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MacFarlane**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HELD TO ANSWER: A NOVEL ***



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FRONTISPIECE. See page 82.

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HELD
TO ANSWER
A NOVEL

BY
PETER CLARK MACFARLANE
AUTHOR OF
THOSE WHO HAVE COME BACK, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
W. B. KING

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HELD TO ANSWER

CHAPTER I THE FACE THAT DID NOT FIT

Two well-dressed men waited outside the rail on what was facetiously denominated the mourners' bench. One was a packer of olives, the other the owner of oil wells. A third, an orange shipper, leaned against the rail, pulling at his red moustaches and yearning wistfully across at a wattle-throated person behind the roll-top desk who was talking impatiently on the telephone. Just as the receiver was hung up with an audible click, a buzzer on the wall croaked harshly,—one long and two short croaks.

Instantly there was a scuffling of feet upon the linoleum over in a corner, where mail was being opened by a huge young fellow with the profile of a mountain and a gale of tawny hair blown up from his brow. Undoubling suddenly, this rangy figure of a man shot upward with Jack-in-the-box abruptness and a violence which threatened the stability of both the desk before him and the absurdly small typewriter stand upon his left. Seizing a select portion of the correspondence, he lunged past the roll-top desk of Heitmuller, the chief clerk, and aimed toward the double doors of grained oak which loomed behind. But his progress was grotesque, for he careened like a camel when he walked. In the first stride or two these careenings only threatened to be dangerous, but in the third or fourth they made good their promise. One lurching hip joint banged the drawn-out leaf of the chief clerk's desk, sweeping a shower of papers to the floor.

"John—dammit!" snapped Heitmuller irritably. The other hip caracoled against the unopened half of the double doors as John yawed through. The door complained loudly, rattling upon its hinges and in its brazen sockets, so that for a moment there was clatter and disturbance from one end of the office to the other.

The orange shipper started nervously, and the chief clerk, cocking his head gander-wise, gazed in disgust at the confusion on the floor, while far within Robert Mitchell, the General Freight Agent of the California Consolidated Railway, lifted a massive face from his desk with a look of mild reproof in his small blue eyes.

Yet when the huge stenographer came back, and with another scuffling of clumsy feet stooped to retrieve the litter about Heitmuller's revolving chair, he seemed so regretful and his features lighted with such a helplessly apologetic smile that even his awkwardness appeared commendable, since it was so obviously seasoned with the grace of perfectly good intent.

Appreciation of this was advertised in the forgiving chuckle of the chief clerk who, standing now at the rail, remarked *sotto voce* to the orange shipper: "John is as good as a vaudeville act!"

At this the red moustaches undulated appreciatively, while the two "mourners" laughed so audibly that the awkward man, once more in his chair, darted an embarrassed glance at them, and the red flush came again to his face. He suspected they were laughing at him, and as if to comfort himself, a finger and thumb went into his right vest pocket and drew out a clipping from the advertising columns of the morning paper. Holding it deep in his hand, he read furtively:

ACTING TAUGHT. Charles Kenton, character actor, temporarily disengaged, will receive a few select pupils in dramatic expression at his studio in The Albemarle. Terms reasonable.

Then John looked across aggressively at the men who had laughed. They were not laughing now, but nodding in his direction, and whispering busily.

What were they saying? That he was a joke, a failure? That he had been in this chair seven years? That he was a big, snubbed, defeated, over-worked handy-man about this big, loosely organized office? That in seven years he had neither been able to get himself promoted nor discharged? No doubt!

As if to get away from the thought, John turned from his typewriter to the open window and looked out. There was the spire of the grand old First Church down there below him. Yonder were the sky-notching business blocks of the pushing city of Los Angeles, as it was in the early nineteen hundreds. There, too, were the villa-crowned heights to the north, shut in at last by the barren ridges of the Sierra Madre Mountains, some of which, in this month of January, were snow-capped.

But here were these foolish men still nodding and whispering. Good fellows, too, but blind. What did they know about him really?

They knew that he was a stenographer, but they did not know that he was a stenographer to the glory of God!—one who cleaned his typewriter, dusted his desk, opened the mail, wrote his letters, ate, walked, slept, all to the honor of his creator—that the whole of life to him was a sort of sacrament.

They thought he was beaten and discouraged, an industrial slave, drawn helplessly into the cogs. They, poor, purblind materialists, were without vision. They did not know that there were finer things than pickles and crude oil. They did not know that he was to soar; that already his wings were budding, nor that he lived in an inner state of spiritual exaltation as delicious as it was unsuspected. They pitied him; they laughed commiseratingly. He did not want their commiseration; he spurned their laughter and their pity. He was full of youth and the exuberance of hope. He was full of an expanding strength that made him stronger as his dream grew brighter. Only his eyes were tired. The cross lights were bad. For a moment he shaded his brow tenderly with his hand, reflecting that he must hereafter use an eye-shade by day as methodically he used one in his nightly study.

The morning moved along. The yearning orange shipper went away. One mourner rose and passed inside. The other waited impatiently for his turn to do the same. Luncheon time came for John, and he ate it in the file room—ravenously; and while he ate he read—the Congressional Record; and reading, made notations on the margin, for John was preparing for what he was preparing, although he did not quite know what. The train of destiny was rumbling along, and when it stopped at his station, he proposed to swing on board.

His luncheon down swiftly, as much through hunger as through haste, he swung out of the door, bound for Charles Kenton, "actor—temporarily disengaged—Hotel Albemarle—terms reasonable," moving with such headlong speed that he was soon within that self-important presence.

"Hampstead is my name," he blurted, with clumsy directness, "John Hampstead," and the interview with Destiny was on.

"The first trouble with you," declared the white-haired actor critically, "is that your face doesn't fit."

John wet a lip and hitched a nervous leg, but sat awkwardly silent, his eyes boring hungrily, as if waiting for more. The actor, however, was slow to add more. Faces were his enthusiasm, as well as the raw material of his profession, but this face puzzled him, so that before committing himself further he paused to survey it again: the strong nose with its hump of energy, the well buttressed chin, and then the broad forehead with its unusually thick, bony ridge encircling the base of the brows like a bilge keel, proclaiming loudly that here was a man with racial dynamite in his system, one who, whatever else he might become, was now and always a first-class animal.

The eyebrows heightened this suggestion by being thick and yellow, and sweeping off to the temples in a scroll-like flare. The forehead itself was broad, but gathered a high look from that welter of tawny hair which was roached straight up and back, giving the effect of one who plunges headlong.

But the eyes completely modified the countenance. They did not plunge. They halted and beamed softly. Gray and deep-seated, they made all that face's force the force of tenderness, by

burning with a light that was obviously inner and spiritual. The mouth, again, while as cleanly chiseled as if cut from marble,—sensitive, impressionistic, fine, was, alas! weak; or if not weak, advertising weakness by an habitual expression of lax amiability; although along with this the actor noted that the two lips, buttoning so loosely at the corners, could none the less collaborate in a most engaging smile.

Kenton concluded his second appraisal with a little gesture of impatience. The man's features gave each other the lie direct, and that was all there was to it. They said: This man is a beast, a great, roaring lion of a man; and then they said: No, this lion is a lamb, a mild, dreamy, sucking dove sort of person.

"That's it," he iterated. "Your face doesn't fit."

Hampstead did not wince.

"The question is," he proposed, in a voice husky with a mixture of embarrassment and determination, "how am I to make it fit? Or, failing that, how am I to get somewhere with a face that doesn't fit?"

The actor's reply was half sagacity, half "selling talk", mixed with some judicious flattery and tinged with inevitable gallery play, although there was no gallery.

"Elocution?" Kenton observed, with a little grimace of derision. "No! Oratory? Not at all!" The weight of his withering scorn was tremendous. "There are no such things. It is all acting! A man speaks with the whole of himself—his eyes, his mouth, his body, his walk, his pose—everything. That's what you need to learn. Self-expression! I can make your face fit. That's simple enough," and Kenton waved his hand as if the re-stamping of a man's features was the easiest thing he did. "I can make your body graceful. I can take that voice of yours and make it strong as the roar of a bull, and as soft as rich, brown velvet. Yes," and the actor leaped to his feet in growing enthusiasm, "I can make 'em all respond to every whim of what's passing inside. But," he asked suddenly, with a penetrating glance, "will that make an orator of you? Well, that depends on what's passing inside. It takes a great soul to make an orator—great imagination, mind, feelings, sentiments. Have you got 'em? I doubt it! I doubt it!"

The old man confirmed his dubiousness with the uncomplimentary emphasis of hesitating silence. In the sincerity of his critical analysis, he had forgotten that he was trying to secure a pupil. "And yet—and yet—" his eye began to kindle as he looked, "I tell you I don't know, boy—there's something—there might be something behind that face of yours. It might come out, you know, *it might come out!*"

Kenton drawled the last words out slowly in a deeply speculative tone, and then asked abruptly: "How old are you?"

"Twenty-four," admitted John, feeling suddenly as if he confessed the years of Methuselah.

But the dark eyes of the old actor sparkled, and his long, mobile lips parted in the ghost of a sigh which crept out through teeth stained yellow by years and tobacco, after which he ejaculated admiringly: "My God, but you are young!"

This came as an inspiring thought to John. He did feel young, all but his eyes. What was the matter with them that the lids were so wooden of late? Yes; he was young, despite seven submerged years, and the wings of his soul were preening.

Back in the General Freight Office, John fell upon his work with happy vigor. Spat, spat, spat, and a letter was on its way from Dear Sir to Yours truly. But in the midst of these spatting, he paused to muse.

"Kenton said he could make me graceful," the big fellow was communing over his typewriter, when abruptly the outer door opened and, after a single glance, John appeared to forget both his communings and his work. Swinging about, he sat transfixed, his odd features turned eccentrically handsome by a light of adoration which began to glow upon them, as if an astral presence had entered.

Yet to the unprejudiced observer the newcomer was no heavenly being, but a mere schoolgirl, whose dress had not been long at the shoe-top stage. With a swish of skirts and an excited ripple of laughter, she had burst in like a breeze of youth itself. But to this breeziness of youth the young lady added the indefinable thing called charm, and the promise of greater charm to come. She was already tall and would be taller, fair to look upon and certain to be fairer. To a dress of some warm red color, a touch of piquancy was added by a Tam-o'-Shanter cap of plaid that was itself pushed jauntily to one side by a wealth of crinkly brown hair; while a bit of soft brown fur encircled the neck and cuddled affectionately as a kitten under the smooth, plump chin. The face was oval with a tendency to fullness, and the nose, while by no means *retroussé*, was as distinctively Irish as the sparkle in the blue of her laughing eyes. Irish, too, were the

smiling lips, but the delicious dimples that flecked the white and red of her cheeks were entirely without nationality. They were just woman, budding, ravishing woman; and there is no doubt whatever that they helped to make the fascination of that merry face complete, when its spell was cast over the soul of Hampstead.

"Oh, John!" exclaimed the young lady with impulsive familiarity, bounding through the gate and over to his side, "I want you to write some invitations for me. This is my week to entertain the Phrosos. See! Isn't the paper dear?"

There were caresses in the big man's eyes as the girl drew near, but he replied with less freedom than her own form of address invited: "Good afternoon, Miss Bessie."

The restraint in his speech however was much in contrast to the bold poaching of his eyes. But Bessie appeared to notice neither restraint nor the boldness as, standing by his desk, with the big man looking on interestedly, she undid the package in her hand.

The picture of frank and simple comradeship so immediately established proclaimed a certain mutual unawareness between this pretty, half-developed girl and this big, unawakened man that was as delightful to contemplate as it evidently was to enjoy.

"Isn't it darling?" the girl demanded again, having exposed to view the contents of her box, invitation paper with envelopes to match, in color as pink as her own cheeks.

"Yes, Miss Bessie, it is dear," John concurred placidly.

"But you are not looking at it," protested the girl.

"No," the awkward man confessed, but entirely unabashed, "I am looking at you—devouringly."

"Well, you needn't," Bessie answered spicily.

"Yes, I need," John declared coolly. "You do not know how much I need. You are the only unspoiled human being I ever see in this office."

"Old Heit does look rather shopworn," Bessie whispered roguishly. "But, look here," and she thrust out her lips in a pout that was at once defiant and tantalizing, while her eyes rested for a moment upon the closed double doors: "My father is an unspoiled human being."

"What have you been doing to your hair?" Hampstead demanded critically, refusing to be diverted.

"Doing it up, of course, as grown women should," she vouchsafed with emphasis. "Don't you like it?"

With a flash of her two hands, one of which snatched out a pin while the other swept off the plaid cap, she spun herself rapidly about so that John might view the new coiffure from all angles.

"Oh, of course, I have to like it," he said, with mock mournfulness. "I have to like anything you do, because I like you, and because you are my boss's boss; but I am sorry to lose the thick braids down your back, with that delicious little velvety tuft at the end that I used to catch up and tickle your ear with in the long, long ago."

"But how long ago was that, Sir Critical?" challenged Bessie.

"Long, long ago," affirmed Hampstead, with another of his humorous sighs, "when it was a part of my duty to take you to the circus and buy you peanuts and lemonade of a color to match your cheeks."

"And that," dissented the young lady triumphantly, "was only last September, and the one before that, and, in fact, almost every circus day since I can remember."

"But now that you are doing your hair up high, you will not need me to take you to the circus again."

This time the note of sadness in Hampstead's voice was genuine, whereat all the loyalty in the soul of Bessie leaped up.

"You shall," she declared, with an impulsive sweetness of manner, while she leaned close and added in a whisper that made the assurance deliciously confidential—"as long as you wish."

"Then I shall do it forever," declared John recklessly.

"However," and Miss Elizabeth Mitchell, with a playful acquisition of dignity, switched the subject abruptly by announcing briskly, "business before circuses."

"Phrosos before rhinos, as it were," consented John.

"Yes—now take your pencil and let me dictate."

"But," bantered John, "I allow no woman to dictate to me. Besides, I write a perfectly horrible hand."

"Oh," explained Bessie, "but I want them on the typewriter. It'll make the other girls wild. None of them can command a typewriter."

"Yet," protested Hampstead, "overlooking for the moment the offensiveness in that word

'command', I venture to suggest, Miss Mitchell, that things are not done that way this year. A typewritten invitation isn't considered good form in the best circles."

"I don't care; we'll have 'em," declared Bessie. "We'll set a new fashion." Her little foot smote the floor sharply, and she stood bolt upright, so upright that she leaned back, gazing at John through austere lashes, her face lengthening till the dimples disappeared, while the Cupid's bow of her lips became almost a memory.

"Oh, very well," weakened Hampstead, bowing his head, "I cannot brook that gaze for long. It shall be as your Grace commands."

"Tired, aren't you?" commented Bessie, suddenly mollified, and scanning the big face narrowly, while a look of soberness came into her eyes. "I can see it; and your eyes look bad—very bad, John." Her voice was girlishly sympathetic. "These people do not appreciate you, either. But I do! I know!" and she nodded her round chin stoutly, while she laid a hand upon the arm of this man who, seven years her senior, was in some respects her junior. "You are a very great man in the day of his obscurity. It will come out some time. You will be General Manager of the railroad, or something very, very big. Won't you?" and she leaned close again with that delightfully confidential whisper.

"I admit it," confessed John, with a happy chuckle.

But Bessie's restless eye had fallen upon the clock. "Pickles and artichokes!" she exclaimed, with a sudden change of mood, "I must flit."

Snatching from her bag a crumpled note, she tossed it on the desk, calling back: "Here. This is what I want to say to 'em."

Hampstead sat for a moment looking after her, his lips parted, his great hands set upon his knees with fingers sprawled very widely, until Bessie was out of view behind the double doors that admitted to her father's presence.

CHAPTER II

ONE MAN AND ANOTHER

In the dusk of the early winter's night in that land where winter hints its presence but slightly in any other way, two children dashed out of a rambling shell of a cottage that sprawled rather hopelessly over an unkempt lot, screaming: "Uncle John! Uncle John!"

Roused from castled, starry dreams, the big stenographer, who had been enjoying the feel of the dark upon his eyes, and the occasional happy fragrance of orange blossoms in his nostrils, greeted each with a bear hug, and the three clattered together up the rickety steps into a tiny hall. On the left was an oblong room, and beyond it, through curtains, appeared a table set for dinner. Light streaming in from this second room revealed the first as a sort of parlor-studio, where a piano, a lounge, easels, malsticks, palettes, and stacks of unframed canvases jostled each other indifferently. An inspection would have shown that these pictures were mostly landscapes, with now and then a flower study in brilliant colors; and to the practised eye a distressing atmosphere of failure would have obtruded from every one.

From somewhere beyond the dining room came the odor of cooking food, and the sound of energetic but heavy footsteps.

"Hello, Rose," called John cheerily.

At the moment a woman came into view, bearing a steaming platter. She was large of frame, with gray eyes, with straight light hair, fair wide brow, and features that showed a general resemblance to Hampstead's own. Her face had a weary, disturbed look, but lighted for a moment at the sight of her brother.

Depositing the platter upon the table, the woman sank heavily into a chair at the end, where she began immediately to serve the plates. The children, a girl and a boy, sat side by side, with John across from them. This left a vacant chair opposite Rose, and before this a plate was laid.

For a time the family fell upon its food in silence. The girl was eleven years old perhaps, with eyes of lustrous hazel, reddish-brown hair massed in curls upon her shoulders and hanging below, cheeks hopelessly freckled, mouth large, and nose also without hope through being waggishly pugged. The boy, whose sharp, pale features exhibited traces of a battle with ill health begun at birth and not yet ended, had eyes that were like his mother's, clear and gray, and there was a brave turn to his upper lip that excited pity on a face so pale. He looked older but was probably younger than his sister. Hero-worship, frank and unbounded, was in the glance with

which the two from time to time beamed upon their uncle.

After a considerable interval, John, glancing first at the empty chair and then at his sister, asked with significant constraint in his tone: "Any word?"

His sister's head was shaken disconsolately, and the angular shoulders seemed to sink a little more wearily as her face was again bowed toward her plate.

After another interval, Hampstead remarked: "You seem worried to-night, Rose."

"The rent is due to-morrow," she replied in a wooden voice.

"Is that all?" exclaimed John, throwing back his head with a relieved laugh. At the same time a hand had stolen into his pocket, and he drew out a twenty-dollar gold piece and tossed it across the table.

"The rent is \$17.50," observed Rose, eyeing the coin doubtfully.

"Keep the change," chuckled John, "and pass the potatoes."

But the woman's gloom appeared to deepen.

"You pay your board promptly," she protested. "This is the third month in succession that you have also paid the rent. Besides, you are always doing for the children."

"Who wouldn't, I'd like to know?" challenged John, surveying them both proudly; whereat Dick, his mouth being otherwise engaged, darted a look of gratitude from his great, wise eyes, while Tayna reached over and patted her uncle's hand affectionately. "Tayna" was an Indian name the girl's father had picked up somewhere.

"Besides," went on John, "Charles is having an uphill fight of it right now. It's a pleasure to stand by a gallant fellow like him. He goes charging after his ideal like old Sir Galahad."

But the face of his sister refused to kindle.

"Like Don Quixote, you mean," she answered cynically. "I haven't heard from him in three weeks. He has not sent me any money in six. He sends it less and less frequently. He becomes more and more irresponsible. You are spoiling him to support his family for him, and," she added, with a choke in her voice, while a tear appeared in her eye, "he is spoiling us—killing our love for him."

The boy slipped down from his chair and stood beside his mother, stroking her arm sympathetically.

"Poppie's all right," he whispered in his peculiar drawl. "He'll come home soon and bring a lot of money with him. See if he don't!"

"Oh, I know," confessed Rose, while with one hand she dabbed the corner of her eye with an apron, and with the other clasped the boy impulsively to her. "I know I should not give way before the children. But—but it grows worse and worse, John!"

"Nonsense!" rebuked her brother. "You're only tired and run down. You need a rest, by Hokey! that's what you need. Charles is liable to sell that Grand Canyon canvas of his any time, and when he does, you'll get a month in Catalina, that's what you will!"

The wife was silently busy with her apron and her eyes.

"Do you know, Rose," John continued with forced enthusiasm, "my admiration for Charles grows all the time. He follows his star, that boy does!"

"And forgets his family—leaves it to starve!" reproached the sister bitterly, while the sag of her cheeks became still more noticeable.

"Ah, but that's where you do Charles an injustice," insisted John. "He knows I'm here. We have a sort of secret understanding; that is," and he gulped a little at going too far—"that is, we understand each other. He knows that while he is following his ideal, I won't see you starve. He's a genius; I'm the dub. It's a fair partnership. His eye is always on the goal. He will get there sure—and soon, now, too."

"He will never get there!" blurted out the dejected woman, as if with a sudden disregardful loosing of her real convictions. "For thirteen years I have hoped and toiled and believed and waited. A good while ago I made up my mind. He has not the vital spark. For five years I have pleaded with him to give it up—to surrender his ambition, to turn his undoubted talent to account. He has had the rarest aptitude for decorating. We might be having an income of ten thousand a year now. Instead he pursues this will-o'-the-wisp ambition of his. He is crazy about color, always chasing a foolish sunset or some wonderful desert panorama of sky and cloud and mountain—seeing colors no one else can see but unable to put his vision upon the canvas. That's the truth, John! I have never spoken it before. Never hinted it before the children! Charles Langham is a failure. He will never be anything else but a failure!"

The words, concluded by the barely successful suppression of a sob, fell on unprotesting silence. Who but this life-worn woman had so good an opportunity to know if they were true, so

good a right to speak them if she believed them true? John looked at his plate, Tayna and Dick looked at each other. It required a stout heart to break the oppressive quiet, and for the moment no one in this group had that heart. The break came from the outside, when some one ran swiftly up the steps and threw open the front door. Instant sounds of collision and confusion issued from the hall, followed immediately by a masculine voice, thin and injured in tone, calling excitedly:

"Well, for the love of Michael Angelo! What do you keep stuffing the hall so full of furniture for? Won't somebody please come and help me with these things?"

The dinner table was abruptly deserted; but quick as John and the children were, Rose was ahead of them, and when they reached the hallway, a thin man of medium height, with an aquiline nose, dark eyes, and long loose hair, was helplessly in the embrace of the laughing and crying woman.

"Oh, Charles, you did come home; you did come home, didn't you?" she was crying.

Charles broke in volubly. "Well, I should say I did. What did you expect? Have I ever impressed you as a man who would neglect his family?" After which, with the look of one who has put his accusers in the wrong, he rescued himself from his wife's emphatic embraces, held her off for a moment with a look of real fondness, and then brushed her with his lips, first on one cheek and then upon the other.

"Dad-dee!" clamored the children in chorus. "Daddee!" Yet it was noticeable that they did not presume to rush upon their father, but flung their voices before them, experimentally, as it were.

"Well, well, *las ninas*" (las ninas being the Spanish for children), the father exclaimed, his piercing dark eyes upon them with delight and displeasure mingling. "Aren't you going to give me a hug? Your mother nearly strangles me, and you stand off eyeing me as if I were a new species."

At the open arms of invitation, both of the children plunged unhesitatingly; but their reception was brief.

"Run away now, father is tired," the nervous-looking man proclaimed presently, straightening his shoulders, while he sniffed the atmosphere. "Dinner, eh? Gods and goats, but I am hungry!"

Rose led the little procession proudly back to the table, drawing out her husband's chair for him, hovering over him, smoothing his hair, unfolding his napkin, and stooping to place a fresh kiss upon his fine, high, but narrow brow.

"That will do now; that will do now," he chided, with an air of having indulged a foolishly doting woman long enough. "For goodness' sake, Rose, give me something to eat."

His wife, still upon her feet, carried him the platter from which the family had been served. Charles condemned it with a glance.

"Isn't there something fresh you could give me? Something that hasn't been—pawed over?"

His tone was eloquent of sensibilities outraged, and his dark eyes, having first flashed a reproach upon his wife, swept the circle with a look of expected comprehension in them, as if he knew that all would understand the delicacies of the artistic temperament.

"Why, yes," admitted Rose, without a sign of resentment. "I can get you something fresh if you will wait a few minutes."

She slipped out to the kitchen from which presently the odor of broiling meat proceeded, while the artist coolly rolled his cigarette, and, surveying without touching the cup of coffee which John had poured for him, raised his voice to call: "Some fresh coffee, too, Rose, please!"

After this Langham leveled his eye on his brother-in-law and asked airily, "Well, John, how's everything with you?"

"Fine as silk, Charles," replied Hampstead. "How is it with you?"

"Never better," declared Langham. "Never saw such sunsets in your life as they are having up the Monterey coast. I tell you there never were such colors. There was one there in December,"—and he launched into a detailed description of it, his eyes, his face, his hands, his whole body laboring to convey the picture which his animated spirits proclaimed was still upon the screen of his mind.

As the description was concluded, Rose placed a platter before him, upon which, garnished with parsley, two small chops appeared, delicately grilled.

Abruptly ceasing conversation, Charles sank a knife and fork into one of them and transferred a generous morsel to his mouth.

"Thanks, old girl; just up to your topmost mark," he confessed ungrudgingly, after a few moments, during which, with half-closed eyes, he had been chewing vigorously and with a singleness of purpose rather rare in him.

"Sold any pictures lately?" asked John casually.

"No," said Langham abruptly, lowering his voice, while a look of annoyance shaded his brow.

"I dropped in at the gallery first thing, but"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"Nothing doing! However," and he became immediately cheerful again, "Mrs. Lawson has been looking awfully hard at that Grand Canyon canvas. If she buys that, my fortune's made."

"And if she doesn't," observed Rose pessimistically.

"And if she doesn't?" her husband exclaimed with sudden irritation. "Well—it'll be made just the same. You see if it isn't! Oh, say!" and a light broke upon his face so merry that it immediately dissipated every sign of annoyance. "What do you think? I saw Owens to-day, the fellow who auctions alleged oil paintings at a minimum of two dollars each. You know the scheme—pictures painted while you wait—roses, chrysanthemums, landscapes even. Well, he offered me fifteen dollars a day to paint pictures for him. Think of it! To sit in the window before a gaping crowd painting those miserable daubs, a dozen or two a day, while he auctions them off. His impudence! If I had been as big as you are, Jack, I would have punched him."

"Fifteen dollars a day," commented Rose thoughtfully.

"Yes," laughed Langham, his little black eyes a-twinkle, as he clipped the last morsel from the first of his chops. "The idea!"

"Well, I hope you took it," his wife suggested.

"Rose!" exclaimed Langham, rising bolt upright at the table and looking into her face as if she had unwarrantably and unexpectedly hurled the blackest insult. "Rose! An artist like me!"

"It is the kind of a job for an artist like you," she rejoined stingingly, with a sarcastic emphasis on just the right words.

"Oh, my God! My God!" exclaimed the man sharply, turning from the table, while he threw his hands dramatically upward and clutched at the back of his head, after which he took a turn up and down the room as if beside himself with unutterable emotions.

John judged that this was the fitting moment for his withdrawal, but Langham's distress of mind was not too great for him to observe the movement and to follow. He overtook his brother-in-law in the studio-parlor, and his manner was coolly importunate.

"Say, old man!" he whispered, "could you let me have five? I'm a little short on carfare, and you'll be gone in the morning before I get up."

"Sure," exclaimed John, without a moment's hesitation, delving in the depths of the pocket from which he had produced the money for the rent, and handing out a five-dollar piece.

"Thanks, old chap," said Langham, seizing it eagerly and hastening away, after an affectionate slap on the shoulder of his bigger and as he thought baser metal brother-in-law. He did not, however, say that he would repay the loan, and Hampstead did not remark that it was the last gold coin in his pocket and that he should have no more till pay day, ten days hence.

John let his admiration for the assurance of Langham play for a moment, and then turned to the rear of the studio, opened a door, struck a match, and groped his way to a naked gas jet. The sudden flare of light revealed a lean-to room, meant originally for nobody knew what, but turned into a bedroom. The only article of furniture which piqued curiosity in the least was a table against the wall, across which a long plank had been balanced. Upon it and equilibrated as carefully as the plank itself, was a row of books of many shapes and sizes and in various stages of preservation. This plank was John's library.

Stuck about upon the walls were several large photogravures, portraying various stirring scenes in history, mostly Roman. They were unframed and fastened crudely to the wall with pins. Evidently this was the living place of an untidy man.

The tiny table, with its balanced over-load of books, was directly beneath the gas. John dropped heavily into the wooden chair before it and drew to him a number of sheets of paper, upon which, with much labor and many erasings, he began to fashion a sort of motto or legend. Satisfied at length with his work, he printed the finished legend swiftly in rude capital letters in the center of a fresh sheet, snatched down the picture of a Christian martyr which occupied the central space above his library, and with the same four pins affixed his motto in that particular spot, where it would greet him instantly upon opening the door, and where it would be the last thing upon which his eyes fell as he went to sleep and the first when he awakened in the morning.

Once it was in position, he stood off and admired it, reading aloud:

"ETERNAL HAMMERING IS THE PRICE OF SUCCESS!"

"That's the stuff," he croaked enthusiastically.

