I thought she must look at him about that way." The Mayor nodded thoughtfully. "D'you know, I've thought more'n once about her and her father. She's about as fine as they're turned out—

that's the way I size her up. Conscience to burn. Mebbe some o' these days she'll find out just what her old man's really like. Well, when she finds out, what's she goin' to do? That's what I've wondered at. Somethin' may happen—but I don't know. Blood's mighty thick, and when it's thickened with money—well, sir, it certainly does hold people mighty close together!"

David quickly shifted the conversation back to business. They were all agreed that success seemed a certainty.

Rogers turned his large bright eyes from one to the other. "There's only one danger of failure I can see."

"And that?" said David.

"If they find out I'm Red Thorpe."

"How'll they learn you're Red Thorpe?" The Mayor dismissed the matter with a wave of a great hand. "No danger at all."

"I suppose not. But I've been fearing this for ten years, and now that my work is coming to its climax I can't help fearing it more than ever."

"Two more weeks and you'll be on your way to Colorado," the Mayor assured him. "By-the-bye, have you had an answer yet from that sanitarium at Colorado Springs?"

"Yes. This morning. I want to show it to you; it's in the other room."

Rogers walked over the strip of carpet through the open door into the living room. The next instant David and the Mayor heard his strained voice demand:

"What're you doing here?"

They both hurried to the door. On Rogers's couch lay Jimmie Morgan. The half-swept floor, the broom leaning against a chair, and the breath of the bottle, combined to tell the story of Morgan's presence.

"What're you doing here?" Rogers demanded, his thin fingers clutching the old man's shoulder.

Morgan rose blinking to his elbows, then slipped to his feet.

"Sweepin'," he said with a grin.

"Why weren't you doing it then?"

"I must 'a' had failure o' the heart and just keeled over," explained Morgan, still grinning amiably.

The Mayor sniffed the air. "Yes, smells exactly like heart failure."

"Yes, it was my heart," said old Jimmie, more firmly, and he began to sweep with unsteady energy.

Rogers, rigidly erect, watched him in fearing suspicion for a space, then said, "Finish a little later," and led him through the other door of the room into the hall. When the door had closed Rogers leaned weakly against it.

"What's the matter?" cried David.

"D'you think he heard what we said about Red Thorpe?"

"Him!" said the Mayor. "Didn't you bump your nose agin his breath? Hear?—nothin'! He was dead to the world!"

"He didn't hear me come up," returned Rogers with tense quiet. "When I saw him first his eyes were open."

"Are you sure?" asked David.

"Wide open. He snapped them shut when he saw me."

They looked at each other in apprehension, which the Mayor was first to throw off. "He probably didn't hear nothin'. And if he did, I bet he didn't understand. And if he did understand, what's he likely to do? Nothin'. You've been a friend to him and his girl, and he ain't goin' to do you no dirt. Anyhow, in a week or two it'll all be over and you'll be pointed toward Colorado."

They heard Kate enter the office and they broke off. The Mayor, remarking that he had to go, drew David out into the hall.

"He dreams o' troubles—I've got 'em," the Mayor whispered. "I asked her to fix the weddin' day last night. She'd been leadin' up to it so much I couldn't put off askin' any longer. And o' course I had to ask it to be soon—oh, I've got to play the part, you know! Did she put it away off in the comfortable distance? Not her! She said she could get ready in a month. Now what d'you think o' that? Who ever heard of a woman gettin' ready in a month! She said since I seemed so anxious she'd make it four weeks from yesterday. Only twenty-seven more days!

"And say, you remember all them lies I told her about myself when I was tryin' to scare her off. Well, she's already begun to throw my past in my face! Rogers there, he dreams o' troubles—but,

oh Lord, wouldn't I like to trade!"

With a dolorous sigh the Mayor departed and David went into the office. As he sat down at his desk Kate Morgan looked sharp questions at him—questions concerning Lillian Drew. She did not speak her questions that afternoon, but they had planned a walk for the evening and they were hardly in the street when the questions began to come. David was instantly aware that the Kate Morgan beside him was the Kate Morgan of a year ago, whose impulses were instantly actions and whose emotions were instantly words.

"Who was that woman this morning?" she demanded.

"Her name is Lillian Drew."

He offered her his arm, but she roughly refused it.

"Who is she?"

"I know little of her; I have spoken to her but once before," he answered evasively.

But in thinking he could parry her with evasion, he had forgotten her old persistent directness. "I know better—you know a great deal about her! And she has something to do with you. Do you suppose I didn't see that in a second this morning?"

David looked with dismay down on the tense face the light from shop-windows revealed to him. He saw that she had to be answered with facts or blank refusals, and he studied for a moment how much of the first he could give her.

"Except for one glimpse of her in the street I haven't seen her for five years—" he was beginning guardedly, when she broke in with,

"That was just before you were sent away?"

"Yes."

Like a flash came her next question. "And it was for her you stole the money? She got the five thousand dollars?"

He was fairly staggered. "I cannot say," he returned.

She quickly moved a step ahead, and looked straight up into his face. "A-a-h!" she breathed. "So that's it!"

"I tell you that, except for a mere glimpse the other day, I never saw her but once before in my life; and that before that time I had never even heard the name; and that, since then, I had never heard of her or seen her till to-day."

Her gaze fairly pierced to his inner self. "You wouldn't lie to me—I know that," she said abruptly. "But she's got some hold on you; she means something in your life—don't she?"

"I've told you all I can tell you," David answered firmly.

She exploded. "I hate her! You hear me?—I hate her!"

He did not answer, and they walked on to the eastward in silence, through streets effervescent with playing children. In Tompkin's Square they sat down on one of the benches which edged both sides of the curving walks and which were filled with husbands, wives, lovers, German and Jewish and Magyar, who had come out for an hour or two of the soft October air. David tried to draw Kate into casual conversation, but she remained silent, and soon they rose and walked on. After several blocks the window of a delicatessen store showed him she was more composed, and he again offered her his arm. She now took it.

Presently they saw the gleam of water at the end of the street, and continuing they came out upon a dock. It was crowded with trucks, and against its one side creakingly rubbed a scow loaded with ashes and against its other a scow ridged high with empty tin cans. Sitting in the tails of some of the trucks were parlourless lovers—their courtship flanked by garbage, presided over by the odour of stables. They did not break their embraces as David and Kate brushed by them and passed on to the end of the dock.

Kate sank upon the heavy end timber and gazed at the surging tide-river that swept along under the moonlight. It came to David, who leaned against a snubbing-post at her side, that this was the very dock on which he had stood on New Year's eve; and half his mind was thinking of the hopelessness of that night and of the bitter days preceding it, when a whispered "David" reached up to him.

He glanced down. The moon, which dropped full into her face, revealed no hardness—showed appealing eyes and a mouth that rippled at its corners.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I hate her—yes." Her voice flamed slightly up with its old fire, but it immediately subsided into tremulous appeal. "But I had no right to talk to you like I did. I can't brag about what I've been, you know."

"There, let's say no more about it," he said gently.

"Yes, I must. I've been thinking about myself while we were walking along. Thinking of your past isn't always pleasant, is it, when there's so much of it that don't suit you. But I've wanted to improve, and I've tried. Do you think I've improved, a little—David?"

The wistful voice drew his hand upon her shoulder.

"I wish I had grown as much!" he breathed.

She pressed his hand an instant to her cheek, then rose and peered up into his face. "Do you say that!" she said eagerly. "If I've tried to improve—you know why."

He looked quickly from her tremulous face, out upon the million-faceted river. He writhed at the pain she must be feeling now, or would some day feel, and was abased that he was its cause.

"Oh, why did things have to happen so!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

"What happen?"

"That you should want—to please me."

She did not speak at once, but her hand locked tightly upon his arm and he felt her eyes burning into him. At length she whispered, in a voice taut with emotion:

"Then you still care—for *her*?"

He nodded.

She was again silent, but the locked grip told him of her tensity.

"But she's impossible to you. She lives in another world. You still believe this?"

"Yes."

Silence. "And I'm still next?"

"Yes."

"And do you like me any less than you did at first?"

He looked back upon her impulsively, and caught her hands.

"This is a miserable affair, Kate!" he cried. "Can't we forget it—wipe it out—and be just friends?"

"Do you like me any less than you did at first?" she repeated.

"More!"

Her next words tumbled out breathlessly. "I'll keep on improving—you'll like me more and more—and then—!"

Her impetuous force fairly dazed him.

"Ah, David!" she whispered almost fiercely, gripping his hands, "you can't guess how I love you!"

He could not bear her passionate eyes, they pained him so—and he looked back across the river to where a blast furnace was thrusting its red fangs upward into the night. There was a silence, broken only by the monotonous chatter of the ripples among the piles below. Then she went on, still tense, but quieter, and slightly meditative.

"Nor how differently I love you. Sometimes there is a tiger in me, and I could kill anyone that stood between us. And then again I'm not the same person; I want first of all what is the best thing for you. When I feel this way I would do almost anything for you, David. I think"—her voice dwindled to the barest whisper—"I think I could almost give you up."

CHAPTER XII

MR. CHAMBERS TAKES A HAND

Mr. Alexander Chambers sat in the center of his airy private office, panelled to the ceiling in Flemish oak, looking through the selections from the Monday morning's mail his secretary had just laid upon his great glass-topped desk. His lofty forehead, crowned with soft, white hair, made one think of the splendid dome of Walter Scott. But below the forehead, in the face that was beginning to be netted with fine wrinkles, there was neither poetry nor romanticism: power, that was all—power under perfect mastery. The gray eyes were quiet, steady; the mouth, half hid under a thick, short-cropped, iron-gray moustache, was a firm straight line; the jaw was a great triangle with the squared apex as a chin. Facetious persons sometimes referred to that triangular chin as "Chambers's cowcatcher;" but many there were who said that those that got in Chambers's way were never thrown aside to safety, but went down beneath the wheels.

As he skimmed the letters through with a rapidity that in him seemed ease, there was nothing about him to suggest the "human dynamo," which has come to be the popular conception of the

man of vast business achievement—no violent outward show of effort, no whirring of wheels, no coruscating flashes of escaping electricity. He ran noiselessly, effortlessly, reposefully. Those who knew him intimately could no more have imagined Alexander Chambers in a strain than Providence.

He glanced the last letter through—a report from Mr. Jordon on the negotiations for the land controlled by Rogers—pushed the heap aside and touched a button. Immediately there entered a young man of twenty-eight or thirty.

"Please have Mr. Jordon come over as soon as he can," Mr. Chambers said in a quiet voice to his secretary.

"Yes, sir. I was just coming to tell you, when you rang, that Mr. Allen is waiting to see you."

"Have him come in."

As Allen entered Mr. Chambers raised his strong, erect figure to his feet and held out his hand with a smile. "How are you, Allen. You look as fresh as a spring morning."

"Then I look as I feel. I'm just back from Myrtle Hill. It was a glorious two days—though we missed you a lot."

"Come now, some of the party may have missed me—but you, did you think of me once?" Those who knew Mr. Chambers in a business way alone, would have felt surprise at the humorous wrinkles that radiated from the outer corners of his eyes. "The next time I arrange for a weekend party I'll see that the wires to Boston are cut. But how did you leave Helen?"

They sat down. "With nothing to be desired in point of health"—Allen hesitated a moment—"and everything to be desired in point of her regard for me."

Mr. Chambers considered Allen's strongly masculine face. "You'll win her in the end, as you've won everything else—by fighting right on. There's no one that ranks higher with her than you."

"She's told me if an edict were passed compelling her to marry to-morrow, I'd be the man. But—she's not eager for the edict."

"You've won her head, at least. That's progress."

"Not even all her head. She disapproves of my ideas. She made that clear to me again yesterday. I tell you, I do wish her concern in St. Christopher's and such things could be—well, at least lessened quite a bit."

"That's hardly possible—her concern is too deeply rooted." Mr. Chambers shook his head reminiscently. "She has it from her mother."

"Yes, but the strength with which she holds to it—that she has from you. I suppose there is little chance of uprooting her convictions. But—I feel I've gained one concession."

"Yes?"

"She's promised at the end of five weeks to give me her yes or no."

Mr. Chambers leaned forward and grasped Allen's hand. "You know which answer I want. And I'm sure it will be that."

They looked at each other steadily a moment, then settled back into their chairs.

"Now about that merger," said Allen. "That's what brought me in." And Allen, who handled the legal side of many of Mr. Chambers's affairs, began to discuss certain legal details of a railroad consolidation Mr. Chambers had under consideration.

The instant Allen was out of the office, the secretary announced Mr. Jordon and at Mr. Chambers's order ushered him in. Mr. Jordon, a man whom prosperity had flushed and bulked, wished Mr. Chambers good morning with that little tone of deference which a successful business man uses to a more successful business man, and seated himself in the leather-covered chair Allen had just vacated.

Mr. Chambers picked up Mr. Jordon's letter from the heap on his desk.

"I wanted to speak to you about the price this Mr. Rogers insists on for the land he controls," he said in his even voice. "It is at a far higher rate than we paid for the rest of the land. You've done all that's possible to get him to lower his terms?"

"Everything!" For emphasis Mr. Jordon clapped two fat hands down upon two fat knees. "But he's as solid as a rock. If we were dealing with the real owners individually, it would be different. They're anxious to sell and they're all short on nerve. It's him that holds them together and keeps them braced up."

"I suppose you've tried to get them to withdraw their land from his control?"

"I tried that long ago. But it wouldn't work. He's promised them a big price, and he's made them believe they'll get it."

"Then you think as you say here"—he laid his hand upon the letter—"that we'd better pay him

what he demands and close the deal?"

"I certainly do. We've got to have that land, and to get it we've got to pay his price. He knows that and he won't come down a dollar. Since we've got to pay the price in the end, I'm for paying it right now and not losing any more time in launching the company before the public."

"Your reasoning is sound. But you're aware, of course, that the difference between his price and the rate we've been paying is considerably over fifty thousand?"

"Yes, but we're not going to lose money on it even at that." Mr. Jordon nodded knowingly. "Besides, when we come to counting up the profits on the whole deal, we'll never miss that fifty thousand."

"Fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Jordon," Mr. Chambers said quietly, "is fifty thousand dollars."

Mr. Jordon blushed as though caught in an ill deed. "Yes—yes—of course," he stammered. "We don't want to lose it, but how are we going to help it?"

Mr. Chambers did not answer—gave no sign of having noticed the other's embarrassment. "Suppose we have a meeting here to-morrow afternoon, and try again to get him to lower his price."

"Very well—I'll write him to be here. But I warn you that he'll not come down a cent."

"Then I suppose we'll have to settle on some other basis." There was a moment's pause. "By the way, who is this Mr. Rogers?"

"Never heard of him till I ran across him in this deal. Nobody seems to know much about him. He's just a little two-for-a-cent agent that was cute enough to see this chance and grab it."

Mr. Chambers said no more, and Mr. Jordon, seeing that use for himself was over, departed.

Mr. Chambers had an instinct for loss that was like a composer's ear for false notes. In his big financial productions he detected a possible loss instantly; it pained him as a discord, and he at once set about correcting it. The New Jersey Home Company was but one of the many coexisting schemes that had sprung from his creative brain, and the fifty thousand dollars was a beggar's penny compared to the sums that floated through his mind. But the fifty thousand dollars was a loss, a flaw, and he could not pass it by.

Mr. Chambers had the theory, proved by long practice, that many men have something hidden away in their lives which if discovered and properly used, or some vulnerable business spot which if struck, will so disable them that they cannot stand up against your plans. This theory, applied, had turned for him many a hopeless struggle into a quiet, easy victory—so that it had become his practice, when dealing with a man whose past life and whose present business relations he did not know, to acquaint himself with all that could be uncovered.

The moment Mr. Jordon had gone Mr. Chambers wrote a line, requesting full information about Rogers, and enclosed it in an envelope which he addressed to the man who usually served him in such confidential matters. He touched a button and handed the note to his secretary. "See that Mr. Hawkins gets this at once," he said.

That afternoon a man, whom David afterward remembered as a diamond ring, a diamond shirt-stud and a heavy gold watch-chain, walked into the office of John Rogers.

"Is this Mr. Rogers?" he asked of David, who was alone in the room.

"No. Aldrich is my name. But I represent him. Can I do anything for you?"

"I'd like to see him if I can. I'm thinking of investing in some real estate in this neighbourhood, and I've been looking at a couple of houses that I was told he was agent for."

"I'll call him—wait a minute."

David went into the living room, and at once returned. "Mr. Rogers will be right in," he said.

"Thanks." The man turned his pinkish face about the room. "Cosy little office you've got, for this part of town," he remarked, with an air of speaking pleasantries to kill time.

"Yes—we think so."

"How long's Mr. Rogers been interested in real estate in this neighbourhood?"

"I've been with him for less than a year, so I don't exactly know. But I believe about eight or nine years."

"In the same business before then?"

But the entrance of Rogers at that instant saved David a reply. The caller, who had sat down, rose and held out his hand.

"Is this Mr. Rogers? Harris is my name—William Harris."

Rogers, as he came up, laid hold of the back of a chair. He did not see Mr. Harris's hand.

"I'm glad to meet you," he returned in his low voice. "Won't you sit down?"

The three took chairs, and the next hour was filled with talk about the houses Mr. Harris had examined. Mr. Harris was very eager for the buildings, and David became excited at the prospect of the agent's commission that would come from the sale. But Rogers was quiet and reserved as always—answering all questions fully, save a few casual personal queries which he evaded. When Mr. Harris went away he said in so many words that the deal was as good as settled, except for a small difference in the price which would bother them little.

The instant the office door closed upon Mr. Harris David turned eagerly to Rogers, who was sitting motionless in his chair.

"Won't that be a windfall though if he takes those houses!" he cried. "Your commission will be at least two thousand dollars!"

There was no tinge of enthusiasm in Rogers's pale cheeks. He did not speak at once, and when he did he ignored David's exclamations.

"Did you notice, Aldrich," he said in a strained voice, "that I avoided taking his hand when he offered it at first and again when we parted?"

"No. Why?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid?" repeated David, puzzled. "What of?"

"I shook hands with Bill Halpin—and you know what he found out."

David stepped nearer to Rogers, and saw in his eyes the look of hunted fear.

"I don't understand," he said slowly.

"Mr. Harris may be a *bona-fide* dealer in real estate—but fifteen years ago he was one of the cleverest detectives on the New York police force. I recognised him the instant I saw him. He helped arrest me once."

David sank slowly to a chair. "You don't say so!" he ejaculated. He stared for several moments at Rogers's thin face, on which he could now see the exhaustion of the straining interview. "Do you think he can possibly be on your trail?—and if so, what for?"

"What for, I don't know. But didn't you notice how he was constantly studying me?—how he slipped in a question about what I used to do?—how he tried to learn the names of some of my friends, whom he might quiz about me? He's clever."

"But do you think he found out anything?"

"I don't think he did. I was watching him closer than he was watching me, for any least sign of recognition. I didn't see any. But you know I can't help fearing, Aldrich! I can't help fearing!"

David tried to drive the strained, hunted look from Rogers's face by saying that there was hardly any possibility of his identity being discovered, and no apparent motive for it being used against him even if found out. David succeeded in bringing back his own confidence, and at length drew from Rogers the admission, "Well, maybe you're right."

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE DEAL

The next morning when David glanced at the envelopes the postman had handed him he saw that one letter was from Mr. Jordon. He was ripping it open eagerly when he noticed the envelope beneath it bore the handwriting of Helen Chambers. He dropped Jordon's letter and excitedly opened the other. Its cordiality set him afire. She was just back in town for the winter, she wrote, and the following afternoon she would be at St. Christopher's. Would he care to come to meet her at about four for an hour's walk?

Would he! He had not seen her since the early summer—and how he had hungered to see her, speak with her, feel her near presence! He walked across the office, in which he was alone, half a dozen times before he took up the letter of Mr. Jordon. Mr. Jordon asked that Mr. Rogers and his associates be at the office of Mr. Chambers at three o'clock that afternoon. He hoped that they would be able to reach an agreement on terms and close the matter up.

David, the letter in his hand, was rushing into the living room to read the news to Rogers, when he saw, through the open hall-door, the ample form of the Mayor passing out. He captured the Mayor and led him in to the side of the couch on which Rogers was lying.

"Listen to this, will you!" David cried, and excitedly read the letter. "Did you take in that sentence

at the last?—'I hope that we will at length be able to agree on terms.' Now what do you think that means?"

"It means," said the Mayor, explosively, "that they've woke up and see that you ain't never goin' to come down to them, they've got to come up to you! It means that you've won!"

Rogers's sunken eyes flamed, and he stood up. "It seems so!" he breathed.

They all seized hands. "This don't mean much to me personally, for I've only got a little in it," said the Mayor, "but I certainly have the glad feeling on your account, Rogers. You can clear right out to a land where the air was made for breathin' purposes. Here in New York the air ain't good for much except fillin' in lots. Yes sir, Rogers, I'm certainly glad!"

They talked on excitedly, as men do who are but a step from success. David was glad, too, on Rogers's account, for he saw afresh how thinly disease had sculptured his cheeks and nose, and how deeply it had chiselled about the eyeballs, and to what a slender shaft it had carved the neck. Also he was ablaze with gladness on his own account. Success, but a few hours off, meant the partial clearing of his name. His mind exulted over the details of the scene to-morrow afternoon when he would tell Helen Chambers he had the means to pay his debt to St. Christopher's.

In the course of the morning Mr. Harris dropped in. He asked for Rogers, but David said that Rogers was out. For half an hour the detective talked about the houses in which he was interested, now and then slipping in a guileless question about Rogers. But David was on his guard; he matched his wits against Mr. Harris's, and when at length the detective went away David was certain he was no wiser than when he came.

At half past two the Mayor thrust his head into the office and, seeing Kate was there, beckoned David into the hall. The Mayor had never before been at elbows with a real money king, so for him the meeting was a new experience; and despite his ire toward Mr. Chambers he was prompted to make his appearance before royalty in fitting court costume.

"D'you think I look all right?" he asked, anxiously.

David surveyed the Mayor's bulky figure. There was a silk hat with not a single hair in disarray, a long light overcoat, a pair of fresh gloves that were staringly tan, and the most gorgeous vest in the Mayor's closet. David could have wished that the whole scheme of dress had been pitched in a lower key, but he criticised nothing but the vest.

"If that's all you kick about, then I'm O. K.," the Mayor said complacently, smoothing a yellow glove over the silken pinks. "You've give me some good points, but when it comes to vests, friend—well, you ain't got no real taste for vests."

He walked to the door and looked out. "There comes our carriage," he called. "Get Rogers and we'll be movin'."

"Carriage!" cried David.

"Sure. D'you think we're goin' to let Chambers and his bunch think we're a lot o' cheapskates? Not much. We're goin' to do this thing proper."

"But Mr. Chambers himself uses the street cars."

"Well, he can afford to," the Mayor returned with equanimity. "We can't."

When David walked with Rogers to the carriage he would not have been surprised had the Mayor handed them for their lapels a bunch of roses knotted with ribbon. They settled back against the cushions and suspense silenced them—and with hardly a word they rumbled over to Broadway, down into Wall Street and up before Mr. Chambers's office.

As they stepped from the carriage, Rogers's thin fingers gripped David's hand like taut cords. Clasp, face, and the feverish fire in his eyes told David how great was the strain Rogers bore. This was the climax of his life.

David returned the pressure of his hand. "It'll be all right," he whispered reassuringly.

They went up the broad steps into a tiled hallway, and turned to their right to the entrance of the private banking house of Alexander Chambers & Co. An erect, liveried negro, whose stiffly formal manners suggested a spring within him, admitted them into a great light room, in which, behind a partition of glass and bronze grating that half reached the ceiling, sat scores of men working swiftly without appearance of speed. A word and a lifted finger from the black automaton directed them to the far end of the room. Here a man with the bearing of a statesman, Mr. Chambers's doorkeeper, bowed them into three leather-seated chairs, and carried their names into Mr. Chambers's private secretary.

They did not speak; the nearness of the climax awed even the Mayor. And to add to the suspense throbbing within him, David began to wonder how he would be greeted by Mr. Chambers, whom he had not seen since his ante-prison days.

Almost at once the doorkeeper reappeared, and with the subdued air that characterised the place, led them into a large office. The keen-faced secretary rose from a desk, ushered them through a door and into another office. At the great desk in the center of the room were Mr.

Chambers and Mr. Jordon.

The two men rose, and David's wonder as to how Mr. Chambers would receive him was at once relieved. An inclination of the head and a quiet, "Glad to see you, Mr. Aldrich"—that was all; nothing in his impassive face and manner to suggest that he remembered the prison-gap in David's life.

The Mayor had announced during the carriage drive that if "Chambers holds out his hand to me to be shook, I won't see nothin' but the ceilin'." But there was no opportunity thus to humiliate Mr. Chambers, for his response to the introduction was but a brief nod. So the Mayor could only declare his independence by opening the front of his overcoat, like a pair of doors, upon his brilliant waistcoat, and by gazing into Mr. Chambers's face with aggressive hauteur.

Mr. Jordon shook hands all around. "Well, I hope we'll settle things up to-day," he said. As to how things were going to be settled, he had not the slightest doubt. He was certain the afternoon would force Mr. Chambers to his way of thinking. A few minutes before Mr. Chambers had asked his opinion as to the result of the conference, and he had said, "They'll not give in; we've got to pay what they ask." Mr. Chambers had said nothing—which had not surprised him, for he knew it was instinctive with Mr. Chambers, even in such small matters as this, to let the completed act announce his purpose.

They all sat down, David, Rogers, and the Mayor in three leather-bottomed chairs which stood in front and to the right of Mr. Chambers's desk. To the left, in a row, were half a dozen other chairs. Mr. Chambers leaned slightly forward and folded his hands on his desk's plate-glass top.

"Let us go straight to the point of this matter," he began, addressing Rogers, who sat between David and the Mayor. "Mr. Jordon tells me you refuse to consider any sum less than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the land you control. Is that correct?"

"It is."

David's shoulder against Rogers told him that Rogers's lean frame was as rigid as the chair that held it.

"This then is your ultimatum?"

"It is."

"Just as I told you," nodded Mr. Jordon, who was at Mr. Chambers's elbow.

Mr. Chambers pressed a button beneath the desk and the door opened before his secretary.

"Please show in the others," he requested quietly.

The secretary bowed and the door closed.

"The others?" breathed Rogers; and he and David and the Mayor looked at each other.

"The others!" exclaimed Mr. Jordon. "What others?"

Mr. Chambers sat silent, with unchanged face. The next instant the door, opening, answered the question. Into the room hesitantly filed the five owners of the land Rogers controlled. Rogers, David, and the Mayor, and also Mr. Jordon, rose in astonishment. The five stopped and stared at Rogers's party; plainly the surprise was mutual.

Mr. Chambers, remaining in his seat, motioned the new-comers to the chairs at the left of his desk. "Be seated, gentlemen."

"What's this mean?" David asked, catching Rogers's arm.

Rogers turned toward him, and for an instant David felt he was gazing into the abyss of fear. Then the arm he held tightened and Rogers looked toward his five clients and nodded.

"Good afternoon. I'm glad to see you," he said in an even tone.

They sat down again, and Rogers's eyes fastened on the finely wrinkled face of Mr. Chambers—as did every other pair of eyes in the room. They vainly strove to read the purpose behind that inscrutable countenance. The purpose was simple enough. By bringing together the two elements of Rogers's crowd, each ignorant that the other was to be present, unprepared with common replies, he had thought he might possibly play them against each other in a way to bring them to his price; and if not, he would at least have them all together, and so be able to make an immediate settlement upon their terms. He had had a faint hope that Mr. Hawkins might discover something significant, but a note from the detective during the morning had contained no single new fact.

Mr. Chambers did not give the surprised group time to readjust itself. "I have called together all parties interested in this transaction in order that we may more effectively reach an agreement, and in the hope that we may obviate the necessity for future meetings."

He fastened his gray eyes upon the five owners, who were looking very much at a loss, and spoke coldly, calmly, as though his decision were unchangeable and his words immutable facts. "First I desire to say that you gentlemen and your agent have a very inflated idea of the value of your property. The price is one we cannot, and will not, pay. If you want to take what we offer, very

well. If not, I assure you that we shall run no streets, water-mains, sewers or gas pipes near your tract. We shall leave the neighbourhood of your property entirely unimproved. You will recall that our land lies between yours and the car line; we shall forbid anybody living on your land crossing our land. Nobody else is going to buy your land under these conditions. You can sell it only to us."

The owners, struck while off guard, were dazed; and David, Rogers, and the Mayor, who had expected the exact opposite of this talk, were completely taken back.

The cold, dominant voice went on. "Such being the situation, does it not seem better to accept our price, which is a fair price, than to have your land made unsaleable, to have your investment tied up for years to come?"

He centered his personality upon the weakest of the five. "I'm sure you think so, do you not?"

The man blinked—then nodded his head.

"But—" began Rogers.

"And you, I'm sure you think so," Mr. Chambers demanded of another owner.

"Ye-e-s," said the man.

This was child's play to Mr. Chambers, who had browbeaten and overpowered even the directors of great corporations. He tried to rush his plan through, before the men could recover.

"It is plain you are all agreed. You see how your clients stand, Mr. Rogers. It certainly seems the only course to settle this matter at once upon the basis of our offer, which seems to them fair and just."

Rogers saw that awe of the great financier and his intimidating statments had fairly stampeded his clients. Fighting down the momentary sense of defeat, and not heeding Mr. Chambers's words to him, he fixed his great burning eyes on the five men.

"Gentlemen!" he said desperately. They shifted their gaze from Mr. Chambers to him. "Gentlemen, I want to assure you that if we hold out we will get our own price. I happen to know they've just bought a piece of ground beyond ours; without ours it will be worthless to them. They've got to have our land! You understand? Simply got to have it!"

The Mayor lifted an emphatic yellow hand toward the owners. "Of course they have! And don't you listen to no bluffin'."

Rogers continued to talk for several minutes; and gradually confidence and determination came into the manner of the five. At the end Rogers turned to Mr. Chambers.

"We shall stand out for our price," he said firmly.

Mr. Chambers had wrecked railroads in order to buy them in at a lower rate, but the similar procedure which he had threatened did not seem worth while here. He had tried his plan, which he had known had only a chance of success, and it had failed. There was but only one thing to do —to yield.

He was thoughtful for several moments. "If we should refuse your terms, we of course in the end would buy your land at our own price. But it occurs to me that the bother and extra cost of improving the land and opening it up at a later date, might be as much as the difference between your price and ours. What do you think, Mr. Jordon?"

"There's much in what you say," returned the general manager, guardedly.

Rogers, David, and the Mayor exchanged quick, triumphant glances. They had won.

Mr. Chambers again relapsed into his appearance of thoughtfulness, and they all sat waiting for him to speak. David laid his hand on Rogers's and pressed it exultantly.

While Mr. Chambers still sat thus, the office door opened and his secretary apologetically tiptoed across the room with a letter in his hand.

"I told Mr. Hawkins you were engaged, but he insisted that this was important," the secretary said to Mr. Chambers, and withdrew.

Mr. Chambers read the note, thought a moment, slowly folded the sheet, then raised his eyes.

"Before going further, there is one point—of no importance, I dare say it will prove to be—that it might be well for us to touch upon." He centered his calm gaze upon the five owners. "Since you have intrusted Mr. Rogers with the management of your property I take it that he has your fullest confidence?"

"Ye-es," said one hesitatingly, and the others followed with the same word.

"Your confidence, of course, is founded on thorough acquaintance?"

David glanced from the impassive Mr. Chambers to Rogers. The mask of control had fallen from his face. He was leaning forward, his whole being at pause, his face a climax of fear and suspense.

A succession of slow "Yes-es" came from the owners.

"Then of course," Mr. Chambers went on in his composed voice, "you are perfectly aware that Mr. Rogers is a man with a long criminal career."

A shiver ran through Rogers; he stiffened, grew yet whiter. There was a moment of blankest silence. Then the Mayor sprang up, his face purpling.

"It's an infernal lie!" he shouted.

Consternation struggled on the faces of the five; they looked from the rigid, white figure of Rogers to the calm face of Mr. Chambers.

"It isn't so," declared one tremulously.

"We will leave the question to Mr. Rogers," said Mr. Chambers's unexcitable voice, and he pivoted in his chair so that his steady eyes pointed upon Rogers. "If Mr. Rogers is not 'Red Thorpe,' the one time notorious safe-blower, with scores of burglaries and three terms in the penitentiary against him, let him say so. However, before he denies it, I shall tell him that I have all the police data necessary for his identification. Now, Mr. Rogers."

Their gaze on Rogers's face, all waited for him to speak—Jordon, astounded, the five pale with the fear of loss, the Mayor glowering, David with a sense that supreme ruin was crushing upon them.

At length Rogers's lips moved. "It is true," he whispered.

"What if it is?" roared the Mayor at Mr. Chambers. "There's nothin' agin him now!"

"I'm making no charges against him," returned Mr. Chambers. "This is merely some information it seemed his clients might be interested in having."

All eyes again turned upon Rogers. He came slowly to his feet, walked to Mr. Chambers's desk, leaned his hands upon it and directed his large burning eyes down into Mr. Chambers's face.

"I have done many bad things, yes," he said in a voice, low, flame-hot, "but nothing as bad as you have just done. You have stolen more this minute than I have stolen in my lifetime."

He held his eyes, blazing with accusation, upon Mr. Chambers's imperturbable face for several moments, then looked about on the five owners. There was a chance, a bare chance, they might not turn against him.

"Yes, I am Red Thorpe," he said in a vibrant voice that became more and more appealing with every word. "I knew it would be found out—some day. There are some things I always told myself I'd say to the world when this day came. But to you I want to say only this: For ten years I've been honesty itself. I've been honest with you—you know it. If you stand by me, I'll do everything I've promised."

He stood rigid, awaiting their verdict. There was a strained silence. The five looked dazedly at Rogers, at one another, completely at a loss.

"If the gentlemen desire to entrust their affairs to a most dangerous criminal, one who might defraud them of everything, that is their privilege," put in Mr. Chambers quietly.

Their bewilderment was gone; Mr. Chambers's words had roused their property instinct. A murmuring rose among them.

David and the Mayor sprang up, but Rogers raised a hand and they remained beside their chairs. A flame began to burn in his white cheeks, in his deep eyes.

"I knew this day was coming," he said in a low voice, that had a wild bitter ring of challenge. "Instead of you, you weaklings"—he looked at the five—"and you, you mere soulless Acquisition"—his eyes blazed at Mr. Chambers—"I wish I had the world before me. I'd like to tell it what a vast fool it is in its treatment of such as me—how eyeless and brainless and soulless! Oh, what a fool!... But the world's not here."

He was silent for a moment. "And why am I at an end?—why?" His answer rang through the room with a passionate resentment, with an agony of loss. "Because the world did not care to step in and point the right way to me. To have saved me would have been so easy! I was worth saving! I had brains—there was a man in me. Whose fault is it that I am now at the end?—a miserable remnant of a man! The world's. I was robbed of my chance in life—robbed, yes sir, robbed!—and I could have made it a splendid life! Ah, how I've wanted to make it a splendid life. And the world—the world that robbed me!—that world calls me criminal. And I must pay the penalty, and the penalty is—what you see! Oh, my God!"

For ten years Rogers had cherished the purpose of accusing the world on the day of his exposure—but now his loss was so overwhelming, speech to these people was so utterly useless, strength was so little, that he could say no more—could only, leaning against the desk, gaze in hatred and despair at Mr. Chambers and the owners. The faces of the five were pale and blank. There was a trace of sympathy in Mr. Jordon's face, and a momentary change in Mr. Chambers's that indicated—who knows what?

David sprang to Mr. Chambers's desk, his soul on fire.

"This, sir, is a damned inhuman outrage!" he flung down into the older man's face.

"It might also have been of interest to Mr. Rogers's clients," Mr. Chambers returned calmly, "to have known the record of Mr. Rogers's associate."

David's wrath had no time to fashion a retort, for the Mayor, at his side, hammered the desk with a great yellow-gloved fist. "That's what it is!" he shouted. "It's a low, dirty, murdering trick!"

"I merely acquainted his clients with his record—which they have a right to know."

A huge sarcastic laugh burst from the Mayor, and he pushed his face down into Mr. Chambers's.

"*You*," he roared, "you, when you're in a deal, you always show your clients *your record*, don't you!"

Rogers, out of whose cheeks the fire had gone, leaving them an ashen gray, tugged at their sleeves.

"It's no use!—let's go!" he begged, chokingly. "Quick!"

David's eyes blazed down upon Mr. Chambers. "Yes, let's leave the infernal thief!"

He took one of Rogers's arms, the Mayor, shaking a huge fist in Mr. Chambers's face, took the other, and they made for the door. Mr. Chambers, still seated, watched Rogers's thin figure, head pitched forward and sunken between his shoulders, pass out of the office. Brushing people out of his way had become the order of his life, and he did it impersonally, without malice, as a machine might have done it. And Rogers was one of the most insignificant he had ever brushed aside.

"Mr. Rogers, as of course you are aware, has not the rights of a citizen," Mr. Chambers said to the five. "Consequently his agreement with you is invalid; he can not hold you to it. If you will kindly wait in the next room a moment, Mr. Jordon will speak with you."

After they had filed out he remarked to Jordon: "They are stampeded. They will come to your terms. I leave them in your hands."

He touched the button on his desk and his secretary appeared. "If Senator Speed has come," he said, "ask him to step in."