"Eternal hammering!" And then he paused a moment, after which his reverie was continued

aloud. "That actor was telling me to-day about technique. He said: 'There's a right way to do everything—to pitch a horseshoe even.' He's right. The fellow with the best technique will knock the highest persimmon. What makes me such a good stenographer? Technique. What makes me such a bum office flunkey? The lack of technique—no voice—no form—no self-confidence. I am a young-man-afraid-of-himself—that's who I am. Technique first and then—gravitation! That's the idea!"

By gravitation, however, Hampstead did not mean that law which keeps the heavenly bodies from getting on the wrong side of the street, but that process, which in his short life he had already observed, by means of which the man in the crowd who takes advantage of his opportunities and, by the dig of an elbow here, the insert of a shoulder there, and the stiff thrust of a foot and leg yonder, sooner or later arrives opposite the gateway of his particular desires.

Mere opportunism? That and a little more; a sort of conviction that fortune herself is something of an opportunist, that what a man wants to do, fortune, sooner or later, will help him to do, if he only wills himself in the direction of the want early enough and long enough to give the fickle jade her chance.

By way of proceeding immediately to hammer, Hampstead reached for a heavy calf-bound volume, bearing the imprint of the Los Angeles Public Library, and settled himself to read.

Most people in the railroad office were tired when they finished their day's work. They were done with effort. John, however, was just ready to begin. They thought of recreation; John thought only of hammering.

Since his scholastic education had been broken off in the middle by economic necessities, he had formed the plan of reading at night the entire written history of the world, from the first cuneiform inscription down to the last edition of the last newspaper. In pursuance of this plan, he had already traveled far down the centuries, and it was with eagerness that he adjusted his eye-shade to-night, because when he lifted the cover of his book he knew that he would swing open the doors on one of the greatest centuries in human history, the century in which the world discovered the individual. Hampstead was himself an individual. This was in some sense the story of his own discovery.

When John had been reading for perhaps half an hour, there came a bird-like tap at his door, accompanied by a suppressed giggle.

"Who comes there?" called the student in sepulchral tones, stabbing the page at a particular spot with his thumb, while his eyes were lifted.

The only audible sound was another giggle, but the door swung open mysteriously, revealing two small, white-robed figures silhouetted against the shadows in the studio.

"Enter, ghosts!" John commanded, in the same sepulchral voice, while his eyes fell again upon his pages. The ghosts chortled and advanced, but with great circumspection, to the little table with its dangerously balanced bookshelf, its miscellaneous litter of papers, and its silent, absorbed student.

Tayna, her long burnished curls cascading over the white of her nightgown, and her eyes shining softly, ducked her head and arose under one arm of her uncle, where presently she felt herself drawn close with an affectionate, satisfying sort of squeeze. The boy, approaching from the other side, laid an arm upon the shoulder of the man, and stood watching with fascination the eyes of his uncle in their steady sweep from side to side of the printed page.

"Uncle John," asked Tayna shyly, burying her face in his neck as she put the question, "when will you be President?"

"When *shall* you be President?" corrected the boy, looking across at his sister with that same old-mannish expression which was a part of all he said and did.

Hampstead cuddled the girl closer, and his eye abandoned the page to look down the bridge of his nose into distance.

"Why?" he asked presently.

"Oh, because," said Tayna, with a little shiver of eagerness, "I can hardly wait."

Hampstead's eyes wandered to his motto on the wall. The eyes of the boy followed and spelled out the letters wonderingly, but in silence.

"We must be able to wait," said John, squeezing Tayna again. "It's a long, long way; but if we just keep on keeping on, why, after a while we are there, you know."

Tayna sighed and reached up a round, plump arm till it encircled Hampstead's neck, as she asked, still more shyly:

"And when you are President, every one will know just how good and great you are, and they won't call you awkward nor—nor homely any more, will they?"

A flush and a chuckle marked John's reception of this query, after which he observed hastily and a bit apprehensively:

"Say, you wet little goldfishes! Remember that you are never, never, now or any time, howsoever odd I bear myself, to breathe a word to anybody, not to a single soul, not to your mamma or your papa or your Sunday-school teacher or anybody, of all these nice little play secrets which we have between ourselves."

An instant seriousness came over the children's faces.

"Cross my heart," murmured Tayna, with a twitch of her slender finger across her breast.

"And hope to die," added Dick, with a funeral solemnity, as he completed Tayna's cross by a vertical movement of a stubby thumb in the direction of his own wishbone of a breast.

Hampstead looked relieved.

"But," affirmed Tayna stoutly, "they are not play secrets. They are real secrets. Aren't they?"

John looked up at his motto again.

"Yes," he said in a low, determined voice. "They are real secrets."

"And," half-declared, half-questioned Dick, "if you aren't President, you are going to be some other kind of a very great man?"

"Aren't you?" the boy persisted, when Hampstead was silent.

"Tell you to-morrow," laughed John. "Good night, ghosts!" and with a swift assault of his lips upon the cheeks of either, he gently impelled them toward the door.

"Good night, your Excellency!" giggled Tayna.

"Good night, my counselors," responded Hampstead, reaching for his book.

An hour later Hampstead was still reading. Another hour later he was still reading. But something like a quarter of an hour beyond that, when it might have been, say, near half-past eleven, he was not reading. He was turning his head strangely from side to side and digging a knuckle into his eyes. A surprising thing had happened. He could no longer see the lines upon the page—nor the page itself—nor the book—nor anything!

His first impression was that the gas had gone out; but this swiftly gave way to the conviction that he had gone blind—stone blind!—and so suddenly that it happened right between the beheading of one of the queens of Henry the Eighth and the marrying of another. He was now tardily conscious that for some time his eyes had been giving him pain, that he had rubbed them periodically to clear away white opacities that appeared upon the page; but now there was no pain; they were suffused with moisture, and the room was dark.

After an interval he could make out the gaslight glowing feebly like the tiny glare of a candle visible in some distant pit of darkness, but he could discern no shapes about the room. Not one!

A horrible fear stole into his breast and chilled it. All of him had suddenly come to naught, and just as he was getting started. He turned futile, streaming orbs up to where his new-made motto should loom upon the wall. It was there, of course, mocking at him now; but he could not see it. He could not see the wall even. For fully five minutes he sat in darkness, his hands clasped above his bowed head. Then he arose and groped his way along the wall to the door and opened it, and stood facing out into the grotesque dark of the studio. He thought of trying to grope his way across it—of calling out—but decided to wait a few minutes.

He felt stricken, broken, overwhelmed. His life, his career, himself were ruined. He required time to get used to the sensation, time to adjust his mind to the extent of the calamity and to gather some elements of fortitude wherewith to face the world. Not even Rose must see him broken and shattered as he felt right now.

Turning back, he closed the door, felt his way to the gas, and turned it off. He had no need of gas now. Then he lay down, fully clothed, upon the bed, with a cold cloth upon his eyes, thinking flightily and feeling very sorry for himself.

CHAPTER III WHEN THE DARK WENT AWAY

| General Freight Agent. |
| Walk in! |
+-----+

This was the sign on the door that John Hampstead had opened every morning for seven years. This morning he did not open it, and there was something like consternation when as late as nine-thirty the chair of the big, amiable, stenographic drudge was still vacant. Old Heitmuller, the chief clerk, after swearing his way helplessly from one point of the compass to another, was about to dispatch the office boy to Hampstead's residence.

Inside, and unaware of all this pother, sat the General Freight Agent. Big of body, with the topography of his father's heath upon his wide face, soft in the heart and hard in the head, Robert Mitchell was a man of no airs. His origin was probably shanty Irish, and he didn't care who suspected it. By painful labor, a ready smile, a hearty laugh, a square deal to his company and as square a deal to the public as he could give—"consistently"—he had got to his present modest eminence. He was going higher and was not particular who suspected that either; but was not boastful, had the respect of all men who knew him well, and the affection of those who knew him intimately.

He sat just now in a thoroughly characteristic pose, with the stubby fingers of one fat hand thoughtfully teasing a wisp of reddish brown hair, while his shrewd blue eyes were screwing at the exact significance of the top letter on a pile before him.

Over in a corner was Mitchell's guest and vast superior, Malden H. Hale, the president of the twelve thousand miles of shining steel which made up the Great South-western Railway System, in which Mitchell's little road nestled like a rabbit in the maw of a python. Mr. Hale was signing some letters dictated yesterday to John, finding them paragraphed and punctuated to his complete satisfaction, with here and there a word better than his own looming up in the context. For a time there was no sound save the scratching of his pen and the fillip of the sheets as he turned them over. Then he chuckled softly, and presently spoke.

"Bob," he said, "that's an odd genius, that stenographer out there."

"Yes," replied Mr. Mitchell absently, without looking up from his work, and then suddenly he stabbed the atmosphere with a significant rising inflection: "Genius?"

"Well, yes," affirmed Mr. Hale. "Genius! He impresses you first as absurdly incompetent, but his workmanship is really superior, and later you get a suggestion of something back of him, something buried that might come out, you know."

"I used to think so," the General Freight Agent replied, with a tone which indicated loss of interest in the subject, but being tardily overtaken in his reading by a sense that he had not quite done justice to the big stenographer, he broke the silence to add: "He is a fine character. He has very high thoughts,"—vacancy was in his eye for a moment,—"*so high they're cloudy.*"

And that was all. Mr. Hale made no further comment. Mr. Mitchell, a just man, was satisfied that he had done justice. Thus in the minds of two arbiters of the destinies of many men, John Hampstead, loyal, laborious, who had served faithfully for seven years, was lifted for a moment until the sun of prospect flashed upon him,—lifted and then dropped. And they did not even know that nature, too, had dropped him,—that he was blind.

But just then a privileged person knocked and entered without waiting for an invitation. The newcomer was Doctor Gallagher, the "Company" oculist, his fine, dark eyes aglow with sympathy and importance.

"That boy Hampstead," he began abruptly, "is in bad shape."

"Hampstead!" ejaculated Mr. Mitchell antagonistically, as if it were impossible that lumbering mass of bone and muscle could ever be in bad shape.

"Yes," affirmed the physician, with the air of one who announces a sensation, "he's likely to go blind!"

"No!" ejaculated Mr. Mitchell, in still more emphatic tones of disbelief, though his blue eyes opened wide and grew round with shock and sympathetic apprehension.

"Yes," explained Doctor Gallagher volubly. "Continual transcription, the sweep of the eye from the notebook page to the machine and back, year in and year out, for so long, has broken down the muscular system of the eye. He had a blind spell last night. He can see all right this morning. But to let him go to work would be criminal. I have him in the Company Hospital for two weeks of absolute rest, and then he will be all right. But the typewriter, never again! You can put him on the outside to solicit freight, or something like that."

A broad grin overspread the features of the General Freight Agent. "You don't know John," he

said. "That boy would die of nervousness the first day out. He's afraid of people. Besides," went on Mitchell, "we couldn't get along without him. He knows too much that nobody else knows."

"Well, anyway, never again the typewriter!" commanded the doctor from the door, getting out quickly and hurrying away with the consciousness of duty extremely well performed. He knew that he had exaggerated the extent of John's eye-trouble; but he believed that it was necessary to exaggerate it, both to Hampstead and to Mr. Mitchell.

In his darkened room at the hospital, John was feeling somehow suddenly honored of destiny. People were thinking, talking, caring about him. There was exaltation just in that. But also he was fuming. He wasn't ill. He was simply confined. He could not read. He could not write. He could do nothing but sit in a darkened room according to prescription, and wait. But on the third day Doctor Gallagher said:

"As soon as it is dusk, you may go out for a swift walk. That's to get exercise. Keep off the main streets; keep away from bright lights, do not try to read signs, to recognize people, or in fact to look at anything closely."

John leaped eagerly at this permission, but there was design in his devotion to the new prescription of which the doctor knew nothing. On the fifth day of his confinement, Tayna and Dick, who had been coming every afternoon to sit for an hour in the semi-darkness with their uncle, surprised the interned one doing odd contortions in the depths of his room: twisting his wrists; standing on one foot like a stork and twirling his great heel and toe from the knee in some eccentric imitation of a ballet dancer; then creeping to and fro across the room in a silly series of bowings and scrapings and salutations that threw Dick into irrepressible laughter. Caught shamefacedly in the very midst of these absurdities, John confessed to the two of them what he would at the moment have confessed to no other living being—last of all to Bessie.

"I am taking lessons," he said, "from an actor. He is going to make me easy and graceful, so people won't call me awkward any more—nor homely," and he looked significantly at Tayna.

"Oh," the children both gasped respectfully, and repeated with a kind of awe in their voices: "From an actor!"

"Yes. Every evening the doctor lets me go for a walk. On every other one of these walks I go to the actor's hotel, and he teaches me."

"Awh! An actor-r-r!" breathed Dick again, his features depicting profoundness both of impression and speculation.

"Say!" he proposed presently. "I would rather you would be an actor than a president, anyway."

John laughed. "I am not going to be an actor," he said, "I am only going to be polished till I shine like a human diamond." And then he devoted himself to the entertainment of his callers.

"Remember! Never again the typewriter!" the physician adjured sternly, when the fortnight of John's captivity was done. For although conveying this verdict immediately to Mitchell, the doctor had postponed its announcement to his patient till his discharge from the hospital. John was stunned. The typewriter was his bread. At first he rebelled, but with a rush like the swirl of waters over his head, the memory of that night when he was blind for an hour came to him and humbled him.

With the trembling courage of a coward, he opened the door of room 513; saw with sickening heart the strange face at his desk, shook the flabby hand of Heitmuller, and inwardly braced himself to enter for the last time between the double doors, where presently he confessed his plight as if it had been a crime.

"You don't imagine we would let you go, do you?" Mr. Mitchell asked, while an expression of amazement grew upon his face till it became a laugh. "Why, Jack"—Mr. Mitchell had never called him Jack before—"we should have to pay you a salary just to stick around and keep the rest of us straight."

The stenographer gulped. It was not the first note of praise he had ever received from this kindly railroad man, but it was the first time Mr. Mitchell or any one else in that whole office had ever acknowledged to John that he was valuable for what he knew as well as for what he beat out of his finger-tips.

"You are going to be my private secretary," explained Mr. Mitchell, still chuckling at the simplicity of John. "I have few letters to write, and you know enough to do most of them without dictation. You keep me reminded of things; handle my telephone calls and appointments. Gallagher says your eyes will probably give you no trouble whatever under these conditions. The salary will be fifteen dollars more a month."

The big awkward man was too confusedly grateful and overwhelmed even to attempt to

murmur his thanks. Instead, he did a thing of unheard-of boldness. He reached over and touched the General Freight Agent on the arm,—just stabbed him in the upper, fleshy part of the arm with a thrust of his stiff fingers, accompanying the act with a monosyllabic croak. It was a clumsy touch, and it was presuming; but to a man of understanding, it was eloquent.

After one month in this new position, John found himself seeing the transportation business through new glasses. He had passed from details to principles, and the change stimulated his mind enormously.

One of his new duties now was to sit at the General Freight Agent's elbow in conferences, and later to make summaries of the arguments pro and con. In transcribing Mr. Mitchell's part of these talks, it interested John to elaborate a little. Soon he ventured to make the General Freight Agent's points stronger when he felt it could be done, and then waited, after laying the transcript on the big man's desk, for some word of reproof. Reproof did not come, and yet John thought the changes must be noticed.

But one day H. B. Anderson, Assistant General Freight Agent of the San Francisco and El Paso, a rival line, was in the office.

"Mitchell," Anderson began, "I am compelled to admit your argument reads a blamed sight stronger than it sounded to me the other day."

At this the General Freight Agent laughed complacently.

"The point about the demurrage especially," went on Anderson. "I didn't remember that somehow."

"Um," said the General Freight Agent in a puzzled way and picked up the transcript of the argument. As he scanned it, his face grew more puzzled; then light broke. "Yes," he replied emphatically, "that's the strongest point, in my judgment."

"Well," confessed Anderson, "it knocks me out. I am now agreeable to your construction."

The private secretary listened from his little cubby-hole with mingled exultation and apprehension. When the visitor had gone, the General Freight Agent walked in and tossed the transcript upon the secretary's table. John looked up timidly. The Mitchell brow was ridged and thoughtful.

"Hampstead," he declared with an air of grave reluctance, "I guess I'll have to lose you, after all."

"What, sir," gasped John, guilty terror shaking him somewhere inside.

At the change in John's face, Mitchell threw back his head and laughed; one of those huge, hearty, bellowing laughs at his own humor, from which he extracted so much enjoyment.

"Yes," he specified, "I am going to put you in the rate department. You have the making of a great railroad man in you. What you need now is the fundamentals. That's where you get 'em. Your brains are coming out, John. I always thought you had 'em,—but it certainly took you a long time to get any of them into the show window."

"It was seven years before you let me get to the window at all," suggested John, meaning to be a little bit vengeful.

"Nobody's fault but yours, my boy," said the G.F.A. brusquely, over his shoulder. "By the way," he remarked, turning back again, "you aren't afraid of people any more, either."

John flushed with pleasure. This was really the most desirable compliment Mitchell could bestow.

"I think I am getting a little more confidence in myself," the big man confessed, glowing modestly.

This was what three months of Kenton and "old Delsarte", as the actor called the great French apostle of intelligible anatomy, had done for John.

But Kenton and "old Delsarte" were doing something else to John that was vastly more serious, but of which Robert Mitchell received no hint until nearly a year later, when the knowledge came to him suddenly with a shock that jarred and almost disconcerted him. It was somewhere about noon of a day in February, and he had just touched the button for John Hampstead, rate clerk. Instead of John, Heitmuller answered the summons, laughing softly.

Now in the rate department John had made an amazing success. In six months gray-headed clerks were seeking his opinions earnestly. At the present moment he was in charge of all rates west of Ogden, Albuquerque, and El Paso, and half the department took orders from him.

"John's away at rehearsal," explained Heitmuller, still chuckling.

"At rehearsal?"

"Yes,—he's going to play Ursus, the giant, in *Quo Vadis*, with Mowrey's Stock Company at the Burbank next week."

"The hell!" ejaculated the General Freight Agent, while a look of blank astonishment came upon his usually placid features. "When did that bug bite him?"

"I can't tell yet whether it's a bite or only an itch," grinned Heitmuller. "For a while he was reciting at smokers and parties and things, and then I heard he was teaching elocution at home nights. Now he's got a small dramatic company and goes out around giving one-act plays and scenes from Shakespeare. Pretty good, too, they say!"

"Well, I be damned," Mitchell commented, when Heitmuller had finished.

"He's only away from eleven-thirty to one-thirty," explained Heitmuller. "He was so anxious and does so much more work than any two men that I couldn't refuse him."

"Of course not," assented Mitchell.

"Besides," added the chief clerk, "he might have gone, anyway. John's getting a little headstrong, I've noticed, since he's coming out so fast."

"Naturally," observed Mitchell drily, after which he dismissed Heitmuller and appeared to dismiss the subject by turning again to his desk.

CHAPTER IV ADVENT AND ADVENTURE

But the General Freight Agent took care that Mrs. Mitchell, Bessie, and himself were in a box at the Burbank on the following Monday night, when the curtain went up on the Mowrey Stock Company's sumptuous production of *Quo Vadis*, which for more than nine days was the talk of the town in the city of angels, oranges, atmosphere, and oil. The Mitchells strained their eyes for a sight of their late-grown protégé, but it appeared he was not "on." However, in the midst of a garden scene with Roman lords, ladies, soldiers in armor and slaves decking the view, there appeared a huge barbarian, long of hair and beard, his torso bound round with an immense bearskin, his sandals tied with thongs, his sinewy limbs apparently unclad, savage bands of silver upon his massy, muscled arms, the alpine ruggedness of his countenance and the light of a fanatical devotion that gleamed in his eye contributing in their every detail to make the creature appear the thing the programme proclaimed him, "Ursus, a Christian Slave."

But the programme claimed something more: that this Ursus was John Hampstead.

Mitchell gaped and then rocked uneasily. The thing was unbelievable. If the man would only speak, perhaps some tone of voice—but the man did not speak, not even move. He stood half in the background, far up the center of the stage, while the talk and action of the piece went on beneath his lofty brow, like some mountain towering above a lakelet in which ripples sparkle and fish are leaping. At length, however, stage attention does center on Ursus, when the man enacting St. Peter, struck by the nature-man's appearance of gigantic strength, observes:

"Thou art strong, my son?"

The rugged human statue moved. In a voice that was low at first but broke quickly into reverberating tones which filled the theater to the rafters, the answer came:

"Holy Father! I can break iron like wood!"

As the speech was delivered, the eye of Ursus gleamed, the folded arms unbent, and one mighty muscle flexed the forearm through a short but significant arc, after which the figure resumed its pose of respectful but impressive immobility.

In that single speech and gesture Hampstead had achieved a personal success and keyed the play as plausible, for by it he had come to birth before a theater-full as a character equal to the prodigious feats of strength upon which the action turned.

"Go to the stable, Ursus!" commanded an authoritative voice.

The huge head of the hairy man, with its crown of long, wild locks was inclined humbly, and with an odd, rolling stride suggestive of enormous animal-like strength, he swung deliberately across the scene and out of it.

Robert Mitchell, staring fixedly, suddenly nodded his head with satisfaction. At last, in that careening walk, he had seen something that he recognized. That was the walk of Hampstead; but now Mitchell recalled it was long since he had seen that gait, long since he had heard the office door reverberate from a bang of one of those hip joints, long since the big man had made any conspicuous exhibition of the physical awkwardness that once had been so characteristic. And now? Why now John was an actor. Not Nero yonder, harp in hand, looked more nearly like his part. Hampstead had put on the pose, the voice, the walk, as he had put on the bearskin and the

beard.

"Isn't he w-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l?" breathed Bessie, with a little squeeze of her father's arm.

Mitchell laughed amiably and reached out for the curling lock upon his brow which was his mainstay in time of mental shipwreck and began to twist it, while he waited impatiently to see more of Ursus.

But the play appeared to have forgotten Ursus. A great party was on in the palace of Cæsar. The stage was alive with lights and music, and with the movements of many people—senators in togas, generals in armor, women with jewels in their hair and golden bands upon their white, gracefully swelling arms. There was drinking and laughter and high carousal. In right center, Cæsar upon his throne was singing and pretending to strike notes from a harp of pasteboard and gilt, notes which in reality proceeded from the orchestra pit. At lower left upon a couch sat Lygia, the Christian maiden, beautiful beyond imagining and being greatly annoyed by the love-makings of the half-intoxicated Roman soldier, Vinicius, who had laid aside his helmet and his sword, and was pleading with the lovely but embarrassed girl, at first upon his knees, then standing, with one knee upon the couch, while he trailed his fingers luxuriously through the glossy blackness of her hair.

As the love-making proceeded, Lygia's apprehension grew. When Vinicius pressed her tresses to his lips, she shrank from him. When, after another cup of wine and just as the whole court was in raptures over the conclusion of Cæsar's song, Vinicius attempted to place his kisses yet more daringly, Lygia started up with a cry of terror. Instantly there sounded from the wings a bellowing roar of rage, and like a flying fury, the wild, hairy figure of Ursus came bounding upon the scene.

Seizing Vinicius by the shoulders, Ursus shook him till all his harness rattled, then hurled him up stage and crashing to the floor. Lygia was swaying dizzily as if about to faint, but with another leap Ursus had gained her side and swung her into his arms, after which he turned and went hurdling across the stage, running in long, springing strides as lightly as a deer, the fair, delicious form of the girl balanced buoyantly on his arms, while her dark hair streamed out and downward over his shoulder—all of this to the complete consternation of the half-drunken Court of Cæsar and the vast and tumultuously expressed delight of the audience, which kept the curtain frisking up and down repeatedly over this climactic conclusion of the second act, while the principals posed and bowed and posed again and bowed again, to the audience, to themselves, and to the scenery. Robert Mitchell even supposed that Ursus was bowing to him, so being naturally polite and somewhat beside himself, the General Freight Agent was on the point of bowing back again when Bessie screamed:

"Oh! Oh! He bowed directly at me."

By this time, however, the curtain had recovered from its frenzy and stayed soberly down while the lights came up so the people could read the advertisements on the front. Immediately the tongues of the audience were all a-buzz, and industriously passing up and down the lines of the seats was the information that John Hampstead was a local character. "Oh, yes, indeed,—instructor in public speaking at the Young Men's Christian Association."

In due course, this piece of interesting information reached the Mitchells in their box.

"I knew it all along," gurgled Bessie proudly.

"I begin to be jealous," announced Mrs. Mitchell, broad of face, expansive of heart, aggressive of disposition. "I want all these people to know that Ursus is our rate clerk."

"And I want them to know," said Mr. Mitchell, by way of venting his disapproval, "that he is spoiling a mighty good rate clerk to make a mighty poor actor."

"But," pouted the loyal Bessie, "he is not a poor actor. He's a w-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l actor! You are spoiling the plain truth to make a poor epigram. You," and she looked up pertly at her father, "you are just a bunch of sour grapes! You kept my poor Jack's nose on the grindstone so long that he broke out in a new place, and now you are afraid you'll lose him."

"Your poor Jack!" sneered Mrs. Mitchell merrily.

"Yes—mine!" answered Bessie stoutly. "I always told you Jack Hampstead was a great man in disguise. I saw him first—before he saw himself, almost. I'm going to be his friend for always and for always. Oh, look there!"

The curtain had gone up on an odd, out-of-the-way corner of the imperial city. There had been some colloquy over the gate of a small close, participated in by the vibrant voice of an unseen Ursus and the calmer one of a visible St. Peter, after which the gate opened and Ursus entered, bearing the still fainting form of Lygia in his arms; giving, of course, the desired impression that this fair figure of a woman had been nestling on his great bosom ever since the

curtain went down some twelve minutes before, an inference that led some of the clerks in the General Freight Office and other persons scattered through the audience, to envy John. This presumption, however, was some distance from the truth. As a matter of fact, Lygia had but recently resumed her position in the arms of Ursus, while two stage hands, lying prone, had plucked open the gate; and various happenings quite unsuspected of the audience had intervened, at least one of which had been a severe shock to the Puritan nature of John Hampstead.

However, there was the dramatic impression already referred to, and it ate its way like acid into the consciousness of at least one person in the playhouse.

Ursus, after looking about him for a moment in the little yard of the Christian's house to make sure he was entirely surrounded by friends, drew his fair burden closer and, as if by a protective instinct, bent over it with a look of tenderness so long and concentrated that his flaxen beard toyed with the white cheek, and his flaxen locks gleamed for a moment amid the raven ones.

"Well," commented Bessie, in a tone that mingled sharp annoyance with that judicially critical note which is the right of all high-school girls in their last year, "I do not see any dramatic necessity for prolonging this. Why doesn't he stick her face under the fountain there for a moment and then lay her on the grass?"

Mercifully, Bessie was not compelled to contain her annoyance too long. Ursus did eventually relinquish his hold upon the lady, and the piece moved on from scene to scene to the final holocaust of Rome.

With the news instinct breaking out above the critical, the dramatic columns of the morning papers gave the major stickful of type to the performance of that histrionic athlete, John Hampstead, forgetting to mention his connection with the Y.M.C.A., but making clear that in daylight he was a highly respected member of the staff of Robert Mitchell, the well-known railroad man.

But to John, the process of conversion from rate clerk to actor had been even more exciting than the demonstration of the fact proved to his friends.

To begin with, it was an experience quite unforgettable to the chairman of the Prayer Meeting Committee of the Christian Endeavor Society of the grand old First Church when for the first time he found himself upon the stage of the Burbank at rehearsal time, with twenty-five or thirty real actors and actresses about him. He looked them over curiously, with a puritanic instinct for moral appraisal, as they stood, lounged, sat, gossiped, smoked, laughed or did several of these things at once; yet all keeping a wary eye and ear for the two men who sat at the little table in the center of the bare, empty stage with their heads together over a manuscript.

"Just about like other people," confessed Hampstead to himself, with something of disappointment.

There were some tailor suited women, there were some smartly dressed young men, there were some very nice girls, not more than a whit different in look and manner from the typists in the general office. There were two or three gray-haired men who, so far as appearance and demeanor went, might have served as deacons of the First Church. There were a couple of dignified, matronly-looking elderly ladies with fancy-work or mending in their laps, as they swayed to and fro in the wicker rockers that were a part of the furnishings for Act II of the play then running. These two ladies, so far as John could see, might have been respectively President of the Ladies' Aid and of the Woman's Missionary Society, instead of what they were, "character old women," as he later learned.

Totaling his impressions, Mowrey's Stock Company seemed like a large exclusive family in which he was suffered but not seen. Nobody introduced him to anybody. Mowrey merely threw him a glance, and that was not of recognition but of observation that he was present.

"First act!" snapped the manager, with a voice as sharp as the clatter of the ruler with which he rapped upon the table. Stepping forward, prompt book in one hand, ruler in the other for a pointer, he began to outline the scene upon the bare stage:

"This chair is a tree—that stage brace is a bench—this box is a rock," and so forth.