When David and Rogers were home again, and the Mayor and his profanity had gone, there was a long silence during which both sat motionless. David searched his mind for some word of hope for Rogers, who was a collapsed bundle in a Morris chair, gazing through the window into the dusky air-shaft.

At length he bent before Rogers and took his hand. "We'll go to some new place together, and start all over again," he said.

Rogers turned his face—the only part of him that the deepening twilight had not blotted out. It seemed a bodyless face—the mask of hopelessness.

"It's no use—I'm all in," he whispered. "Even if I had the courage to make another fight, there's no strength."

He was silent for several moments. Then a low moan broke from him. "Ten years!" he whispered. "And this is the end!"

BOOK IV

THE SOUL OF WOMAN

CHAPTER I

HELEN CHAMBERS GETS A NEW VIEW OF HER FATHER

The morning light that sunk down the deep air-shaft and directed its dimmed gaze through the window, saw Rogers lying dressed on the couch and David sitting with sunken head at the window, a sleepless night on both their faces. There had been little talk during the crawling hours, save when the Mayor had dropped in near midnight and set walls and furniture trembling with his deep chest-notes of profanity. Even Tom, awed by the overwhelming disaster, moved noiselessly about and spoke only a few whispered monosyllables. The blow was too heavy to be talked of—too heavy for them to think of what should next be done.

Once, however, David, whose personal loss was almost forgotten in his sympathy for Rogers, had

spoken of the future. "There is no future," Rogers had said. "In a few days the owners of my buildings will hear about me. They will take the agency from me. I have a few hundred dollars. That will soon go. And then—?"

The dinginess in the light began to settle like the sediment of a clearing liquid, and the sense that the sun must be breakfast-high worked slowly to the seat of David's will. He rose, quietly set a few things in order, Rogers's eyes following him about, then put on his hat with the purpose of going to the Pan-American for his breakfast and to bring Rogers's.

As he started for the door Rogers reached forth his hand. "I'm glad you found out about me, Aldrich," he said. "I can never tell you how much you've meant to me during the last eight months, and how much you mean to me now."

David grasped the hand and looked down into the despairing eyes. "I'm glad," he said, simply.

After a moment Rogers's weak grip relaxed and he turned away his face with a sigh. David went softly out.

While David was at breakfast—his appetite shrunk from it—the Mayor sat down at his table, which had the privacy of an empty corner. "By the way," the Mayor whispered, "d'you have any idea yet how Chambers found out?"

"No more than yesterday. We told you of the call of that detective. He must have been from Chambers, and he must have made the discovery. But how, we don't know."

"Poor Rogers!" The Mayor shook his head sadly, thoughtfully. His face began slowly to redden and his eyes to flash. He thrust out a big fist. "Friend, I don't believe in fightin'—but say, I'd give five years to flatten the face that belongs to Mr. Chambers!"

David had to smile at the idea of the Mayor and Mr. Chambers engaged in fisticuffs. "It's sad, but men like Mr. Chambers are beyond the reach of justice."

The Mayor dropped his belligerent attitude. "Oh, I don't know. Mebbe they can't be reached with fists, or law—but there's other ways. And I'd like to jab him any old way. I've been thinkin' about that daughter o' his. Wouldn't I like to tell her a few things about her dad!"

The Mayor swayed away in response to a summons from the kitchen, and a few minutes later David entered his room bearing in a basket Rogers's prescribed milk and soft-boiled eggs. Rogers drank down the eggs, which David had stirred to a yellow liquid, and after them the milk, and then with a gasp of relief sank back upon the couch. As David was clearing up after the breakfast he heard some one—Kate he guessed—enter the office, and presently there was a rap on the door between the two rooms. David opened the door and found, as he had expected, Kate Morgan. She wore her coat and hat, just as she had come from the street. On her face was a strange, compressed look, and her eyes were red-lidded.

"Can I come in?" she asked with tremulous abruptness.

"Please do," said David.

She entered and moved to the foot of the couch where she could look down on Rogers. "I've come to say something—and to say good-bye," she announced.

"Say good-bye?" Rogers sat up. "Good-bye? Why? Oh, you have a new position?"

"No. I've no right to be here. You won't want me when you know. So I'm going."

Her face tightened with the effort of holding down sobs. The two men looked at her in wonderment, waiting.

"You know how broke up I was when you told me about yesterday afternoon," she went on, "and how mad I was at Mr. Chambers. And then to find out what I have!... Here's what I've come to tell you. Yesterday afternoon and last night my father was drinking a great deal. I wondered where he got the money. This morning I went through his clothes while he was asleep; there were several dollars. I asked him about it. He lied to me, of course. But I got the truth out of him in the end.

"You remember that detective you told me about last night. When he left here yesterday about noon he happened to see my father sweeping off the sidewalk. He began to talk to my father, got my father to drinking, gave him some money. And after a while my father—he'd learned it somehow—he told the detective—he told him you were Red Thorpe."

The two men were silent a moment, looking at the strained face down which tears were now running.

"So that's how it happened!" Rogers breathed.

"Yes—my father told!" The tremor in her voice had grown to sharp sobs—of shame, agony, and wrath. "My father brought all this on you. And it's all because of me. If you both hadn't tried to be good to me, my father would not have been here and everything would have turned out right. It's all because of me!—all my fault!—don't you see? I know you'll both hate me now. I know you'll want me to go away. Well—I'm going. But I want to tell you how sorry I am—how sorry!... Good-bye."

David wanted to speak to her, but this was Rogers's affair rather than his.

She swept them both with her brimming eyes. "Good-bye," she said again, and turned to the door.

"Miss Morgan!" called Rogers.

She paused and looked at him.

"Don't go yet."

He rose and came to her with outstretched hand. "It wasn't your fault."

She stared dazedly at him. "You're ruined—you told me so last night, and I did it. Yes, I did it."

"No. You couldn't help it. You mustn't go at all."

She took his hand slowly, in astonishment. "Oughtn't I to go?" she quavered.

"You must stay and help bear it," he said.

She looked steadfastly into his eyes. "You're mighty good to me," she breathed in a dry whisper. And then a sob broke from her, and turning abruptly she went into the office.

In the afternoon David walked over to St. Christopher's to meet Helen Chambers. Besides his bitterness, and his suspense over seeing her, David felt as he entered the door of the Mission (what he had felt on his three or four previous visits) a fear of meeting some wrathful, upbraiding body who would recognise him. But he met no one except a group of children coming with books from the library, and unescorted he followed the familiar way to the reception room, where Helen had written she would meet him. This, like the rest of the Mission's interior he had seen, was practically unchanged; and in this maintenance of old arrangements he read reverence for Morton. He wandered about the room, looking at the friendly, brown-framed prints that summoned back the far, ante-prison days. The past, flooding into him, and his sense of the nearness of Helen, crowded out for the time all his bitterness over Rogers's destruction.

When Helen appeared at the door, he was for an instant powerless to move, so thrilled was he with his love for her. She came across the room with a happy smile, her hand held out. He strode toward her, and as he caught her hand his blood swept through him in a warm wave.

"I'm so glad to see you again!" she cried, and a little laugh told him how sincere her joy was.

A sudden desire struggled to tell her, truly, how great was his gladness, and its kind, at seeing her again; and fighting the desire back made him dizzy. "And I to see you!" he said.

"It's been—let's see—five months since I've seen you, and—"

"Five months and four days," the desire within David corrected.

"And four days," she accepted, with a laugh. "And there've been so many things during that time I've wanted to talk with you about. But how are you?"

She moved near a window. She was full of spirits this day. The out-door life from which she had just come, the wind, the sun, the water, were blowing and shining and rippling within her. David, in analysing his love for her, had told himself he loved her because of her able mind, her nobility of soul, her feeling of responsibility toward life. Had he analysed further he would have found that her lighter qualities were equally responsible for his love—her sense of humour, the freshness of her spirits, her joy in the pleasures of life. She had never shown him this lighter side with more freedom than now—not even during the summer seven years before when for two weeks they had been comrades;—and David, yesterday forgotten, yielded to her mood.

He frankly looked her over. She wore a tailor-made suit of a rich brown, that had captured some of the warm glow of sun-lit autumn, and a little brown hat to match on which bloomed a single red rose. Her face had the clear fresh brown of six months' sun, and the sun's sparkle, stored in her deep eyes, beamed joyously from them. She was a long vacation epitomised, idealised.

"May I say," he remarked at length, with the daring of her own free spirit, "that you are looking very well?"

For her part, she had been making a like survey of him. His tall figure, which had regained its old erectness, was enveloped in clothes that fit and set it off; and his clean-lined face, whose wanness had been driven away by the life in hers, looked distinguished against the background of the dark-green window hangings.

"You may," she returned, "if you will permit me to say the same of you."

"Of me? Oh, no. I'm an old man," he said exultantly. "Do you know how old I am?" He touched his head. "See! The gray hairs!"

"Yes—at least a dozen," she said gravely. "Such an old man!"

"Thirty-one! Isn't it awful?"

"Twenty-eight—that's worse for a woman!"

They looked at each other solemnly for a moment. Then she broke into a laugh that had the music of summer, and he joined her.

Her face became more serious, but all the sparkle remained in it. "There are so many things I want to talk over with you. One is a check my father has just given me. Every autumn he gives me a sum to spend on philanthropic purposes just as I see fit—he never asks me about it. The check's for twenty thousand dollars. I thought you might have some suggestions as to what to do with it—something in line with what we have often talked about. But we'll speak of that and some other things later. First of all, have you heard anything from your book?"

"Not a word."

"You will—and favourably, I am sure. I want to say again what I've written—I think it's splendid as a piece of literary work and splendid as a work of serious significance. And Uncle Henry is just as enthusiastic as I am."

David reddened with pleasure, and his enthusiasm, dead for over a month now, began to warm with new life. Her eyes were looking straight into his own, and the love that had several times urged him beyond the limits of discretion, now pressed him again—and again all his strength was required to hold it silent.

"But come!—we were to walk, you know," she said, smiling lightly. "I'll prove that I'm the better walker."

During their silent passage through the halls to the Mission door, it returned to him that she was the daughter of the man who, by an even-toned word, had destroyed one of his hopes and utterly destroyed all of Rogers's. His high spirit, which had been but a weaker reflection of her own, faded from his face, leaving it tired and drawn; and she, looking up at him, saw the striking change.

"Why, have you been ill?" she exclaimed.

A grim little smile raised the corners of his mouth. "No."

"Then you've been working too hard. What have you been doing since you finished your book?"

He briefly told of his discharge and his acceptance of a position with Rogers—and while he spoke his refluent bitterness tempted him to go on and tell her father's act of yesterday.

"But this was over a month ago," she said when he had ended. "Have the expected developments in Mr. Rogers's business taken place?"

"Tell her all," Temptation ordered. He resisted this command, and then Temptation approached him more guilefully. "Tell her all, only give no names but yours and Rogers, and no clues that would enable her to identify her father." This appealed to David's bitterness, and instantly he began.

He told her Rogers's true story, which of course he had as yet not done—of Rogers's fight, so like his own—of Rogers's deception of the world for ten years that he might live honestly—of his loneliness during that time, his fears, his secret kindnesses—of the first stages of the real estate deal—of the vast meaning of success to Rogers, and of its meaning to himself—and finally of the happenings of the day before. "So you see," he ended, "this Mr. A. has utterly destroyed Mr. Rogers, in cold blood, merely that he might increase the profits of his company."

She had followed him with tensest interest, and indignation's flame in cheek and eye had grown higher and higher.

"Do you mean to say," she demanded, slowly, "that any man would do such a thing as that?"

"Yes—and a most respected citizen."

"It was heartless!" she burst out hotly. "That man would do anything!"

It filled David with grim joy to hear her pass such judgment upon her own father. At that moment he was untroubled by a single thought as to whether he had acted honourably to betray her into pronouncing judgment.

"That man should be exposed!" she went on. "Honourable business men should ostracise him. Won't you tell me his name? Perhaps my father can do something."

An ironic laugh leaped into David's throat. He checked it. "No, I cannot tell his name."

Her indignation against the destroyer gave way to sympathy for the destroyed. She saw Rogers defeated, despairing, utterly without chance. They came to David's street and her sympathy drew her into it.

"I'm so sorry for him!" she burst out. "So sorry! I wish I could do something. I'd like to go in and tell him what I feel—if you think he wouldn't mind that from a stranger."

"I'm afraid he would," said David, grimly.

They fell silent. As they drew to within a block of the house, David saw the Mayor of Avenue A,

whom he had left with Rogers, come down the steps and start toward them, which was also toward the café. The Mayor recognised them instantly, and a smile began to shine on his pink face. He had long been wanting to meet Helen, and now the chance was his. He came up, his overcoat spread wide at the demand of his vest, and, pausing, took off his hat with his best ball-room flourish.

"I've heard a great deal about you through Mr. Aldrich," Helen said, when David had introduced them. "I'm very happy to meet you."

"And I'm happy to meet you, miss," he returned, bowing, making a graceful sweep with his hat, and vigorously shaking the hand she had given him. "And me, I've heard about you a lot—and that long before I saw Mr. Aldrich.

"From St. Christopher's, I suppose."

"Yes, there—and elsewhere," said the Mayor, smiling gallantly. "On the society pages. I've seen lots o' pieces about you, and seen your picture there among the beauties of society."

The Mayor expected to see her blush with gratification and ask for more—as women always did. But she quickly shifted to another subject.

"Mr. Aldrich has just been telling me of a business affair you, he and Mr. Rogers have been engaged in."

"Oh, has he!"

The Mayor, in the agreeable experience of meeting Helen, had forgotten there was such a person as her father. But he was the gallant no longer. His feet spread apart, his face grew stern, and he looked Helen squarely in the eyes.

"Well," he demanded, "—and what do you think o' your father now?"

"My father?" she said blankly.

David caught his arm. "Keep still, Hoffman!" he cried roughly.

The Mayor looked from one to the other in astonishment. "What," he cried, "d'you mean you hadn't told her it was her father?"

The colour of summer faded slowly from Helen's face, and a hand reached out and caught a stoop railing. Her eyes turned piercingly, appealingly, to David. After a moment she whispered, "My father—was that man?"

He nodded.

Her head sank slowly upon her breast, and for moment after moment she stood motionless, silent.

The Mayor when he had thought of her as an instrument to strike her father, had not thought the instrument itself might be pained. Filled with contrition, he stammered: "Please, Miss, I'm sorry—I didn't mean to hurt you."

She did not answer; she seemed not to have heard. A moment later she lifted a gray, drawn face to David.

"Mr. Aldrich," she said tremulously, "will you please put me in a cab?"

In the cab she sat with the same stricken look upon her face. She had, as David had once said to the Mayor, always regarded her father as a man of highest honour. She had never felt concern in his business affairs, or any business affairs, despite the fact that her interests overreached in so many directions the usual interests of women, and despite the fact that her heart was in various material conditions which business had created and which business could relieve.

Seen from the intimate view-point of the home, her father was generous and kind. She had heard of the reports that circulated in the distant land of business, and she had glanced at some of the articles that had appeared in years past in magazines and newspapers, and she knew that stories were at this time current. Her conception of her father had given the silent lie to all these reports. She believed they sprang from jealousy, or false information, or a distorted view. They had troubled her little, save to make her indignant that her father was so maligned; and even this indignation had been tempered with philosophic mildness, for she had remembered that it had ever been a common fate of men of superior purpose, or superior parts, or superior fortune, to be misunderstood and to be hated.

But, all of a sudden, her conception of her father was shattered. This thing he had indubitably done was certainly not without the legal law, and perhaps not wholly without the cold lines of the moral—but it was hard-hearted, brutal. "The man who would do that would do anything," she had said to David; and all the way home in the cab this thought kept ringing through her consciousness, and kept ringing for days afterwards. It led logically and immediately to the dread question: "After all, may not these other stories be true?"

Helen did not belong to that easy-conscienced class who can eliminate unpleasantness by closing their eyes against it. She had to face her question with open vision—learn what truth was in it. She secured all she could find in print about her father and read it behind the locked door of her room. There was case after case in which her father, by skilful breaking of the law, or skilful compliance with it, or complete disregard of moral rights, had moved relentlessly, irresistibly, to his ends over all who had opposed him. The picture these cases drew was of a man it sickened her daughter-love to look upon—a man who was truly, as the articles frequently called him, an "industrial brigand," and whose vast fortune was the "loot of a master bandit."

The articles seemed woven of fact, but she could not accept them unsubstantiated. She must know the truth—beyond a single doubt. At the same time, she, her father's daughter, could not go to the men he had wronged, demanding proof. At length she thought of her Uncle Henry, whom she loved and trusted, and whom she knew to be intimately acquainted with her father's career.

To him she went one night and opened her fears. "Are these things true?" she asked.

And he said: "They are true."

She went away, grief-burdened, feeling that the whole structure of her life was tottering. And two questions that before had been vaguely rising, became big, sharp, insistent: What should be her attitude toward her father, whom she loved? And what should be her attitude toward his fortune, which she shared?

CHAPTER II

DAVID SEES THE FACE OF FORTUNE

When David had handed Helen into the cab, she had not spoken to him, had not even said, "Thank you," and had rolled away without giving him so much as a backward glance. He now felt it had been brutal, dishonourable, to trap her into denouncing her father and then to strike her with her father's guilt. He was certain she was deeply offended, and this conviction grew as day after day passed without a word from her.

But there were other things to be thought of during these days. There was his future—upon which, uncertain as it was, he saw that Lillian Drew was to be a parasite; for she had made another call (while Kate was out of the office; he was thankful for that) and had carried away the larger fraction of his small store of money. He was again workless—again at the base of that high, smooth wall which before he had been able to surmount only with, as it were, his last gasping effort.

What he should do, he had no idea. But his own future he thrust aside as being a less pressing problem than Rogers's future and Rogers's present. As Rogers had predicted, the fact that he was Red Thorpe quickly reached the ears of his clients, and they all lost no time in withdrawing their property from his charge. The owner who had forced David's dismissal as janitor demanded with the same delicacy that Rogers should vacate the rooms he occupied; but Rogers had a lease and, moreover, had paid a month's rent in advance, so they and their belongings were not tumbled into the street.

These days were for Rogers solid blackness. David had promised to share with him, but he saw that there was doubt of David's having anything to share. Even if David did, his bitter mood now looked upon that portion as charity, and little more agreeable to his pride than public charity—which he saw as a near-looming, shame-laden spectre, feared more than death. That he who had had the brains to achieve independence, who had been on the verge of fortune, should have been crushed to his present extremity—this filled him with wild revolt. Kate, with a subdued gentleness that begged to serve; Tom, with his alert willingness; David, with his constant presence and consideration; the Mayor, with his ever-ready vituperation and bluff words of hope that rang hollow;—they all tried to lift the draping blackness from about him—and failed, because they had nothing but blackness to hang in its place.

But some definite plan for the future had to be made, and Rogers himself made it. Since Colorado was not for him, he would, as soon as his month here was ended, secure as cheap a room as he could find and try to stretch his small funds to reach that final day when he would have no need of more.