The rehearsal had begun. It moved swiftly, for Mowrey was a man with snap to him. His words were quick, nervous, few—until angry. His glance was imperative. It was all business, hot, relentless pressure of human beings into moulds, like hammering damp sand in a foundry.

"Go there! Stand here! Laugh! Weep! Look pleased! Feign intoxication!" Each short word was a blow of Mowrey's upon the wet human sand.

John's name was never mentioned. Mowrey called him by the name of his part, Ursus. Ursus

was "on" in the first act, but with nothing to do, and his eyes were wide with watching. One woman in particular attracted him. She was tall and shapely, clad in a close-fitting tailored suit, with hat and veil that seemed to match both her garments and herself. She moved through her part with a kind of distinguished nonchalance, her veil half raised, and a vagrant fold of it flicking daringly at a rosy spot on her cheek when she turned suddenly; while in her gloved hands she held a short pencil with which, from time to time, additional stage directions were noted upon the pages of her part. This accomplished and really beautiful young actress was Miss Marien Dounay, one of the two leading women of the company.

Hampstead was inexperienced of women. He confessed it now to himself. But this was to be the day of his opportunity, and he felt the blood of adventure leaping in his veins. In his consciousness, too, floated little arrows like indicators, and as if by common agreement, they pointed their heads toward Miss Dounay.

If it were she now who played Lygia? Yes; it was she. They were calling her Lygia. Hampstead smiled to himself. Presently he chuckled softly, and the chuckle appeared to loose a small avalanche of new-born emotions that leaped and jumbled somewhere inside.

But the first encounter was disappointing. Miss Dounay seized him by the arm, without a glance,—her eyes being fixed on Mowrey,—and led the big man out of the scene exactly as if he had been a wooden Indian on rollers.

"Now," she said, "you have just carried me off." Her voice had wonderful tones in it, tones that started more avalanches inside; but she appeared as unconscious of the tones and their effect as of him. She was making another note in her part.

"Better practice that 'carry off stage' before we try it at rehearsal," called the sharp voice of Mowrey. His eyes and his remark were addressed to Miss Dounay. Miss Dounay nodded.

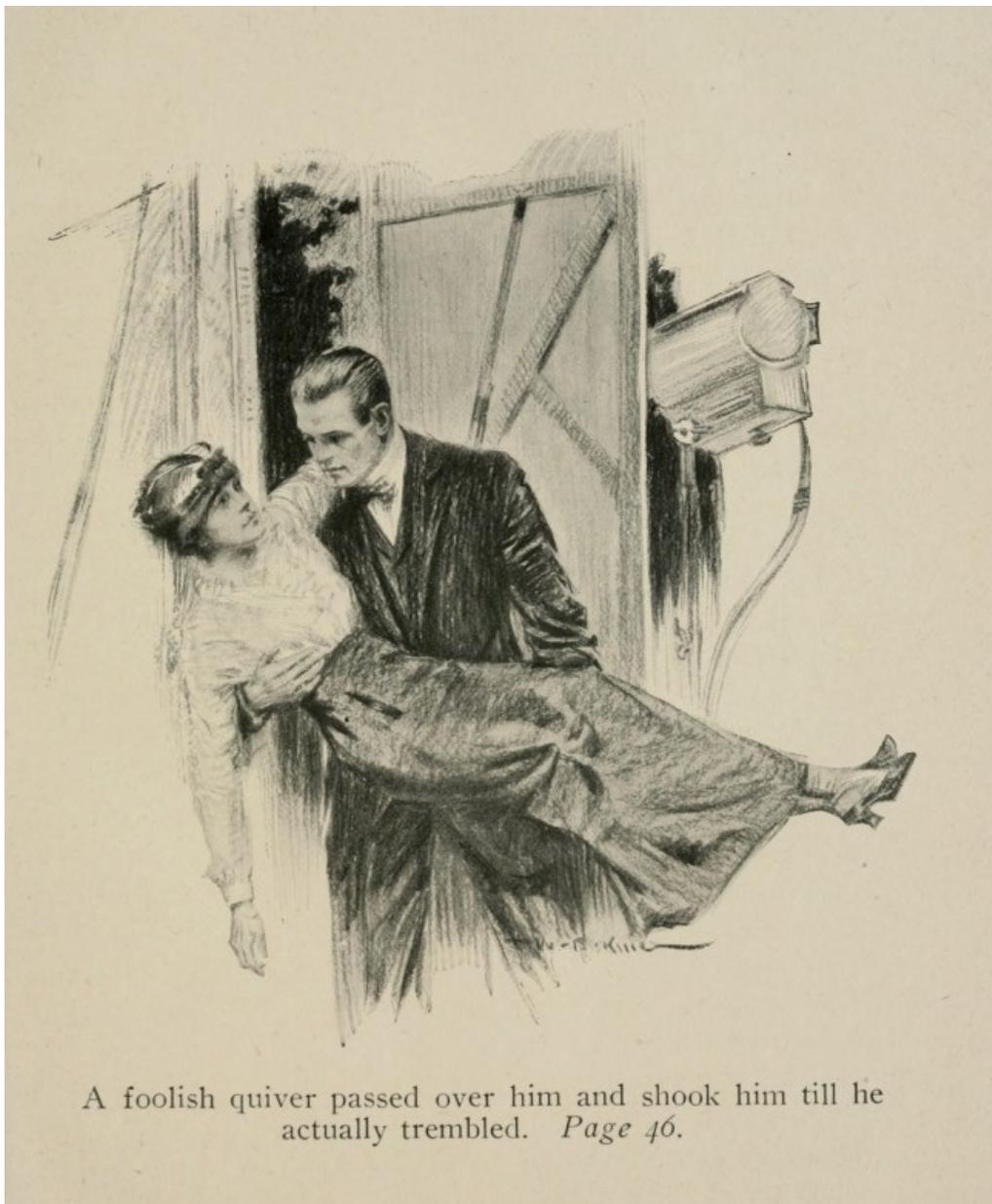
"Shall we?" she said, and looked straight at Hampstead, giving him his first glance into self-confident eyes which were clear, brownish-black, with liquescent, unsounded depths. In form it was a question she had asked; in effect it was a command from a very cool and business-like young person.

"I presume we had better," said John, affecting a foolish little laugh, which did not, however, get very far because the earnest air of Miss Dounay was inhospitable to levity.

"See here!" she instructed. "I throw up my arms in a faint. My left arm falls across your right shoulder. At the same time I give a little spring with my right leg, and I throw up my left leg like this. At the same instant you throw your right arm under my shoulders, your left arm gathers my legs; I will hold 'em stiff. There!"

Miss Dounay's arm was on John's shoulder, and she was preparing to suit the rest; of her action to her words. "Without any effort to lift me," she continued, talking now into his ear, "I will be extended in your arms. All you have to do is to be taking your running stride as I come to you, and after that to hold me poised while you bound off the stage. Can you do it?"

With this crisp, challenging question on her lips, Miss Dounay completed the proposed manoeuvre of her lower limbs, and John found himself with the long, exquisitely moulded body of a beautiful woman balancing in his arms, while a foolish quiver passed over him and shook him till he actually trembled.



A foolish quiver passed over him and shook him till he actually trembled.

"Am I so heavy?" asked a matter-of-fact voice from his shoulder.

"You are not heavy at all," replied Hampstead, hotly provoked at himself.

"Run, then," she commanded.

The resultant effort was a few staggering, ungraceful steps.

"Dounay weighs a hundred and fifty if she weighs an ounce," said a passing voice.

John, all chagrin as he deposited the lady upon her feet, saw her lip curl, and her dark eyes flash scornfully at the leading juvenile man who, with grimacing intent to tease, had made the remark to the ingenue as both passed near.

"Insolence!" hissed Miss Dounay after the scoffer, and turned again to Hampstead, speaking sharply. "Very bad! You must be in your running stride when my weight falls on you. We must practice."

And practice they did, at every spare moment of the rehearsal during the entire week. From these "practices", Hampstead learned an unusual number of things about women which, in his limited experience, he had either not known or which had not been brought home to him before. Some of these he presumed applied generally to all women; others, he had no doubt, were particular to Miss Dounay.

As, for instance, when he looked down at her face where it lay in the curve of his arm, he saw that the oval outline of her cheeks was startlingly perfect; that there were pools of liquid fire in her eyes; that her lips were beautifully and naturally red; that they were long, pliable, sensitive, with fleeting curves that raced like ripples upon these shores of velvet and ruby, expressing as they ran an infinite variety of passing moods. The chin, too, came in for a great deal of this

attention. It was round and smooth at the corners, with a delicately chiseled vertical cleft in it, which at times ran up and met a horizontal cleft that appeared beneath the lower lip, when any slight breath of displeasure brought a pout to that ruby, pendant lobe. This meeting-place of the two clefts formed a kind of transitory dimple, a trysting-place of all sorts of fugitive attractions which exercised a singular fascination for the big man.

He used to wonder what the sensation would be like to sink his lips in that precious, delectable valley. It would have been physically simple. A slight lifting of his right arm and shoulder, a slight declension of his neck, and the mere instinctive planting of his lips, and the thing was done. However, John had no thought of doing this. In the first place he wouldn't—without permission; for he was a man of honor and of self-control. In the second place, he wouldn't because a woman was a thing very sacred to him, and a kiss, a deliberate and flesh-tingling kiss, was a caress to be held as sacred as the woman herself and for the expression of an emotion he had not yet felt for any woman; a statement which to the half-cynical might prove again that John Hampstead was a very inexperienced and very monk-minded youth indeed to be abroad in the unromanticism of this twentieth century. Yet the fact remains that Hampstead did not consciously conspire to violate the neutrality of this tiny, alluring haunt of tantalizing beauty which lurked bewitchingly between the red lower lip and the white firm chin of Miss Marien Dounay.

But there were other things that John was learning swiftly, some of which amounted to positive disillusionment. One was that a woman's body is not necessarily so sacred nor so inviolate, after all. That instead of inviolate, it may be made inviolable by a sort of desexing at will. Miss Dounay could do this and did do it, so that for instance when her form stiffened in his arms, it was no more like what he supposed the touch of a woman's body should be than a post. In the first place the body itself, beneath that trim, tailored suit, appeared to be sheathed in steel from the shoulder almost to the knee. John had supposed that corsets were to confine the waist. This one, if that were what it was and not some sort of armor put on for these rehearsals, encased the whole body.

Another thing that contributed to this desexing of the female person was Miss Dounay's bearing toward himself. He might have been a mere mechanical device for any regard she showed him at rehearsals. She pushed or pulled him about, commanded the bend and adjustment of his arms as if he had been an artificial man, and never by any hint indicated that she thought of him as a person, least of all as a male person. Undoubtedly this robbed his new adventure of some of its spice. But a change came. When for five days John was undecided whether he should admire this manner of hers as supreme artistic abstraction or resent it as supercilious disdain, Margaret O'Neil, one of the character old ladies who had constituted herself a combination of critic and chaperone of these "carry" practices, turned, after a word with Miss Dounay, and said:

"We should like to know who it is that is carrying us about."

"Why, certainly," exclaimed John, all his doubt disappearing in a toothful smile as he swept off his hat. "My name is Hampstead, John Hampstead."

"Miss Dounay, allow me to present Mr. Hampstead," said Miss O'Neil, without the moulting of an eyelash.

Miss Dounay extended her hand cordially for a lofty, English handshake, accompanied by an agreeable smile and a chuckling laugh, understood by John to be in recognition of the oddness of the situation.

After this, things were somewhat different. There was less sense of strain on his part, and he began to realize that there had been some strain upon hers which now was relaxed. Her body was less post-like; and toward the end of rehearsal, when possibly she was a little tired, it lay in his arms quite placidly, relaxing until its curves yielded and conformed to the muscular lines of his own torso.

Yet Miss Dounay never betrayed the slightest self-consciousness at such moments. Whatever the woman as woman might be, she was, as an actress, so absolutely devoted to the creation of the character she was rehearsing, so painstakingly careful to reproduce in every detail of tone and action the true impression of a pure-minded, Christian maiden that Hampstead, with his firm religious backgrounding, unhesitatingly imputed to the woman herself all the virtues of the chaste and incomparable Lygia.

When dress-rehearsal time came at midnight on Sunday, just after the regular performance had been concluded, and John saw Miss Dounay for the first time in the dress of the character, his soul was enraptured. The simple folds of her Grecian robe were furled at the waist and then swept downward in one billowy leap, unrelieved in their impressive whiteness by any touch of

color, save that afforded by the jet-bright eyes with their assumed worshipful look and the wide, flowing stream of her dark, luxuriant hair, which, loosely bound at the neck, waved downward to her hips. The devout curve of her alabaster neck, the gleaming shoulders, the full, tapering, ivory arms, her sandaled bare feet—yes, John looked close to make sure, and they were actually bare—rounded out the picture.

Marien Dounay stood forth more like an angel vision than a woman, at once so beautiful and so adorable that big, sincere, open-eyed John Hampstead worshipped her where she stood—worshipped her and loved her—as a man should love an angel. Yet as he looked, he was almost guiltily conscious that he knew a secret about this angelic vision,—that this chiseled flesh with rounded, shapely contours that would be the despair of any sculptor was not as marble-like as it looked, was, indeed, soft to the touch and warm, radiant and magnetic.

And John, blissfully aglow with his spiritual ardor, had no faint suspicion that his secret might kill his illusion dead, nor that his devotion would survive that decease, although something very like this happened on the night of the first performance.

The great second act was on. Things were not going as smoothly as they appeared to from the front. Even the inexperienced Hampstead, as he waited for his cue, could see that his angel was being enormously vexed by the manner in which Vinicius made love. Henry Lester was a brilliant actor, but flighty and erratic. During rehearsal Mowrey had much trouble in getting him to memorize accurately the business of his part. He would do one thing one way to-day and forget it or reverse it on the next. To-night Lester was committing all these histrionic crimes. Miss Dounay had continually to adapt herself to his impulsive erraticisms, to shift speeches and alter business. The climax of exasperation came when one of the wide metal circlets upon his arm became entangled in the gossamer threads of Lygia's hair and pulled it painfully. Yet the actress was sufficiently accomplished to play her own part irreproachably and deliver John's cue at the right moment to secure the startling entrance already described, and thus to be gracefully and dramatically swept away from the rude advances of her importunate lover.

It was at the end of this particular scene and off stage, when the curtain was descending to the accompaniment of applause from the audience, that the death of John's illusion came. For a delicious instant, he was still holding Lygia from the floor as if instinctively sheltering her amidst the general confusion of crowding actors and hurrying stage hands. Nothing loth, she lay at rest, with eyes closed and features composed as if in the faint. To the raw, impressionable young man, Marien had never looked so much an angel as at this moment; and now she was coming to, as if still in character. Her eyelids fluttered but did not open, and then her lips moved slightly, stiffly, under their load of greasy carmine, as if she would speak. In self-forgetful ecstasy, Hampstead bent eagerly to receive the confidence. Perhaps she was going to thank him, to whisper a word of congratulation. Whatever the communication might be, his soul was in raptures of delightful anticipation as he felt her breath upon his cheek.

The communication was made promptly and unhesitatingly, after which Miss Dounay alertly swung her feet to the floor and walked out upon the stage to receive her curtain call, leading Ursus by the hand, mentally dazed, inwardly wabbling, outwardly bowing,—trying, in fact, to do just as the others did. But in John's mind now there was this numbing sense of shock, for he could not refuse to believe his ears, and what this angelic vision had breathed into them in tones of cool, emphatic conviction, was:

"What a damn fool that man Lester is!"

Off the stage again Hampstead stumbled about amid flying scenery, racing stage hands, and a surging mass of supernumeraries, like a man recovering consciousness. He wanted to get out of sight somewhere. He had the feeling of having been stripped naked. Every vestige of his religious adoration had been dynamited out of existence. This was no Christian maiden but an actress playing a part. As for the woman herself, she was very blasé and very modern, who, at this moment, as he could see by a glance into the open door of her dressing room, was sitting with crossed knees, head back and enveloped in a halo of smoke, while her pretty lips were distended in a yawn, and the spark of a cigarette glowed in her finger tips.

"And I am another!" Hampstead muttered, with a sneer that was aimed inward.

Seven minutes later, Lygia walked out of her dressing room minus the cigarette and looking again that angel vision, but Hampstead knew better now. He viewed her at first critically and then reflectively; but was presently startled at the gist of his reflections, which was a sort of self-congratulation because this creature that he was about to take in his arms was not an angel, but that more alluring, less elusive thing, a woman.

Two more minutes and the pair of stage hands were stretched stomach-wise upon the floor

ready to swing open the wings of the gate at the cue from St. Peter, and Lygia was lying once more in John's arms. In the instant of waiting before the curtain rose, he had time to notice how contentedly and trustfully she appeared to nestle there. Her breathing was like his at first, easy and natural; but gradually, as the moment of suspense lengthened and the instant of action drew near, the rhythmic pulse of both bosoms accelerated, as if, heart on heart, their souls beat in unison. John was noticing, too, how soft Marien's body was where the armor did not extend, how deliciously warm it was, indeed how something like an ethereal heat radiated from it and filled all his veins with a strange, electric, impulsive wistfulness. What was that giddy perfume?

Involuntarily he drew her closer, with a gentle, steady pressure. At this she raised her eyelids and gazed at him for a moment, contemplatively first and then passively curious, after which she lowered the lids again, while her lips half parted in a voiceless sigh.

So far as Hampstead was concerned, illusion had gone. He knew that he was just a man. So far as Miss Dounay was concerned, he suspected that she was just a woman. But devotion remained. John did not relax his hold. Instead there was a momentary tightening of his arms.

"Let 'er go," called the low, tense voice of Mowrey; and with a rustling sound the great curtain slipped slowly upward.

CHAPTER V

THE RATE CLERK

The week went by like a shot. On Sunday night the glory that was a very stagy Rome burned down for the last time beneath the gridiron of the old Burbank Theater. On Monday morning no odor of grease paint and no noxious smell of stewing glue, which proclaims the scene painter at his work, was in the nostrils of John. Instead, the clack of typewriters, the tinkle of telephone bells, the droning voices of dictators, and the shuffling feet of office boys filled his ears.

As if to completely re-merge the man in his environment, Robert Mitchell came walking in, tossed a bundle of papers upon the desk, fixed the rate clerk with a shaft of his blue eye, and commanded drily:

"Ursus! Make a set of tariffs embracing our new lines to correspond with the commodity tariffs of the San Francisco and El Paso."

John colored slightly at the thrust of that name Ursus, but looked Mr. Mitchell fairly and meekly in the eye and answered:

"Yes, sir."

"Have them effective July 1st," concluded the General Freight Agent, as he turned away.

Burman, the lordly through rate clerk, lowered his sleek face behind his books and snickered. John shot a scowl at Burman and then for a few minutes hunched his shoulders over the documents in the case.

The California Consolidated was being consolidated some more. Two more roads in the big system had just been pitchforked into the jurisdiction of Robert Mitchell, adding twelve hundred additional miles to his responsibility and pushing him several swift rounds up the ladder of promotion.

These additions made the California Consolidated competitive with the San Francisco and El Paso lines at hundreds of new stations. John's job was to consolidate the freight tariffs of the three lines and make sure that they equalized the rates of the competitor at competing stations. It was an enormous task, and the General Freight Agent had breezily commanded it to be done in ten weeks. That was why Burman snickered. It was also why Hampstead scowled.

Now a freight tariff starts youthfully out to be the most scientific thing in the world, but it ends by being the most utterly unscientific document that ever was put together. The longer a tariff lives, the more depraved it becomes. The S.F. & E.P. tariffs were very old, but not, therefore, honorable.

John turned to the shelf that contained them and scowled again, a double scowl, as black as his blond Viking brows could manage. These were to be his models. They were yellow—a disagreeable color to begin with,—each a half inch thick and larger than a letter page,—abortions, every one of them! They were pea-vine growths like the monster system which issued them, cumbered with the adjustments and easements of the years.

The flour tariff! The hay tariff! The grain tariff! John took these in his hands one by one and glowered at them. The mistakes, the inconsistencies, the clumsiness of thirty sprawling years

were in them. And he was asked to duplicate these confusions on his own system.

Should he do it? No; be hanged if he would! He felt big and self-important as he slammed the first of them face down upon his desk and each thereafter in succession upon its fellow, until the pile toppled over, after which, leaving the reckless heap behind him, while Burman snickered again, John stamped out of the room.

"These S.F. & E.P. tariffs are so old they've got whiskers on 'em," he began to say to Mr. Mitchell, "and hairs! And the hair has never been cut nor even combed. They have been tagged and fattened and trimmed and sliced and slewed round till the tariff is issued just to keep up the basis and the tradition, and then you look in something else,—an amendment, or a special, or a 'private special', or sometimes the carbon copy of a letter,—to find out what the rate actually is. Sometimes when I call their office up on the 'phone to get a rate, it takes 'em twenty-four hours to answer, and maybe a week later they notify me the answer was wrong. Our slate is clean; why not simmer the figures down to what is the actual basis instead of the assumed one, and publish the rates as we intend to charge 'em, and as we know they do charge 'em?"

Mitchell had listened with surprise at first to this rash proposal. It sounded youthful and impetuous. But it also sounded sensible. Mitchell hated red tape, and he knew that John's idea was the right one; but tradition was god on the S.F. & E.P. They would fight the innovation and fight it hard; they might win, too, and Mr. Mitchell had no stomach for tilting at windmills. However, it might be a good thing for John, this fight; might make him forget that foolish stage ambition of his; and if he won, might crown him so lustroously that of itself it would save him to a future already assuredly brilliant in the railroad business.

"Do you think you could whip it out with 'em before their faces, John, when the scrap comes?" Mr. Mitchell asked tentatively, but also by way of further firing the soul of the fighter.

"I believe I could," replied John ardently.

"Then go to it," said Mr. Mitchell tersely.

And John went to it.

But there was another man who had been shocked by John's theatrical venture, and that was the pastor of the First Church, who had his virtues, much as other men. His face was round and like his figure, full of fatness. He was a merry soul and loved a joke. He had a heart as tender as his sense of humor was keen.

But beside his virtues, this man of God had also his convictions. His pulpit was no wash-wallowing craft. He steered her straight. To Heaven with Scylla! To Gehenna with Charybdis! Indeed, if there was one man in all Los Angeles who knew where he was going and all the rest of the world too, it was this same Charles Thompson Campbell, pastor of the aforesaid grand old First Church. Doctor Campbell's hair and eyes were black. His voice had the ultimate roar in it. When he stood up, locks flying, perspiration streaming, and thumped his pulpit with that fat doubled fist, the palm of which had been moulded in youth upon the handle of a plow, every nook and cranny of the auditorium echoed with the force of his utterance. But Doctor Campbell's convictions, like most people's, were only in part based upon knowledge.

Some things in particular he wot not of yet scorned. One was the modern novel. Another was the stage! Shakespeare, Doctor Campbell admitted largely, had shed some sheen upon the stage and more upon literature; but he never quoted Shakespeare. One could almost doubt if he had read him, and when Shakespeare came to town, he never went to see him.

On the morning, therefore, when the good Doctor Campbell read in the papers that the youngest of his deacons had the night before made his debut as Ursus in *Quo Vadis*, he was not only pained but moved to self-reproach. Grief enveloped him. It thrust the sharp cleft of a frown into his smooth brow. It thrust his chin down upon his bosom and caused him to heave a tumultuous sigh. He bowed his head beside his study table and then and there put up an earnest petition for the soul of John Hampstead. It was a sincere and natural prayer, because Doctor Campbell was a sincere man and believed in the efficacy of prayer.

Besides, he loved John Hampstead. The young man's impending fate stirred the minister deeply and caused him to reproach himself. In this mood, he dug out all his sermons on the stage, nine years of annual sermons on the influence of the drama, and read them sketchily and with disappointment. Paugh! Piffle! How weak and ineffective they seemed. He delved into his concordance for a text and found one. Then he drove his pen deep into his inkwell and began to write.

The following Sunday night Doctor Campbell's red, excited features were seen dimly through dun, sulphurous clouds of brimstone and fire; but to the preacher's dismay, John Hampstead was not present for fumigation. The reverend gentleman, in his unthinking goodness, had quite

overlooked the fact that the play in which John was performing concluded on Sunday night instead of Saturday night; and so while his pastor was hurling his fiery diatribes at that conspicuously assailable institution, the stage, Deacon Hampstead was blissfully bearing Marien Dounay about in his arms.

But the next morning John read the sermon published in the newspaper. He had already noted that the more doubtful the sermon, the more likely it is to get into the headlines, because from the editor's standpoint it thus becomes news, and late Sunday night, which is the scarcest hour of the whole week for news, there is more joy in the "city room" over one sermon that breathes the fiery spirit of sensation than over ninety and nine which need no hell and damnation in which to express the tender gospel of Jesus. John read it with a sense of wrath, of outrage, and of humiliation. That night he launched himself at the study door of his pastor.

"I was very sorry you did not hear my sermon last night," began Doctor Campbell blandly, sensing the advantage of striking first.

"Brother Campbell, I have come to arraign you for that sermon," retorted John, with an immediate outburst of feeling. "I say that you spoke what you did not know. I say," and his voice almost broke with the weight of its own earnestness, "I say that you bore false witness!"

The amazed minister's mouth opened, but John repressed his utterance with a gesture.

"You will say you preached your convictions. I say you preached your prejudice, your ignorance. I say you bore false witness against struggling women, against aspiring men, against those of whose bitter battlings you know nothing."

The Reverend Charles Thompson Campbell leaned back aghast. No man had ever presumed to talk to him like this, no man of twice his years and spiritual attainments; yet here was this stripling not only talking to him like this, but with a fervor of unction in his utterance that made his upbraiding sound half inspired.

"You are condemning the stage as an institution," went on John scornfully. "You might as well condemn the printing press as an institution. You discriminate with regard to newspapers and books. Do the same with the stage. Taboo the corrupt play and teach your people to avoid it. Support the good and teach the managers that you will. Taboo the notorious actor or actress if you wish. Give the rest of them the benefit of the doubt, as you do in your personal contact with all humanity. Oh, Doctor Campbell, you are so charitable in your personal relations with men and so uncharitable in much of your preaching!"

This one exclamatory sentence had in it enough of affectionate regard to enable the minister to contain himself a little longer, under the impassioned tide which now flowed again.

"The stage? The stage as an institution?" John appeared to pause and wind himself up. "Why, listen! The stage function is a godlike function. When God created man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life he planted in man's breast also the instinct to create. That instinct is the foundation of all art. Man has always exhibited this passion to create something in his own image. It might be a rude drawing on a rock, or only a manikin sculptured in mud and set in the sun to dry; or it might be a marble of Phidias, with the form, the strength, the spirit of life upon it. The painter can go farther. He gets the color and the very visage of thought and even of emotion. Yet each falls short. There is no God to breathe into their creations the breath of life."

The minister leaned back a little as if to put his understanding more at poise.

"But," continued Hampstead, "the playwright and the actor can go farther. They breathe into their creations that very breath of God himself, which he breathed into man. They make a character real because he is a living man. They put him in the company of other men and women who are as real for the same reason; they toss them all into the sea of life together; the winds of life blow upon them. Hate and love, virtue and vice, hope and despair, weakness and strength, birth and death, work their will upon them."

"That is very beautiful, John," said Doctor Campbell, "very beautiful."

The tribute was sincere, but John was not to be checked even by a compliment.

"The stage creates and recreates," he rushed on. "It can raise the dead. It makes men and women live again—Julius Cæsar and Cleopatra, Napoleon and Dolly Madison. It seizes whole segments out of the circles of past history and sets them down in the midst of to-day, with the glow of life and the sheen of reality over all, so that for an afternoon or a night we live in another continent or another age. We see the life, the customs, the petty quarrels, the sublimer passions, the very pulse-beats of men of other circumstances and other generations than our own, so that when we come out of the theater into the times of to-day, we have actually to wake ourselves up and ask: Which is real, and which is art?"

Doctor Campbell leaned forward now. His mouth was round, his eyes were widely open.

"It is that which gives the stage its dignity and power," concluded John. "It is the highest expression of man's instinct to create a new life in a more ideal Eden than that in which he finds himself. When you condemn the stage you condemn the creative instinct, and," exhorted John, with the sudden sternness of a hairy prophet on his desert rock, "you had better pause to think if you do not condemn Him who planted that instinct in the human breast."

Hampstead had now finished; but the minister was in no hurry to speak. He felt the spell of the picture which had been painted, but he felt still more the spell of the young man's ardent enthusiasm.

"You must have thought that out very carefully, John," he said.

"Brother Campbell!" answered John fervently, "I have done more than think it out. I have felt it out. I propose to live it out!"

But Doctor Campbell had kept his head amid this swirl of words, and his return was quietly forceful.

"The stage of to-day," he began, "as I know it from the newspapers and the billboards, never seemed so vulgar and damnable as it does now after your glorious idealization of it. I, as a preacher of righteousness, must judge of such an institution externally, by its effects. I have weighed the stage in the balance, John, and I have found it wanting."