Kate's father fell with the rest of the Rogers regime, and from the basement they moved into a couple of cheap rooms a few blocks away. David had often considered the relation between Kate and her father: aside from keeping him alive Kate was of no service to him—he was a terrible drag on her; if they could be separated, with his maintenance secured, he would be no worse off and she would be far better. David now talked the matter over with Rogers; together they talked it over with Kate, who finally yielded; and David enlisted the interest of Dr. Franklin in behalf of getting old Jimmie into an institution for inebriates.

There was little for Kate to do in Rogers's office, but she insisted on remaining and remaining without salary. "It's because of me all this happened—you may need me—I'm going to stay," she said to Rogers. "I've still got most of my last month's wages—two or three weeks will be soon

enough to get a job." And nothing Rogers urged could move her.

Tom begged to be allowed to go to work, but David prevailed on him to continue in school. "Something good will surely turn up," David said to the boy. But days went and nothing arose. David was on the point of yielding to Tom, when into the general gloom there shot, for him, a bright shaft of hope. Ten days after he had put Helen into the cab a letter came to him addressed in her handwriting. He hardly dared open it, for he expected reproof—delicately conveyed, of course, but still reproof. When he drew the letter from its envelope an enclosure fell unheeded to the floor. Instead of censure he found this:

> "It seems your address was not on your manuscript, so Mr. Osborne has sent the enclosed letter to you in care of me. I can hardly refrain from opening it. I feel certain there is good news in it. I congratulate you in advance!
>
> "You know how interested I am, so I know you'll come and tell me all about it just as soon as you learn the book's fate. You'll find me in almost any time."

David picked up the envelope—stamped in one corner with "William Osborne & Co," a name he had once worshipped from afar off—ripped it open and read the following, signed by Mr. Osborne himself:

> "We have been greatly interested in your story. If you will call at your convenience I shall be glad to talk with you about it."

David stared at the three type-written lines. The letter was not an acceptance—but then neither was it a rejection. A wild hope leaped up within him. Could it be here was a ladder up the unseizable wall? Could it be the success he had failed of five years before was at last about to be won? He dared not let himself be swept to these dizzy heights; he knew how far it was to the ground. So he told himself it could not be possible. Still, was there not a chance?

He slipped away without hinting of his hope to Rogers—there would be time for telling later, if anything was to tell—and at ten o'clock reached a little five-story brick building off Union Square that was the home of William Osborne & Co. At first he had not the courage to enter. He remembered, as he walked on, a manuscript novel he had left here in the long ago—and it came back to him that this was the very manuscript he had been working over on that day, now more than five years gone, when Morton's death had summoned him to St. Christopher's.

When he reached the door again he drove himself in and was swung to the top floor in a little creaking elevator, and before his courage had time to recede he was within a railed-off square in a large room and had given his name to a boy to be carried to Mr. Osborne. In a moment the boy returned and led him across the room, filled with sub-editors, manuscript readers and stenographers, and ushered him into a small private office. Here at a desk sat a white-haired man chatting with two visitors.

The white-haired man rose as David entered and smiled a kindly, spectacled smile. "I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Aldrich. If you'll excuse me for a minute, I'll be right with you."

David sat down in the chair Mr. Osborne indicated and waited with pulsing suspense for the two men to go. There, on one corner of Mr. Osborne's desk, which was littered with letters, manuscripts and magazine page-proofs, he saw his book. He felt, as he waited, almost as he had felt five years before during the suffocating minutes between the return of the jury with its verdict and the verdict's reading. The verdict on the book was ready. What was it to be?

At length the two men went away. Mr. Osborne turned from the door and came toward David, smiling cordially, his hand outstretched.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Aldrich!" he said heartily.

David rose and put a nerveless hand into Mr. Osborne's. "You mean—you like it?"

"Indeed I do! If you and I can come to an agreement, we shall be proud to publish it."

David gazed swimmingly at him. There was a whirling, a bubbling, within him—but he managed to say with fair control: "It's hardly necessary to tell an old publisher how happy a new author is to hear that."

Mr. Osborne sat down and David automatically did likewise.

"You, Mr. Aldrich, have particular reason to feel happy. We print a great many well-written, dramatic stories—stories which are just that, and no more. That, of course, is a great deal. But when a book, without impairment to its dramatic and artistic quality, leaves a profound impression regarding some aspect of life—that book has an element of bigness that the other stories lack. Mr. Aldrich, yours is such a story."

David felt he was reeling off his chair. "Yes?" he said.

Mr. Osborne went on to praise the book in detail. After a time he proposed terms. David took in hardly a word of the offer; his mind was over-running with his success, his praise. But he accepted the terms instantly.

This settled, Mr. Osborne picked up several yellowed type-written sheets from his disordered

desk. "By the way, are you the David Aldrich that submitted us a novel five or six years ago called 'The Master Knot?'"

"Yes," said David.

"I thought you might be interested in the readers' opinions on that story, so I had them brought in."

He handed the sheets to David, and when he saw David had glanced them through, he remarked: "You see they all amount to the same. 'The author knows how to write, but he does not know life.'" He gazed steadily at David through the kindly spectacles. "Since then, Mr. Aldrich, you have come to know life."

"I think I have." David strained to keep his voice natural.

"Yes, you have come to know life—to feel it." He paused, and considered within himself. For all his warmth, there had been in his tone and manner, caution, reserve. Suddenly these fell away, and he radiated enthusiasm.

"I try never to raise false hopes in a young author," he cried, "but I've got to say more than I've said. Really, I think I've made what a publisher is always looking for, hoping for—a great find, a real writer! You're going to do big things!"

David dared not respond; he knew his voice would not be steady.

"Yes—big things," Mr. Osborne repeated. "But here's another point I wanted to speak of. We can use several short stories from you in our magazine. If you have any, or will write some, that are anywhere near as good as the book, I can guarantee acceptance."

It was a moment before David could trust himself to speak. "I have none, but I should like to write some." Then he suddenly remembered he had not the money to carry him through the period that must elapse before the stories could be written and paid for. "But I fear I'm not in a position to write them just now," he added.

Mr. Osborne had had thirty years' experience with the impecuniosity of authors. "Money?" he queried.

There was no taking offence at the friendly way he asked this. "Yes," David confessed.

"I think we can solve that difficulty. I don't know how the book there is going to sell. I was a publisher before you were born, but after all my experience I have to regard the commercial side of publishing as pretty much of a gambling game. Critically, your book is certain of great success. Financially—I don't know. It may win in a large way; I hope so. But you are sure of at least a moderate sale. Suppose, then, I make you a small advance on your royalty. Say—let's see—well, three hundred. Will that do?"

David felt, as he had felt since he had heard his verdict, that to venture beyond a monosyllable would be to explode. He swallowed. "Yes," he said.

"Very well, then. Do you prefer check or cash?"

"Cash."

Ten minutes later David entered the street, three hundred dollars in his pocket, his heart wild with joy, hope. He wanted to run, to shout, to fly. His glowing face was the visage of triumph.

At last the success he had prayed for—striven for—given up—had come!

He turned northward, to carry the news to Helen. A suggestion of hers flashed into his mind: the book might help pay his debt to the Mission. Obeying impulse he walked into a bank he was at the instant passing, and when he came out there was in an inner coat pocket a draft for two hundred dollars made out to the Reverend Joseph Franklin.

All the way to Helen's door there was no pavement beneath his feet. When he had called here the last time—the time he had read her part of the story; he was a shabby creature then—he had borne himself very humbly toward the footman. Now he asked for Helen with a buoyant ring in his voice and fairly flung his coat and hat upon the astonished servant; and he bowed with a new dignity to Helen's aunt, Mrs. Bosworth, whom he met on the stairway.

Helen met him at the drawing-room door. "I can read the news in your face!" she cried. "I'm so glad!"

He laughed joyously as he caught her hand. "Yes, Mr. Osborne took it!"

"I knew he would! And he likes it? Tell me—how does he like it?"

"You must ask him. But—he likes it!"

"Immensely—I'm certain! Come, you must tell me all!"

They sat down and David told her of his half-hour with Mr. Osborne. Since receiving her note that morning he had not once thought of the end of their last meeting. If he had, and had been aware of the pain that meeting had brought her, he would have marvelled at the ease with which she threw her misery aside for the sake of a mere friend, a dishonoured friend. But he did not

wonder; he just drank recklessly of this glorious draught, compounded of her praise and her joy in his joy.

At the end he told her of the three hundred dollars—never thinking that it was barely more than the price of the simple-looking gown she wore, that it was but a penny to the rich furnishings of the drawing-room, that it was her father's income for perhaps less than a quarter of a business hour. And completely abandoned to the boyish happiness that forced him to share everything, he told her of the draft for two hundred dollars.

Her face shadowed; this man, who was paying back, had suddenly brought to mind her father, who was not paying back. But quickly a deep glow came into her eyes.

"You should be as proud of this as of any of the rest," she said.

She gazed at him thoughtfully, her head slightly nodding. "Yes—you are going to win all you started out to win," she went on, her low voice vibrating with belief. "You are going to clear your name; you are going to achieve a personal success; you are going to carry out your dream to help save the human waste. Yes, you are going to do it all."

His success, her words, the glowing sincerity in her brown eyes, swept him to the heights of exaltation. Suddenly his love made another of its trials to burst from him.

He leaned toward her. "And there's something else to tell you."

"Yes?"

But he did not go on. Instantly his love was being fought back. Exalted though he was, the old compelling reasons for silence had rushed into him.

"Yes? What is it?" she asked.

He swallowed hard. "Some other time," he said.

"When the time comes, I shall be glad to hear it."

He looked into her steady eyes, and saw she had no guess of what the thing might be.

"When the time comes—I shall tell," he said. But in his heart was no belief that time would ever come.

CHAPTER III

HELEN'S CONSCIENCE

When David reached home he found the Mayor had just brought over Rogers's lunch and Kate, with the help of Tom, was arranging it on the table. He threw his happiness among them in a score of words.

The Mayor stepped forward, his face ruddied with a smile. "Friend, put 'er there!" invited his gruff diaphragm, and David put his hand to bed in the big, mattress-soft palm. "Well, sir, I'm certainly happy—that's me! On the level, when I first heard you were tryin' to write a book, said I to myself, private-like, 'he'd better be makin' tidies.' But you're the goods, friend! Every man and woman on the Avenue has got to buy one o' your books, you bet!"

"Say, pard, you're certainly it!" cried Tom, who had seized him from the other side. "Dat puts you on top—way up where you belongs. An' no more worryin' about de coin!"

"I'm glad too,—you know that, Aldrich!" said Rogers, grasping David's hand. Rogers's face was drawn; David's success had freshened, emphasised, his own failure. "I wish both of us could have pulled out. But if only one of us could, it's best that that one is you. I'm glad, Aldrich!"

David felt the pain behind Rogers's words, felt their pathos, and he suddenly was ashamed of his success. "It's because I was doing something where the world did not have to trust me," he said apologetically.

"It's because you are the exceptional man, doing the exceptional thing. They have a chance. The others have not."

Kate had not moved since David had announced his good fortune. She stood with her hands on the table and leaning slightly against it, her white, strained face fastened on David. "I'm glad, too," she now said, in a voice that had a trace of tremolo; and, turning abruptly, she went into the office.

In there, alone, she sat at her desk with her cheeks in her hands. Soon, with a little burst of despair, she cried out: "Why did this have to happen!" And she added, with a moan: "Oh, David, this puts you such a long ways off!"

That afternoon and evening David could settle to nothing; and that night he slept not a minute for sweeping joy, for flashing ideas for stories, for swift, vivid visions of the future.

The next morning he had a note from Helen asking him to call in the afternoon. "You remember my speaking to you about the check for twenty thousand dollars my father gave me," she said, when he had come. Her face was pale and she spoke with an effort. "I've decided what to do with it. I want you to help me."

"If I can," he said.

"I've been thinking a great deal about Mr. Rogers." She paused, then went on, her voice more strained. "He should not have lost that money. I have cashed the check. I want to give the money to Mr. Rogers—not as a gift, but as property that belongs to him."

He looked wonderingly into her pained eyes. "You're in earnest?" he said slowly.

"I am—I must do it. And I want you to take the money to him, from"—she obeyed a sudden instinct of blood-loyalty—"from my father."

His anger against her father suddenly flamed up. "From your father? I know how much your father knows of this plan!"

She went on as if she had not heard him, though she had quivered at his words. "I want you to take the money to Mr. Rogers. You will know what to say."

The full significance of what she had said was just dawning upon him. He gazed at her, wondering what must have been passing in her mind these last few days.

"Mr. Rogers is very proud," he said. "He'll not take the money—at least not from me."

"You're certain?"

"From me—never."

"Then I must take it to him myself." She rose. "I'll be ready in a few minutes. You must go with me."

He rose also. Her white face, that met his so squarely, told him how deeply she felt, how strong her determination was.

"Yes, I'll go with you," he said.

When she re-entered the library she was dressed in the suit of autumn brown and the brown hat with its single rose, which she had worn the day they had met at St. Christopher's. He knew she felt the matter of her errand too keenly to speak of it, and too absorbingly to speak of anything else; and so, in silence, they went out into the street.

Half an hour later they entered Rogers's office. "Just wait a minute, while I tell him you're here," whispered David, and went into the living room where Rogers was. Presently he brought her in, introduced her to Rogers, and withdrew.

Helen had never seen Rogers. Her picture of him was purely of the imagination, and imagination had put in its vague portrait the hard lines, the hang-dog look, the surly bearing that might well remain with a reformed criminal. So she was totally unprepared for the slight figure with the wasted, intellectual face that rose from an easy-chair by the air-shaft window, and for the easy gesture and even voice with which he asked her to be seated. She recognised instantly that to make him accept the money would prove a harder task than she had counted.

"Thank you," she said, and sitting down she studied Rogers's face for the moment she was adjusting her faculties to the new difficulty. "Did Mr. Aldrich tell you why I wished to see you?"

"No." He would be courteous to her for the sake of the request David had made to him, but his hatred of her father allowed him only a monosyllabic reply.

To speak words that would show warm sympathy for him and no disloyalty to her father, this was her problem. "Mr. Aldrich has told me of your land enterprise and how—it failed," she said with a great effort, feeling that her words were cold and ineffective. "He told me how you lost a large sum that you had practically gained. He told me that it was—my father—who made you lose it."

Her first effort would carry her no further. He nodded.

She clutched the arms of her chair, breathed deeply, and drove herself on. "You should not have lost it. I have come to bring you—to ask you to let me return to you"—a brown-gloved hand drew a roll of bills from the bag in her lap "this money that belongs to you."

She held the elastic-bound roll out to him. His interlocked hands did not move from his lap.

"I don't just understand," he said slowly. "You mean that this money is the equivalent of what I should have made in the land deal?"

"Yes."

His face tinged faintly with red, his bright eyes (he had discarded glasses, now that a disguise no longer served him) darted quick flames, and he leaned toward her.

"Do you think I can take as a gift that which I honestly earned?" he demanded in a low, fierce voice.

"But it is not offered as a gift. It is restitution."

"Restitution! So you want to make restitution? Can you restore the strength despair has taken from me? My good name was built on deception, but I had worked hard for it and it was dear to me. Can you restore my good name? I've lost everything! Can you restore everything?"

The ringing bitterness of his voice, the wasted face working with the passion of despair, the utter hopelessness of the future which her quick vision showed her—all these stirred a great emotion which swept her father from her mind. Before, she had sympathised with Rogers abstractly; now her sympathy was for a hopeless soul, bare and agonising beneath her eyes.

Her words rushed from her, in them the throb of her heart. "No! No! I can't give them back—no one can. Oh, what a wrong it was!"

He stared at her. The wrath and bitterness on his face slowly gave place to surprise.

"Oh, but it was a shame!" she cried, her face aflame, her voice aquiver. And then a sense of the irretrievableness of this wreck laid hold upon her and a quick sob broke forth. She felt a sympathetic agony for Rogers, and an agony that she, through her blood, was the cause of his wrecked life.

"Oh, it was terrible, terrible! You are right! Restitution cannot be made—only the pitiful restitution of money. But you must let me make that—you must!"

He felt that he was speaking to a friend, and it was as to a friend that he said quietly: "I can't."

"But you *must*!" She was now thinking of but one thing, how to force him to take the bills. "I'm not doing you a favour. I'm asking a favour from you. I come to you in humility, contrition. The money I bring is not my money—it is your money. My father entered your house and took it; I bring it back to you. You merely accept your own. You see that, don't you? Surely you see that!"

Rogers did not answer at once. He was so dazed by the rush of her words—words that sprang from complete sympathy and understanding, words that might have come from his own heart—that he could not.

She had risen and now stood above him. "You understand, don't you?" she went on imploringly. "My father has done wrong; I feel it just as though I had done it. I must repair the wrong as far as I can. You must take this money for my sake, don't you see?"

He rose and started to speak, but she cut him off. "I know what is in your heart; your pride wants you to refuse. If you refuse, you do only one thing: you deny me the relief of partially correcting a wrong. That is all. Is it right for you to deny me that? Will you yourself not be doing a wrong?"

He was trembling; she had taken the only road to his consent. But he made no motion toward the money in her outstretched hand.

"For my sake—I beg you—I implore you." She spoke tremulously, simply.

He held out a thin hand, and she laid the money in it. "For your sake," he breathed.

"Thank you," she said.

Helen felt herself growing weak and dizzy. The reaction was setting in. "I must go. I can't ask you to forgive me—but won't you let me, as one that would like to be regarded as a friend, wish that there may be brightness ahead which you don't see."

She held out her hand, timidly. He grasped it. He could not speak.

"Thank you," she whispered, and slowly turned away. At the door she paused, and looked back. "My best wishes are with you," she said, and went out.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL OF KATE MORGAN

That night David and Rogers had a long talk. In consequence, correspondence was re-opened with the sanitarium at Colorado Springs, and David began to spend part of his time in helping equip Rogers for the distant struggle against death.

During the two weeks since his exposure Rogers had not railed; he had borne his defeat in grim, quiet despair. His bitterness did not now depart; he had not forgotten his defeat, and he had not forgiven the world. But his life now had an object, and the hope, which the really brave always save from even the worst wreck, began to stir within him.

The next two weeks David worked with his pen as he had never worked before. He was in that rare mood when things flow from one. Before the end of the two weeks he turned in to Mr. Osborne two short stories which Mr. Osborne, with the despatch a publisher gives a new author he is desirous of holding, immediately examined, accepted and paid for at a very respectable rate. Mr. Osborne suggested a series of articles for his magazine, spoke of more stories, assured

David he would have no difficulty in marketing his writing elsewhere; and when David left the publisher's office it was with the exultant sense that financially his future was secure.