This time there was something in the minister's calm tone, in the cool detachment of his point of view, that held John silent.

"Isn't it possible," the minister continued, in a kind of sweet reasonableness, "that there is something insidiously demoralizing or infectious about it? Take your own experience, John. You are a Christian man. You have been soaking yourself in the atmosphere of the stage for a couple of weeks. Examine your soul now, and answer me if you are as fine, as pure a man as you were before you went there. Are you?"

"Why, of course I am," ejaculated Hampstead impulsively.

"Think," commanded the minister, in low, compelling tones; for having controlled his emotions the better, he was just now the stronger of the two. "Are you—John?"

Hampstead opened his mouth eagerly, but the minister's repressing gesture would not let him speak. The young man was literally compelled to think, to question his own soul for a moment, and as he searched, a telltale flush came upon his cheek, and then his glance fell. There was an embarrassing moment of silence, during which this flush of mortification deepened perceptibly.

The minister was a wise man. He read the sign and asked no questions. He upbraided nothing, cackled no exultant, "I told you so."

"Let us pray, Brother John," he proposed after the interval, and knelt by his chair with a hand upon Hampstead's shoulder. The prayer was short.

"Oh, Lord," the man of God petitioned, "help us to know where the right stops and the wrong begins. Keep us back from the sin of presumption. Give thy servants wisdom to serve thy cause well and work no ill to it by over-zeal or over-confidence. Amen!"

Doctor Campbell might have been praying for himself. But John knew that this was only a part of his tact.

As the two men rose, John felt a sudden impulse to defend the stage from himself.

"It was my own fault," he urged; "the fault of my own weakness in unaccustomed surroundings. It was not the fault of the surroundings themselves, nor of any other person. Besides, it was nothing very grave."

"Deterioration of character is always grave," said the Reverend Charles Thompson Campbell as he walked to the door with his caller, and the minister's tone intimated his conviction that this particular deterioration had been very grave indeed.

CHAPTER VI ON TWO FRONTS

There was high commotion in a big front office in the top floor of a tall, gray building that stood in the days before the fire on the corner of Kearney and Market streets in the city of San Francisco. This gray structure housed the general offices of the San Francisco and El Paso Railroad Company, and that big front office contained the desk of the Freight Traffic Manager.

Before this desk sat a man with a domed brow and the beak of an eagle, hair gray, eyes piercing, complexion colorless, and a mouth that closed so tightly it was discernible only as a crescent-shaped pucker above his spike-like chin. His mouth at the moment was not a pucker; it was a geyser. The name of this man was William N. Scofield, and he was obviously in a rage. He had grown up with the S.F. & E.P., his brain expanding as it expanded, his power rising as it had risen. Long ago, when the one lone clerk in its little rate department, he had made with his own hands the first of those yellow commodity tariffs that John Hampstead had scorned with objurgations. Now Scofield held in the hand which trembled with his anger the first of that upstart's own contributions to the science of tariff making—not yellow, but white, in token of the clarity it was meant to introduce.

"How did they make it? this—this botch!" he exploded, repeating his interrogation with other embellishing phrases not properly reproducible and then slamming the offending white sheets down hard upon his desk,—much harder than John had slammed the yellow ones,—this impudent, white-livered thing that was an assault upon the customs he, Scofield, had instituted and time itself had honored!

"Telegram!" he barked to his stenographer. "Robert Mitchell, Los Angeles. Insist immediate withdrawal your entire line of commodity tariffs, series J. Basis carried in our own tariffs is only one we will recognize."

Mitchell answered:

"Decline to withdraw; our tariffs issued on actual basis on which charges are assessed."

The fight was on.

Arming himself cap-a-pie with tariffs, amendments, letters, and memoranda, Mitchell two days later followed his telegram to San Francisco. Most of his resources, however, were packed behind the wide, blond brow of John Hampstead, who accompanied his chief and was more eager for the fray than Mitchell. The battle began on Monday morning about ten of the clock, and was not finished with the day. The field of action was a room of this same gray building, where Howison, General Freight Agent of the S.F. & E.P., sat at the end of a long table, flanked right and left by assistant general freight agents, rate clerks, and even general and district freight agents called in from the field, all to convince Robert Mitchell and his lone rate clerk sitting at the other end of the table that their new tariff was a hodgepodge, without practical basis or the show of reason to support it. Scofield himself did not take a seat in the battle line, but looked in occasionally, either to walk about nervously or sit just back of Howison's shoulder.

On the afternoon of the second day, the enemy Traffic Manager appeared to watch Hampstead intently for half an hour. Again and again the keen old fighter saw his allied forces attack, but invariably this self-confident, smiling young man with a ready citation, the upflashing of a yellow "special", the digging out of a letter or a telegram from his file, or occasionally even of an old freight bill issued by the S.F. & E.P. showing exactly what rate had been assessed, triumphantly repelled the assaults, until reverses began to be the order of the day.

"It strikes me," Scofield remarked sarcastically, "that this young man has got us all pretty well buffaloed. The trouble is, Howison," he glowered, "that your Tariff Department needs cleaning out. You've got a lot of old mush heads in there."

With this warning shot into his own ranks, Scofield arose, went discontentedly out, and never once came back. Keener than any of his staff, he had already discerned that defeat was advancing down the road.

But the battle of the tariffs raged on throughout the week, and it was not until late on Saturday afternoon that John, standing in one room of the suite in the Palace Hotel charged to the name of Robert Mitchell, flung the pile of papers from his arms into the bottom of a suitcase with a swish and solid thud of satisfaction. Victory from first to last had perched upon his tawny head. He had met good men and beaten them; and he had a right to the wave of exultation that surged for a moment dizzily through his brain.

Mr. Mitchell, too, was feeling exultant and proud beyond words, as he stood in the door of John's room. His hands were deep in his pockets; his large black derby hat was pushed far back from his bulging brow. On his great landscape of a countenance was an oddly significant expression.

"Well, Jack," he began, after an interval of silence, "what about the stage?"

John started like a man surprised in a guilty act, although he had known for months that this was a question Mr. Mitchell might ask at any moment; but the decision involved seemed now so big that from day to day he had hoped the inevitable might be postponed.

"I shall be naming a new chief clerk in a couple of weeks, now that Heitmuller is to become

General Agent," Mr. Mitchell went on half-musingly, and as if to forestall a hasty reply to the question he had asked. "The new man will be in line to be appointed Assistant General Freight Agent very soon, on account of the consolidations."

For a moment John saw himself as Chief Clerk, sitting in the big swivel chair at the high, roll-top desk, with all the strings of the business he knew so well how to pull lying on the table before him; with clerks, stenographers, men from other departments and that important part of the shipping public which carried its business to the general freight office, all running to him.

And from there it was only a short, easy step to the position of Assistant General Freight Agent.

Only the man who has toiled far down in the ranks of a railroad organization doing routine work at the same old desk in the same old way for half a score of years can know on what a dizzy height sits the Chief Clerk, or how far beyond that swings the lofty title of Assistant General Freight Agent.

"Your advancement would be very rapid," suggested Mr. Mitchell, flicking his flies skilfully upon the whirling eddies of the young man's thought.

John had achieved enough and glimpsed enough to see that Mitchell was right. Advancement would be rapid. Mitchell would soon go up the line himself; he could follow him. General Freight Agent, Assistant Traffic Manager, Traffic Manager, Vice-president in charge of traffic—President! with twelve thousand miles of shining steel flowing from his hand, which he might swing and whirl and crack like a whip! The prospect was dazzling in the extreme, and yet it was only for a moment that the picture kindled. In the next it was dead and sparkless as burned-out fireworks.

"You have a strong vein of traffic in your blood," the General Freight Agent began adroitly, but John broke in upon him.

"Mr. Mitchell," he said, and his utterance was grave, "I am sorry to disappoint you, but it comes too late. A year ago such a hint would have thrown me into ecstasies. To-day it leaves me cold. I have had another vision."

The face of Mitchell shaded from seriousness almost to sadness, but he was too wise to increase by argument an ardor about which, to the railroad man, there was something not easy to be understood, something, indeed, almost fanatical. Instead Mitchell asked with sober, interested friendliness:

"What is your plan, John?"

"To resign July first," John answered, for the first time definitely crossing the bridge, "to come to San Francisco and seek an engagement with some of the stock companies playing permanently here, even though I begin the search for an opening without money enough to last more than a week or two."

"Without money!" exclaimed Mr. Mitchell, in surprise.

"Yes," confessed Hampstead, flushing a little. "My salary was not very munificent, you know, and I have usually contrived to get rid of it, frequently before I got the pay check in my hands."

Mr. Mitchell's small, prudent eyes looked disfavor at a spendthrift.

"However," he suggested, "you have only yourself to think of."

"That's another point against me," confessed Hampstead. "I have some one else to look out for. My brother-in-law is an artist, you know, and he has not been very successful yet, so that I hold myself ready to help with my sister and the children if it should ever become necessary."

"That's a handicap," declared Mitchell flatly.

"I won't admit it," said John loyally. "You don't know those children. Tayna's the girl, nearly twelve now, a beauty if her nose is pugged. Such hair and eyes, and such a heart! Dick's the boy, past ten. He's had asthma always, and is about a thousand years old, some ways. But they—"

Hampstead gulped queerly.

"Those two children," he plunged on, "are dearer to me than anything in the whole wide world. You know," and his tone became still more confidential, while his eyes grew moist, "it would only be something that happened to them that would keep me from going on with my stage career."

Mitchell's respect for John was changing oddly to a fatherly feeling. He felt that he was getting acquainted with his clerk for the first time. He resolved that he would not tempt the boy, and that if it became necessary, he would help him. However, before he could express this resolve, if he had intended to express it, the telephone rang.

Hampstead answered it, stammered, faltered, replied: "I will see, sir, and call you in five minutes," hung up the 'phone and turned to confront Mitchell, with a look almost of fright upon his face.

"It's William N. Scofield," he exclaimed. "He wants me to take dinner with him at his club to-night."

A disbelieving smile appeared for a moment on the wide lips of Mitchell; then understanding broke, and his smile was swallowed up in a hearty laugh.

"He wants to offer you a position," Mitchell said, when his exultant cachinnations had ceased. "Look out that he doesn't win you. Scofield is a very persuasive man. He nearly got me once. Besides, he has more to offer you than I have."

Hampstead pressed his hand to his brow. Under his tawny thatch ideas were in a whirl.

"What shall I do?" he asked rather helplessly.

"Stay over," commanded Mitchell unhesitatingly. "Ring up and tell him you'll be there."

"But there's no use, anyway," replied John suddenly, getting back to the main point. "My mind's made up."

"No man's mind is made up when he's going to take dinner on the proposition with William N. Scofield," answered Mitchell oracularly.

"And you?" asked Hampstead, suddenly aware how good a man at heart was Robert Mitchell, and quite unaware that he had seized that gentleman's pudgy right hand and was wringing it in a manner most embarrassing to Mitchell himself. "You—"

But the telephone was tingling impatiently.

"Mr. Scofield wants to know," began a voice.

"Yes, yes, I'll be happy to," interrupted John, not knowing just what tone or form one should take in expressing the necessary amenities to the secretary of a great man.

"Very well. His car will call for you at six-thirty," responded the voice.

But before John could pick up the thread of his unfinished sentence to Mr. Mitchell, a knock sounded at the door, at first soft and cushioned, as if from a gloved hand, then louder and more determined, and repeated with quick impatience.

"Come in," called Mitchell.

The knob turned, and the door swung wide, leaving the panel of white to frame the picture of a woman. She was young, of medium height and appealing roundness, clad from head to foot in a traveling dress of dark green, with a small hat of a shade to match, the chief adornment of which was a red hawk's feather slanting backward at a jaunty angle. A veil enveloped both hat brim and face but was not thick enough to dim the sparkle of bright eyes or the pink flush of dimpled cheeks, much less to conceal two rows of gleaming teeth from between which, after a moment's pause for sensation, burst a ringing cadence of laughter.

"Miss Bessie!" exclaimed John excitedly.

"The very first guess!" declared that young lady, advancing and yielding the doorframe to another figure which filled it so much more completely as to sufficiently explain a more deliberate arrival.

"Mollie!" ejaculated Mitchell, who by this time had turned toward the door. "What in thunder?"

But the General Freight Agent's lines of communication were just then temporarily disconnected by an assault upon his features conducted by Miss Bessie in person. During this interval, Mrs. Mitchell stood placidly surveying the room, and as she took in its air of preparation for immediate departure, a tantalizing smile spread itself on her expansive features.

"Is this an accident or a calamity?" demanded Mitchell, playfully thrusting Bessie aside and advancing to greet his wife.

"Both!" declared that lady, submitting her lips with more of formality than enthusiasm, after which, feeling that sufficient time had elapsed to make an explanation of her sudden appearance not undignified, she proceeded:

"Just one of my whims, Bob! Next week was the spring vacation; no school, and the poor child was pale from overstudy and so anxious about her examinations (Bessie shot a look at Hampstead), that I just made up my mind I'd bring her up here and let her get a good bite of fog and a breath from the Golden Gate."

"Fine idea!" declared Mitchell. "Fine! Now that you've had it," he chuckled, "we'll start home. I'm leaving at eight."

"You are not!" proclaimed Mrs. Mitchell flatly. "You will stay right here for at least three days and do nothing but devote yourself to your child. And to her mother!" she subjoined, as if that were an afterthought; all with a toss of her chin, which, by way of emphasis, held its advanced position for a moment after the speech was done.

"And the business of the company?" Mitchell suggested, with a solicitous air.

"It can wait on me," averred Mrs. Mitchell decisively, taking a turn up and down the room and surveying once more the signs of confusion and of hasty packing. "Many's the time I've waited on it. You can stay, too, John," she said, turning to Hampstead. "I want you to take Bessie to a lot of places Robert and I have been and won't care to visit this time."

"Robert!" and while her eyes turned toward the windows, two of which opened on a view of Market Street, the new commander began a redistribution of forces, "I rather like this suite. Bessie and I will take the corner room. You can take this room and Mr. Hampstead can move across the hall, or anywhere else they can put him."

As an act of possession, Mrs. Mitchell walked to the dresser, took off her hat, stabbed the two pins into it emphatically, and tossed it upon the bed, where it bloomed like a flower-garden in the midst of a desert of papers while she, still standing before the mirror, bestowed a few comfortable pats upon her hair.

"John," Mitchell said jovially, "I know orders from headquarters when I get 'em. You were going to stay over, anyway; but use your own judgment about obeying the instructions you have just received."

"Never had such agreeable instructions in my life," declared Hampstead, turning to Mrs. Mitchell with an elaborately stagy bow, and the natural quotation from Hamlet which leaped to his lips:

"I shall in all my best obey you, madam."

"See that you do," said that lady, not half liking the bow and shooting a glance at Hampstead less cordial than austere. "And by the way," she added, "see that you don't let that stage nonsense carry you much further, young man," with which remark Mrs. Mitchell turned abruptly and gave Hampstead a most complete view of a broad and uncompromising back.

In Mrs. Mitchell's mind a man had much better be a section hand on the Great Southwestern than a fixed star on the drama's milky way.

"By the way, mother," remarked Mr. Mitchell, with the air of one who makes an important revelation, "John is just going out to dine with William N. Scofield."

Mrs. Mitchell turned quickly, and her dark eyes shot a meaningful glance at her husband, while the line of her lower lip first grew full and then protruded. A squeeze of that lip at the moment, Hampstead reflected, would extract something at least as sour as very sour lemon juice.

"Scofield is after him," bragged Mitchell.

"Well, see that he doesn't get him," his wife commanded sternly, and then shifting her somber glance until it rested on John with a look that was near to menace, inquired acridly:

"Young man, you wouldn't be disloyal? You wouldn't sell yourself?" In the second interrogatory her voice had passed from acidity to bitterness, while the eyes bored implacably, till Hampstead at first wriggled, then grew resentful and replied crisply, standing very straight:

"No, Mrs. Mitchell, I would not sell myself!"

"That's right," exclaimed Bessie, stepping impulsively toward John's side. "Do not let her browbeat you. I am sorry to say, Mr. Hampstead, that mother is inclined to be somewhat dictatorial. You see what she does to poor papa!"

"And you see what you do to poor me," exclaimed that worthy lady, turning on her daughter with surprise and injury in her glance and tone,—*"dragging me almost out of bed last night to make this foolish trip up here with you. Next week, of all weeks, too, when I wanted to do so many other things."*

"Ho! ho!" broke in Mitchell, "so that's the way of it. This trip up here is a scheme of yours," and he turned accusingly upon his daughter, but Bessie smiled and curtseyed, entirely unabashed. "Well, then, I don't guess we'll stay," teased Mitchell. "And I don't suppose you knew a thing about Hampstead's being here. That was all an accident."

"It was not," flashed Bessie. "I did. I haven't seen dear old John for a year. I could go in and have delightful tête-à-têtes with him when he was a stenographer, but out in the Rate Department there are forty prying eyes and men with ears as long as jack-rabbits. He hasn't taken me to a circus or anything for nobody knows how long. You shall give him money for theater tickets, for dinners, for auto rides, for everything nice for three whole days."

Bessie was standing directly in front of her father, her eyes looking up into his, and her two hands patting his generous jowls, as her speech was concluded.

John listened rapturously. This was the old Bessie talking. She had entered the room looking a year older, a year prettier since that day when he wrote the Phroso invitations for her, and had taken on so easily the lacquer and dignity of dresses and of years that he was beginning to feel in awe of her. This speech was a great relief.

Besides, in the whirl of the hour before she came, he had found himself strangely wanting to take counsel with Bessie. The Mitchells had made of him for all these years a convenient caretaker of their daughter. Bessie had made of him a playfellow with whom she took the same liberties as with any other of her father's possessions. This attitude on her part had created the only atmosphere in which Hampstead could have been at ease with her. It had permitted his soul to bask when she was by, but it had done no more. But now, he somehow wanted to confide in Bessie,—not to take her advice for he wasn't going to take anybody's advice; all advice was against him,—but to tell her what he was going to do, because he believed she would listen appreciatingly, if not sympathetically. He felt he needed at least the added support of a neutral mind. He had rejected Mr. Mitchell's proposal, but the glitter of it flashed occasionally. And now he was going to face the resourceful, the ingratiating, the dominating William N. Scofield, and he felt like a man who goes alone to meet his temptation on the mountain top.

CHAPTER VII

THE HIGH BID

For an hour and a half at dinner, and for another hour sunk in the depths of a great leather chair in the lounging room of the Pacific Union Club, William N. Scofield had searched the soul of Hampstead, who had not only been led to talk rapturously of his stage ambition but to reveal the metes and bounds of his interest in and knowledge upon many subjects.

"Gad, but you know a lot," ejaculated Scofield, with unfeigned amazement. "Where'd you get it all?"

"I have read a good deal," confessed John, trying to appear much more modest than in his heart he felt; for it was a part of Scofield's whim or of his campaign to flatter him enormously, and he had succeeded.

But for a time now, the Traffic Manager was silent, puffing meditatively at his cigar and staring at the ceiling through loafing rings of smoke in which, as if they were floating letters, he seemed to read the transcript of his thought,—the thought that if, beside employing this enormously able young man, he could also enlist in behalf of the railroad as an institution his capacity for fanatical devotion to an ideal, the prize was one worth bidding high for, high enough to win!

"People like you, Hampstead," Scofield broke out presently, and in his most ingratiating vein. "We all felt that down at the office. You did a difficult thing without making an enemy of one of us. Therefore what your personality can do interests me even more than what you know."

The railroad man interrupted his speech to shoot an exploratory glance from under veiling lids and went on calculatingly:

"The railroad business is going to change. Now we tell the Railroad Commission what to do. The time is coming when it will tell us what to do, and we will do it. But the public attitude toward the railroad has also got to change." Scofield's tone had taken on new emphasis.

"You would make the type of executive that could change it! The successful transportation man of the future has got to be a sort of ambassador of the railroad to the people, and the man who best serves the people tributary to his road will best serve his stockholders."

"Do you know who gave me that point?" the Traffic Manager asked, turning from the vision he was contemplating in the clouds of smoke over his head and looking sharply at Hampstead.

"Naturally not," admitted the younger man.

"Bob Mitchell," said Scofield, and paused while his thin lips coaxed persistently at the cigar which appeared to have gone out. "Bob Mitchell! And I reviled him for his sagacity, told him he was an altruistic fool. But after a while I saw he was right. Then I tried to get him for us, but I didn't succeed. He wasn't as sensible as I hope you will be. Besides, I am going to offer you more than I offered him."

More than he offered Mitchell! There was a sudden jolt somewhere in John's breast, and he wet a dry, parched lip, but did not speak.

"Yes," breathed Scofield softly, almost as if he had been interrupted. "I am going to offer you more. Hampstead!" and the voice was raised quickly, "I want you to be our General Freight Agent!"

If Scofield had leaned over and kissed him, John would not have been more surprised, nor have known less what to say.

"General Freight Agent!" he croaked hoarsely.

"Yes," affirmed the other coolly, almost icily, while he flicked the ashes from his cigar and enjoyed the sensation his proposal had produced.

"At my age?" stumbled John, still groping, but trying to see himself in the position.

"Why, yes," reassured Scofield suavely. "You tell me you're past twenty-five. Paul Morton was Assistant General Freight Agent of the Burlington at twenty-one. Look where he is to-day—in the cabinet of the President of the United States. The salary," Scofield added casually, by way of finally clinching the argument, "will be twelve thousand a year."

Hampstead's lips silently formed the words—twelve thousand! But he did not utter them. They dazed him. They rushed him headlong. They made rejection impossible. No man had a right to throw away such a fortune as that. One thousand dollars a month! He felt himself yielding, helplessly, irresistibly.

And then, suddenly as the photographer's bomb lights up every lineament of every face in the darkened room, for one single moment Hampstead saw things clearly and in their true proportions. This Scofield was not a man. He was a grinning devil, with horns and a barb on his tail. He was tempting, trapping, buying him. He would not be bought. "*No, Mrs. Mitchell, I would not sell myself,*" he had said, not, however, meaning at all what that lady meant.

Leaning back stubbornly, his fist smiting heavy blows upon the cushioned arm of the chair, John muttered through clenched teeth:

"No! No! No—I'll never do it. No, Mr. Scofield, I cannot accept your offer. I thank you for it; but I cannot accept it. The stage is to be the place of my achievement. Why, why, Mr. Scofield, the wonderfully flattering offer you have made to me to-night has come because of the training incident to the cultivation of a stage ambition. If it can bring me so much with so little devotion, is it not reasonable to suppose that it will bring me more—very much more? I will not be so disloyal to that which has been so generous with me."

Scofield's countenance had suddenly and impressively changed. It became a mask of stone, a sphinx-like thing, the brow a knot, the nose a beak, the mouth a stitched scar. The beady gleam of the eyes from beneath drawn lids was sinister. This fanatical young fool was escaping him, and Scofield did not like any one to escape him.

But the young man refused to be swerved by frowns.

"Not to manage railroads," he declared enthusiastically, "but to mould human character is to be my life-work; to depict the virtues and the vices, the weaknesses and the strengths of life, to make men laugh and love and—forget."

Scofield's eyes twinkled, and his mouth became less a scar, but John thought this was a very fine phrase really, and he rushed along:

"Life looks like a tangle, like a mess—drudgeries, disappointments, injustices—the wrong man prospering—the wrong girl suffering! The drama composes life. It grabs out a few people and follows them, compressing into the action of two hours the eventualities of a lifetime and shortening perspectives till men can see the consequences of their acts, whether for good or for ill. The stage teaches the doctrine of the conservation of moral energy—and of immoral energy—that sustained effort, conserved effort is never cheated; it gets its goal at last."

"Say!" broke in Scofield; but John would not be denied what he felt was a final smashing generalization.

"To figure the tariff on human conduct, to grade and classify the acts of life, to quote the rates on happiness and misery in trainload lots. That's what I'm going to do," he concluded, with a glow upon his face.

But by this time a smile of cynic pity had appeared upon the face of the railroad man.

"Hampstead," he exclaimed sharply, with a mimic shudder and a shrug of relief as if he had just escaped something, "you're not an actor. You're a preacher!"

John gasped.

"You're a moralist," asserted Scofield accusingly, "a puritanical, Sunday-school, twaddling moralist. I have misjudged you. I wouldn't want you around at all."

With a look akin to disgust upon his face, the railroad man made a motion with his fingers in the air as if ridding them of something sticky, and arose, not abruptly but decisively, making clear that the interview had proved disappointingly unprofitable and was therefore at an end.

John also arose, bewildered by the sudden change in Scofield's attitude—a change which he resented, and also the ground of it. He a preacher? The idea was ridiculous.

Besides, it makes an astonishing difference when one has been stubbornly refusing an offer to have the offer coolly and decisively withdrawn. Something subtly psychological made him want

the offer back. The door of opportunity had been closed behind him with a snap so vicious that he wanted to turn and kick it open.

But the thin, talon-like hand of Scofield was hooking the young man's rather flaccid palm for a moment.

"Remember what I tell you," he barked out in parting. "You're not an actor. You're not a railroad man. You're a preacher!"

The last word was flung biting, like an epithet.

John, feeling uncomfortable, walked out and along one side of Union Square, casting a momentary wondering eye on the stabbing, twin towers of the Hotel St. Francis, many windowed and many-lighted; then turned on down Geary into Market and along that wide and cobbled thoroughfare to the doors of the old Palace Hotel. By the time he was in bed, he realized that Scofield had shaken him terribly. His decision was all to make over again.

However, Bessie would be there for three days to help him, and with this thought he felt comforted.

* * * * *

"It's been a great three days," sighed John, on the following Tuesday. Bessie also sighed.

They had clambered down from the parapet below the Cliff House and sat watching the seals at play upon the rocks a stone's throw out from beneath their feet. Their position marked the southern portal of the famous Golden Gate, through which a mile-wide stream of liquid blue was running. Across the Gate rose the sheer gray cliffs of Marin County and beyond those the rugged greens and blues of the mountains, spiked in the center by the peak of Tamalpais.

Before their faces, the ocean, in swells and scoops of ever grayer gray, ran out to catch the horizon as it fell, illumined in its lower reaches by the sun, which was sinking into the haze above the waters like a lustrous orange ball.

Southward, beyond the green head of Golden Gate Park, the yellow gray of the sand dunes and the blue gray of the sea met in a lingering, playful kiss that swept back and forth in a long shimmering line which ran on sinuously, growing fainter and fainter, till lost in the shadow of the distant cliffs.

The hour was five o'clock. At eight that night John was to leave for Los Angeles. His vacation—the only vacation of his hard-driven life—was to end, and an epoch in his existence was also nearing its end. The past was clear as the land behind him; the future was an area of tossing uncertainty. Nothing appeared,—no track, no wake, no sail, no sun even. Only far over, beyond the curve of the horizon, was a kind of strange, unearthly glow, and on this his eye was set.

For three days his soul had ebbed and flowed like that lip of foam upon the beach, now stealing far up on the land,—for him the backward track; now turning and running far out to sea,—for him the way of adventure and advance.

But now the ultimate decision was to be made. Bessie saw it rising like a tide upon that face which once had seemed not to fit, a rapt look which snuggled in the hills and hollows and then began to harden like setting concrete. No one would call that face homely now. Interesting, most likely, would have been the word.

The gray eyes burned brighter, the lips grew tighter. The chin advanced, moved out to sea a little, as it were.

"Follow your star, John," Bessie declared stoutly, though a look of pain momentarily touched her whitening lips. "I shall despise you if you do not."

"The decision is made," John replied solemnly, "and you, Bessie, have helped to make it."

Bessie did not reply; she only looked.

Silence fell between them. Silence, too, was in the heavens; the sun, the waves, the restless wind for the moment appeared to stand still. All nature had paused respectfully. A man, young, inexperienced, but potential, had cast the horoscope of life beyond the power of gods or men to intervene,—and with it had cast some other horoscopes as well.

Hampstead felt the spell his act of will had wrapped about them, but he felt also the substance of his resolution framing like granite in his soul and making him strong with a new kind of strength.

But soon the sun was descending again, the clouds were drifting once more, and a gust of wind nipped sharply, causing the skirts of John's overcoat to flap lustily. Bessie twitched her fur collar closer about the neck, and thrust both hands deep into the pockets of her gray ulster. Hampstead passed his own hand through the curve of the girl's elbow, gripped her forearm possessively, selfishly, absently, and drew her toward him.

Indeed Bessie was closer to him than she had ever been before; and yet she had never felt so far away.

"Oh, but it's great to have a woman by you in a crisis," John chuckled happily.

Bessie looked up startled. John had called her woman. But she recovered from the start,—he had also called her *a* woman.

"Come to understand each other pretty well, haven't we?" John observed, still looking oceanward, but giving the arm of Bessie what was intended for a meaningful squeeze.

"Not at all," sighed Bessie, also still looking oceanward.

Hampstead, his thoughts bowling rapidly forward, continued motionless until a white-winged, curious-eyed gull sailed between his line of vision and the water. Then, as if abruptly conscious that Bessie's answer was not what it should have been, he turned, and at the same time boldly swung her body round till they stood facing each other. Bessie met this gaze unblinkingly for a moment, with her face set and sober; then something in John's mystified glance touched her keen sense of humor, and she laughed,—her old, roguish laugh,—and flirted the stupid in the face with the end of her boa.

"You great big egoist!" she smiled. "There, that's the first chance I've had to use that word. I only learned the difference between it and another last week."

"Indeed!" retorted Hampstead. "And when did you learn the difference between me and the other word?"

"Well, I'm not sure that there is a difference," she sparred. "Being polite, I just concede it."

"Oh," he chuckled. "But," and he was serious again, "you say we don't understand each other?"

"Nonsense; I was only joking. I do understand you; you great, big, egoistical egotist! You are just now absolutely self-centered—and all, all ambition! And I am secretly—secretly, you understand—proud of you!"

"And you," said Hampstead, drawing her close again, "are just the truest, most understanding friend a man ever, ever had. You know, Bessie, a fellow can talk to you just like a sister,—a pretty little sister!" he subjoined, when Bessie looked less pleased than he thought she should.

"You've changed a lot, too, in a year," he conceded, studying her face critically. "When you came into the hotel that night, you struck fear into my heart, and then kind of made it flutter. I said to myself, 'She's gone—the old Bessie, that could be played with. But here's a young woman, a handsome young woman, taking her place.'"

"Did you say that?" asked Bessie happily.

"An exceedingly beautiful woman," went on John, as if stimulated by the interruption. "By George, a very corker of a woman—look at those eyes, those lips, those dimples. Same old dimples, girl!" he laughed emotionally. "And I said, 'Now, here's a woman, a ripe, wonderful woman, to be made love to—'"

"John!"

There was in Bessie's sudden exclamation the surcharged sense of all the proprieties which their relationship involved.

"Oh, don't be alarmed," exclaimed Hampstead, suddenly very earnest and respectful. "I am not leading up to anything. I do not misunderstand the nature of your goodness to me. I am not presuming anything. I am only telling you what I said to myself."

"Oh," murmured Bessie noncommittally, though she shivered for a moment as if a gust of wind had come again. Hampstead, feeling this, drew her still closer and hunched his broad shoulder to shelter her more, as he explained further:

"But it was I, you know, and there was nothing for me to do but to fly. I was for jumping out the window. And then you suddenly made that wonderful speech about going to the circus with dear old John, and your mother let it out that you wanted me to run around with you here, and I saw that toward me you were the same old Bessie; that for a few days we could be once more just friendly, only two finer friends, because we're both grown up now."

"Yes," Bessie sighed, almost contentedly. "I did want you, John. A girl gets tired of society, of clubs and dances and things, even in High. You know, I get weary of the sight of these slim, pompadoured boys sometimes. I just wanted somehow to feel the arm of a real man, to hear him talk, even if he does nothing but talk about himself, and until this minute in three days has not confessed that I have dimples, and—and a heart."

"Slow, about some things, am I not?" confessed John. "Awfully, awfully slow!"

"I will agree with you," said Bessie, with a mournfulness that literally compelled him to perceive that she was some way disappointed in him.

"But," he inquired reproachfully, "aside from my usefulness as a social escort and a sort of masculine tonic, you do admire me a little, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," she answered frankly. "I admire you a lot."

"But you're disappointed about something?"

"Apprehension is the better word," she confessed soberly.

"Apprehension? Of what?" John was looking at her almost accusingly. Bessie avoided his glance. She could not tell him what she feared nor why she feared it.

"You think I'll fail?" John demanded.

"No," disclaimed Bessie seriously. "I think you will succeed!"

"You think so?" and Hampstead's face lighted brilliantly. "Oh, God bless you for that!" and again he shook her, this time tenderly and drew her closer till her breast was touching his, and she leaned her head far back to look up into his face.

"Yes," she breathed softly, "I think so!"

"And you do not think me silly for turning my back upon solid realities to follow my ideal?"

"No! No!" and she shook her head emphatically, "I honor you for it, John. You have inspired me, John, and thrilled me. I used to think—how good you are! Now I think—how noble you are! You have made my feeling for you one of worshipfulness almost."

The look in her face did express that, and Hampstead noticed it now.

"Ah," he murmured, pressing her arms against her sides, "you dear, impressionable little girl!"

Quite thoughtless of how unnecessarily close he was drawing Bessie, either to shelter her from the wind or for the purpose of conversation, or especially in the fulfillment of his duty to his charge as guide and protector, John was finding a pleasurable sensation in this position of intimacy, and was indeed, just upon the threshold of one very great discovery when he made another, perhaps equally surprising, but vastly less important. Looking into the upturned eyes, which after the canons of Delsarte, he was thinking expressed "devotion" perfectly, a shadow was seen to project itself downward from the upper lids across the iris, as if a storm were gathering on a placid lake. John watched the shadow curiously as it deepened, until it became clear that a mist was congealing in those swimming violet depths.

"Why, Bessie," he exclaimed, amazed, "you are going to cry!"

On the instant two tears trickled from the dark lashes and gleamed for a moment like solitaire diamonds in the setting of two ruby spots that had gathered unaccountably upon her upturned cheeks.

"You are crying," he charged straightly.

Bessie's expression never changed, but her smooth, round chin nodded a trembling and unabashed assent. A sudden impulse seized John. The position of his arms shifted.

"Bessie!" he murmured feelingly, "I am going to kiss you!"

Bessie did not appear half as surprised at this announcement as Hampstead at himself for making it.

"May I?" he persisted.

The expression of devotion in Bessie's swimming orbs remained unstartled, her pose unaltered. Only her lips moved while she breathed a single word: "Yes."

Instantly their ruby and velvet softness yielded to the pressure of John's, planted as tenderly and chastely as was his thought of her,—for that other discovery that he was on the verge of making had been fended off by the coming of the tear.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN MAKES UP

That night, according to programme, John went back to Los Angeles; and a few weeks later, also according to programme, he was again in San Francisco, no longer a railroad man, but—in his thought—an actor.

Now calling oneself an actor and being one are quite different; but it took an experience to prove this to John. Even the opportunity for this experience was itself hard to get. It was days before he even saw a theatrical manager, weeks before he met one personally, and a month before he got his first engagement.

When he talked of the drama to actors the way he had talked of it to the Reverend Charles

Thompson Campbell, they did not comprehend him; when he talked to them as he had to Scofield, they smiled cynically; when he admitted to one manager that he was without professional experience, the admission drew a sneer which froze the stream of hope in his breast.

John thereafter told no other manager this, but learned instead the value of a "front", and inserted in the professional columns of the *San Francisco Dramatic Review* a card which read:

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+-----+
|       |
| JOHN HAMPSTEAD |
|   HEAVY       |
| AT LIBERTY    |
|       |
+-----+
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"Heavy" in theatrical parlance means the villain. Modestly confessing himself not quite equal to "leads", though in his heart John scorned to believe his own confession, he had announced himself as a "heavy."

This card appeared for three succeeding weeks, but on the fourth week there was a significant change. It read:

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+-----+
|       |
| JOHN HAMPSTEAD |
|   HEAVY       |
| With the People's Stock Company |
|       |
+-----+
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The People's Stock Company was new, a "ten-twenty-thirty" organization, got together in a day for a season of doubtful length, in a huge barn of a house that once had been the home of bucket-of-blood melodramas, but for a long time had been given over to cobwebs and prize fights. The promoters had little money. They spent most of it on new paint and gorgeous, twelve-sheet posters. Everything was cheap and gaudy, but the cheapest thing was the company—and the least gaudy.

The opening play was a blood-spiller with thrills guaranteed; the scene was laid in Cuba at a period just preceding the Spanish-American War. Hampstead's part was a Spanish colonel, Delaro by name. Delaro was no ordinary double-dyed villain. He was triple-dyed at the least, and would kick up all the devilry in the piece from the beginning to the end; he would steal the fair Yankee maiden who had strayed ashore from her father's yacht; he would imprison her in an out-of-the-way fortress; court her, taunt her, threaten her—and then when the audience was wrought to the highest pitch of excitement and the last throb of pity for her impending fate at the hands of this fiend in yellow uniform and brass buttons, the galloping of horses would herald the appearance of Lieutenant Bangster, U.S.N., lover of the maiden and hero of the play. (The Navy on horseback!) A pitched battle would result, pistols, rifles, cannon would be fired, the fortifications would be blown away, and Old Glory go fluttering up the staff to the thundering applause of the gods of the gallery.

Delaro was an enormous opportunity; but it was also an enormous responsibility. John went into rehearsal haunted by fear that the carefully guarded secret of his inexperience would be discovered, knowing that instant humiliation and discharge would follow. He had trudged, hoped, brazened, starved, prayed to get this part. He must not lose it, and he must make good. The sweat of desperation oozed daily from his pores.

Halsen, the stage manager, was a tall, tubercular person, with a husk in his throat and a cloudy eye. This eye seemed always to John to be cloudier still when turned on him. On the fourth day of rehearsal, these clouded looks broke out in lightning.

"Stop that preaching!" Halsen commanded impatiently. "You are intoning those speeches like a parrot in a pulpit. Colonel Delaro is not a bishop. He is a villain—a damned, detestable, outrageous villain! Play it faster; read those speeches more naturally. My God, you must have been playing—By the way, Hampstead, what were you playing last?"

The shot was a bull's-eye. John felt himself suddenly a monstrous fraud and had a sickening sense of predestined failure. In his soul he suddenly saw the truth. Acting was not bluffing.

Acting was an art! The poorest, dullest of these people, bad as they appeared to be, knew how to read their lines more naturally than he. He was not an actor. He never had been an actor. He was only a recitationist.

"What were you playing last, I say?" bullied Halson, as if suddenly suspicious.

But John had rallied. "If I don't get the experience, how will I ever become an actor," was what he said to himself.

"My last season was in Shakespeare," was what he observed to Halson, with deliberate dignity.

"Oh," exclaimed the stage manager, much relieved. "That explains it. I was beginning to think somebody had sawed off a blooming amateur on me."

John had not deemed it prudential to add that this season in Shakespeare lasted one whole evening and consisted of some slices from the Merchant of Venice presented in the parlor of the Hotel Green in Pasadena; and the scorn with which Halson had immediately pronounced the word "amateur" sent a shiver to Hampstead's marrow, while he congratulated himself on his discretion. Nevertheless, he suffered this day many interruptions and much kindergarten coaching from Halson and felt himself humiliated by certain overt glances from the cast.

"The boobs!" thought John. "The pin-heads! They don't know half as much as I do. They never taught a Y.M.C.A. class in public speaking; they never gave a lesson in elocution in all their lives, and here they are staring at me, because I have a little trouble mastering the mere mechanics of stage delivery. It's simple. I'll have it by to-morrow."

But at the end of the rehearsal, John felt weak. Instead of leaving the theater, he slipped behind a curtain into one of the boxes and sank down in the gloom to be alone and think. But he was not so much alone as he thought. A voice came up out of the shadows in the orchestra circle. It was the voice of Neumeyer, the 'angel' of the enterprise, who was even more inexperienced in things dramatic than his "heavy" man.

"How do you think it'll go?" Neumeyer had asked anxiously.

"Oh, it'll go all right," barked the whiskey-throat of Halson. "It'll go. All that's worrying me is this blamed fool Hampstead. How in time I sawed him off on myself is more than I can tell. However, I've engaged a new heavy for next week."

John groped dumbly out into the day. But in the sunshine his spirits rallied. "They can't take this part away from me," he exulted and then croaked resolutely: "I'll show 'em; I'll show 'em yet. They're bound to like me when they see my finished work."

And that was what he kept saying to himself up to the very night of the first performance. But that significant occasion brought him face to face with another problem,—his make-up.

The matter of costume was simple. It had been rented for a week from Goldstein's. It was fearsomely contrived. The trousers were red. Varnished oilcloth leggings, made to slip on over his shoes, were relied upon to give the effect of top boots. The coat was of yellow, with spiked tails, with huge, leaf-like chevrons, with rows of large, superfluous buttons, and coils on coils of cord of gold.

But make-up could not be hired from a costumer and put on like a mask. It was a matter of experience, of individuality, and of skill upon the part of the actor. All John knew of make-up he had read in the books and learned from those experimental daubs in which his features had been presented in his own barn-storming productions. The make-up of Ursus had been almost entirely a matter of excess of hair, acquired by a beard and a wig rented for the occasion. This, therefore, was really to be his first professional make-up, and Hampstead was blissfully determined that it should be a stunning achievement.

In order that he might have plenty of time for experiment, the heavy man entered the dressing rooms at six o'clock, almost an hour and a half before any other actor felt it necessary to appear, and went gravely about his important task.

First treating the pores of his face to a filling of cold cream,—all the books agreed in this,—John chose a dark flesh color from among his grease paints and proceeded to give himself a swarthy Spanish complexion. Judging that this swarthiness was too somber, he proceeded next to mollify it by the over-laying of a lighter flesh tint; but later, in an effort to redden the cheeks, he got on too much color and was under the necessity of darkening it again. Thus alternately lightening and darkening, experimenting and re-experimenting, seven o'clock found him with a layer of grease paint, somewhere about an eighth of an inch thick masking his features into almost complete immobility.

Next he turned attention to the eyes, blackening the lashes and edging the lids themselves with heavy mourning. At the outer corners of the eyes he put on a smear of white to drive the eye

in toward the nose; between the corner of the eye and the nose, he was careful to deepen the shadow. This was to make his eyes appear close together. Down the bridge of the nose he drew a straight white stripe to make that organ high and thin and narrow; while in the corner between the cheek and nostril went another smear of white, to drive the nose up still higher and sharper.

In the midst of this artistry, Jarvis Parks, the character man, who had been assigned to dress with Hampstead, entered.

"Hello," said John, with an attempt at unconcern.

"Hard at it," commented Parks, and began with the ease of long practice to arrange his make-up materials about him, after which deftly, and almost without looking at what he was doing, he transformed himself into a youthful, rosy-cheeked, navy chaplain.

"Half hour!" sang the voice of the call boy from below stairs.

John was busy now adjusting a pirate moustache to his upper lip by means of liberal swabbings of spirit gum. As he worked, he hummed a little tune just to show Parks how much at ease and with what satisfied indifference he performed the feat of transposing his fair Saxon features into the cruel scowls of a villainous Spanish colonel.

But catching the eye of Parks upon him for a moment, Hampstead was puzzled by the expression, although he reflected that it was probably admiration, since he certainly had got on ever so much better than he expected. It surely was a fine make-up—a brilliant make-up.

"Fifteen minutes," sang the voice of the call boy.

Hampstead could really contain his self-complacency no longer.

"Well," he exclaimed, turning squarely on Parks, "what do you think of it?"

Now if John had only known, he disclosed his whole amateurish soul to wise old Parks in that single question, for a professional actor never asks another professional what he thinks of his make-up.

"Great!" responded Parks drily, but again there was that look upon his face which Hampstead could not quite interpret.

"Five minutes!" was bellowed up the stairway.

Hampstead drew on his coat of brilliant yellow, buckled on his sword, and had opportunity to survey himself again in the glass and bestow a few more touches to the face before the word "overture", the call boy's final scream of exultation, echoed through the dressing rooms.

The corridor outside John's door was immediately filled with the sound of trampling feet, of voices male and female, some talking excitedly, some laughing nervously, every soul aquiver with that brooding sense of the ominous which sheds itself over the spirits of a theatrical company upon a first night.

Parks, with a final touch to his hair and a sidewise squint at himself, turned and went out. The footsteps and voices in the corridor grew fainter and then came trailing back from the stairway like a chatterbox recessional.

It was quiet in the dressing rooms, except for a droning from across the way, and John knew what that was; for the sweet little ingenue had told him in a moment of confidence: "On first nights I always go down on my knees before I leave my dressing room." There she was now, telling her beads.

"Shall I pray, too?" he asked, and then answered resolutely, "No! Let's wait and see what God'll do to me."

His throat was arid. His lips, from the drying spirit gum and the excess of grease paint, were stiff and unresponsive.

"*Eternal Hammering is the Price of Success*" he muttered thickly, trying to brace himself. "Now for a great big swing with the hammer." But his spirits sagged unaccountably, and he turned out into the corridor as if for a death march.

At this moment the area between the foot of the stairs and the wings of the stage was a weaving mass of idling scene-shifters, hurrying, nervous, property men, and a horde of supernumeraries made up as American sailors, Spanish soldiers, and Cuban natives. All was movement and confusion.

The principals had drifted to their entrances and taken position in the order in which they would appear; but they too were restless; nobody stood quite still; at every movement, at every loud word, everybody turned or looked or started. The hoarse voice of Halson and his assistant, Page, repeatedly resounded.

As Hampstead descended the stairs upon this strange, moving picture, it appeared to him to organize into a ferocious, misshapen monster that meant him harm; or a python coiling and uncoiling its gigantic, menacing folds. The thing was argus-eyed, too, and every eye stabbed him

like a lance.

Emerging upon the floor, John paused uncertainly before this hostile wall of prying scrutiny. Somebody snickered. A woman's voice groaned "My Gawd!" and followed it with a hysterical giggle.

Could it be that they were laughing at him? John felt that this was possible; but he stoutly assured himself that it was not probable.

However, just as his features passed under the rays of a bunch light standing where it was to illumine with the rays of the afternoon sun the watery perspective of a jungle scene, he came face to face with the stage manager. Halson darted one quick glance, and then a look of horror congealed upon his face.

"In the name of God!" he hissed huskily. "Hampstead, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Doing to myself?" exclaimed John, trying for one final minute to fend off fate. "Why? What do you mean?"

Halson's voice floated up in a half humorous wail of despair, as he rolled his eyes sickly toward the flies.

"What do I mean?" he whined. "The man comes down here with his face daubed up like an Esquimaux totem pole, and he asks me what do I mean?"

But Halson was interrupted by a sudden silence from the front. The orchestra had stopped. The curtain was about to rise.

"Page! Page!" groaned Halson in a frantic whisper, "Hold that curtain! Signal a repeat to the orchestra! Here, you!" to the call boy. "Run for my make-up box. Quick!"

John's knees were trembling, and he felt his cheeks scalding in a sweat of humiliation beneath their blanket of lurid grease, as Halson turned again upon him with:

"You poor, miserable, God-forsaken amateur!"

Amateur! There, the word was out at last, and it was terrible. No language can express the volume of opprobrium which Halson was able to convey in it. To Hampstead it could never henceforth be anything but the most profane of epithets. As a matter of fact, he was never after able to hate any man sufficiently to justify calling him an amateur.

While the orchestra dawdled, while the company of "supers" crowded close, and the principals looked sneeringly on from all distances, Halson made up the heavy's face for the part he was to play, thereby submitting John Hampstead to the bitterest humiliation of his dramatic career.

Yet once engaged upon this work of artistry, the stage manager's wrath appeared to soften. Half cajoling and half pleading, he whined over and over again, "If you had only told me, Mr. Hampstead! If you had only told me, I would have helped you."

"If I only had told him," reflected John, beginning all at once to like Halson, and never suspecting that the man in his heart was hating him like a fiend, and that his fear that the amateur would go absolutely to pieces under the strain of the night was the sole reason for soothing and encouraging and commiserating him by turns.

But now the orchestra grew still again.

"Aw-right," husked Halson, and Hampstead heard that ominous, sliding, rustling sound which to the actor is like no other in all the world.

CHAPTER IX

A DEMONSTRATION FROM THE GALLERY

Every chair in the orchestra of the People's Theater was taken; the boxes were occupied, and as for the odd rectangular horseshoe of a gallery, with its advancing arms reaching forward almost to the proscenium arch, while its rearward tiers rose and faded into distance like some vast enclosed bleachers, it seemed a solid mass of humanity. The curtain rose on critical silence. The repetition of the overture had given a hint that all was not running smoothly, and at the first spoken word a jeer came from the gallery. The actor stammered and made the foolish attempt to repeat his words, but the attempt was lost in a clamor of voices. Feet were stamped, hats were waved, peanuts and popcorn balls were thrown. The actors braced themselves and went on doggedly, but so did the balconies, and it presently appeared that something like a demonstration was in progress. Swiftly an explanation of the great masses in the gallery and their behavior was passed from mouth to mouth behind the scenes. It said they were six hundred south-of-Market-

Street hoodlums who had been hired by a rival theatrical manager to come and break up the performance. Whether this was true, or whether the outbreak in the gallery was merely the unsuppressible spirit of turbulent youth, it stormed on like a simoon, gaining in volume as it proceeded.

For a while the people down-stairs, having paid their thirty cents to witness a theatrical performance, protested; but they appeared soon to conclude that the show in the gallery was the more worth while. Ceasing to protest, they began to applaud the trouble-makers and even to abet them.

Behind the scenes panic reigned. The actors at their exits bounded off, panting in terror, as if pelted by bullets. Those whose cues for entrance came, snatched at them excitedly, and like gladiators rushing into the arena, plunged desperately upon the stage. The face of the leading lady was white beneath her make-up as she almost tottered upon the scene. Some instinct of chivalry led the mob to desist for a minute while she delivered her opening lines. But the demonstration broke out afresh as the leading man entered, though he wore the uniform of a lieutenant in the navy. His every speech was jeered. The excitement grew wilder; not a word spoken upon the stage was heard, even by the leader of the orchestra.

"My God, what they will do to you, Hampstead!" exclaimed Halson fiercely, as a detachment in the gallery began to march up and down the aisle, the rhythm of their heavy steps making the old house shiver like a ship in a storm.

Yet of all the actors trembling behind the scenes, it is possible that Hampstead was the very coolest. He had been the most perturbed, the most distraught; but this counter-disturbance made his own distressing situation forgotten. No eyes were riveted on him now. No thoughts were on him and the terrible humiliation he had publicly endured or the wretched failure he was going to make. The best, the most experienced, were in the most complete distress—clear out of themselves. The leading man had become angry, had lost his lines, and did not know what he was saying.

"Stanley's lost; he's ad-libbing to beat the band," John heard Page remark.

Ad-libbing! It was a new word. In the midst of all this confusion, John took note of it and next day learned of Parks that it was a stage-participle made from *ad libitum*. An actor ad-libbing was an actor talking on and on to fill space in some kind of a stage wait or because, as with Stanley, he had forgotten his lines.

Neumeyer, the "angel", came in from the front and added his white, agitated face to the awed groups standing about the wings.

"They've lost half the first act," he groaned, through chattering teeth. "Even when they wear 'emselves out, the piece is ruined because the people down-stairs have missed the key to the plot."

"Your cue is coming," bawled Page to John.

"Don't worry, though," croaked Halson in Hampstead's ear, still fearful that his man would collapse. "The piece is going so rotten you can't make it any worse. Cut in!"

But to his surprise, Hampstead's eye glinted with the light of battle.

"Worry?" he exclaimed excitedly. "Watch me. I'm going to get 'em!"

Halsion gazed in pure pity.

"Get 'em," he guttured. "You poor, God-forsaken amateur!"

But the cue had come. Colonel Delaro, his sword clattering, his buttons flashing, his tall figure aglow with color, leaped through the entrance and took the center of the stage—so clumsily that he trod on Stanley's favorite corn and hooked a spur in the mantilla trailing from the arm of Miss Constance Beverly, the mislaid daughter of a millionaire yachtsman; but nevertheless, Hampstead was on. He had seized the center of the stage and he filled it full, as with an ostentatious gesture, he swept off his gold lace cap before Miss Beverly.

"What star's this?" shrieked a voice on one side the gallery.

"No star at all. It's a comet!" bawled a man from the other side, cupping his hands to carry his second-hand wit around the auditorium.

The Spanish War was not then so far back in memory that the sight of the uniform did not speedily kindle a little popular wrath upon its own account, and the demonstration began again and rose higher, but Hampstead became neither flustered nor angry. He maintained his character and his dignity. He remembered his speeches, and delivered them in stentorian tones that sounded vibrantly above the general clamor. When the gallery discovered to its surprise that here was a voice it could not entirely drown, it stopped out of sheer curiosity to see what the voice was like and found it as attractive as it was forceful. Moreover, there was a kind of special

appeal in it. It was the voice of a real man; if they had only known it,—of a man at bay. He was not Colonel Delaro, plotting against the liberty and affections of a lady. He was John Hampstead, fighting,—with his back to the wall,—fighting for his opportunity, for an accredited position in this poor, cheap misfit company,—a position which seemed to him just now the most desired thing in all the world. Furthermore, he was fighting to justify his own faith in himself and the faith of Dick and Tayna; yes, and the faith of Bessie.

Hampstead was, moreover, used to rough houses. He had faced them more than once on his own barn-storming one-night appearances.

The way to get an audience like this he knew was to play it like a fish, to get the first nibble of interest and then hold it motionless with the lure of some kind of dramatic story. The situation called for a skilled, dramatic *raconteur*, and in truth that was what Hampstead was,—not an actor but a recitationist. Also his talks in church circles had given him skill in extemporaneous speaking. It happened that his speeches in this first act completed the introduction of the plot, but they were meaningless without a clear knowledge of what already had been said. Now Hampstead began, at first instinctively and then deliberately, as he played, to gather up these lost lines of half a dozen actors and weave them into his own. The fever of composition seized him. He used the people on the stage like puppets. He made them help him re-lay the plot while he struggled to grasp the attention of the mass child-mind out there in front and enthrall it with a story.

No better way could have been devised of making Hampstead overcome his terrible faults of action and delivery. With marvelous intensity came more repose. His eyes had been changed by the deft hand of Halson till they no longer looked like holes in a blanket; and he shot out his speeches, never once in that rhythmic, preaching tone, but rapidly, jerkily, plausible or menacing by turns, but all the while convincingly.

Within a few minutes the audience was captured. It lost its enthusiasm for riot and sat silent, following first the story as Hampstead had retold it and then the action which thereafter began to unfold. It was the sheer strength of the personality of the man which made this possible. In his strength, too, the other players took courage; and soon the action was tightly keyed and moving forward to a better conclusion of the act than any rehearsal had ever promised.

At the fall of the curtain, an avalanche leaped upon Hampstead, an avalanche which consisted solely of Halson. He seemed to have a thousand hands. He was slapping John on the back with all of them, in fierce, congratulatory blows.

"Man!" he exclaimed. "Man! You saved it! You saved it!"

Neumeyer was capering about deliriously, while tears of joy were trickling from his eyes. Others crowded round: Stanley, who had the lead, amiable old Parks, Lindsay, Bordwell, Miss Harlan, and the rest.

The audience, too, was excitedly expressing itself with hand-clappings and foot-stampings.

"Scatter!" bawled Page.

The stage swiftly cleared of people as the curtain began to rise.

"Miss Harlan!" Page was shouting. "Mr. Stanley! Mr. Hampstead!"

In the order named, the three emerged and took their calls, but the heartiest applause was for the big man in yellow and red, who, quite ignoring the orchestra circle, showed all his teeth in a cordial and understanding grin to the galleries, which thereupon broke out in that hurricane of hisses which is the heavy's hoped-for tribute.

Throughout the remainder of the performance, the yellow and scarlet figure of Delaro, with his great, sweeping gestures and his vast, bellowing voice, moved, a unique and dominating figure; no doubt the first and last time in which a villain who as a character was without one redeeming quality was made the hero of the gallery gods.

With the final fall of the curtain, Hampstead climbed to his dressing room, tired but gloriously happy. All the company knew his shame, the shame of being an amateur; but all, too, knew his power, the power of a man who could rise to emergency, who had commanding presence and constructive force.

The dressing rooms were mere partitions open at the top, so that everybody could hear what everybody else was saying, or could have heard, if only they had stopped to listen. But apparently nobody listened. The strain was over, and everybody talked as if the joy were in the talking and not in being heard. Yet after the first few minutes of excited blowing-off of steam, there came a lull, as if all had stopped for breath at once.

Into this lull, Dick Bordwell, the juvenile man, as he wiped the grease paint from his face, lifted his fine tenor voice in the first half of a queer antiphonal chant, by inquiring loudly above

his four wooden walls toward the common ceiling over all:

"Who is the greatest leading woman on the American stage?"

"Louise Harlan!" chanted every voice on the floor, their tones mingling merrily, as if they were playing a familiar game.

"Right-o," sang Dick, and chanted next: "Who is the greatest leading man on the American stage?"

"Billie Stanley!" chorused the voices, with shrieks of laughter.

"And who," inquired Dick, with an insinuating change in his voice, "*who is the greatest juvenile man in America?*"

"Rich-a-r-r-r-d Bordwell!" screamed the magpies.

"Right-o-right!" echoed Dick, with a grunt of immense satisfaction; and then he went on piping his interrogatories, as to the rest of the company, desiring to be informed who was the greatest character old man, character old lady, soubrette, light comedian and stage manager, concluding yet more loudly with:

"And who is the greatest amateur heavy on the American stage?"

As if they had been waiting for it, the voices burst out like a college yell:

"John Hampstead! John Hampstead, is the greatest amateur heavy on the American stage!"