Mr. Osborne assured him his book was going to turn much serious thought to our treatment of the criminal and other wasted people, and that his shorter writings were going to help to the same end. His publisher asked him to speak before a club interested in reform measures, and his talk, straight from the heart and out of his own experience, made a profound impression. The success of this speech suggested to him another means of helping—the spoken word. He felt that at last his life was really beginning to count.

But he realised he was still only at the beginning. Before him was that giant's task, conquering the respect of the world—with the repayment of St. Christopher's as the first step. The task would require all his mind and strength and courage and patience, for years and years and years —with success at the end no more than doubtful.

The more David pondered upon the ills he saw about him, the less faith did he have in superficial reforms, the deeper did he find himself going for the real cure. And gradually he reached the conclusion that the idea behind the present organization of society was wrong. That idea, stripped to its fundamentals, was selfishness—and even a mistaken selfishness: for self to gain for self all that could be gained. Under this organization they that have the greatest chance are they that are strong and cunning and unscrupulous, and he that is all three in greatest measure can take most for himself. So long as the world and its people are at the mercy of such an organization, so long as self-interest is the dominant ideal—just so long will the great mass of the people be in poverty, just so long will crime and vice remain unchecked.

He began to think of a new organization of society, where individual selfishness would be replaced as the fundamental idea by the interest of the whole people—where "all men are born free and equal" would not be merely a handsome bit of rhetoric, but where there would be true equality of chance—where the development of the individual in the truest, highest sense would be possible—where that major portion of vice and crime which spring from poverty and its ills would be wiped out, and there would remain only the vice and crime that spring from the instincts of a gradually improving human nature. And so, without losing interest in immediate changes that might alleviate criminal-making conditions, David set his eyes definitely upon the great goal of a fundamental change.

Since Rogers would soon be gone, David began to look for new quarters. His pride shrunk from a boarding-house, where he knew he would be liable to snubs and insults. As money matters troubled him no longer, he leased a small flat with a bright southern exposure, in an apartment house just outside the poorer quarter. If he and Tom prepared most of their own meals they could live here more cheaply than in a boarding-house, and he could save more to quiet Lillian Drew and to pay off the debt to St. Christopher's.

One afternoon, while David was at the Pan-American talking to the Mayor, and Kate was at her desk type-writing a manuscript, the office door opened and closed, and a low, satiric voice rasped across the room:

"Hello, little girl!"

Kate looked about, then quickly rose. Her cheeks sprang aflame. At the door stood Lillian Drew, smiling mockingly, her face flushed with spirits.

"Hello, little girl!" she repeated.

Kate's instinctive hatred of this woman, founded partly on what Lillian Drew obviously was, but more on the certainty that she had some close and secret connection with David's life, made Kate tremble. A year before the wrathful words that besought to pass her lips would have burst forth unchecked. But she controlled herself.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

To pain a person who stirred her antagonism, this twenty uncurbed years had made one of Lillian Drew's first instincts. She had observed before that Kate disliked her and stung under her "little girl;" consequently to inflict her presence and the phrase on Kate was to gratify instinct.

She walked with a slight unsteadiness to David's chair, sat down and smiled baitingly up into Kate's face. "I've just come around to have a visit with you, little girl. Sit down."

Kate grew rigid. "If you want Mr. Aldrich, he's not here."

"Oh, yes, he is. But I don't want him just yet. I want to have a visit with you." She looked Kate up and down. "Well, now, for such a little girl, you're not so bad."

Kate's eyes blazed. "I tell you he's not here. There's no use of your waiting."

"I'm in no hurry at all. But you're too thin. You've got to put on ten or fifteen pounds if you expect to catch his eye."

Kate pointed to the door. "Get out of here!—with that breath of yours!"

The vindictive fire gathered in Lillian Drew's eyes; the return blow of her victim had roused her pain-giving desire into wrath.

"Oh, you want to catch him, all right!" she laughed, malignantly. "I saw that in a second the other day from the way you looked at him. But d'you think he'll care for a girl like you? I came the other day and found no one around but that nice father of yours. I had a little talk with him, and—well, I've got you sized up just about right. And you think you're the girl for him!"

Kate took one step forward and drew back her open hand. But the hand paused in mid-blow. "You drunken she-devil!" she blazed forth, "get out of here!—or I'll have the police put you out!"

Lillian Drew sprang up, as livid as if the hand had indeed cracked upon her cheek, and glared at the flame of hatred and wrath that was Kate Morgan. Rage, abetted by liquor, had taken away every thought, every desire, save to strike this girl down. Her hands clenched; but blows make only a passing hurt. All her life she had used words; words, if you have the right sort, are a better weapon—their wound is deep, permanent.

"You little skinny alley-cat!" she burst out furiously. "You think you're going to marry him, don't you. You marry him! Oh, Lord!"

Kate shivered with her passion. "Get out!"

Lillian Drew gave a sharp, crunching, gloating laugh. "That's it!—you think you're going to marry him. You think he's a thief, don't you. You think you're in his class. Well—let me tell you something."

She drew close to Kate and her eyes burned upon Kate with wild vindictive triumph. "He's not a thief—he never was one!"

"It's a lie!" cried Kate.

"Oh, he says he is, but he's not. He never took that five thousand dollars from St. Christopher's. He pretends he did, but he didn't. You hear that, little girl?—he didn't. Phil Morton took it. I know, because I got it.—D'you understand now?—that he's not a thief?—that he's ten thousand miles above you? And yet you, you skinny little nothing, you've got the nerve to think you're going to catch him! Oh, Lord!"

"You're drunker than I thought!" sneered Kate.

"If it wasn't true, d'you suppose he'd be paying me to keep still about it?"

"Pay you to keep still about his not being a thief! And you want me to believe that too?" Kate laughed with contempt. Then she inquired solicitously: "Would you like a bucket of water over you to sober you a bit?"

At this moment the hall door opened and David entered the room. He paused in astonishment. "What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

The two had turned at his entrance, and, their faces ablaze with anger, were now glaring at him. Kate was the first to speak, and her words tingled with her wrath.

"Nothing. Only this charming lady friend of yours—don't come too near her breath!—has been telling me that you didn't take the money from the Mission—that Mr. Morton did—that she got it—that you're paying her not to tell that you're innocent."

The colour slowly faded from David's face. He held his eyes a moment on Kate's infuriate figure, and then he gazed at Lillian Drew. She gazed back at him defiantly, but the thought that her betrayal of the secret might cut off her supplies began to cool her anger. David thought only of the one great fact that the truth had at last come out; and finally he exclaimed, almost stupidly, more in astoundment than wrath:

"So this's how you've kept it secret!"

Kate paled. Her eyes widened and her lips fell apart. She caught herself against her desk and stared at him.

"So—it's the truth!" she whispered with dry lips.

But David did not hear her. His attention was all pointed at Lillian Drew. "This is the way you've kept it, is it!" he said.

"She's the only one I've told," she returned uneasily.

Her effrontery began to flow back upon her. "She's only one more you've got to square things with. Come, give me a little coin and I'll get out, and give you a chance to settle with her."

"You've had your last cent!" he said harshly.

"Oh, no, I haven't. I don't leave till you come up with the dough!" She sat down, and looked defiantly at him.

Kate moved slowly, tensely, across to David, gripped his arms and turned her white, strained face upon his.

"So—you never took that Mission money!" Her voice was an awed, despairing whisper.

Her tone, her fierce grip, her white face, sent through him a sickening shiver of partial

understanding. "I'm sorry—but you know the truth."

She gazed wide-eyed at him; then her voice, still hardly more than a whisper, broke out wildly: "Yes—yes—you took it, David! Say that you took it!"

He was silent for a moment. "If I said so—would you believe me?" he asked.

Her head slowly sank, and her hands fell from his arms. "Oh, David!" she gasped—a wild, choked moan of despair. She took her hat and jacket from their hooks, and not stopping to put them on, not hearing the triumphant "Good-bye, little girl" of Lillian Drew, she walked out of the office.

She moved through the acid-sharp November air, a white-faced automaton. She felt a vague, numb infinity of pain. She perceived neither the causes of the blow nor its probable results; she merely felt its impact, and that impact had made her whole being inarticulate.

But presently her senses began to rouse. She began to see the outlines of her disaster, its consequences; her great vague pain separated into distinct pangs, each agonisingly acute. She felt an impulse to cry out in the street, but her instinctive pride closed her throat. She turned back and hurried to her room, locked herself in, and flung her hat upon the floor and herself upon the bed.

But even here she could not cry. All her life she had been strong, aggressive, self-defending; she had cried so rarely that she knew not how. So she lay, dry-eyed, her whole body clenched, retched with sobs that would not come up.

Lillian Drew's words, "He's ten thousand miles above you," sat upon her pillow and cried into her ear. She had seen David's superior quality and his superior training; but she and he had both been thieves—they were both struggling to rise clear of thievery. This commonness of experience and of present effort had made him seem very near to her—very attainable. It was a bond between them, a bond that limited them to one another. And she had steadfastly seen a closer union a little farther ahead.

But now he was not a thief. The bond was snapped—he was ten thousand miles above her! Her despair magnified him, diminished herself; and when she contrasted the two she shrunk to look upon the figure of her insignificance. He must see her as such a pigmy—how could he ever care for such paltriness? He never could. He was lost to her—utterly lost!

All that afternoon she was tortured by her hopelessness. In the evening she became possessed by an undeniable craving to see David, and she went to David's house and asked him to walk with her. For the first minute after they were in the street the silence of constraint was between them. David could but know, in a vague way, of Kate's suffering; he was pained, shamed, that he was its cause.

In the presence of her suffering, to him, with his feeling of guilt, all else seemed trivial. But there was one matter that had to be spoken of. "You've not told a soul, have you, what you learned this afternoon?" he asked.

"No," she returned, in a muffled voice.

"I was sure you hadn't. I was afraid this afternoon that Rogers had overheard, but he didn't; either you talked in low voices, or he was asleep. No one must ever know the truth—no one—and especially Rogers."

"Why him especially?" she asked mechanically.

David hesitated. "Well, you see one thing that makes him feel close to me is that he believes we have both been in the same situation. In a way that has made us brothers. If he knew otherwise, it might make a difference to him."

"I understand!" said Kate's muffled voice.

She asked him details of the story Lillian Drew had revealed, and since she already knew so much, he told her—though he felt her interest was not in what he told her.

At length—he had yielded himself to her guidance—they came out upon the dock where they had talked a month before. She had wanted to be with him alone, and she had thought of no better place. Despite the wind's being filled with needles, they took their stand at the dock's end.

They looked out at the river that writhed and leaped under the wind's pricking—black, save beneath the arc lamps of the Williamsburg bridge, where the rearing little wave-crests gleamed, sunk, and gleamed again. For several minutes they were silent. Then the choked words burst from her:

"I'm not fit to be your friend!"

"You mustn't let this afternoon make a difference, Kate," he besought. "It doesn't to me. Fit to be my friend! You are—a thousand times over! I admire you—I honour you—I'm proud to have you for a friend!"

She quickly looked up at him. The light from the bridge lamps, a giant string of glowing beads, lay upon her face. In it there gleamed the sudden embers of hope.

"But can you love me—some time?" she whispered.

It was agony to him to shake his head.

"I knew it!" she breathed dully.

When he saw the gray, dead despair in her face, he cried out, in his agony and abasement:

"Don't take it so, Kate! I'm not worthy to be the cause of so much pain."

She looked back at the river; the wind had set her shivering, but she did not know she was cold. He saw that she was thinking, so he did not speak. After several minutes she asked in a low voice:

"Do you still love Miss Chambers?"

He remained silent.

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"As much as I love you?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. When she next spoke she was looking him tensely in the face.

"Would she love you if she knew the truth?"

"I shall never tell her."

"But would she love you?" she repeated, fiercely. She clutched his arms and her eyes blazed. "She'd better not!—I'd kill her!"

The face he looked down into was that of a wild animal. He gazed at it with fear and fascination.

The vindictive fire began slowly to burn lower, then, at a puff, it was out. "No!—No!" she cried, convulsively, gripping his arms tighter. "I wouldn't! You know I wouldn't!"

The face, so rageful a minute before, was now twitching, and the tears, that came so hard, were trembling on her lashes. Her eyes embraced his face for several moments.

"Ah, David!" she cried, and her words were borne upward on the sobs that now shook her, "even if you don't love me, David—I want you to be happy!"

CHAPTER V

THE COMMAND OF LOVE

Mr. Allen put down his teacup and gazed across the table at Helen. Since Mrs. Bosworth had left the drawing-room, ten minutes before, they had been arguing the old, old point, and both held their old positions.

"Then you will never, never give your ideas up?" he sighed, with mock-seriousness that was wholly serious.

"Then you will never, never give your ideas up?" she repeated in the same tone.

"Never, never."

"Never, never."

They looked at each other steadily for a moment, then their make-believe lightness fell from them.

"We certainly do disagree to perfection!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. So perfectly that the more I think of what you've asked for, the more inadvisable does it seem."

"But you'll change yet. A score of drawn battles do not discourage me of ultimate victory."

"Nor me," she returned quietly.

Their skirmish was interrupted by the entrance of a footman. Helen took the card from the tray and glanced at it.

"Show her into the library and tell her I'll join her soon." She turned back to Mr. Allen. "Perhaps you remember her—she was a maid at your house a little while—a Miss Morgan."

"I remember her, yes," he said indifferently.

His face clouded; he made an effort at lightness, but his words were sharp. "Where, oh where, are you going to stop, Helen! You are at St. Christopher's twice a week, not counting frequent

extra visits. Two days ago, so you've just told me, that Mr. Aldrich was here. To-day, it's this girl. And the week's not yet over! Don't you think there might at least be a little moderation?"

"You mean," she returned quietly, "that, if we were married, you would not want these friends of mine to come to your house?"

"I should not! And I wish I knew of some way to snap off all that side of your life!"

She regarded him meditatively. "Since there's so much about me you don't approve of, I've often wondered why you want to marry me. Love is not a reason, for you don't love me."

The answers ran through his head: He admired her; she had beauty, brains, social standing, social tact, and, last of all but still of importance, she had money—the qualities he most desired in his wife. But to make a pretence of love, whatever the heart may be, is a convention of marriage—like the bride's bouquet, or her train. So he said:

"But I do love you."

"Oh, no you don't—no more than I love you."

"Then why would you marry me?—if you do."

"Because I like you; because I admire your qualities; because I believe my life would be richer and fuller and more efficient; and because I should hope to alter certain of your opinions."

"Well, I don't care what the reasons are—just so they're strong enough," he said lightly. He rose and held out his hand; his face grew serious; his voice lowered. "I must be going. Four more days, remember—then your answer."

After he had gone she sat for several minutes thinking of life with him, toward which reason and circumstances pressed her, and from which, since the day he had declared himself, she had shrunk. This marriage was so different from the marriage of her dreams—a marriage of love, of common ideals; yet in it, her judgment told her, lay the best use of her life.

She dismissed her troubling thoughts with a sigh and walked back to the library. As she entered Kate rose from a high-backed chair behind the great square library-table, whose polished top shone with the light from the chandelier. Kate's face was white, the mouth was a taut line, the eyes gleamed feverishly amid the purpled rings of wakeful nights.

Helen came smiling across the noiseless rug, her hand held out.

"I'm very happy to see you, Miss Morgan."

Kate did not move. She allowed Helen to stand a moment, hand still outheld, while her dark eyes blazed into Helen's face. Then she abruptly laid her hand into the other, and as abruptly withdrew it.

"I want to speak to you," she said.

"Certainly. Won't you sit down?"

Kate jerked a hand toward the wide, curtained doorway through which Helen had entered.

"Close the door."

"Why?" asked Helen, surprised.

"Close the door," she repeated in the same low, short tone. "Nobody must hear."

The forced voice, and the repressed agitation of Kate's bearing, startled Helen. She drew together the easy-running doors, and returned to the table.

Kate jerked her hand toward the open plate-glass door that led into the conservatory.

"And that door."

"There's no one in there." But Helen closed the heavy pane of glass.

"Won't you sit down," she said, when this was done, taking one of the richly carved chairs herself.

"No."

Kate's eyes blazed down upon Helen's face; her breath came and went rapidly, with a wheezing sound; her hands, on the luminous table-top, were clenched. Her whole body was so rigid that it trembled.

The colour began to leave Helen's face. "I'm waiting—go on."

Kate's lips suddenly quivered back from her teeth. She had to strike, even if she struck unjustly.

"People like you"—her voice was harsh, tremulous with hate—"you always believe the worst of a man. You throw him aside—crush him down—walk on him. You never think perhaps you've made a mistake, perhaps he's all right. Oh, no—you never think good of a man if you can think bad." She leaned over the corner of the table. "I hate your kind of people! I hate you!"

"Is this the thing you wanted no one to hear?" Helen asked quietly.

Kate slowly straightened up. After two days and two nights—a long, fierce, despairing battle between selfish and unselfish love—she had decided she must come here; but now her rehearsed sentences all left her. For a moment she stood choking; then the bald words dropped out:

"He's not a thief—never was one."

"Who?"

"David Aldrich."

Helen came slowly to her feet. Her face was white, her eyes were wide. For a moment she did not speak—just stared.

"What do you mean?"

"He did not take the money from the Mission."

Helen moved from the corner of the table, her wide eyes never leaving Kate's gleaming ones, and a hand clutched Kate's arm and tightened there.

"Tell me all."

"You hurt me."

Helen removed her hand.

Kate crept closer and stared up into her face.

"Does it make any difference to you?" she breathed, tensely.

"Tell me all!"

Kate drew back a pace, and leaned upon her clenched hands. "You knew Mr. Morton," she said, in a quick strained monotone. "When he was young, he lived with a woman. He wrote her a lot of letters—love letters. She turned up again a few months before he died, and threatened to show the letters if he didn't pay her. He had no money; he took money from the Mission and paid her. Then he died. His guilt was about to be found out. But David Aldrich said he took the money and went to prison. He did it because he thought if Mr. Morton's guilt was found out, the Mission would be destroyed and the people would go back to the devil. You know the rest. That's all."

Helen continued motionless—silent.

"It's all so," Kate went on. "The woman herself told me. She knew the truth. She'd been making David pay her to keep from telling that he was innocent. She told me before him. He had to admit it."

Kate leaned further across the corner of the table. "He made me promise never to tell." For a moment of dead quiet she gazed up into Helen's fixed face. "And why do you think I've broken my promise?" she asked in a low voice, between barely parted lips.

Helen rested one hand on the back of a chair and the other on the table. She trembled slightly, but she did not reply.

"Because"—there was a little quaver in Kate's voice—"I thought it might sometime make him happy."

There was another dead silence, during which Kate gazed piercingly into Helen's face.

"Do you love him?" she asked sharply.

Helen's arms tightened. After a moment her lips moved.

"You love him yourself."

"Me?—it's a lie. I don't!"

Kate moved round the corner of the table and laid a fierce hand on Helen's arm.

"Do you love him?" she demanded.

Silence. "Thank you—for telling me."

Kate laughed a low, harsh laugh, and flung Helen's arm from her.