The spirit of fun and hearty good will with which this initiation ceremony had been performed was salve to the bruised, excited soul of John. Besides an ever present sense of meanness and hypocrisy from the concealment he had practiced, John had suffered a feeling of extreme loneliness that had at no time been so great as now, when, the strain of the play over, all these children of the stage were romping joyously together. Now they had included him in the circle of their magic fellowship. True, they had used the hateful word amateur, but that was in play, and he was sure they would never use it again.

And he was right—from that hour some of them who liked him showed it; some who disliked him showed that; some merely revealed themselves as cool toward him or appeared ill at ease in his presence; but never one of them, by word or act, failed from that moment to recognize his standing as a man entitled to all the free masonry of their unique and fascinating profession.

But the climax of this climactic night for John was reached when, descending the stairway, Halson honored him with an astounding confidence.

"Marien Dounay joins the People's to-morrow," he whispered excitedly.

"Fact!" he affirmed in response to John's look of sheer incredulity. "She's a spitfire and a genius. She can do what she likes. She's quarreled with Mowrey. She's coming here to spite him. Pie for us while it lasts, huh? She opens as Isabel in *East Lynne*."

John knew that Mowrey had come up from Los Angeles and was just opening a long season at the Grand Opera House; but Marien Dounay—almost a star!—in that thread-bare play, *East Lynne*, in this out-at-elbows company, and in this old barn of a house! Impossible!

This was what John was thinking, but he was too weak to give it utterance. He wanted Halson's information to be true whether it was or not. Yet in the midst of the elation which began to kindle swiftly, he remembered what Halson had said to Neumeyer on Saturday in the dark of the orchestra: that a new man had been engaged to play the heavies.

A wave of bitterness surged over him; and yet, he reflected, things must be changed. They would scarcely let him go after to-night, so he mustered courage to inquire:

"By the way, Halson, what do I play in *East Lynne*?"

"You play the lead," affirmed Halson, with dramatic emphasis.

"The lead?" John gulped, struggling as if a cobblestone had just been tossed into his throat.

"Sure! You'll get away with it, too," declared the stage manager with over-enthusiasm, slapping John heavily upon the back as the big man turned away quickly, utterly unwilling that any save two or three not there to look should see into his face.

It would scarcely have diminished his joy to know that he was getting the lead simply because Archibald Carlyle was such an unredeemed mollicoddle that the leading man usually chose to enact the villain, Levison.

CHAPTER X A STAGE KISS

For the strange freak of Miss Marien Dounay in joining The People's Stock Company, the papers

found ready explanation in artistic temperament. The brilliant young actress, so the story ran, taking umbrage because Miss Elsie McCloskey, twin star of the Mowrey cast, was chosen to play a part for which Miss Dounay deemed herself specially fitted, had resigned in a huff; and thereupon, to spite Mowrey, had signed with this obscure stock company playing a dozen blocks away, where it was believed her popularity would be sufficient to punish the well-known manager in his one vulnerable spot, the box-office.

But there was one person interested who did not care a rap why Marien Dounay was playing Isabel Carlyle, the wife of Archibald Carlyle at the People's Stock this week, in the time-frazzled drama of *East Lynne*, and that was the man to play Archibald. She was there, and that was enough for him, swimming into his ken at the first rehearsal like a vision of some glory too entrancing to belong to anything but a dream.

Had she changed much in the four months since he had held her in his arms? Not at all, unless to grow more beautiful.

Yet if that crude actor fancied himself on terms of more than bare acquaintance with this exquisite creature, his imagination presumed too far. Miss Dounay's bearing made it instantly apparent that she gave herself airs. One comprehensive glance was bestowed upon the semicircle of the company. Hampstead's portion was more and less, a look and a nod. The nod said: "I know you, puppet." The look warned: "But do not presume. Stand."

John stood, wondering. As rehearsals progressed, his wonder grew into bewilderment. Miss Dounay treated the whole company cavalierly, but she treated him disdainfully. Her feeling for the others was simply negative; for him it appeared to be positive.

As an actress, it developed that she was "up" in the part of Isabel, having played it many times. She had, moreover, ideas of how every other part should be played and was pleased to express them. Nobody protested, Halson least of all. She was a "find" for the People's. As a director, too, Miss Dounay was masterful. A languid glance, a single word, a very slight intonation, had more force than one of Halson's ranting commands. And she was instinctively competent.

Hampstead, despite his own sad experience, watched her open-mouthed. This young woman, it appeared, was an intellectual force as well as a magnetic one. She cut speeches or interpolated them, altered business, and in one instance rearranged an entire scene, while in another she boldly reconstructed the conclusion of an act. The storm center round which much of this cutting, slicing, and fattening took place was Hampstead. She heckled him unmercifully about the reading of his lines, ridiculed his gestures, and badgered him to madness.

On the fourth day of this, John moped out of the theater, head down, reflecting bitterly upon the illusory character of woman, of which he knew so little,—moped so slowly that Parks overtook him on the first corner.

"This woman is a friend of yours," Parks proposed tentatively.

"I thought she was," sighed Hampstead weakly, "but she keeps cutting my speeches. By the end of the week, I won't have any part left at all."

Parks indulged a self-satisfied chuckle at the keenness of his own discernment.

"Don't you see," he explained, "she's cutting the stuff you do badly. She took away from you a situation in which you were awkward and unreal. She changed that scene around and left you with a climax in which you are positively graceful as well as forceful. You'll get a big hand in it. She studies you. I've watched her."

"Old man," blurted Hampstead, with sudden fervor, "it would make me the happiest man in the world if I thought that you were right. But you are wrong, and her badgering has begun to get on my nerves. Say!" and he interrupted himself to ask a question not yet answered to his satisfaction. "Why is she here?—with the People's, I mean?"

"You've heard the stories," answered Parks, with a shrug. "However, I doubt if it's any mere whim. She appears to me to have a cool, good reason for anything she does."

Parks turns off at Ninth Street, and John moved on down Market. "A cold good reason for what she does," he murmured. "What's the answer, I wonder, to what she does to me?"

As the days went on, John's wonder grew.

Now it is according to the method of dramatists that when a husband is to be abandoned by his wife in the second act there shall be certain tender passages between the two in the first act, and this ancient drama was no exception. There were contacts, handclasps, embraces, kisses. Through all of these at rehearsal time the two went mechanically. Miss Dounay apparently treated Hampstead with mere indifference, but actually she found a thousand little ways to show utter repugnance. After the first shock, John's combative instinct and his pride led him to face

this situation, so difficult for a gentleman, unflinchingly. Taking her hands, pressing her to him, patting her cheek, playing with the wisps of hair upon her temple, he conscientiously rehearsed the part of the affectionate, doting husband. His very sincerity, it would seem, must have been a rebuke to the woman. She must have seen that his heart was stirred by an unexplained feeling toward her, and might have observed in his determined bearing under the galling fire of her man-baiting something noble.

Here, if she could only perceive it, was a man who had turned his back on at least one of the kingdoms of this world to become an actor; a man who would endure anything, suffer anything to add to his knowledge and skill in that difficult and all demanding art; which, indeed, was why he laid himself open to her polished ridicule by over-playing every scene, overemphasizing every word, over-expressing every gesture and emotion.

But she never relented, not even on the night of the first performance. Instead she became more aggressive in her antagonism, her method changing from subtle scorn to open derision.

Now among experienced actors there are a great many things which may take place upon the stage unsuspected of the audience. On this night, all through the tender exchanges of that first act, Miss Dounay seized upon intervals when her back was to the front to throw a grimace at John,—to do, or *sotto voce* to say, something irritating or ludicrous that would throw him out of character, or, as the profession puts it, "break him up." John steeled himself against all of this and went on playing with that dignity of earnestness which seemed to characterize all his life, until it would appear the climax of malice was reached when, as Miss Dounay hung about his neck, she laughed in the midst of one of his tenderest speeches, and whispered:

"There is a daub of smut on the end of your nose."

To John this communication was an arrow poisoned by the subtle power of suggestion. Was there smut upon his nose? If there were and he touched it with a finger, it would smear and ruin his make-up. If he did not remove it, the audience would observe it the first time he came down stage and laugh. On the other hand, he did not believe that there was smut upon his nose. How could it get there? In no way unless some joker had doctored the peephole in the curtain just before he peered out at the audience.

Smutted or not smutted? To touch his nose or let it alone? That was the maddening question. The puzzle and the doubt disconcerted him. His memory faltered, his tongue stumbled, and a feeling of awful helplessness came over him. He *was* breaking up! He *was* out of character! This devilish woman had succeeded. She saw it, too. John read the exultation in her eyes, and it filled him with indignation until a wave of wrath surged over his great frame like a storm. Miss Dounay saw his eyes grow suddenly stern with a light she had never noticed in them. One arm was encircling her in a caress, the other hand rested upon her shoulders. For one instant she felt this embrace tighten into a python grip that was terrifying. The man's position had not changed. To the audience it was still a mere pose, an expression of endearment.

But to Marien Dounay it was an ominous hint that this great amiable child had in him the primal elements of a brutal strength. A look of alarm shot into her face, and she whispered:

"Don't, John! Don't."

The tone of her voice was pleading. She, the proud, had cringed. She had called him John. She had surrendered.

"It was just a mean little fib," she whispered, and for a moment clung to him helplessly.

John, greatly surprised, was not too much surprised to feel the exultant surge of victory. For one moment he had lost control of himself, but in that moment he appeared to have gained control of Marien.

The strangest thing was that Miss Dounay seemed rather happy about it herself; and the wide range of the woman's capacity was revealed by her swift transition to a mood of purring contentment and a spirit of affectionate camaraderie that presently reached a surprising climax.

The act ended in the garden, with Isabel seated on a rustic bench, and Archibald bending over her. As the curtain descended, he was to stoop and print a kiss of tenderest respect upon her forehead. But now, as the curtain trembled, Miss Dounay lifted not her forehead but her lips, and held them, warm and clinging, to his for an instant that to Hampstead seemed a delicious, thrilling eternity, from which he emerged like a man newborn.

But the male instinct to gloat was the first clear thought.

"You do like me, don't you?" he breathed exultantly, while the curtain was down for an instant. Marien answered with her eyes and a quick affirmative nod, before the curtain bounded upward again for a last picture of husband and wife gazing into each other's eyes with a look expressing an infinitude of fondness. But John had ceased to be Archibald. What his look

expressed was an infinitude of mystery and joy.

"And they say there is no satisfaction in a stage kiss!" he whispered to himself as he leaped up the stairs to his dressing room.

CHAPTER XI SEED TO THE WIND

The next night Miss Dounay gave John her forehead instead of her lips to kiss, but she heckled him no more, and it was perfectly obvious to him, as to Parks, that she helped him deliberately and had been helping him all along by her stage direction.

"If you've got her interested in you, you're fixed for life," grumbled Parks wistfully. "That girl's going up the line, and she's got stuff enough to take somebody else with her."

There was a suggestion in this which John resented.

"I'm going up, too," he rejoined with the defiant exuberance of youth, "but on my own steam."

Parks looked at John up and down, and laughed,—just that and nothing more. The old man's frankness was comforting at times; at others disagreeable. John moved away irritated, and his head went up into the clouds of his dreams. But there was something in what Parks had suggested that kept coming back to his mind. True, Miss Dounay never exchanged more than the merest words of courtesy with John off the stage. But on the stage and at rehearsal it really did seem as if there was a very nice little understanding growing up between them.

Off stage John dreamed of going to call upon her. In his little room he thought of her much and hungrily. That he should think hungrily was not strange, since he was hungry. His salary was twenty dollars a week. To send half to Rose, and save money to meet his wardrobe bills, he lived on two meals a day. The morning meal, taken at half-past nine, consisted of coffee and cakes, and cost ten cents. The evening meal was taken at half-past five. It was a grand course dinner that went from soup to pie, and its cost was fifteen cents. The tip to the waitress was a smile.

When one goes supperless to bed, dreams come lightly and are fantastic. John's dreams were of banqueting after the play with Marien Dounay. Greenroom gossip had it that Marien lived royally but in modest thrift; that her French maid, Julie, was also cook and housekeeper; that Marien's disposition was domestic and yet convivial. That instead of a supper down town in one of the brilliant cafés, she preferred the seclusion of her small but cozy apartment, and the triumphs of Julie at a tiny gas grill, supplemented and glorified by her own skill with the chafing dish. That there were nights when she supped alone, but others when a lady or two, or much more likely a gentleman, or mayhap two gentlemen were honored with invitations to this feast of goddesses; for tiny, efficient, ambidextrous Julie was in her way as much of an aristocrat as her mistress, and as skillful in imparting the suggestion that she was herself of some superior clay. Subject to the whims of her mistress, she, too, had whims, and made men—and women—not only respect but admire them. Rumor said that if an invitation to one of these midnight revels with toothsome food under the personal direction of this flashing beauty ever came, it was on no account to be despised, especially if a man were hungry either for beauty or for food.

John Hampstead was hungry for food, and now he began to feel hungry also for beauty. This last was really a new appetite. John, through all his struggling years, had of course his thoughts of woman as all men have, but vaguely, as something a long way off, indefinitely postponed. Yet ever since he carried Lygia in his arms, these thoughts of woman had been recurring as something nearer, more tangible, and more necessary even. As for that kiss in the garden scene of *East Lynne*! Well, there was something wonderfully awakening in that kiss. It was worlds different from that brotherly, sympathetic little kiss he had given Bessie yonder upon the rocks.

By the way,—why did Bessie cry? He used to wonder sometimes why she did! And why did Marien Dounay taunt him till he was angry enough to beat her,—and then kiss him?

Women were hard to understand. They seemed to do things that had no meaning; to use words not to convey but to conceal thought; and they spoke half their speeches in riddles. However, John reflected that when he had been with women more, he would know them better. And in the meantime he supplemented his professional contacts with Marien by thinking of her constantly, even to the point where his absorbing interest led him to follow her home at night after the play,—keeping always at a safe distance behind,—and to stand across the street and watch till the light went on in that third-story bay-window on Turk Street near Mason; and then still to stand, trying to interpret the meaning of shadows moving across the window for

uncounted hours, till the light went out, sometimes at two and sometimes later, or until a policeman bade him move on. If any one had told John that he was falling in love with Marien Dounay, he would have indignantly rejected the idea. She held a fascinating interest for him,—that was all. Something basic in him was attracted by something basic in her, and he yielded to it wonderingly, experimentally almost, and that was all it amounted to.

But on the night that Miss Dounay completed her engagement at the People's, for her tiff with Mowrey was over in just four weeks, the opportunity came to John to submit his feelings to more searching experimentation.

It had been his custom to wait in the shadowy wings each night to see the object of his solicitous interest depart, supposing himself always to be unobserved. But on this last night Marien surprised him into nervous thrills by walking over into the shadow with the cool assurance of an autocrat, and saying:

"Come home to supper with me, John."

At the same time Miss Dounay took the big man's arm as comfortably as if the matter had been arranged the week before last, and John walked out as if on air, but hurriedly. That soft touch upon his arm made him hungry with indescribable anticipations. Moreover, he was stirred by an itching curiosity concerning the whole of the intimate personal life of Marien Dounay. Who was she? What was she? *How* was she?

Yet on the very threshold of the little apartment, his sense of what was conventional in the world out of which he had come halted him.

"Should I?" he asked huskily, as the door stood open. "Would it be—proper?"

"Most particularly proper, innocent!" laughed Marien. "At the theater Julie is my maid; at home she is my housekeeper, my social secretary, my companion, and chaperone."

While the light of reassurance kindled on John's face, Marien gently drew him inside.

"Behold!" she exclaimed with a stage gesture, when the door was closed behind him. "My temporary home; my balcony window overlooking the street, my alcove wherein I sleep, the kitchenette in which we cook; behind that the bath, and back of that Julie's own room. Isn't it dear?"

"Dear!" That was a woman's word. Bessie said that about her invitation paper for the Phrosos.

"Dear?" he breathed, comparing it in one swift estimating glance to his own barren cell. "It's a paradise!"

"So much more seclusion than in hotels," declared Marien, and then went on to say in that sort of tone which belongs to an air of frank and simple comradeship: "So much less expensive, too. Do you know what saves a girl in this business? Money! Ready money. And do you know what ruins her? Extravagance—debt. We are very economical, Julie and I. We have what crooks call 'fall money', laid by for any emergency. That's what you'll need to do. Save half your salary every week. There'll be weeks you don't play, weeks when you have to go to expense. You may be ill or have an accident, or your company will close unexpectedly. Save. Save your money!"

Marien uttered these bits of practical wisdom, which were to John the revelation of an unthought-of side of this exquisite young woman's character while she was conducting him toward the window.

"Sit here," she commanded. "Look straight down Turk. See the lights battling with the fog. Listen to the waning music of the night in this noisy, cobbly, clangy city. Don't turn your head till I say!"

The lights were indeed beautiful, each with its halo of mist. The clanging bells of cars, and even the horrible squeak of the wheels as they turned a curve, with the low singing of the cables that drew them, did rise up like the orchestration of some strange new motif of the night that lulled him till he was only faintly conscious of the opening and closing of doors and a rustling at the other end of the room.

"Now!" called the voice of Marien cheerily, awakening him with a sudden thrill to the realization of her presence.

She stood at the far end of the room, surveying herself in a long mirror. Her figure was draped rather than dressed in a silken, shimmering texture of black, splashed with great red conventional flowers. The garment flowed loosely at neck, sleeves, and waist, and the fabric was corrugated by a succession of narrow, vertical, unstitched pleats, which gave an illusory effect of yielding to every movement of the sinuous body and yet clinging the closer while it yielded. As John gazed, Marien belted this flowing drapery at the waist with a knot of tiny crimson cord, and then released her coils of rich dark hair so that they fell to her hips in a fluttering cascade as

silky as the texture of her robe.

When she advanced to him, the shimmering, billowy movements of the gown matched the rhythmic sway of her limbs as completely as the red splashes upon it matched the color of her cheeks. She came laughing softly, and bearing in her hand a pair of tiny red and gold slippers.

A low divan ran along one side of the room, piled high with gay cushions. Near the foot of it was a Roman chair.

"Sit here," said Marien, indicating the chair; and John, as if obeying stage directions, complied, while his hostess sank back luxuriously amid the cushions and by the same movement presented a slim, neatly booted foot upon the edge of the divan, so very near to the big man's hand as to embarrass him. At the same time she held up the slippers to his notice and observed with a nod toward the boot:

"As a mark of special favor."

For a moment John's face reddened, and he looked the awkwardness of his state of mind, his eyes shifting from the boot to Marien's face and back again.

Her face took on an amused smile, and the boot wiggled suggestively.

"Oh," exclaimed John, blushing with fresh confusion at his own dullness as he bent forward and began to struggle with the buttons of the boot.

"You see," he explained presently, still worrying with the combination of the first button, "you see—well, I guess I don't know women very well."

Marien laughed happily.

"Stage women!" John added, as if by an afterthought.

"Stage women," affirmed Marien loyally, "are no different from other women—only wiser." Then she tagged her speech sententiously with, "They have to be. Careful! You will tear the buttons off. And you—you are pinching me!"

"I beg your pardon," stammered John. "But there are so very many of these buttons."

After an interval during which Marien had appeared to watch his labors with amused interest, she asked, with mocking humor:

"Are you hurrying or delaying? I can't quite make out."

But John was by this time enjoying the to him novel situation, and merely chuckled happily in reply to this thrust. When the shoes were off, by a mystifying movement Marien snuggled first one stockinged foot and then the other into the gold embroidered slippers and with a sigh of contentment appeared to float among her pillows, while she contemplated with smiling attention the face of Hampstead. Presently she asked smiling:

"Are you a man or a boy, I wonder?"

Feeling himself drifting farther and farther under the personal spell of this magnetic woman, and entirely willing to be enthralled, John answered her only with his eyes.

"That's the Ursus look," she laughed softly, as if it pleased her.

A silver cigarette case was on a tabaret within reach of her hand.

"Have a cigarette!" she proposed.

John declined, a trifle embarrassed by the proffer. Miss Dounay lighted one and puffed a small halo above her head before she looked across at him again and asked quizzically:

"You do not smoke?"

"And I do not think women should," Hampstead replied, with level eyes.

"It is a horrid habit," she confessed, "but this business will drive women to do horrid things. Listen, Hampstead. It's hard for a man; you've found that out, and you're only beginning. It's harder for a woman; the despairs, the disappointments, the bitter lonelineses,—the beasts of men one meets! But—" With a shrug of her shoulders she suddenly broke off her train of thought, and turning an inquiring glance on Hampstead asked:

"You never smoked?"

"Oh, yes," confessed John, "but I quit it. I decided it would not be good for me."

She regarded him narrowly, and asked:

"You would not do a thing which did not appear good for you?"

There was just a little accent on the "good."

"I have tried to calculate my resources," John confessed, resenting that accent.

Again Miss Dounay contemplated him in silence.

"You are a singularly calculating young man, I should say," she decreed finally. "And how long, may I ask, have you been living this calculating life?"

Marien was making a play upon his word "calculate."

"Seven years, I should say," replied John, thinking back.

"Seven years?" she mused. "Seven! And you feel that it has paid?"

"Immensely," replied John aggressively.

"By the way, how old are you, Ursus?"

This was what the old actor had asked. People were always asking John how old he was.

"Twenty-five," John answered a trifle apologetically. "I got started late. And you?"

The question was put without hesitation, as if it were the next thing to say.

"A man does not ask a woman her age in polite conversation," suggested Marien tentatively.

"He does not," replied John quickly, "if he thinks the answer is likely to be embarrassing."

Marien's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, hear him!" she laughed. "This heavy man is not so heavy, after all; but," she added, with another insinuating inflection, "he is always calculating." Then she went on, "You are right. The confession to you at least is not embarrassing. I am twenty-four years old, and I, too, have been living a calculating life for seven years."

"For seven years. How odd!" remarked John, rather excited at discovering even a slight parallel between himself and this brilliant creature.

"Yes," Marien replied. "I ran away from home at sixteen. I have been on the stage eight years. The first year was a careless one. The other seven have been—*calculating* years."

John could think of no words in which to describe the sinister significance which Marien now managed to get into her drawling utterance of that word "calculating." She made it express somehow the plotting villainies of an Iago, of a Richard the Third and a Lady Macbeth, and then overlaid the sinister note with something else, an impression of lofty abandon, of immolation, as if, in calculating her life, she had laid upon the altar all there was of herself—everything—in order to attain some supreme end.

John, staring at her, got a sudden intuitive gleam of a woman who was not only ambitious as he was ambitious, but wildly, dangerously ambitious, with a danger that was not to herself alone, but to any who stood near enough to be trampled on as she climbed upward,—dangerous to one who might love her, for example!

He got the thought clearly in his mind, too; yet only for a moment, and to be crowded out immediately by another thought, or indeed, a succession of thoughts, all induced by the picture she made amid her cushions.

How beautiful she was! How very, very beautiful! And how magnetic! How she had made the blood run in his veins when she lay upon his breast as Lygia, their hearts beating, their souls stirring together!

And now she had resigned herself for an hour to his company, had given him her confidence, was awaiting, as it seemed, his pleasure,—while the color came and went in her cheeks, while subdued lights danced in the dark pools beneath lazily drooping lashes, and the filmy gown which sheathed her body stirred with every breath as if a part of her very self.

Lying there like this, her presence ceased soon to induce thoughts and began to stimulate impulses. Hampstead longed to reach out and lay a hand upon her. She was so alluring and so, so helpless.

For weeks now he had allowed himself to dream of her as possibly the woman of his destiny,—not admitting it, but still dreaming it. Here in his presence, she suddenly ceased to be even a woman. She was just Woman; and the primal attraction of the elemental man is not for the woman. Fundamentally, it is just for woman. And here was Woman, the whole race of woman, beautiful, bewitching, compulsive.

An odor began to float in from the kitchenette, an odor that was not of coffee and cakes, nor of grease upon the top of a range in a dirty little restaurant. It was savory and fragrant, and it filled his nostrils. It reminded him of all the appetizing meals he had ever eaten. It made him hungry with all the hungers he had ever known; his brain was reeling; he was going to faint,—and with mere appetite. Yet the appetite was not for food.

With a kind of shock he recognized the nature of his appetite. The shock passed; but the hunger remained. John felt that he himself was somehow changed. He was not the Chairman of the Prayer Meeting Committee of the Christian Endeavor Society, not a Deacon of the grand old First Church. He was instead the man that the Reverend Charles Thompson Campbell feared for and prayed for. He was the man whose heavy ridged brows had indicated to the shrewd old actor a nature packed full of racial dynamite.

And Woman was fulminating the dynamite. Deliberately—or recklessly—or innocently; but none the less surely. Her lips were pliant. Her form was plastic. The smouldering light in the eyes, the lashes drooping lazily, the witchery of a dark tress which coiled upon the white soft

shoulder, all combined in the appeal of physical charm. To this, Woman added the subtle, maddening witchery of silence,—breathing, watchful, waiting quiet.

This silence continued until it became oppressive, explosive even.

Would she not speak? He could not. Would she not move? He dared not.

As if in response to this frenzy of thought, the ripe lips parted in a smile that added one more lovely detail to the picture by revealing rows of pearly, even teeth, and her hand began to move toward him.

"Don't touch me—don't," he found himself pleading suddenly.

But already the hand was laid tenderly upon his own, and Hampstead returned the clasp like one who holds the poles of a battery and cannot let go.

Laughing softly, Woman drew Man gently to her, his eyes gazing fascinated into the depths of hers, his body bending weakly, nearer and nearer.

"John!" she breathed softly, "John!"

But at the first warmth of breath upon his cheek, the explosion came. He snatched her in his arms as if she had been a child, and pressed her to his heart rapturously, but violently. And then his lips found hers, vehemently, almost brutally, as if he would take revenge upon them for the passion their sight and touch had roused in him. She struggled, but he pressed her tighter and tighter, till at length she gave up, and he felt only the rhythmic pulsing of her body.

When at length he released the lips and held the face from him to gaze into it fondly, her eyes were closed, and the head fell limply over his arm with the long tresses sweeping to the floor.

In sudden compunction he placed her tenderly upon the divan.

"I have hurt you, Marien; I have hurt you. Forgive me; oh, forgive me!" he implored in tones of deep feeling.

When she remained quite motionless, he asked, foolishly, "Marien, have you fainted?"

Slowly her bosom rose with a respiration so deep and long that it seemed to stir every fold of her pleated gown and every cushion on the divan, while with the eyes still closed the face moved gently from side to side to convey the negative.

"Thank God!" he groaned, dropping to his knees beside her, where, seizing her hand, he began to press his kisses upon it.

Presently disengaging the hand, Marien lifted it, felt her way over his face and began to push back the tumbled mop of hair from his brow, and to stroke it affectionately.

"I thought I had hurt you," he crooned.

"You did," she murmured.

"Oh, I am so, so sorry," he breathed, seizing her hand once more and pressing it against his heart.

"I do not think I am sorry," she sighed contentedly, and was still again, the lashes lying flat upon her cheeks, the long tresses in disarray about her head.

Lying there so white and motionless, she looked to John like a crushed flower. Her very beauty was broken. As he gazed, remorse and contrition overcoming him, her lips parted in a half smile while she whispered:

"The—the calculated life cannot always be depended upon, can it?"

Innocently spoken, the words came to John with the force of a reproach, which hurt all the more because he was sure no reproach had been meant. She had trusted him, and he had failed. His sense of guilt was already strong. At the words he leaped up and rushed toward the hat-tree upon which his hat and coat had been disposed. Yet before he could seize them and start for the door, Marien was before him, barring his way, looking pale but majestic, like a disheveled queen.

"Let me go," he said stubbornly. "I am unworthy to be here."

"Stay," she whispered, in a tone sweeter, tenderer, than he had ever heard her use before. "It is my wish. I do not," and she hesitated for a word, "I do not misunderstand you—poor, lonely, hungry man!"

"Supper, Madame!" piped the voice of Julie.

CHAPTER XII

A THING INCALCULABLE

One whole month passed before John sat again at midnight in the Roman chair with Marien *vis-à-vis* upon her heaped-up cushions. Many things may happen in a month. Many did in this. For John

it was a month of progress in his art. Though the People's Stock Company had passed out of existence within two weeks after Marien Dounay's departure from it, John had done so well that he found no difficulty in securing an engagement as heavy man across the bay in Oakland with the Sampson Stock, the grade of which was higher and its permanency well established.

It was also a month of progress in his passion for Marien Dounay, although during all those thirty days he did not see her once. In the meantime imagination fed him. Every memory of that night and every deduction from those memories fanned the flame of his infatuation. Each in itself was slight, but they were like a thousand gossamer webs. Once spun, their combined holding power was as the strength of many cables.

Take, for instance, the environment in which he found her. It spoke gratifyingly to him of a genuinely good, modest nature to see that she shrank away from the garish theatrical hotels to this quiet nest with Julie. It revealed a true woman's instinct for domesticity not only surviving but flourishing in this vagabond life to which her profession compelled her.

And yet how unlike the life of the fine women he had known in the old First Church. It would have so shocked them,—this roving, Bohemian life that turned the night into day, the deep-sleep time from twelve to three into the leisure, happy, carefree hours that were like the sun at noon instead of the dark of midnight. How unbecoming it would have been in those coddled home-keeping women of the First Church, this reversal of life,—how immoral even! Yet to her it was natural. In her it was moral. It did pay a proper respect to those conventions which protect the character and happiness of woman. It was not prudish. It was better than prudish, it was good. Her virtue was not forced. It was hardy, indigenous, self-enveloping. Yes, this whole mode of life became her in her profession.

And the thought that he was of her profession threw him into raptures. Hers was a life into which he could enter,—had entered already, by reason of the favor she had shown him. What could that favor mean? Nothing else but love. She had given him too much, forgiven him too much in that one evening for him to question that at all.

And he loved her! Doubt on that score had vanished so many days ago that he could not remember he had ever doubted it.

That the partnership could not at first be equal, he was humiliatingly aware; but the development of his own powers would soon balance the inequality. However, it was something else that for the moment wiped out of mind the enormity of his presumption, and this was that memory of unpleasant experiences at which she had hinted. The thought of this beautiful, ambitious, devoted creature battling her way alone among selfish, brutal, designing men was maddening to him. The chivalrous impulse to be with her, to protect her, to battle for her, made him forget entirely considerations of inequality, and he prepared to offer himself boldly. If she did not invite him again soon, he meant to seek her out; but the invitation came before his processes had reached that stage.

John was impatiently prompt. His eyes leaped upon her eagerly as if to make sure she was still real, still the flesh and blood confirmation of his passion. She was,—not a doubt of it. Her eye was bright; the clasp of her hand was warm. Her personal power was never more evident, its whimsical manifestations never more varied, interesting, or captivating than now.

To John, no longer quite so hungry, for his salary was larger now, that supper was not so much a meal as a series of delightful additions to his impressions of the finer side of the character of Marien. But with the supper despatched, and his beautiful hostess again lolling in luxurious relaxation, it was her personality once more rather than her character which began to play upon him like an instrument with strings. Lazily she brooded and mused, talked and was silent, drifting from momentary vivacities to periods of depressed abstraction. Again and again John felt her eyes upon him scrutinizingly, estimatingly almost, it seemed to him. Because it was a supremely blissful experience to submit himself thus to the play of her moods, John postponed the declaration he felt impelled to make until it burst from him irresistibly, like a geyser.

"Listen!" he broke out excitedly, and began to pour out impetuously the tale of his swiftly ripened infatuation.

Marien did listen at first as if surprised, and then with a flush of pleasure that steadily deepened on her cheeks. Even when he had concluded she sat for a moment with lips half parted, eyes half closed, and an expression of enchantment upon her face as if listening to music that she wished might flow on forever.

"Do not speak!" John protested suddenly, as her expression appeared to change. "The picture is too beautiful to spoil. Let me take from your lips in silence the kiss that seals our betrothal."

But Marien held him off with sudden strength.

"Marien, I love you. I love you," he protested vehemently.

"No," Marien replied, lifting herself higher amid the pillows and speaking alertly as if she had just been given words to answer. "You do not love me. You love the thing you think I am."

John's blond brows were lifted in mute protest.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "You compelled me to listen. Now I must compel you to listen—mad, impetuous man!" and she seemed almost resentful. "In what you have just been saying, you have written a part for me. You have given me a character. If I could play that part always, I should be what you are in love with, and you would love me always; but I cannot play it always; I can play it seldom. I play it now for an hour and then perhaps never again."

"Never again?" Hampstead gasped, something in the finality of her tone thrilling him through with a hollow, sickening note.

Her eyelids narrowed as she replied: "You forget that I, too, live the calculating life."

There was again that mysteriously sinister meaning in her utterance of the word "calculating."

"The key to my life is not love; it cannot be love," she went on. "I am not the purring kitten you have described. It angers me to have you think so. I am not a thing to love and fondle. I am a tigress tearing at one object. I am," and in the vehement force of her utterance she seemed to grow tall and terrible, "I am an ambitious woman! An unscrupulous, designing, clambering, ambitious woman!"

"But I love you, Marien," John iterated weakly.

"There is no place for love in the calculating life," she rejoined unhesitatingly. "Love is a thing incalculable." Yet as she uttered this sentence, her tone softened, and her eyes had a look of awe and hunger oddly mixed in them; but immediately the expression of resolute ambition succeeded to her features.

"When I am at the top," she proposed loftily.

"But the better part of life may be gone then," John protested bitterly. "The top! When shall we reach the top?"

"I shall reach it in a bound when my opportunity comes," Marien answered with cool assurance. "Nobody, not even myself, knows how good I am. Any night some man may sit in front who has both the judgment to see and the money to command playwrights, theaters, New York appearances to order. When they come, I shall conquer. Oh," and her eyes sparkled while she shivered with a thrill of self-gratulation, "it is wonderful to feel the great potential thing inside of you, to know that your wings are strong enough to fly and you only wait the coming of the breeze. It is dazzling, intoxicating, to think that within three months I may be a Broadway star; that within a year the whole English-speaking world may recognize that a new queen of the emotional drama and of tragedy has been crowned. Until that hour," and she lowered her voice as she checked the exaltation of her mood, "until that hour a lover would be a millstone."

"But," exulted John, "you are not at the top yet. I may arrive first!"

Marien looked him up and down and laughed, just laughed,—about the look and laugh that Parks had given him.

Hampstead's eager face flushed.

"You do not think that possible," he challenged aggressively.

"No, dear boy," replied the woman, her tone and manner swiftly sympathetic, "I know it is not possible. You do not realize how far you have to go. If you have genius, you do not show it. You have talent, temperament, intelligence, application; these may win for you, but the way will be long and the compensation uncertain. If you persist for ten, fifteen, maybe twenty years, till some of your exuberance has died, till experience has rounded you off, till you have learned from that great big compelling teacher out there in front, the audience, what is art and what is not; while you may not be accounted a great star, yet the world will recognize your craftsmanship and concede you a place of eminence upon the stage, a position well worth occupying, but one for which you will pay long years before you get it."

"But our love," John protested helplessly.

"Who said 'our love,'" Marien declaimed almost petulantly. "I have not confessed to any love."

"But—but," and John's eyes opened widely, "you would not permit—"

"I did not permit," she flashed. "You took, and I forgave because I told you I could understand. Can you not, blind man, also understand? If man is sometimes man, will not woman also sometimes be woman?"

"Did it mean—no more than that?"

John's eyes searched hers accusingly.

Her answer was to scorn to answer. She made it seem that she was dismissing him, exactly as any heartless woman might dismiss a favorite who had amused her for an hour, but whose antics and cajoleries had now begun to pall.

Dazed and dumb, Hampstead seemed to feel his way backward toward the door, where Julie came mysteriously, unsummoned, to help him on with his coat and thrust his hat into his hand. When John turned for a last look, Marien's back was turned, and though the head was bowed and the side of the face half concealed, he thought he saw a look of agony upon it.

"Marien," he murmured hoarsely, with sudden emotion. "Marien!"

But on the instant she raised her face to him, and it was the old face, wonderful and witching, beaming with a happy, cordial smile as she laid her hand in his without a sign of restraint of any sort. The very heartlessness of it completed his bewilderment. Did the woman not know that she was breaking his heart? It killed his hope; it cowed him and threw him into a sullen mood.

"Good-by, Miss Dounay," he said huskily.

Her eloquent eyes shot him a look in which reproach and tenderness mingled, while her hand pulsed quickly like a heart beating in his palm. What mood of sullenness could withstand that look? Not his. He smiled, as if a ray of sunshine played upon his face, and amended with:

"Good night, Marien."

"Good-by, John," she answered sweetly.

The door was closed behind him before John realized that with all her sweetness, she had said good-by, and the emphasis was on the "by."

At the corner the bewildered man turned and looked up. He could see the lace curtain at the window, but he could not see the pillows on the divan quivering with sobs from a soft burden that had flung itself among them when the door was closed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SCENE PLAYED OUT

Marien Dounay loved him, but for the sake of her own ambition was trying to kill that love. This was the explanation which the sleepless, tossing hours fed again and again into John Hampstead's mind until he accepted it as the demonstrated truth.

As for himself, he could no more have killed his love for Marien than he could have killed a child. He determined deliberately to match his will against hers and break it; to see her again immediately, to meet her arguments with better arguments, her firm rejections with firmer affirmations; to melt her resolution with an appeal to her heart; in short, and by some means not now clear, to overmaster her purpose for the sake of her own happiness as well as his.

But a thought of Bessie Mitchell came crowding in. Now this was not altogether strange, since John had half-consciously cherished the notion that he would some day love Bessie, and he reflected now that she must have had a feeling of the same sort toward himself. Perhaps this was why she cried that day upon the rocks; perhaps, too, that was why he kissed her, for he was beginning now to understand some things better than he had before. Conscience demanded therefore that he write Bessie a tactful letter which, while vague and general, would yet somehow reveal the tremendous change in the drift of his affections.

Just that much, however, was going to be hard—a brutal piece of work—to merely hint that some other woman might be coming more intimately into his life than this trustful, jolly-hearted companion. But it was honest and it must, therefore, be done.

Hampstead summoned grimly all his resolution and dipped his pen in ink.

"Dear Bessie," he wrote, and then his pen stopped, and an itching sensation came into the corners of his eyes and a lump into his throat.

Presently he laid the pen down as resolutely as he had taken it up. He could not write Bessie out of his life, after all; at least not like that. Instead he wrote a letter that was a lie, or that started out to be a lie; but the surprising thing to Hampstead was that while he wrote, visioning Bessie at home in Los Angeles, rose-embowered, or walking to school beneath rows of palms, he was himself transported to Los Angeles, and the letter was not false. He was back again in the old life, and Bessie was an interesting and necessary part of it.

Yet he found he could not seal himself into the old life when he closed the flap of the envelope. The moment the letter was mailed, his mind went irresistibly back to Marien, whom it was a part of his plan to see that very day. This was possible because Mowrey rehearsals were

long and somewhat painful affairs.

Hurrying from the Sampson Stock, at the end of his own rehearsal, John was able to cross the bay and reach the Grand Opera House while Mowrey's people were still wearily at work, and to make his way apparently unseen through the huge, gloomy auditorium to a box which was deep in shadow, as boxes usually are at rehearsal time.

Marien was "on", and the big fellow's heart leaped at the sound of her voice; yet presently it stood still again, for his jealous ear had detected a disquieting note in her utterance, a sort of cajoling purr which the lover recognized instantly. It was not Marien Dounay in rehearsal, nor yet in "character"; it was Marien herself when in her most ingratiating mood, and was meant neither for the rehearsal nor for the character, but for the actor who played the opposing rôle.

Who, by the way, was this handsome man, with the rare, low voice that combined refinement and carrying power, so absolutely sure of himself, whose every move betokened the seasoned, accomplished actor, and who displayed to perfection those very graces which John himself hoped some day to exhibit?

In the box in front of Hampstead was another ghostly figure, also watching the rehearsal. John reached forward and touched him on the shoulder, whispering hollowly: "Who is the new leading man?"

"Charles Manning of New York," was the reply; "specially engaged for this and three other rôles."

"Thank you," said John, swallowing hard, for now he understood perfectly the disagreeable meaning of those cajoleries. They represented just one more element in Marien Dounay's calculating life. This New York actor might go back and drop the word that would bring her opportunity, the thing her vaulting ambition coveted more than it coveted love. Therefore she was taking deliberate advantage of these situations to kindle a personal interest in herself, for which, once her object was gained, she would refuse responsibility as heartlessly as she had tried to reject the big man who just now started so violently as he watched her.

Look at that now! The stage direction had required Manning to take Marien in his arms for a minute. Hampstead ground his teeth.

Well, why didn't they separate? What was she clinging to him so long for? Why, indeed, if it were not for this same reason that to John, stewing in jealous rage, seemed despicable and base. This was not nice; it was not womanly; it was not a true reflection of Marien's character. It was, he assured himself hotly, one of the things from which he must save her.

But he had no opportunity to begin his work of salvation that afternoon, for rehearsal ended, Marien walked out with Charles Manning so closely in her company that Hampstead could not so much as catch her eye, and his emotions were in such a riot that he dared not trust himself to accost her.

When John had walked the streets for an hour, with the storm of his feelings rising instead of settling, he resolved upon a note to Marien and went to the office of the *Dramatic Review* to dispatch it.

"Dear Marien," he wrote. "I must see you to-night. I will call at twelve. JOHN."

The brevity of this communication was deliberately calculated to express his headlong mood and the depths of his determination. He had not asked an answer, but waited for one, assuring himself that if none came he would call just the same. Yet the answer was ominously prompt. John tore it open with brutal strength and saw Marien's handwriting for the first time. It was vigorous and rectangular, but unmistakably feminine, and there was neither salutation nor signature.

"Stupid!" the note began abruptly. "I saw you in the box to-day. I will not have you spying upon me. You must not call. I have tried to make you understand. Why can you not accept the situation? Or are you mad enough to compel me to stage the scene and play it out for you?"

John read the note twice, crumpled it in his hand, and walked slowly down Geary Street to Market and down Market Street to the ferry.

In the second act that night he forgot to take on the knife with which he was to stab his victim, and nearly spoiled the scene, through having to strangle him instead.

"*Stage the scene and play it out for you?*" What could she mean by that.

Determined to find out, John hurried from the theater at the close of the performance, with his lips pursed stubbornly, and at exactly twelve o'clock Julie was answering his ring at the door of the little apartment on Turk Street.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, smiling cordially. "It is the big man again. No, Madame is not in. She is having supper out to-night. With whom? La! la! I should not tell you that," and Julie shrugged one shoulder only, after a way of hers, and made a movement to close the door; but something in John's eyes induced her to add, with both sympathy and chiding in her tone: "You must not come to see Madame when Madame does not want you."

"But I must see her, Julie!" John pleaded huskily, rather throwing himself upon the mercy of the little French woman.

Julie gazed at him doubtfully. She had fended off the attentions of many an importunate suitor from her beautiful mistress but never one who engaged at once so much of her sympathy and respect as he. In her mind she was weighing something; reflecting perhaps whether it was not kindness to this big, earnest man to let his own eyes serve him. Her decision was evidently in the affirmative.

"If you go quickly to the entrance of Antone's," she suggested hurriedly, "you will see Madame arriving presently in an automobile."

Stubborn as John was in his purpose, he nevertheless flushed that even Julie could think him capable of standing at the door of a French restaurant at midnight waiting to catch a glimpse of the woman he loved in the company of another man. Yet pride was so completely swallowed up in jealousy and passion that another five minutes found him loitering before the entrance to Antone's, resolving to go, to stay; to look and not to look; feeling now weakly ashamed of himself and now meanly resolute.

The place was half underground, with a gilded and illumined entrance that yawned like the mouth of a monster. John was sure from its outward look that Antone's was no more than half respectable. The fragrance of the food which assailed his nostrils was, he felt equally sure, an expensive fragrance. A meal there would cost as much as a week of meals where he was accustomed to take his food. Manning, of course, had a fine salary. He could afford to take Marien for an automobile ride and to Antone's for supper.

Hampstead's envious rage flamed again at this thought, but at the moment the flash of a headlight in his eyes called attention to an automobile just then sweeping in toward the curb. However, instead of the stalwart, graceful figure of Manning, there emerged from the car a squat, oily-faced man, huge of paunch, with thick lips, a heavy nose, pouched cheeks, and small, pig-like eyes, upon whose broad countenance hung an expression of bland self-complaisance. By an odd coincidence, this man was also connected with the stage. John knew him by sight as Gustav Litschi, and by reputation as a very swine among men, utterly without scruple, although endowed with an uncanny business sense; a man who had money and whose theatrical ventures always made money, though often their character was as doubtful as himself.

Disappointed, Hampstead nevertheless experienced a feeling of curiosity as to Litschi's companion, and before drawing back, followed the gross glance of the gimlet eyes within the car to where they rested gloatingly upon a woman in evening clothes, who was gathering her train and cloak about her preparatory to being helped from the car. To John's utter amazement the woman was Marien.

For a moment he stared as if confronted with a specter, then felt his great hands itching while he wavered between a desire to leap upon this coarse creature and tear him to pieces, and the impulse to accost Marien with reproaches and a warning. But the swift reflection that she probably knew the man's character perfectly well prompted John instead to the despicable expedient of deliberately spying upon her. Turning impetuously, he ran quickly down the steps in advance of the couple.

"One?" queried the headwaiter, with a keen estimating glance under which John ordinarily would have felt himself to shrivel; but now a frenzy of jealousy and a sense of outrage had made him bold.

"Yes," he replied brusquely; "that seat yonder in the corner where I can see the whole show."

It was a lonely and undesirable table, smack against the side of the wall, along which ran a row of curtained, box-like alcoves that served as tiny private dining rooms. John could have it and welcome. He got it, and as he turned to sit down, his eye scanned the interior swiftly for Marien and Litschi. To his surprise they were coming straight at him, Marien leading. Certain that she had seen him and was going to address him, John nevertheless determined to await a look of recognition before arising. To his further surprise, no such look came. Coldly, icily beautiful to-

night, the glitter in her eyes was hard and desperate, with a suggestion of menace in it, reminding John of that momentary intuition he had once experienced, that this woman could be dangerous. Her note had warned him not to spy upon her, he recalled. It must be that her discovery of his presence had roused a devil in her now. So strong did this feeling become that he felt a relief as great as his surprise when she brushed by as if oblivious of his presence and passed from view into the nearest box, the curtain of which a waiter was holding aside obsequiously.

When the screening curtain dropped, swinging so near that John could have reached across his table and touched it with a hand, he had a sense of sudden escape, as if a tigress, sleekly beautiful and powerfully cruel, had over-leaped him to tear a richer prey beyond. The swine-like Litschi, waddling after her into the box, was the chosen victim. Yonder by the curb John had feared for Marien; now, repulsive as the creature was, he felt a kind of pity for Litschi.

Yet with the curtain drawn, Hampstead's emotion passed swiftly back to love and anxiety for her. She had not seen him, that was all. The supposed look of menace was the product of his imagination and his jealousy.

As the minutes passed unnoted, this anxiety grew again into sympathy and consideration. Marien had complained to him of the hard things she had to do. This supper with Litschi was merely one of them. That scene with Manning was another. He reflected triumphantly that she had not welcomed Litschi to her apartment; but compelled him to bring her to this public place. Poor, brave girl! She had to play with all these men; to warm them without herself getting burnt; to woo them desperately upon the chance: Manning that he might somewhere speak the fortunate word, Litschi that in some greedy hope of gain he might be induced to risk his money on the venture that would give Marien the opportunity for which she had been calculating indomitably for seven years.

But what was that?

John's hand reached out and clutched the table violently, while his body leaned forward as if to rise. What was that she had said so loudly he could hear, and so astonishing that he could not believe his ears?

He had been sitting there such a long, long time, thinking thoughts like these, stirred, soothed, and stirred again by the sound of her voice, heard intermittently between the numbers of the orchestra. He had ordered food and eaten, then ordered more and eaten that,—anything to think and wait, he did not know for what.

Waiters bearing trays had come and gone unceasingly from behind the curtain four feet from his eyes, and he knew that they had borne more bottles than food. Several times he had heard a sound like "shots off-stage." This sound always succeeded the entry of a gold sealed bottle. Evidently they were drinking heavily behind the curtain, Litschi's voice growing lower and less coherent, and Marien's louder and less reserved, till for some time he had been catching little snatches of her conversation. She had been talking about her future, painting a picture of the success she would make when her opportunity came; but now she had said the thing that staggered him.

"What?" he came near to saying aloud; and at the same time he heard the drink-smothered voice of Litschi also with interrogative inflection. Litschi, too, wanted to be sure that he had heard aright.

"I say," iterated the voice of Marien deliberately, as if with calculated carrying power, "that a woman who is ambitious must be prepared to pay the price demanded—her heart, her soul—if need be—*herself!*"

She plumped out the last word ruthlessly, and broke into a half-tipsy laugh that had in it a suggestion unmistakable as much as to say:

"You understand now, don't you, Gustav Litschi? You realize what I am offering to the man who buys me opportunity?"

Her heart—her soul—herself! Hampstead, having started up, sat down again weakly, the cold sweat of horror standing out upon his brow.

So this was what she had meant all the time in her speech about the calculating life. She could not give herself up to love him or any one, because she was dangling herself as a final lure to the man who would give her opportunity.

"Why, this woman was spiritually—morally—potentially, a—" he could barely let himself think the hateful word. To utter it was impossible.

Perhaps she was worse! A choking, burning sensation was in his throat. He tore at it with his hands, gasping for breath. He wanted to tear at the curtain—at the woman! How he hated her!

She had no longer any fineness. She was a coarse, designing, reckless—*prostitute!* There! In his agony, the word was out. He sent it hurtling across the stage of his own brain. It flew straight. It found its mark upon the face of his love and stuck there blotched and quivering, biting into the picture like acid. It ate out the eyes of Marien Dounay from his mind; it ate away her pliant ruby lips, her cheeks and her soft round chin, and it left of that face only a grinning hideousness from which John Hampstead shrank with a horrible sickness in his heart.

At this moment the curtain rings clicked sharply under the sweep of an impetuous arm, and with the suddenness of an apparition, Marien stood just across the table from him. Her face was highly colored, but the preternatural brightness of the eyes had begun to dull, and there was a loose look, too, about the mouth, the lips of which were curled by a mocking smile.

"Well, John Hampstead!" she sneered, with a vindictive look in her eyes, insinuating scorn in her tones. "Now that I have played out the scene, do you think you understand?"

John had risen stiffly, every fiber of him in riot at the horror he had heard and was now seeing; but his self-control was perfect, and a kind of dignity invested him for the moment.

"Yes," he said, meeting her gaze unflinchingly, "I understand!"

The tone of finality that went into this latter word was unescapable. As it was uttered, Marien attempted one of her lightning changes of manner but failed, breaking instead into a fit of hysterical laughter, during which, with head thrown back, her body swayed, and she disappeared behind the curtain, where the laughter ended abruptly in something like a choke, or a fit of coughing.

But John's indignation and disgust were so great that he did not concern himself as to whether Miss Dounay's laughter might be choking her or not. Embarrassed, too, by the number of eyes turned curiously upon him from the nearer tables where the diners had observed the incident without gathering any of its purport, his only impulse was to pay his bill and escape, before the building and the world came clattering down upon him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE METHOD OF A DREAM

So paralyzing to a man of Hampstead's sensitive nature was the effect of Marien Dounay's startling disclosure that he experienced a partial arrest of consciousness, the symptoms of which hung on surprisingly.

Somehow that night he got back to Oakland, and the next morning was again about his work; but the days went by mechanically—days of risings and retirings, eatings and sleepings, memorizing of lines, mumbling of speeches, sliding into clothes, slipping into grease paint, walkings on and walkings off. Through all of these daily obligations the man moved with a certain absent-minded precision, like a person with a split consciousness, who does not let his right lobe know what his left lobe is thinking.

He knew, for instance, that a telegram came to him one day with the charges collect, and that he paid the charges and signed for the message, but he did not know that the message lay unopened on his dresser while he spent all his unoccupied time sunk in a stupor of meditation upon the thing which had befallen him.

Most astonishing to John was the fact that while he felt rage and humiliation at having so duped himself over Marien Dounay, he had no sense of pain. He was like a man run over by a railroad train who experiences no throb of anguish but only a sickish, numbing sensation in his mangled limbs.

Recognizing that his condition was not normal, Hampstead wondered if he could be going insane. He was eating little; he was taking no interest in his work. He went and came from the theater automatically, impatient of company, impatient of noise, of newspaper headlines, of interruptions of any sort, anxious only to get to his room, to throw himself into a chair or upon a bed, and relapse into a state of mental drooling. After several days he roused from one of these reveries with the clear impression that some presence had been there in the room, had breathed upon him, had touched his lips, and spoken to him. He leaped up and looked about him. He opened the door and scanned the corridor. No one was there,—no echo of corporeal footsteps resounded.

Realizing that it must have been his own dream that waked him, he came back sheepishly and tried again to induce that state of mental dusk in which the odd sensation had been

experienced. Soon he roused again with the knowledge that the presence had been with him and had departed; but this time a clear picture of the vision remained. It was a woman,—it was like Marien. It was, he told himself, the image of his Love. He entertained it sadly, like an apparition from the grave. The vision came again, but with repeated visits, its form began to change, until it no longer resembled the form of Marien.

This was exciting; the image might change still further till it definitely resembled some one else.

This surmise proved correct. It did change more and more until identity was for a time completely lost, but as days passed, the features ceased to blur and jumble. The eyes were now constantly blue; the complexion was consistently pink and white; the hair was brown and began to appear crinkly; the lips grew shorter, and of a more youthful red; the chin broadened and appeared fuller and softer. One morning these rosier lips smiled with a rarer spontaneity than the vision had ever shown before, and with the smile came two dimples into the peach-blow cheeks.

"Bessie!" John cried, with a welcoming shout of incoherent joy. "Bessie!"

But his joy was speedily swallowed up in the gloom of mortifying reflections. Could it be that his love was so inconstant as to transfer itself in a few days from Marien Dounay to Bessie Mitchell, and if it did, what was such love worth? Besides, how could he love Bessie as he had loved Marien. There was no fire in her. As yet, she was only a girl. But at this juncture a memory came floating in of that day on the Cliff House rocks, when some vague impulse, which he thought to be sympathy, had made him draw Bessie's face up to his and kiss it. Now, as he recalled it, the touch of her lips was the touch of a woman; and her look that puzzled him then,—why, it was the look of love!

Hampstead leaped up excitedly. Bessie was a woman, and she loved him! And he loved her! But how could he have been such a fool as to think that he loved Marien?

"Passion," he told himself scornfully, "mere passion."

"She was the first ripe woman I ever touched, and I fell for her! That's all," he muttered. "But, how could I ever, ever, ever have done it?"

Heaping bitter self-reproaches, he took his bewildered head in his hands, while he wrestled with the humiliating chain of ruminations. Naturally enough, it was the memory of a speech of Marien's which afforded him his first clue.

"In what you have just been saying, you have given me a character," she had replied to one of his advances. "If I could play that part always, I should be what you are in love with, and you would love me always; but I cannot play it always; I can play it seldom. I play it now for an hour and then perhaps never again."

This speech, vexatiously enigmatic then, sounded suddenly rational now. It meant that he had unconsciously bestowed upon her his idealized conception of womanhood. This was made comparatively easy because in the plays Marien almost invariably enacted the heroines, always sweet, always gentle, and almost always good; or, if erring, they were more sinned against than sinning. Most of these piled-up virtues of her rôles John dotingly had ascribed to her, and his professional contacts afforded few glimpses of the real Marien by which his drawing could be corrected.

Atop of this had come those few hours of delicious intimacy in her apartment, when she had deliberately played the part she saw that he would like. This had sufficed to make his illusion complete.

Still John had no reproaches for the actress. Instead, he found within him a renascence of respect for her, particularly for her frankness. Most women—most men, too, for that matter, he thought—play the hypocrite with themselves and with others. He must do her full credit. She had not done so. She might have ruined him. He owed his escape to no discernment of his own. When he had not understood, she had resolutely played the scene out for him—to the uttermost. It must have cost a woman, any woman, something to do that, he reasoned. Under this interpretation, Marien was no longer repulsive to him. Instead, he found in her something to admire. Her courage was sublime. Her devotion to her god, ambition, if terrible, was also magnificent.

"Yet, why," he asked himself, "did she let me take her in my arms? Sympathy," he answered at last. "She never loved me. A woman who loved a man could not do what she did in the restaurant. She was very sorry for me, that was all. She let me kiss her as she would let a dog lick her hand." And then he remembered another speech of hers: "If a man is sometimes man, may not woman be also sometimes woman?"

This helped him finally and completely, as he thought, to understand; but it left him with a still deeper sense of his own weakness and humiliation.

Marien Dounay had roused the woman want in him and while she was near, her personality had been strong enough to center that want upon herself. But when she shook his passion free of her, it turned, after circling like a homing pigeon, due upon its course to Bessie. John saw that this was all logical and psychological. Patently, it was also biological.

But it was mortifying beyond words. He felt that he had dishonored himself and dishonored Bessie. He had supposed himself strong; he found himself weak. He had been swept off his feet and out of his head. He was ashamed of himself, heartily. Bessie, the good, the pure, the noble! Why, he could not think of her at all in the terms in which he thought of Marien Dounay. His instinct for Marien had been to possess. For Bessie it was to revere, to worship—and yet—and yet—he wanted her now with an urge that was stronger than ever he had felt for Marien.

Still, he had no impulse to rush to Bessie. He felt unworthy. He could not see himself taking her hand, touching her lips, declaring his love to her now. It seemed to him that he must test his love for Bessie before he declared it, and purify it by months—years, perhaps,—of waiting, as if to expiate the sin of his weakness.

But in the meantime, Bessie loved him, and would be loving him all the time. And he could write to her! Ah, what letters he would write, letters that would not only keep her love alive but fan it, while he punished himself for his insane disloyalty.