"You!—you think you're way above him, don't you! Well—you're not! You're not fit for him!" Her eyes leaped with flame. "I hate you!"

Again a moment of silence. A tremor ran through Helen. She moved forward, and her hands reached out and fell upon Kate's shoulders.

"I love you," she whispered.

Kate shrunk sharply away. Her eyes never leaving Helen's face, she backed slowly toward the doors. She pushed them apart, and gazed at Helen's statued figure. Kate's face had become ashen, drawn. After a moment she slipped through the doors and drew them to.

As the doors clicked, Helen swayed into a chair beside the table, and her head fell forward into

her arms.

CHAPTER VI

ANOTHER WORLD

At half-past eight o'clock that evening David walked up the broad steps of the Chambers's house and rang the bell. The footman left him in the great hall, rich with carved oak and old tapestries, and went off with his card. As he waited, he continued to wonder at the telegram he had received half an hour before from Helen, which had merely said, "Can you not call this evening?" Why could she so suddenly desire to see him? He had no faintest guess.

In a few minutes the footman returned, led him up the stairway and directed him into the library. A wood fire was burning in the broad fire-place, and on a divan before it she was sitting, all in white.

She rose. "Will you draw the doors, please," her voice came to him.

He did so, and went toward her eagerly. But his steps slowed. Two or three paces from her he came to a stop. She stood, one hand on the divan's arm, gazing at him with parted lips, and wide, marvelling eyes. The look put a spell upon him; he returned it silently, with a growing bewilderment.

For several moments her whole being was brought to a focus in the awed wonder of her face. Then her breast began to rise and fall, her face to twitch, her eyes to flood with tears. The tears glinted down her cheeks and fell upon her swelling breast. She gave them no heed, but continued to hold her quivering face full upon him.

"What is it?" he whispered.

She stretched out her hands and slowly moved toward him, her eyes never leaving his face. He automatically took her hands. They were warm and tight, and through them he felt her whole body trembling. He thrilled under their pressure and under her look—under her glorious, brimming eyes.

As she gazed upon him his last five years ran through her mind—his trial, his prison life, his struggle for a foothold, his dishonoured name. A sob broke from her, and upon it came her low, vibrant voice—quavering, awed:

"It was God-like!"

He could barely ask, "What?"

"What you did."

He could not find a word, he was so bewildered, so thrilled by her gaze, by her clinging hands.

Her tears continued to drop from her eyes to her heart. There was a momentary silence, then the awed, quavering voice, said slowly:

"You never took the money!—the Mission money!"

For a space he was utterly dazed. The room swam; he held to her hands for support. Slowly the bewilderment of ignorance passed into the greater bewilderment of knowledge. She knew the truth! The secret of his life that he had hidden from her, thought always to hide from her, she had found out!

He realised this, but no more. It did not occur to him even to wonder how she had learned—and her words, "Miss Morgan told me," lodged an explanation in his mind that would waken after a while, but did not now stir a single thought regarding Kate. That she knew, had burst upon him so suddenly as to set everything whirling within him—to overwhelm, outcrowd all else. He sank to the couch, and she sank to a place beside him, their hands and eyes still clasped.

"Oh, you never took it!"

The voice dripped with tears, vibrated with a rising note of triumph.

"To think what you've gone through!" she marvelled on, quaveringly. "Your struggles—such struggles!—and everybody believing you dishonoured. And all the time, you being this splendid thing that you are!" A great sob surged up.

He was still whirling and still saw her face hazily. But his faculties were coming back. "What I did was not active—it was merely passive," he said.

"To achieve by suffering, and be repaid by dishonour—what can be higher?"

She gazed at him, and gazed at him. "And to think that I believed you—you!—guilty! To think that I never sent you even a single word while you were in prison! How I drew away from you when I found you sick in that poor room! How since then I have tried to help you reform! Ah, the irony of

that now! And the irony of my proposing to you to pay back the money you never took!"

The words, the voice, had reached the ears of his heart; it was going madly. He gazed into her glorious face, quivering, tear-splashed, into her glorious, swimming eyes. Even in his daringest fancy he had never pictured his innocence affecting her so! He felt himself suddenly a wild, exultant flame. The insuperables were swept out of the world. He was the lover he had tried seven years to stifle.

He had thought the words would never be spoken. But they came out boldly—with a rush.

"I love you!"

She paled slightly. For a moment she looked wonderingly into his eyes. Her head slowly shook.

"Ah—how can you!" she whispered. "After I've had no faith!—after I've treated you so!"

She tried to draw away. But he caught her hands, held them tight.

"I love you!"

Again her head shook. "I'm ... not worthy."

"But you're glad—I did not take it?"

There was silence. Her eyes held steadfastly to his.

"It's another world!" she whispered.

Her glorious self looked at him, leaned toward him, from her divine eyes. His soul reeled; awe descended upon him. One hand loosed itself from hers, and weak, tingling, fearful, crept slowly about her, drew her toward him. She came at his touch. He bent down breathless. He felt her tremble in his arm. Her face was white, but it did not waver; her eyes glowed into his. As their lips touched, her free arm slipped about his neck and she shook with sobs.

"Yes ... another world!" she breathed.

When he had finished the long story of his acceptance of Morton's guilt and of what had followed, she sat gazing at him with her look of awe.

"I shall never stop being amazed that a man could do a thing like that," she said. "It was wonderful!"

He shook his head. "No," he said slowly, "the real wonder is that you could learn to love a man whom you believed to be a criminal." For a moment he looked silently into her eyes; this great thing that had come to pass still seemed hardly true. "That's the wonder—Helen."

It was the first time he had used her name, and he spoke it with a fervent hesitancy. He repeated it softly, "Helen!"

She flushed. "I loved you long before I thought you were guilty," she said. "It seems that I have always loved you."

"Always!" he repeated, amazed. "Always?—just as I've always loved you?"

"Yes."

For a space he was lost in his astonishment. "It doesn't seem possible. What was there in me to make you love me?"

"I loved you because of your idealism, because there was an indefinable something in you that was good and great. I loved you—Oh, I don't know why I loved you. I just loved you. And how I felt when I thought you had taken the money! Oh, David, it was——"

"Say it again!" he broke in.

"What?"

"David."

She smiled. "David."

Her face became serious. "It was weeks before I could sleep. I tried to forget you. As the years passed I sometimes thought I had; but when I tried to listen to other men talk of love, I knew I hadn't. I never forgot you. I was on trial with you. I was in prison with you. Though I kept away from you, I suffered with you when you were sick in that poor little room. I have searched for work with you. I have struggled with you to regain place in the world. Haven't you ever felt me beside you?"

"I have always thought of you as far away from me. Of you here"—his eyes swept the library—"in this life."

The glance about the room was an abrupt transition. For an hour or more he had been oblivious

to all things save herself and himself. Now the library's material richness recalled to him the circumstances his rapture had for the time annihilated—her wealth, her social position, his poverty, his disgrace. Slowly these forced upon him one relentless fact. His face became grave, then pale.

"Why, what's the matter?" she cried.

"After all, we are as inexorably separated as ever," he said. "We can be merely friends."

"Why?"

"I'm poor—without position in life—covered with dishonour."

"It's your soul that I love," she said. "It's rich, and full of honour."

Her look, the ring in her voice, made him catch his breath.

"What!—you don't mean you'd marry me—as I am!"

"Yes."

Wild joy sprang up within him. But he choked it down.

"No—No! You couldn't. You haven't thought. You couldn't give up all the richness of your life, all your friends, for my poverty, my friendlessness. And this isn't all—nor the worst. There's my disgrace." He paused a moment before the great fact that must always be a barrier between them. "Do you realise, Helen," he went on, "that I can never clear myself. To do that would be to destroy the people of St. Christopher's. I can never do that. I never will."

She was thoughtful for several moments. "No, you never can," she said slowly. Then a glow came into her face, and she added suddenly in a tone that vibrated through him:

"But I shall marry you anyhow!"

He caught her hands. "God bless you!" he said huskily.

He shook his head slowly, with pale resolution. "But no. I love you too much, honour you too much, to drag you from your place—to let you marry a criminal!"

CHAPTER VII

AS LOVE APPORTIONS

After David had gone Helen sat gazing into the rich romance of the glowing logs, reproached by the remembrance of her treatment of David, awed by his long sacrifice, thrilled with love and the knowledge of his innocence. Her imagination showed her scenes of David's trial, of his prison life, of his struggles to regain place in the world, and she cried softly as she looked upon him amid these travails. That she had not believed in him despite appearance and his own declaration, she regarded as evidence of her weakness, and she told herself that her five years of suffering were too light a punishment for her lack of faith. She should have learned his innocence—and lost him!

Presently her mind, rehearsing the evening, came to David's statement that, for St. Christopher's sake, he must always remain a guilty man. She paused before the declaration. Yes, he was right. As she admitted this a calm fell upon her, and she saw, as she had not seen before, the distance that lay between them. He could not come to her; he was bound where he was. If they came together, she must go to him.

Could she go? She loved the ease and beauty which surrounded her; and this love now pointed out that going to him meant resigning all the comforts of her father's house, all things that thus far had comprised her life. And not alone resigning them, but substituting for them the cramped, mean surroundings of a poor man. Was the love of a poor man sufficient to balance, and balance for the rest of life, the good things that would be given up?

She had said to David with ringing joy, "I shall marry you anyhow!"—and now, with the same glow of the soul, she swept her present life out of consideration. Yes, she could give it up! But following immediately upon the impulse of renunciation came the realisation that David was not only a poor man—he was, and must be always, to the rest of the world a criminal. Was her love strong enough, and was she strong enough, to share a criminal's dishonour and struggles—even though she knew him to be guiltless?

While this question was asking itself her father entered, and with him her Aunt Caroline—in an ermine-lined opera cloak and a rustling cream-lace gown, about her plump throat a collar of pearls and in her gray hair a constellation of diamonds.

"Why, Helen, sitting here all alone, and at one o'clock!" her aunt cried. "Well, at any rate it means you're feeling better." Helen had had her dinner brought to her sitting-room, and had excused herself from the opera on the plea of indisposition.

Helen returned the kiss with which her aunt, bending over, lightly touched her cheek. She would

have preferred to say nothing of David's visit, but she knew her aunt, who had charge of the servants, would doubtless learn of it on the morrow from the housekeeper.

"But I haven't been alone the whole evening," she returned quietly. "Mr. Aldrich called."

Mrs. Bosworth hopelessly lifted her shoulders, whose fulness her fifty-odd years had not impaired. "What'll your help-the-poor ideas make you do next!" she cried. "Think of giving up Melba to be bored a whole evening by an East Side protégé! And such a lot of your friends came to our box, too. Mr. Allen was very disappointed."

"It seems to me, too, Helen," said her father who stood with his back to the fire, "that you're carrying your philanthropy a little too far in having your brands-snatched-from-the-burning so much at the house."

Helen did not answer.

"Well, I suppose you must find some satisfaction in it or you wouldn't do it," Mrs. Bosworth sighed. "Good night, dear."

They kissed again, perfunctorily. Helen liked her aunt in that moderate way in which we all like good-natured, fate-made intimates whose interests touch our own at few points. And Mrs. Bosworth's complacent good-nature there was no denying—even if her interest did pause, way-worn, after it had journeyed out as far as those remote people who had only twenty-five thousand a year.

"Don't sit too long," said her father, bending down. During the last four weeks she had tried to wear before her father an unchanged manner. So she now met his lips with her own. "Only a few minutes longer; good night," she said.

When they had gone her gaze returned to the fire, and her mind gathered about her father. Since she had learned he was a great highwayman whose plunderings were so large as to be respectable, her days and nights had been filled with thoughts of him, and of her relation to him and his fortune. She realised that if he were seen by the world as he actually was, and if the world had the same courage to condemn large thefts that it had to condemn small thefts, he would be dishonoured far below David. She realised that his great fortune was founded on theft, that the food she ate, the dresses she wore, the house she lived in, were paid for with money that was rightly others!

What should she do?—for almost a month that question had hardly left her: Should she beg her father to change his business ways, and to restore his money to whom he had defrauded? She knew the power was not in her, nor any other, to change him. Since he was going to continue gathering in other people's money with his own, should she keep silent and remain by him, and see that the money was spent in service of the people? Or should she, refusing to live on dishonest income, withdraw from his house and shape her own life?

She came out of her thoughts with a start to find herself shivering, the bronze clock on the mantel pointing at two, and the glowing romance in the fire-place cooled to gray ashes. When she reached her sitting-room she remembered a yellow photograph of David that on the day he had confessed his guilt she had tried to burn, and which she had since tried to forget, but which she had often taken from its hiding-place and gazed at in pained wonderment. She took this out of the drawer of her writing desk, went into her bedroom and set it upon the reading-table beside her bed. After preparing herself for sleep she lit the candles on the table, turned out the gas, and lying with her head high up on the pillows she looked with glowing eyes on the open boyish face. After a time she reached a white arm for the picture, pressed a kiss upon its yellowed lips, then snuffed the candle and held the picture against her heart; and, lying so, she presently drifted softly away into sleep.

Paradise walked home with David that night. He did not think of the barrier that stood between Helen and him—that must always keep them apart despite her declaration that she would marry him. He thought only of her love. This fact was so supremely large that it had filled his present. At times he thrilled with awe, as though God had descended and were walking at his side. Again he could barely hold down the eruptive cries of his exultation; he clenched his hands, and tensed his arms, and flung his face up at the far, white stars.

He strode through the night, too excited to think of anything but Helen and himself. He and she—they were the world. But presently, after hours of walking, his thoughts went to people without the walls of his paradise. He thought of Rogers—and the misery of Rogers was an accusation against his joy. He had gained everything—Rogers had lost everything. He was ashamed of himself, and he tried to subdue his happiness by thinking of Rogers's failure and hopelessness.

And the thought of Kate shot through him a great jagged pain. He realised how fierce must have been the struggle that had preceded her call on Helen; he realised that he owed his paradise to the apotheosis of her love; and he realised, too, how utterly beyond his power it was to make her any repayment.

When, toward three o'clock, he reached his house, he was surprised to see that a light burned in Roger's office. The office door was unlocked, and he entered. Beside her desk stood Kate, suddenly risen, and on the desk's arm lay a few note-books, a dictionary and a pair of sateen sleeve-protectors.

"I've come for my things—I've got a new job," she said after a moment, in a dry unnatural voice.

David saw instantly through her pitiful craft—knew instantly how long she had been waiting there. He filled tinglingly with a quick rush of pity and pain and tenderness. He wanted to thank her, but he felt the emptiness of words, and dared not. So, confusedly, awkwardly, he stood looking at the white face.

Her eyes holding to his like a magnetic needle, she moved across the room, paused a pace away, and stared, hardly breathing, up at him. Her burning, questioning eyes, ringed with their purple misery, forced from him a low cry of pain.

"Oh, Kate!—Kate!"

She trembled slightly at his voice. "You've seen her!" she whispered.

"Yes."

He felt tears scalding his eyes. Suddenly he caught her hands and broken words leaped from his lips.

"What a wonderful soul you are!—I can't speak my thanks, but in my heart—"

She jerked her hands away and drew back. "Don't!" she gasped. "Don't!"

He hated himself for the suffering he was causing her—for his helplessness to thank her, to say the thing in his heart.

She continued to stare up at him with the same quivering tensity. After a moment she asked in a dry whisper:

"And she loves you?"

"Yes."

A sharp moan escaped her. She put an unsteady hand out and caught her desk, and the edge of David's vision saw how the fingers clenched the wood.

"I knew it—from the way she acted," she said mechanically.

For several moments more she looked up at him, her face as pale as death. Then she turned and, thoughtless of her belongings, walked toward the door, a thin, unsteady figure. As she reached for the knob he sprang across the room with a cry and caught her outstretched hand.

"Oh, Kate—forgive me!—I hate myself!—Forgive me!"

Her hand tightened spasmodically on his, her body swayed, her eyes flamed up into his. "Oh, David!" burst from her in a low moan of infinite pain and loss. For a moment she was all a-tremble. Then she clenched herself in an effort at self-control, answered him with a slow nod, and dropping her head turned and went through the door.

CHAPTER VIII

A PARTIAL RELEASE

When David, after leaving Helen at the end of the next afternoon, sat down to his early dinner in the almost empty Pan-American, the Mayor came swaying toward him. During the last two weeks the Mayor had been daily seeking David for sympathy over his marriage, or advice upon his wedding clothes and upon arrangements for the ceremony that was to make his life a joyless waste. He took an opposite chair, sighed heavily and regarded David in steady gloom.

"D'you, realise, friend," he burst out, "that it's only one day more? Twenty-four hours from to-night at nine o'clock! Only one day more o' life! If God had to make me, why didn't he put a little sense into me—that's what I'd like to know!"

He shook his head despairingly. But after a few moments his face began to lighten and he leaned across the table. "But anyhow, friend, don't you think my weddin' clothes is just about proper!"

David agreed they were, and in the discussion of the marriage garments the Mayor forgot the marriage and became quite happy. From garments he passed on to a description of the preparation for the wedding festivities, which were to be held in the Liberty Assembly Hall.

He leaned proudly back and glowed on David. "It's goin' to be the swellest ever," he said, with a magnificent wave of his right hand. "It's goin' to have every weddin' that was ever pulled off in this part o' town, simply skinned to death—yes, sir, simply faded to nothin'."

He flamed upward into the very incandescence of pride. But on the morrow his pride was ashes. Never did another bridegroom have so severe an attack of the bridegroom's disease as did the Mayor. All the afternoon he kept David beside him, and once when David tried to leave for a few minutes the Mayor frantically caught his arm and would not let him go. The Mayor was too

agitated to sit still, too nerveless to move about, too panic-stricken to talk or to listen to David; and when, after dinner, it came to putting on his wedding raiment, he was in such a funk that David had to dress him. He had but one coherent idea, and that he often expressed, his glassy, fearful eyes appealingly on David, with a long-drawn moan: "Friend, ain't it hell!"

When it came time to leave, the Mayor collapsed into a chair and glared defiantly at David. "I ain't goin' to go!" he announced in a tremulous roar. But David, by the use of force and dire pictures, finally got him into the dressing-room of the Liberty Assembly Hall where he was to meet Miss Becker. She was already there, and she came toward him with a blushing smile. He stood motionless, his tongue wet his lips, a hand felt his throat. He gazed at the white gown and at the veil as a condemned man at the noose. He put a limp, fumbling hand into hers. "Howdy do, Carrie," he said huskily.

Some men are cowards till the battle starts, then are heroes. When the Mayor and his triumphant bride, radiant on his arm, paused a moment outside the hall door for the march to begin, he was still the agitated craven. But when he saw within the hall the scores of gorgeous guests, and realised that he was the chief figure in this pageant, his spirit and *savoir-faire* flowed back into him; and when Professor Bachmann's orchestra struck into the wedding-march he stepped magnificently forward, throwing to right and left ruddy, benign smiles. He bore himself grandly through the ceremony; he started the dancing by leading the grand march with Mrs. Hoffman in his most magnificent manner; and at the wedding supper, which was served in an adjoining room, he beamingly responded to the calls for a speech with phrases and flourishes that even he had never before equalled.

At the end of the supper the party resumed dancing, and the Mayor had a chance to pause a moment beside David. He swept a huge, white-gloved hand gracefully about the room, and demanded in an exultant whisper:

"Didn't I tell you, friend, that this was goin' to be the swellest weddin' that ever happened? Well, ain't it?"

"It certainly is," agreed David.

The Mayor tapped David's shirt-front with his forefinger. "It certainly is the real thing, friend. Nothin' cheap-skate about this, let me tell you. Everything is just so. Why, did you notice even the waiters wore white gloves? Yes, sir—when I get married, it's done right!"

He leaned to within a few confidential inches of David's ear. "And say—have you sized up Carrie? Ain't she simply *It*! Huh, she makes every other woman in this bunch look like a has-been!"

A little later, during a lull in the dancing, the Mayor and his bride, who had quietly withdrawn, suddenly appeared in the doorway of the hall, hatted and wrapped.

"Good-bye!" boomed the Mayor's mighty voice. "Same luck to you all!"

Mrs. Hoffman's finger-tips flung a kiss from her blushing lips to the guests, and the Mayor's hand gathered a kiss from amid his own glowing face and bestowed it likewise. The guests rushed forward, but the couple went down the stairs in a flurry, into a waiting carriage, and were gone.

The dancing continued till early workmen began to clatter through the streets—for in the supper-room was enough cold meats and cake and punch and ices to gorge the guests for a week, and Professor Bachmann has been paid to keep his musicians going so long as a dancer remained on the floor. But David slipped away soon after the bride and groom.

When he got home he found Kate Morgan sitting by Rogers's side. He looked at her in constraint, and she at him—and it was a very uncomfortable moment till Rogers announced:

"She's going with me."

David turned to his friend. There was an excited glow in Rogers's dark eyes.

"What?" David asked.

"She's going with me—to Colorado."

David stared at him, and then at Kate, who nodded. "Oh, I see!" he said.

Kate's features tightened, and she looked at him defiantly. "It isn't what you think. I offered to marry him, but he wouldn't let me."

"What, let a woman marry a wreck like me!" exclaimed Rogers. "No, she's going as a nurse. I've begged her not to go, but she insists."

"Why shouldn't I?" Kate asked, still with her straight, defiant look full on David. "My father's now in an asylum. Mr. Rogers needs me: he'll be lonely—he ought to have someone to take care of him. I know something about nursing. Why shouldn't I?"

David looked at her slight, rigidly erect figure, standing with one hand on the back of Rogers's chair, and tried to find words for the feelings that rushed up from his heart. But before he could speak she said abruptly, "Good night," and, very pale, marched past David and out of the room.

The following afternoon, as David was helping Rogers with the last of the packing for the western trip, which was to be begun that night, a messenger brought him a letter. He looked at the "St.

John's Hospital" printed in one corner of the envelope in some surprise before he opened the letter. It read:

> "DEAR SIR:—
>
> "There has just been brought here, fatally injured from being run down by an express wagon, a woman whose name seems to be Lillian Drew, judging from a packet of old letters found on her person. As your address was the only one about her, I am sending you this notice on the possibility that you may be an interested party."

The note was signed "James Barnes, House Surgeon." David's first thought was, Morton's letters have been read and the secret has begun to come out! For a space he did not know whether this was a hope or a fear. On the way to the hospital it was of the glory that would follow this disclosure, and not of the disaster, that he thought. He saw his name cleared, himself winning his way unhampered into honour, free to marry Helen—he saw a long stretch of happiness in work and in love.

On reaching the hospital he was led to a small room adjoining the operating-room. Here he found Dr. Barnes, a young fellow of twenty-five, shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, aproned in a rubber sheet, head swathed in gauze. He was beginning to wash his hands at an iron sink.

"Are you a near friend or relative?" Dr. Barnes asked after David had introduced himself.

"An acquaintance," David answered.

"Then I can break the news point-blank. She died a few minutes ago."

David hardly knew what the young surgeon was saying—his mind was all on the letters.

"It's the old, old story," added the surgeon, with a shrug. "Intoxicated—got in the way of a truck—a cracked skull. I've been trying to do what I could for her"—he nodded toward the open door of the operating-room,—"but she died under the operation."

"In your note," David said as steadily as he could, "you mentioned some letters."

"Oh, yes. I wanted to find the address of friends, so I read a few of them." He smiled at David as he rubbed a cake of yellow soap about in his hands.

David leaned heavily against a window-sill. His mind was reeling.

"They were from relatives?" he forced from his lips.

The surgeon gave a short laugh. "Hardly! They were love letters—and warm ones, too! All about twenty years old. Queer, wasn't it."

He rinsed the soap from his arms and began to rub them with a white powder. "But I got nothing out of them. They were merely signed 'Phil.'"

David's control returned to him, and he was conscious of a tremendous relief. "I suppose," he said, "there's no objection to my claiming and taking the letters."

"We usually turn anything found on a body over to the relatives or friends. But pardon me—I don't know that you're the proper person."

"There's no one else to claim them. I'm perfectly willing to give you security for them."

"Oh, I guess it'll be all right. They're merely a package of old letters."

He walked over to where several coats were hanging, and pointed a scoured hand at one. "I've just washed up for another operation, so I can't take them out for you. You'll find them in the inside pocket."

David transferred the yellow packet to the inside pocket of his own coat. He had thanked the surgeon and said good-bye, when the fear seized him that perhaps the dead woman might after all not be Lillian Drew. He turned back and asked if he might see the body. The surgeon led him into the operating-room where two attendants were starting to push out a wheeled operating-table, burdened with a sheeted figure. The surgeon stopped them, and at his order a nurse drew back the sheet from the head. David gave a single glance at the face. His fear left him.

With the letters buttoned inside his coat he left the hospital and set out for Helen's, on whom he had promised to call that afternoon. At this moment he had not for Lillian Drew that understanding, sympathy even, which he was later to attain; he did not then consider that she, too, might have had a very different ending had her beginning been more fortunately inspired. For such a sympathy he was too dazed by the narrowness of his escape from vindication and of the Mission's from destruction. Had the letters been signed by Morton's full name, then the house surgeon, in trying to learn who Philip Morton was, would certainly have started a scandal there would have been no stopping. But now his secret was safe: Lillian Drew would menace him no more, and the two women who knew his story would keep it forever locked in their hearts.

He chanced to reach the Chambers's home at the same moment as Mr. Chambers, who bowed coldly and passed upstairs. As Mr. Chambers went by the drawing-room door he saw Helen and Mr. Allen at the tea-table. He entered and shook hands cordially with Mr. Allen.

"How are you, Allen?" he said. "But I just stopped for a second. I'll try and see you before you go."

At this moment a footman handed Helen David's card. "Don't you think, Helen," her father asked quietly, "that you're letting that fellow make himself very much of a bore?" Without waiting for an answer he passed out.

"Will you show Mr. Aldrich up," Helen said to the waiting footman. Mr. Allen had begun, before her father's entrance, to draw near the question he had come to put. She shrunk from answering it, so David's coming was doubly welcome.

"A minute, please," Mr. Allen called to the servant. "Now, Helen, is this treating me fair?" he demanded in a whisper. "You know I want to see you. Can't you send down word that you're engaged?"

"He's in the house—I'm here—I can't deny him," she said rapidly. "Besides, for a long while I've been wanting you to meet him. Show him up, Mitchell."

"Well, if I must meet him, I suppose I must," Allen said with a shrug, sharpness cutting through his even tone. "But I warn you, Helen—I'm going to outstay him."

A moment later David entered the room. He was crossing eagerly with a hand held out to Helen, when he saw Allen beside the tea-table. He suddenly paused. Allen slowly rose, and for a space the two men stared at each other.

"So," Allen said, with slow distinctness, "You're Mr. David Aldrich?"

David went pale. He knew, from what Helen had told him of Allen, that he was in the power of a man whose ideas of justice and duty made him merciless. For a moment David had, as on the night Allen had forced him to unmask, a glimpse of the inside of a cell.

"I am," he said.

Helen had looked from one to the other in surprise. "What—you know each other?"

David turned to her. "You remember I told you that about a year ago I broke into a man's house. It was his house."

"What!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, your protégé is a thief!"

There was a vibration of triumph in Allen's voice. An old idea had flashed back upon him. He had often thought that if he could, by some striking example, show Helen the futility of her work, show her that the people whom she thought were improving were really deceiving her, then her belief in her efforts would be shattered and she would abandon them—would come nearer to him. This man Aldrich here summed up to her the success of her ideas.

"I think I shall leave you for a while," Allen said.

He moved toward the door.

David knew where Allen was going. Helpless to save himself, he stood motionless, erect, and watched Allen start from the room.

Helen, very pale, blocked Allen's way. "You intend to have him arrested. It's in your face."

"I certainly do."

"You must not!" cried Helen, desperately. "Why, he took nothing—you yourself told me he took nothing."

"That doesn't make him any less a thief," returned Allen. "He had good reason for not taking anything—he was frightened away."

He started to pass around her, but she caught his arm. "You must not! You'll be committing a crime!"

He looked at her almost pitingly. "Really, Helen, he must have hypnotised you. You know he's a thief. I caught him in the act; he's confessed to you. What more can you want?"

She gazed steadily up into his face. "Won't you let him go if I assure you that in arresting him you'll be making the mistake of your life?"

"No. Because I know that you, in believing that, are mistaken."

She was silent a moment; her brown eyes never left his face. "Won't you let him go because I, a friend, ask it as a favour?"

"You are making it very hard for me," he said in genuine distress. "You know it's a duty to society to put such men where they can do no harm."

"Nothing can prevent your arresting him?" she asked slowly.

"It's my duty," he said.

Her face was turning gray with despair, when her eyes began to widen and her lips to part, and

she drew in a long, slow breath and one hand crept up to her bosom. She looked about at David.

"Will you please wait for me in the library," she said; and she added immediately to Allen, "I'll give you bond for his return when you want him."

David bowed and left the room.

Helen caught the back of a chair. The hand above her heart pressed tightly. "You have left me but one thing more to say for him," she said in a low voice.

"And that?" asked Allen.

"I love him."

He stepped back and his face went as pale as her own. Several moments passed before words came from him.

"You love Mr. Aldrich?" asked a strange whisper.

"I love him," she said.

Again several moments passed before he spoke, and when he did speak his words were to himself rather than to her.

"And this is my answer?"

"Forgive me—because it came this way," she begged.

There was silence between them.

"He is safe," he said. He continued gazing at her several moments, then without speaking again he left the room.

CHAPTER IX

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

For several minutes after Allen had gone, Helen sat, her face in her hands, waiting for the refluence of her strength. Then she walked back to the library, where she found David pacing restlessly to and fro. He saw that she was very white and that she was trembling, and forbearing to question her he led her to a deep easy-chair before the open wood fire. But she saw his suspense and at once told him that Allen would be silent.

Gently, reverently, David laid his hand upon her hair, and of all the things in his heart he could only say, "You saved me."

She drew his hand down and held it against her cheek and gazed up into his eyes. He sat down on the arm of her chair. They had both been through too great a strain to fall into easy converse, and for several minutes each was filled with quivering thoughts. Presently David remembered what he had forgotten since entering the house—his experience at St. John's Hospital. He told her the story, and when he had ended he drew out the packet containing the yellow letters, the photograph and the two notes of five years before.

"Well, they'll make no more trouble," he said, and started toward the fire-place.

She laid a hand upon his arm. "What are you going to do?"

"Burn them."

She shook her head and held out her hand. "No—you must not. Give them to me."

He laid them in her hand. "But why do you want them?"

"Didn't you ever think, David, that there may come a time, years from now, when you may want to clear your name? Well, these letters will help. I shall keep them for that time. They're precious to me, because they contain your good name."

She slipped the soiled and worn packet into the front of her dress. In the silence that followed, her mind, as it was constantly doing these days, reverted to her father's business practices, and again she was beset by the necessity of telling David her new estimate of her father. She gathered her strength, and, eyes downcast, told him briefly, brokenly, that her father was not an honest man. "So you see," she ended, "I have no right to any of these things about me—I have no right to stay here."

David had suffered with her the shame of her confession. He took her hands. "Oh, I wish I had the right to ask you to come to me, Helen!"

She raised her eyes. "I'm coming to you," she said.

"But I'd be a brute to let you. You can leave your father, and yet keep almost everything of your present life except its wealth—your friends, your position, your influence, your honour. I can't let

you give up all these things—exchange them for my disgrace. I can't let you become the wife of a thief! I love you too much!"

"But I'm ready for it!"

"I can't do it, Helen! I can't!"

She gazed at his pain-drawn, determined face—her eyes wide, her lips loosely parted, her face gray. "And you never will?" she whispered.

"I can't!" he groaned huskily.

His arm dropped from the chair back about her shoulders, and they sat silently gazing into each other's eyes. They were still sitting so when the library doors rolled back and Mr. Chambers appeared between them. David sprang up, and Helen also rose. Mr. Chambers gave back a pace as to a blow, and his hand gripped the door. For a moment he stared at them, then he quietly closed the door and crossed the room.

Rigidly erect, he paused in front of Helen, his face pale and set and harsh, and looked squarely into her face. He turned a second to David; his gray eyes were like knives of gray steel. Then his gaze came back to Helen.

"What's this mean?" his quiet voice grated out.

Helen's face was like paper and her eyes, held straight into his, had a fixed, wild stare. She gathered her strength with a supreme effort.

"I'm going to marry him," she said.

For a moment he merely stared at her. Then he reached out a hand that trembled, caught her arm and shook her lightly.

"Helen?" he cried. "Helen?"

"I'm going to marry him," she repeated, with a little gasp.

"You're—really—in—your—senses?"

"I am."

He loosed his hold, and studied her strained face. "You are!" he whispered, in low consternation.

David's defiant hatred of Mr. Chambers was beginning to rise. He was willing that Mr. Chambers should feel pain; but Helen's suffering because of himself, this would not let him keep silent.

"But, Helen, you know you're——"

She stopped him with a touch on his shoulder. "This is my moment. I've been expecting it. It is I that must speak."

Mr. Chambers slowly reddened with anger. "Marry that thief? You shall not!" he cried.

Her face was twitching, tears were starting in her eyes. "Forgive me for saying it, father," she besought tremulously, "but—can you prevent me?"

"Your reason, your self-respect, should prevent you. Have you thought of the poverty?"

She put a hand through David's arm. "I have. I'm ready for it."

"And of the disgrace?"

"I'm ready for it."

He paled again. He saw the utter social ruin of his daughter, and it gave him infinite pain—and he saw the social injury to himself. She would sink from her present world, and her sinking would be the year's scandal; and that scandal he would have to live with, daily meet face to face.

"Yes," he said slowly, "but your act will also disgrace your family, your friends. You are willing to disgrace me?"

For three weeks conscience had demanded one attitude toward him, love another. "Please let's not speak of that!" she begged.

"You're willing to disgrace me?" he repeated.

She did not answer for a moment; then "Forgive me—I am," she whispered.

"And you're decided—absolutely determined?"

She nodded.

"My God, Helen!" he burst out, "to think that you, with open eyes, would destroy yourself and dishonour your father!"

"Forgive me!" she begged.

He turned to David, his face fierce with rageful contempt. "And Aldrich! Let me say one thing to

you. Any man in your situation who would ask a decent woman to marry him is a damned cad!"

Helen raised a hand to stop the retort that was on David's lips. "It is I that insist on marriage—he refuses me," she said quietly.

Mr. Chambers stared long at her, astounded as he had never before been in his life. "There's something behind all this," he said, abruptly.

She was silent.

Even in this tense moment his readiness did not desert him. Sometimes one is stronger than two, sometimes weaker. This time one would be weaker.

"Mr. Aldrich," he said quietly, "would you be so kind as to leave us. There are matters here to be talked over only between Helen and me."

Helen felt the moment before her she had for a month been fearing—felt herself on the verge of the greatest crisis of her life. "Yes—please do, David. It's best for us two to be alone."

She gave David her hand. He pressed it and silently withdrew.

Mr. Chambers stepped close to Helen and gazed searchingly into her face. "There's something back of this. You're telling me all?"

"I can't—please don't ask me, father!"

"You propose—he refuses," he said meditatively. He studied her face for several moments. "I think I know you, my child.—I would have staked my fortune, my life, that you would never have given yourself to any but a man of the highest character."

His face knitted with thought; he began to nod his head ever so slightly. "I recall now that there were some queer circumstances connected with his taking the money. His motives, what he did with it, did not seem particularly plausible to me."

His eyes fairly looked her through. His mind, trained to see and consider instantly all the factors of a situation, and instantly to reach a conclusion, sought with all its concentration the most logical explanation of this mystery.

After a moment he said softly: "So—he didn't take the money after all?"

She gazed at him in choking fascination.

"If he had taken it, if he was what he seems to be, you would never have offered to marry him," he went on in the same soft voice. "I've guessed right—have I not?"

She did not answer.

"Have I not?" he repeated, dominantly.

It seemed to her that the words were being dragged from her by a resistless power. "Yes," she whispered. The next instant she clasped her hands. "Oh, why did I tell!" she cried.

"I guessed it," he said.

They looked silently at each other for a space. When he spoke his tone was quiet again.

"Since I know the main fact I might as well know the minor ones. Why did he pretend to be guilty?"

She hesitated. But he knew the essential fact—and, besides, he was her father, and she had the daughter-desire for her father to appreciate what manner of a man this was whom she loved. So she told the story in a few sentences.

"It's remarkable," he said in a voice that showed he had been affected deeply. "I can see that it was a deed to touch a woman's heart. All the same—he's not the match I'd prefer for you."

He was thoughtful for several moments. He knew the quality of Helen's will—knew there was no changing her determination to marry David. The problem, then, was to arrange so that the marriage would bring the minimum disgrace.

"No, he's not the match I'd prefer for you. Still, if he'll publicly admit and establish his innocence, I'll have not a word to say against him."

"But we've agreed that he can't do that," she said. "I've already made plain to you that to clear himself would be to destroy St. Christopher's."

"Nothing can change that decision?"

"No."

Mr. Chambers again thought for a minute. "I think you exaggerate the effect of the truth on St. Christopher's. However, for the moment, I'll grant you're right. From what you told me I gather Mr. Aldrich has some rather large philanthropic ideas. Well, if he will clear himself, I'll settle upon you any amount you wish—ten million, twenty million. That will enable him to carry out his ideas on any scale he may like. The good he can do will more than balance any injury that may be

done to St. Christopher's. On the one hand, he will have, and you with him, powerless disgrace. On the other, clear name, love, fortune, unlimited power to do good."

She slowly shook her head. "It's all thought over—he can't do it."

"And nothing can change your determination to marry him?"

She held out a hand to him. "No. Forgive me, father," she whispered.

He gazed steadily at her—and again his quick mind was searching for a solution to the situation. He pressed her hand. "I want to think. We'll speak of this again."

He started out, but she stepped before him. "Wait—there's something I must say. But first, you must never tell what you've just found out."'

He did not answer.

His silence stirred a sudden new fear. She crept close to him and peered up into his face. "Father—you're not going to tell, are you?"

Again he was silent.

Her face paled with consternation. She drew a long breath, and her voice came out a thin whisper. "You are going to tell, father! I see it."

He looked into her wide brown eyes and at her quivering face. "I think, Helen, you can leave the proper action to my discretion."

She swayed slightly, and then her whole body tightened with effort. "You are going to make his innocence public," she said, with slow accusation. "You can't deny it."

"I am," he said shortly.

She stepped a pace nearer him. "You must not! You must not!" she cried.

His jaw tightened and his brows drew together. "I shall!—you hear me?"

"But, father—it isn't your secret. You haven't the right."

"I have the right to protect my own daughter and myself!"

"But to destroy others?" she implored. "You know it will ruin hundreds. Have you the right to do that?"

"A man's first duty is to those nearest him."

"But don't you see?—you destroy hundreds to save yourself, and me!"

"You have my answer," he said.

She looked at him despairingly. "Then nothing can stop you?"

"Nothing." His face was firm, his voice hard. "And now, Helen, I'm going," he said shortly. "There's nothing more to be said."

Helen caught his arm. "Not yet!" She gazed at him, her face gray and helpless.... Then the crisis gave her inspiration. A new view of the situation flashed into her mind. She considered it for several moments.

"Father," she said.

"Well?"

She spoke slowly, with a frantic control, with the earnestness of desperation. "Listen, father. Suppose you tell—what will be the use? David will deny your story. I, who shall be with him, I shall deny the story. And there is the decision of the court. All say the same. On your side, you have no proof—not one bit. The world will say you made up the story just to save yourself. The world will honour you less, because it will say you've tried to save yourself by disgracing Mr. Morton.... Don't you see, father?—it will do you no good to tell!—don't you see?"

He gazed at her, but did not answer.

"The story will create a great scandal—yes," she went on. "For you to accuse Mr. Morton—you know how that will injure St. Christopher's before the public—you know how it will lessen the Mission's influence in the neighbourhood. The story will do great ill—so very great an ill! But it will not help you a bit, father—not a bit!"

She paused a moment. "Please do not tell it father! Please do not ... I beg it of you!"

He did not reply at once. He realised the truth of what she had said—but to yield was hard for the Chambers's will, and it was hard to accept the great dishonour. He swallowed with an effort.

"Very well," he said.

"Then you'll say nothing?" she asked eagerly.

"No."

"Oh, thank you!—thank you!" she cried, her voice vibrating with her great relief.

They looked into each other's eyes for a long space. "I hope this is all," he said.

"There's one more thing," she answered, and tried to gather herself for another effort. Her breast rose and fell, and she was all a-tremble. "There is something else—something I must say—something that has been upon my heart for weeks. Say that you forgive me before I say it, father!"

"Go on!"

Her voice was no more than a whisper. "I have learned that the stories ... about your not being honest ... are true."

His face blanched. "So—you insult your own father!"

"Don't make it any harder!" she besought piteously.

"You do not understand business matters," he said, harshly.

She did not hear his last words. "This is the other thing—I'm going to leave home," she went on rapidly. "Perhaps I would not decide to do what I am going to do, if I thought I could help you—to be different. But I know you, father; I know you will not—be different; you do not need me—you are strong and need no support—you will have Aunt Caroline. So I am going to go.

"I'm going to leave home because it seems to me that I have no right to it—to it and the other things of my life. You understand. So I want to ask you not to send any of these things to me. I want nothing—not a cent."

He was silent a moment. The determination in her face again kept him from argument or intercession. He saw that to her this break was a great, tragic, unchangeable fact, and so it also became to him.

"But how are you going to live?" he asked.

"I have the money mother left me—that's enough."

Despite the tragedy of the moment a faint smile drew back the corners of his mouth. "That's two thousand a year—that doesn't begin to pay for your clothes."

"I shall wear different clothes. It will be enough."

"Very well." His face became grim. "And I have my reason why I cannot give you anything! Do you realise, Helen, that you are driving me, in order to protect my reputation, to disown you publicly if you marry Mr. Aldrich?"

She did not reply. "But don't forget," he went on after a moment, "that you are escaping my fortune only temporarily. It will all go to you on my death."

"No—no! I don't want it!"

"But you can't escape it, if I choose to leave it to you."

"If you do," she said slowly, "I shall use it to make restitution, as far as I can, to the people it—it came from." She added, almost breathlessly, "Why not do that now, father? It's the thing I've been wanting to ask you, but have not dared."

"I have not noticed any lack of daring," he observed grimly.

There was a brief silence. "Then this is all," she said.

Suddenly she stretched out her arms to him, and tears sprang into her eyes. "Forgive me, father!—forgive me!"

Standing very erect, his hands folded before him, he gazed fixedly into her imploring face while his mind comprehended their new relations.

She dared a step nearer and laid a hand upon his arm. "Forgive me—won't you please, father?" she whispered.

His face twitched, and he put his hands on her shoulders almost convulsively. "You're taking my heart out!" he said huskily.

"Forgive me!" she sobbed. "I can't help it! I'm the way God made me."

"And God made you very much like your mother," he said, his mind running back to scenes not unlike this. He drew her to him and she flung her arms about his neck and they kissed.

"I love my father—I always shall—it's the business man that"—but her voice trailed away into sobs.

They drew apart. "We shall never speak of this matter again," she said tremulously. She held out her hand. "Good-bye ... father. I shall see you again—yes. But this is the real good-bye."

He took her hand. "Good-bye," he said.

They gazed steadily into each other's eyes. "Good-bye," she repeated in a low voice, and, head down, walked slowly from the room.

He sat long before the fire while upon him his new situation pressed more heavily, more sharply. It was the bitterest hour of his life. Upon him bore the pain of impending public disgrace, the pain of the loss of his daughter—and cruellest of all, the pain of being judged by the one person of his heart, disowned by her. And this last bitterness was given a deep-cutting, ironic edge as he realised afresh that, to protect himself, he must disown her—that, cast off by her, he must make it appear to the world that he had cast her off.

And how the world would take this! His imagination saw in the papers of some near day, across the first page in great black head-lines, "Miss Helen Chambers Marries Ex-Convict—Disowned and Disinherited By Her Father—Social World Horrified!" The irony of it!

But even in this hour, pained as he was by Helen's judgment, he felt no regret for those deeds for which he had been judged. For thirty years and more he had had one supreme object—to take from life, for himself, all that life could be made to yield. All his faculties were pointed to, attuned to, acquisition. His instinct, his long habit, his mighty will, his opportunity-making mind, his long succession of successes, the irresistible command of his every cell to go on, and on, and on—all these united in a momentum that allowed him neither to recoil from what he had done nor to regard it with regret. He felt pain, yes—but mixed with his pain was no other feeling, no impulse, that would swerve his life even a single degree from its thirty-years' direction.

CHAPTER X

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

In five minutes the long, heavy express was due to pull out of the station and go lunging westward through the night. Kate's and Rogers's hand luggage was piled in Kate's seat, and across the aisle and a little ahead, in Rogers's seat, were the two travellers, side by side. Facing them sat David and the Mayor, the latter just back from his brief honeymoon, and standing in the aisle was Tom.

"Well, got everything you need for the trip?" asked the Mayor, in tones that filled the sleeper.

"There's enough in our trunks and in those bags"—Rogers nodded backward towards Kate's seat—"for a trip to the moon. Aldrich tried to buy out New York."

"There's nothin' like havin' too much," declared the Mayor. "Oh, say there, captain," he cried to the porter who had just brushed by. "See here."

The porter turned back. "Yes suh." There was even more than the usual porterly deference in his manner, as he instantly measured the authority in the Mayor's florid person and took note of the silk hat and the imposing beflowered vest. "Yes suh."

"These here two people are friends o' mine. You want to see that they get everything that's comin' to 'em, and a few more besides. Understand?"

"Yes suh."

The Mayor, with some effort, got into and out of a trouser pocket, and held forth a dollar. "If you ain't bashful, take that. And stick it some place where your willingness'll know you've got it.

"There's nobody'll treat you as white as a well-tipped nigger," he remarked as the porter passed on. He leaned forward and laid a hand on Rogers's knee, his smiling face redly brilliant under the Pintsch light. "Just as soon as you get your bellows mended and some meat on your bones, I'm goin' to write you a letter handin' you some straight advice."

The edge of his glance slyly took in Kate. "No, I ain't goin' to wait. I'll tell you now and be in the price o' the stamp. Friend—get married!"

Kate rose abruptly, walked back to her seat and began to fumble about the baggage.

The Mayor nodded his head emphatically. "There's nothin' like it!"

The cry, "All aboard," sounded through the car, and they rose. The Mayor said good-bye, and after him Tom. Then David took Rogers's thin hand. The two men silently gazed at one another for a long moment; each realised he might never again look into the other's face.

"Good-bye, old man," breathed David, gripping his hand. "I hope it's going to be as you hope. God knows you deserve it!"

Rogers's large eyes clung to him. "I've never had a friend like you!" he said slowly. "Good-bye—and if it's to be the long good-bye, then ... well, good-bye!"

He broke off, then added: "You're going to try to help change some things we both know are wrong. Never forget one thing: the time to reform a criminal is before he becomes one. Save the kids.—God bless you!"

The car began slowly to move. They gripped hands again, and David hurried back to Kate, whom the Mayor had just left and who was kissing Tom good-bye. David took her hand, and on gazing into her dark eyes and restrained face, it rushed upon him anew how much joy she had brought him and how much misery he had given her; and suddenly he was without a single word to say farewell.

"Good-bye," she said with a forced calmness.

"Forgive me!" he burst out in a whisper. "Your heart will tell you what I'd like to tell you. Forgive me!"

Her head sank forward in affirmation. "But you've done nothing."

There was no time to reply to that. "God bless you, Kate!—Good-bye!" he cried in a low voice. He ran out of the rapidly moving car and swung himself to the platform—unconscious that Kate's eyes had followed him to the last.

He joined the Mayor, and together with Tom they walked out of the station and into the street, talking of the friends they had just left. But the Mayor, who had met the party at the station, and consequently had not had a confidential word with David, was bubbling with his own affairs, and he quickly left Kate and Rogers to travel their way alone.

"Friend," he said with joyful solemnity, slipping his arm through David's, "I'm the biggest fool that ever wore pants!"

"Why?"

"For not lettin' Carrie marry me before."

"Then you're happy?"

"Happy?" A great laugh rose from beneath the Mayor's vest, and he gave David a hearty slap upon the back. "Yes, sir! Happy!—that's me!

"Yes, sir," he went on, after they had boarded a car, "I've got only one thing agin Carrie, and that is that she didn't rope me in before. Say, she's all right—she's *It*. No siree, friend, there ain't nothin' like gettin' married!"

The Mayor continued his praise of his present state till David and Tom bade him good night and left the car. As they walked through the cross street a sense of loneliness began to settle upon David; so that when Tom slipped a hand through his arm he drew the hand close against his side.

"You're not going to leave me, are you?"

"Me?" Tom hugged the arm he held. "Not till you turn me out!"

They walked in silence for a block. "Pard," Tom began in a low voice, "I don't know why you've been so good to me. I don't know nuttin', an' I'm a lot o' trouble. Mebbe sometimes you t'ink I don't appreciate all what you've done for me. But I do. When I t'ink about when I tried to steal your coat a year ago, an' den when I t'ink about now—I certainly do appreciate. I'm goin' to work hard—an' I'm goin' to study hard—an' I'm goin' to do what you tell me. If I do, d'you t'ink I'll ever make somebody?"

David pressed the arm closer. "My boy, you're going to make a splendid man!"

Tom looked up; tears were in his eyes. "Pard—I'd die tryin'—for you!" he said.

When they reached the apartment house that held their new home, David sent Tom upstairs and set out for St. Christopher's Mission. His sense of loneliness made his mind dwell upon Mr. Chambers's offer of millions; for earlier in the evening a messenger had brought a note from Helen which gave the substance of her talk with her father. He would not have returned an answer different from hers—yet in this moment he ached for those things which had been refused in his name, and the aching drew him to look upon that for which he had given them up.

He paused across the street from St. Christopher's and gazed at the brilliant windows of the club-house and at the great window in the chapel that glowed in memory of Morton. Then he crossed the street and entered the club-house. A few young men and women were coming down the stairway, and a few struggling late-comers were mounting to the floors above. He stood irresolute, then noticing that farther down the hall the door of the assembly room was open, he cautiously joined the little knot of people who stood about it.

The room was crowded with men and women, all in their best clothes. David quickly gathered from the talk of the officers on the platform, all women, that this was a meeting of the Women's Club, held for the double purpose of installing new officers and entertaining the members' husbands. He had been gazing in but a few minutes when the new president, a shapeless little woman, was sworn into office. The audience demanded a speech, and her homely face glowing with happiness and embarrassment, she responded in a few halting, grammarless phrases. "I hope I can do my duty," she ended, "so good that Dr. Morton, who got us to make this club, won't

never be ashamed when he looks down on it."

Her other sentences had been applauded, but this last was received in that deep silence which is applause at its highest; and it came to David afresh that Morton was still the soul of St. Christopher's. All the while that other officers were being installed this closing sentence and its significance persisted in his mind, and so engrossed him that he was startled when the folding chairs began to be rattled shut and stacked in one corner of the room. A little later a piano and a violin started up, and part of the fathers and mothers began stumbling about in a two-step, and part crowded against the walls and made merry over the awkwardness and disasters of the dancers.

David slipped out of the building. Clearer than ever before had come to him a realisation of the responsibility of sacrifice: when one gives, the gift no longer belongs to one—it belongs to those who have builded their lives upon it.

Across the street, he looked back. Only once before had the Morton Memorial window seemed to him more significant, more warm and powerful in its inspiration—and that was on the day of his discharge from prison when it had first flashed upon his vision. Above the glowing window the chapel's short spire, softened by the round-hanging poetry of night, seemed to his imagination to be the uplifted, supplicatory hands of the neighbourhood.... Well, their Morton was safe.

When David reached home he found that Tom was in bed and fast asleep. He walked through the scantily furnished rooms. They were still strange to him, for this was his first night in them—and their strangeness, and the fresh loss of two of his best friends, and the sense, which grew heavier and darker, that he and Helen must remain apart, sharpened his loneliness to a racking pain. He tried to dissipate it by thinking of the ground he had gained—progress that a year ago, when all men refused him a chance, he would have thought impossible; by thinking of the greater achievements the future held. But he could not beget even an artificial glow of spirits; his success seemed but ashes. So he ceased to struggle, and gave himself over to his dejection.

He turned down the gas in his little sitting-room, and raising the shade of a window he sat down and gazed into the street. It was always a quiet street—and now, at half past ten, only an occasional figure moved darkly along its sidewalks. Far above the line of opposite housetops, in a moonless sky, gleamed thousands of white stars. Leaning back in his easy chair, and gazing up at the remote points of light, he went over anew the problem of his relations with Helen, and he asked himself again if he had decided rightly. Yes, he had done right to save her.... And yet, how he longed for the thing she was willing to give! How empty his life seemed without it—what a far, far stretch of loneliness!

His gloom was pressing heavier and heavier upon him, when suddenly there came a ring of his bell. Wondering who could be calling on him at that hour, he crossed the room and opened the door. A tall figure, heavily veiled and wearing a long coat, stepped in. Despite the veil and the dusk of the room, he knew her instantly.

"Helen!" he exclaimed in an awed whisper.

She did not speak. He closed the door and turned up the gas, and he saw she carried a small travelling bag in one hand.

"Helen!" he said.

She set the bag on a chair, and drew her veil up over the front of her hat. Her face was pale, determined.

"I've come to stay," she said slowly.

He could only stare at her.

"I've come to stay," she repeated.

"Helen!" he breathed.

"I've left home—for good. I belong with you. I shall not go away."

"Helen!"

"We shall be married to-night."

He gazed wordless at her white face, and he vaguely realised what her mind had passed through since he had left her five hours before. A wild joy sprang ablaze within him—yet he held fast to his old decision. "But Helen——"

"I've thought it all over," she broke in. "Everything. Heretofore you've been the rock. Now I'm the rock—I can't be changed.... I understand that you've refused me because you want to save me, and I love you for it. But I have searched my soul—I know what I want, I know what I can bear, I know what is best for us both. I know, David!—I know! Since you would not take me, I have come here to force you to take me. You cannot avoid it. I shall not go away."

His heart thrilled at her words, at the steadfastness of her erect figure. "But Helen!—when I think of the disgrace that will fall upon you—oh, I can't let you!"

"The truth is not known about either of us," she returned, steadily. "If the truth were known and

if justice were done, my father would be disgraced and I would share his disgrace, and you would be exalted. It would be I who would dishonour you. If I do get a part of your false disgrace, I only get what is due me.

"You have borne this disgrace for years," she went on. "Don't you think I have the strength to bear, supported by you and love, what you have borne alone?"

His heart drew him toward her with all its tremendous strength.

"I've come to stay!" she repeated.

He wavered. But his old decision had still another word. "There's one more thing, Helen. We can speak of it—we are no longer children."

"No," she said. Her mind fluttered back a month to when they had stood together at the window of the Mission, and she smiled tremulously. "I'm twenty-eight."

He remembered the day, too, and smiled. "And I'm thirty-one—and see, the gray hairs!"

His face sobered. "There's another thing—children. Would it be fair to them?—to be born into disgrace?"

A faint colour tinged her cheeks. "I have thought of everything—that too," she returned steadily. "In a few years you will have won the respect of all; it will be an honour, not a disgrace, to be your child."

Suddenly she stretched out her hands to him. "Oh, I want to share your sorrows, David! I want to share your sorrows! And there will be glories! I want to help in the good you are going to do. My life will count for most with you ... I've come to stay, David! I belong with you! I'm not going away! Take me!"

He sprang forward. "Oh, Helen!" his soul cried out; and he gathered her into his arms.

A few minutes later, when he returned from telephoning an old clergyman whom she knew well, she met him with a glowing smile. "I've been all through it—I shall love it, *our* home!"

He thought of the home she had just left. He caught her hands and gazed into her deep eyes. "Darling—you'll never regret this?" he asked slowly.

"I never shall."

"God grant it!"

"I never shall. This is the day when my life begins."

"And mine, too!" He drew her to him, and kissed her. "But we must go. He said he'd be waiting for us. Come."

She lowered her veil, and they stepped into the hall. In the darkness they reached for each other, their hands touched and clasped; and so, hand in hand, they went down the stairs and forth into the night—and forth into the beginning of life.

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