Disloyalty! Yes, that was the very word. He knew as he reflected that he had been disloyal ever to yield to the spell of Marien Dounay. He had been disloyal to Bessie, to his ideals, and to himself.

He turned to where a few days before he had pinned his old Los Angeles motto on the wall of his Oakland room: "Eternal Hammering is the Price of Success."

Hammering, he decided, was the wrong word. It was not high enough. He stepped over to the wall and changed it to the new word so that it read:

"Eternal *Loyalty* is the Price of Success."

He liked that better; so well, in fact, that he lifted his hand dramatically and swore his life anew, not to hammering but to Loyalty,—loyalty to himself, to Bessie, to Dick and Tayna, and to God!

This gave him a feeling of new courage. He turned away as from a disagreeable experience now forever past. His eyes wandered about the room exactly as if he had returned from an absence, taking in detail by detail the familiar, scanty furniture, the hateful spring rocker, the washstand, the bed, the torn, smoke-soiled curtains at the window, the picture of Washington at Valley Forge upon the wall, and the dresser with its cheap speckled mirror.

His glance had just paused mystified at the sight of the unopened telegram upon the dresser when there was a knock at the door.

With a stride, John turned the key and swung open the door.

Bud, the fourteen-year-old call boy of the Sampson Theater, entered; a breathless, self-important youngster with freckles and a stubby pompadour.

"Mr. Cohen's says yer better write a letter ter yer sister," the lad blurted, while his eyes scanned the room and the actor, where he stood reaching in a dazed sort of way for the telegram.

"Hey," exclaimed Hampstead, looking up sharply, "my sister?"

"Ye-uh," affirmed Bud stoutly. "Mr. Cohen's got a letter from her, and she wants to know if yer sick 'r anything."

"By jove, that's right, Bud," confessed John with sudden conviction. "I've had my mind on something of late, and guess I've rather overlooked the folks at home. I'll write to-day. Awfully kind of you, old chap, to come over. Here!"

And Hampstead, now with the telegram in his hand, attempted to cover a feeling of confusion before these bright, peering eyes by a pilgrimage to the closet, from which he tossed Bud a quarter. The lad accepted the quarter thankfully.

"Say, Mr. Hampstead," he broke out impulsively, with an embarrassed note in his voice, "I'm sorry you got your notice!"

"Got my notice?" asked John a bit sharply.

"Yes. Yer let out," announced Bud, with unfeeling directness, though consideration was in his heart. "You been good to me, Mr. Hampstead, and I'm sorry you're goin'. Some of the others is, too."

But John was roused now, thoroughly.

"Why, Bud, what are you talking about?" he demanded, turning accusingly to the boy.

"For the love of Mike," exclaimed Bud, advancing a little fearsomely and studying the face of Hampstead with new curiosity, "Yer let out and don't know it! What'd I tell 'em? Why, there it is,"

and he snatched up a blue, thin-looking envelope from the dresser. "Y' got it a week ago when you got yer pay. Y' ain't opened it even."

Hampstead took the blue envelope from Bud's hand, an awful sense of weakness running through him as he read that his services would not be required after the customary two weeks.

"What did I get this for, Bud?" he asked, sensing the uselessness of dissimulation before this impertinent child.

"Y' got it fer bein' dopey," answered Bud reproachfully. "Y' ain't had no more sense than a wooden man fer ten days. Say, Mr. Hampstead," he ventured further with sympathetic friendliness, "yer a good actor when you let the hop alone. Why don't you cut it? You're young yet. You got a future, Mr. Cohen says, if you'll let the dope alone."

Hampstead's face took on a queer, half-amused look.

"Is that what he said?"

"That's what he said," affirmed Bud aggressively.

"Well, then, all right, Bud. I will cut it out. Here's my hand on it."

Bud took the hand, a trifle surprised and feeling a little more important than usual. "Say," he added confidentially, "wise me, will y'; what kind have you been takin'? Mr. Cohen says he's never seen nothin' like it, and he thought he'd seen 'em all."

"Oh, it's a little brand I mixed myself," confessed John. "But I'm done with it. Run along now, Bud. You've been a good pal," and he gave the lad a pat on the shoulder and a significant shove toward the door.

"Glad I came over," reflected Bud at the door, jingling the quarter in his pocket. "Better write yer sister, or she'll be comin' up here. Say," and Bud returned as if for a further confidence, "y' never know what a woman's goin' to do, do y'? Las' fall a woman shot our leadin' juvenile in the leg—because she loved him. Get that? Because she loved him!"

Bud's drawling scorn was inimitable.

"Y' can't figger 'em, can yuh? Some of 'em wants to be called, and some of 'em don't. Some of 'em wants their letters before the show, and some of 'em after. Some of 'em is one way one day and the other way the next day. If I ever get my notice,—if I ever lose my job it'll be about a woman. I never seen a man yet that I couldn't get his nannie. I never seen a woman yet that couldn't get mine and get it fresh every time I run a step fer her. Say! Mr. Hampstead—honest—ain't they the jinx?"

Bud had got his hand on the door, but getting no answer to this very direct and to him very important question, he turned and scrutinized the face of the big man curiously at first and then with amazement, as he exclaimed: "Fer the love of Mike! He ain't heard me. Say, Mr. Hampstead! Say!" Bud went back and shook the big man's arm, with a look of apprehension on his face, and shouted very loud, as if to the deaf: "Say! Come out of it, will y'? Don't write. Telegraph her. Gosh! She might blame me!"

After which parting gun in behalf of duty and of prudence, with a sigh and the air of having done a man's best, the lad got hastily through the door and slammed it after him very loudly.

CHAPTER XV

THE CATASTROPHE

Bud was right. John had not heard him. He stood with the telegram torn open in his hand.

"Charles fell from El Capitan," it ran. "Body brought here. ROSE."

For a moment the man gazed fixedly, deliberately but absently crushing the envelope in one hand, while the other held the open message before him. Then his lips moved slowly and without uttering a sound, they framed the words of his thought: "Charles!—Dead!—Merciful God!"

For a reflective interval the gray, startled eyes set themselves on distance and then turned again to the message. It was dated April 4.

April 4? What day was this?

On the dresser was an unopened newspaper. John remembered now he had bought it yesterday, or rather he assumed it was yesterday. The date upon the paper was April 14. If it were yesterday he bought that paper, to-day was the 15th, and Charles had been dead eleven

days! What had they thought—what had they done without a word from him in this crisis? What had become of them?

And there were unopened letters on the dresser, three of them, all from Rose. John tore them open, lapping up their contents with his eyes.

"Poor, poor Rose!" he groaned. "What must she think of me?"

The first letter told of the death of Charles and the lucky sale of "Dawn in the Grand Canyon" which afforded money for the recovery of the body and its decent interment, but little more.

The second letter was briefer and expressed surprise at not hearing from him in response to her message, which the telegraph company assured her had been delivered to him in person. This letter showed Rose bearing up under her grief and stoutly making plans for taking up the support of her children.

The third letter was addressed by the hand of Rose, but the brief note enclosed was penned by the kind-hearted Doctor Morrison, the railroad's "company" physician, to whom, as a part of his outside practice, Rose would have applied in case of illness.

"Your sister," Doctor Morrison wrote, "has suffered a complete nervous breakdown. Long rest with complete relief from financial care is imperative."

This letter stirred John to immediate action. He rushed to the long-distance telephone. The telegraph was not quick enough.

"Please reassure my sister immediately," John telephoned to Doctor Morrison. "Every provision will be made for her care and that of the children." Not satisfied with this, John sent a telegram to his sister direct and to the same effect.

These messages were dispatched as the first and most natural impulses of the brother's heart, without pause to consider the responsibilities involved; and then, having no appetite for breakfast, John returned to his room to write to Rose.

Poor Rose! And poor old Charles! Such an end for him. No great pictures painted; no roseate successes gathered; just to follow his vision on and on until in absent-minded admiration of a sunset glow he stepped off the brow of El Capitan in Yosemite and fell hundreds of feet to death. Yet John's grief was strangely tempered by the thought that somehow this death was fitting. It was like the man's life. In art he had tried to walk the heights with no solid ground of ability beneath, and he had fallen into the bottomless abyss of failure.

For a moment John pitied Charles greatly; yet when he thought of Rose, prostrated, as he was sure, not by grief, but by long anxieties, his feeling turned to one of reproach. When he thought of the children left fatherless, with no provision for their future or that of Rose, the reproach turned to bitterness. He found himself judging Charles very sternly, and a verse from scripture came into his mind,—something about the man who provides not for his own being worse than a murderer.

But in the midst of this condemnation, Hampstead's jaw dropped, and he sat staring at the pen with which he was preparing to write. The expression on the man's face had changed from concern to one of agony. When the pain passed, his features were gray and tenantless, almost the look of the dead; for John Hampstead had suddenly perceived that *his stage career was ended!*

Rose, Dick and Tayna were now "his own." To give Rose the best of care, upon which his heart had instantly determined, he must have what were to him large sums of money weekly and monthly; money for nurses, money for doctors, for sanitariums possibly; and perhaps Dick and Tayna must be sent to boarding-school or some place like that for the present, while their higher education must also be considered and provided for.

John knew he could never do these things and follow the stage. He could succeed upon the stage; he had proven that, to his own satisfaction at least; but he could not make money there yet, not for years and years. Marien was right. If he persisted, rewards would come and affluence. But they would come at the other end of life. He must have them now.

Perhaps hardest of all to John was the hurt to his pride, to his self-confidence, the reflection that, having set his eye upon a shining goal, he must abandon the march toward it unbeaten, with his strength untested, or with the tests so far made distinctly in his favor. It was hard to think himself a "quitter." And yet he could feel the stir of a noble satisfaction in being a "quitter" for duty's sake. He remembered with a certain sad pleasure how almost prophetically he had told Mr. Mitchell that it would only be something that would happen to Dick and Tayna that could keep him from going on with his ambition. Now exactly that had come to pass; yet to make immediate surrender of the ambition to which he had devoted himself with such enthusiasm seemed impossible. He knew what he should do—what he intended to do—but he lacked the resolution for the moment.

If Bessie were only here!

And yet if she were, he would shrink from her presence. He felt just now unworthy to look into those trusting eyes of blue. This time he must face his destiny alone.

His head sank low. His hands were clasped above it, as they had been that night when he was stricken blind. The world was dark before him. Now, as then, he felt sorry for himself. In a very few months a great many things had happened to him that had wrenched him violently. He had been racked by doubts and inflamed by mysterious emotions. He had hoped and he had dared; he had struggled; he had gained some things and lost some; but he had survived, and on the whole was conquering. Now came the heaviest blow, as it seemed, that could possibly fall upon his head,—and just in the very hour when the upward way was clearing!

His face was flat upon the page he had meant to fill with words of love and help to Rose. Above him, on the wall, was the sheet of faded yellow paper that bore his just amended motto. Two pins, loosened no doubt when he changed the word on the legend, had been whipped out by the breeze which swept in through the open window, and this breeze now fluttered the free end of the yellow sheet insistently like a pennant, so that the distracted man lifted his clouded eyes and read once again, as if to make sure:

"Eternal Loyalty is the Price of Success."

"Loyalty to what?" he demanded fiercely of himself. To his ambition? Or to two little growing lives that trusted and believed in him?

To put the question like that was to answer it. John rose abruptly, snatched the legend from the wall, crumpled it as he had the envelope, and cast it on the floor. He didn't need it any more.

"And yet," he reflected after a moment, "why not?"

"Uncle John, when will you be president?" Tayna had asked him that one night, and he smiled as in fancy he felt her arms again about his neck, her bare feet cuddling in his lap. The thought roused him. He was not surrendering all ambition when he surrendered a stage ambition. He was a man of greatly increased ability now as compared with then. Surely a man was pretty poor stuff if, having been defeated in one desire through no fault of his own, he could not carve out another niche for himself somewhere in the wide hall of achievement. John stooped and recovered the crumpled square of yellow, smoothed its wrinkles reverently, and fastened it again and more securely upon the wall above him.

* * * * *

That night John Hampstead went to the theater as usual, but entered the dressing room like a man going into the presence of his dead. Throughout the performance he made his entrances and exits solemnly.

The play for this, his final week, was *Hamlet*, and John's part was the King. Every night as the Prince of Denmark killed him with a rapier thrust, John enacted that spectacular and traditional fall by which, since time forgotten, all Kings in *Hamlet* go toppling to the floor, where they die with one foot upraised upon the bottom-most step of the throne, as if reluctant even in death to give up the perquisites and preeminence of royalty. So hour by hour John felt that he was killing the King in his soul, but the King died reluctantly, always with one foot on the throne.

The last night came, and the last hour. Methodically the man assembled his make-up materials, his grease paints, his hare's feet, and the beard he had himself fashioned for the King to wear, and put them away, with their sweetish, unmistakable odor, in the old cigar box, to be treasured henceforth like sacred things, symbols of a great ambition which had stirred a young man's breast, and remembrances of the greatest sacrifice it seemed possible aspiring youth could be called upon to make.

But no one was to know that it was a sacrifice; not Rose, not Dick nor Tayna even. They were to think he did it happily and because "The stage—the stage life, you know! Well, probably there are better ways for a man to spend his energies."

But, really, in his heart of hearts, Hampstead knew he would love the drama always. He owed it a debt that he could never repay, and some day when he had achieved a brilliant success in another walk of life—when Dick and Tayna were grown and far away perhaps—he would take out the old cigar box and gather his children around him, if he should have children, and tell them the story of his first divinest ambition as one tells the story of one's first love; and of the great sacrifice he had made in the cause of duty, fingering the while these crumbling things as one caresses a lock of hair of the long departed.

"Look, Bud, here's a box of cold cream—nearly full. You can get a quarter for it from somewhere along the line," suggested John, nodding toward the row of dressing rooms as he

walked away, his overcoat over his shoulder, a suitcase in his hand.

CHAPTER XVI THE KING STILL LIVES

To make money quickly and steadily and in considerable amounts, was his immediate necessity. He remembered, naturally, that only seven months ago William N. Scofield had offered him a salary of twelve thousand dollars a year, and he went to see that gentleman promptly. But while the Traffic Manager's eye lighted at sight of him, the light faded. Scofield did not refer to the offer he had made or the things he had talked about that night in the Pacific Union Club. He only said absently: "I will speak to Parsons." The next day Parsons offered Hampstead a position in the rate department at one hundred dollars per month. John was not greatly surprised. He knew the world was like that.

Of course, he might have gone next to Mr. Mitchell, but did not. In the first place John knew that no position which that kind-hearted gentleman might offer could pay as much money as he must have. In the second place, he felt himself big with a sense of new-grown powers, of personality that he wanted to capitalize, not for some employer, but for himself.

"Seems to me," he communed, as he walked down Market Street, "that I could sell real estate, or stocks, or bonds; that I could promote enterprises, work with big men, put through their deals, and make a lot of money. I believe I will try it."

An advertisement which seemed to promise something like this was answered by him in person, but it proved instead a proposition to sell books. John revolted at the idea, but the books interested him greatly. The set was designed for self-improvement, and the price was thirty dollars.

"Every time you sell a young man or woman a set of these, you do them good," he suggested to the manager, with a glow upon his face.

"Exactly," assented that suave gentleman, sighting two prime essentials of a salesman, faith in his article and a missionary enthusiasm. "You could make a hundred a week selling 'em!"

One hundred dollars a week! John looked his incredulity.

"What were you doing before?" inquired the manager.

"Acting!"

"Selling books is like acting," mused the manager. "If you are a good actor, you could make a hundred a week easy."

Because John needed one hundred dollars a week, and reflected that the experience would be good training for that higher form of salesmanship upon which he meant to embark, he took his prospectus and started out. The first week his commissions were \$7.50. He had made one sale. But he needed one hundred dollars worse the second week, and set forth with greater determination. That week he made two sales. "I've almost got it," he assured himself, gritting his teeth desperately. And the third week he did get it. His commissions for six days were \$74.50, for the next week \$112.50, for the fifth week \$145.00. John Hampstead was successfully launched upon an enterprise that would care for all his money wants.

And the work itself was happy work. It was no foot-in-the-door, house-to-house campaign on which he had entered. Ways were found of gathering lists of persons likely to be interested. He called upon these people like a gentleman; he was received and entertained like one. His self-respecting manner, his stage-trained presence, his growing store of personal magnetism, his strong, interesting face, with the odd light of spiritual ardor in his eyes, and the little choke of enthusiasm that came into his voice, all helped to make his presence welcome and his canvass entertaining. He became an adept in reading character and in playing upon the springs of desire and resolution.

He discovered, too, something to interest and admire in nearly every one upon whom he called. He was surprised to find how nice people were generally. He had before known people mainly in the mass, as publics, as audiences, or congregations. Now he began to know them as individuals, and to like them, to conceive a sort of social passion for them, and to desire fervently to do all men good. With this went the knowledge that he was becoming socially very skillful, and a sense of still increasing personal power peppered his veins with the sparkle of new hopes. Ambition flamed once more. The king in his soul was alive again. He could not only meet people, but handle them. He felt that as a politician he could win votes, as a lawyer he could sway juries.

He might even turn again to the stage, with the prospect of swifter and surer success; but he had begun to discover that one cannot go back, that no life ever flows up-stream.

Yet the thing which really made the stage career no longer possible was this sense of new powers grown up within him that were not mimetic, but creative and constructive, and which would insistently demand some other form of expression.

Besides, the perspective of his life was now long enough for him to look back and see how all his experiences had enriched him. His very awkwardness, his temporary blindness, his dramatic ambition, the calamity which shattered that career and made him a seller of books, each had been a step into power. His passion for Marien even, while it was a fall, was a fall into knowledge, which taught him self-control and made his love for Bessie a tenderer and, as he fancied, a stauncher devotion than it could otherwise have been.

This gave him a feeling, half-superstitious and half-religious, that his existence was being ordered for him by a power above his own. The effect of this was to increase his eager zest for life itself. He lived excitedly, hurrying continually, to see what would leap out at him from behind the next corner.

Meantime, he was making money. Within six months all the bills were paid and he had more than a thousand dollars in the bank. Rose was out of the sanitarium and, with Dick and Tayna, was housed in a cottage on the slope of a hill in western San Francisco, where the setting sun flashed its farewell upon the windows, and the wide ocean rolled always in the distance.

John was beginning, too, to feel that the time had come when he could go back to Bessie and tell her of his love. The past seemed very far past indeed. The memory of those whirlwind hours of passionate attachment to Marien Dounay was like a distorted dream of some drug-induced slumber into which he had sunk but once, and from which he had awakened forever.

Letters had passed frequently between himself and Bessie. On his part, these were carefully studied and almost devoutly restrained in expression; but none the less freighted in every line with the fervor of his growing devotion to her.

On her part, the letters were as frankly and impulsively rich with the essence of her own happy, effervescent self as they had always been. She had expressed a loyal sympathy with him in the shattering of his stage career, but had commended him for his renunciation, while through the letter had run a note of relief, which led John to discover for the first time that Bessie's concurrence in his dramatic ambitions was never without misgivings. True, she had told him this once, but it was when he had been too deaf to hear. What pleased John most in this correspondence was a pulse of happiness, quickening almost from letter to letter, which the big man felt revealed her perception of his growing love for her.

Perhaps it was this that put the past so far behind, that made it seem as though his love for Bessie had always been a part of his life, and the impulse to declare it a legitimate ripening of fruit that had grown slowly towards perfection.

In this mood a day was set when John would go to Los Angeles to visit Bessie. As the time approached, he could think of nothing else. On the morning of that day, the evening of which was to mark his departure, he was canvassing in Encina, a beautiful section of that urban population of several hundred thousand people across the Bay from San Francisco, the largest municipal unit of which is the City of Oakland. But thoughts of Bessie crowding in, so filled the lover's mind with rosy clouds that he had not enough of what salesmen call "closing power."

As it happened, a tiny park was just at hand, two blocks long and half a block wide, curved at the ends, dotted with graceful palms, with tall, shapely, shiny-leaved acacias, and covered with a thick sod of grass, laced at intervals by curving walks.

Upon a bench in the very center of this park Hampstead dropped down and gave himself up to blissful meditations. Across the street from him was a block of happy-looking cottage homes, the homes of the great middle-class folk of America, the one class that John knew well and sympathetically, for he himself was of it.

On the corner directly before him was a grass-sodded lot, larger than the others, holding in its center, not a cottage, but a structure of the country schoolhouse type, painted white, and with a small hooded vestibule out in front. Over the wide doors admitting to this vestibule was a transom of glass, on which was painted in very plain letters the words: CHRISTIAN CHAPEL.

"The house of God does not look so happy as the homes of men hereabout," Hampstead remarked, and just then was surprised out of his own thoughts by seeing the door of the deserted looking chapel open and two men come out. One was tall and heavy, gray of moustache and red of face, wearing a silk hat, a white necktie, and a full frock coat.

"An ex-clergyman," voted Hampstead shrewdly, because, aside from his dress, the man

looked aggressively unclerical.

The other was slender, with a black, dejected moustache and also frock-coated, but the material of the garment was gray instead of black, and the suit rubbed at the elbows and bagged at the knees. This man carried a small satchel.

"Some sort of a missionary secretary, I'll bet you," was John's second venture at identification.

Another incongruous thing about the man with the clerical dress was that he had a carpenter's hammer in his hand. Dropping this tool upon the wooden landing, where it clattered loudly, he drew a key from his pocket and locked the door, shaking it viciously to make sure that it was fast. Then, descending the steps, with the claw of the hammer he pried loose a plank, some six or eight feet long, from the wooden walk that ran across the sod to the concrete pavement in front. The missionary secretary took one end of this, and the two raised it across the door, where the ex-clergyman disclosed the fact that his bulging left hand contained nails, as with swinging blows, he began to cleat the door fast.

"Nailing up God!" commented John, whose mood had become sardonic.

"What's the story, I wonder," he remarked next, and rising, sauntered across the narrow street and up the wooden walk, till he stopped with one foot on the lower step, gazing casually, with mild curiosity expressed upon his face.

The missionary secretary had noted John's advance and appeared to recognize that his chance interest was legitimate.

"A miserable, squabbling little church," the man remarked, an expression of pain upon his face. "A disgrace to the communion. I'm the District Evangelist. I've had to step in from the outside and close it up, in the interest of peace. Brother Burbeck, here, is a leader of one of the wings. He has tried to bring peace in vain."

"I have stood up for the Lord against the disturber," announced Brother Burbeck over his shoulder, while he dealt a vicious blow, as if the head of the nail were instead the head of the malefactor.

"And who was the disturber?" queried John. "A man of bad character, I suppose."

"No, you couldn't call him that, could you, Brother Burbeck?" ventured the District Evangelist. "Just a young man from the Seminary, with his head overflowing with undigested facts."

"Near facts, they was—*only*," interjected Brother Burbeck sententiously, as he held another nail between a hard thumb and a knotted finger, and tapped the head gently to start it.

"Rather undermining the faith of the people in the old Gospel," went on the Evangelist.

"Takin' away what he couldn't never put back," amended Brother Burbeck, between blows, and then added accusingly: "He had no respect for the Elders, not a bit."

Brother Burbeck's tones, as he contributed this additional detail, were as sharp as his blows.

"You were one of the Elders?" inquired John, in an even voice that might have been construed to mean respect for the eldership.

"I am one of 'em," corrected the driver of nails. "I preached the old Jerusalem Gospel myself for twenty years," he affirmed proudly, "until my health failed, and I went into undertaking."

"You appear to have got your health back," observed John dryly, noting marks of the hammer upon the plank where the nail heads had been beaten almost out of sight by his slashing blows.

"Yep," admitted that gentleman, just as dryly.

Looking at Elder Burbeck's large head, with its iron-gray hair, at the silk hat, which stuck perilously, but persistently, to the back of it; noticing the folds of oily flesh on his bullock neck, the working of his broad, fat shoulders, and the sweat standing out on his heavy jowls, as if protesting mutely this unusual activity discharged with such vehemence, John made up his mind that he could never like Elder Burbeck. In his heart he took the part of the disturber.

"You know what this reminds me of, somehow?" he asked, with just a minor note of accusation in his tone.

"Not being a mind reader, I don't," replied Elder Burbeck, turning on John a look which showed as plainly as his speech that in the same interval of time when John was deciding he didn't like Burbeck, Burbeck was deciding he didn't like John. "What does it?" and the Elder-undertaker stared fiercely at the book agent.

"Nailing Jesus to the Cross," replied John, shooting a glance at Burbeck that was hard and beamlike.

"Hey!" exclaimed Burbeck, his red face reddening more.

"But," explained the Secretary, interjecting himself anxiously, as a man not too proud of his

duty that day, "it is in the interests of peace. We expect to give time a chance to heal the wounds. In six months the disturbing element will have gone away or given up, and then we can open the doors to peace and the old faith."

"Oh, I see," said John, as instinctively liking the Missionary Secretary as he instinctively disliked Brother Burbeck, "it is a movement in behalf of the *status quo*?"

"Yes," replied the Secretary, smiling faintly, as he noticed the shaft of humor in John's eye.

"And Brother Burbeck?" John twitched his chin in the direction of the tipsy silk hat and the vehemently swinging hammer. "He is the apostle of the *status quo*?"

"Yes," assented the Missionary, smiling yet more faintly, after which he countered with: "Are you a Christian, my brother?"

"I was a Deacon in the First Church, Los Angeles," answered John, "but I've been traveling round for a year or so. Hampstead's my name."

The Secretary's face lighted with unexpected pleasure.

"How do you do, Brother Hampstead," he exclaimed, putting out his hand quickly. "My name's Harding."

"Glad to meet you, Brother Harding," said John; "I've seen your name in the church papers."

"Brother Burbeck, this is Brother Hampstead, of the First Church, Los Angeles," announced Harding, when that gentleman, having driven his last nail and smashed the plank a parting blow with his hammer, turned to them again.

Elder Burbeck's manner instantly changed. "Oh, one of our brethren, eh, Hampstead? Why, say, I remember hearing you talk one night down there in Christian Endeavor when I was down at the Undertakers' Convention. They told me you were going on the stage. That's how I remember you so well, I guess."

"I got over that nonsense," said John easily. "Sorry to hear you've been having trouble in your little church."

"It's been a mighty sad case," sighed the Elder, heaving his ponderous bosom and mopping his red brow and scalp, for the removal of his hat revealed that his iron-gray hair was only a fringe.

"By the way," asked John, who was contemplating the bulletin board, "what about the Sunday school? I see it's down for nine forty-five."

"Dwindled to a handful of children," declared Burbeck, as if a handful of children was something entirely negligible.

John had a reason for feeling especially tender where the feelings of children were concerned.

"But they'll come next Sunday, and they'll be terribly disappointed," he urged. "It will shake their faith in God himself. They won't understand at all, will they?"

"I reckon they will when they see the church nailed up," answered Burbeck grimly, quite too triumphant over spiking an enemy's guns to consider the mystified, wondering soul of childhood as it might stand before that nailed door four mornings forward from this, for the day of the crucifixion of the door was Wednesday.

Their task completed, the Elder and the Evangelist were turning toward the street. "Good-by, Brother," said Harding, again shaking hands.

"Oh, good-by, Brother Hampstead," exclaimed Burbeck, turning as if he had forgotten something, and offering his stout, once sinewy palm.

John gave it a grip that shook the huge frame of Elder Burbeck, and made him feel, as he seldom felt about any man, that here was a personality and a physical force at least as vigorous as his own.

"Good-by, Brother Burbeck," John responded, with an open smile; and then while the two men took themselves down the street in the direction of the car line, the book-agent went back and sat contemplatively in the park.

It was a marvelously pleasant day. A few fleecy clouds were drifting overhead, revealing patches of the unrivaled blue of California's sky above them. The sun shone warmly when the clouds were not in the way, and when they were, the lazy breeze made its breath seem cooler and more bracing, as if to compensate for the absence. Down the street two or three blocks Hampstead could see the Bay waters dancing in the sunlight. The cottages on both sides of the park were embowered with vines, roses mostly, white roses and red, with here and there a giant bougainvillea, some of its lavender, clusterlike flowers abloom, and some of them still sealed in their transparent pods that looked like envelopes of isinglass.

High in the blue an occasional pigeon circled; off to the left a kite appeared, sailing high, and

bounding vigorously when the upper air currents freshened.

On John's own level, the world was faring onward very happily.

About every cottage there was an air of nature's cheer and a suggestion of blooming activity. Only the little church looked hopeless and abandoned of men, the letters of its name staring out big-eyed and lonely from above the glass transom, while the plank of the *status quo*, nailed rudely across its front, was a brutal advertisement of its dishonored state.

"Some day," mused John, "I think I'll build a church, and I believe I'll build it to look like a cottage, with roses round it and bougainvilleas and palms, with broad verandas, inviting lawns, and bowing vines. I'll make it the most homey looking place in the whole neighborhood, with a rustic sign stuck up somewhere that says 'The Home of God', or something like that."

Still musing, the scornful words spoken to John by Scofield more than a year ago on the steps of the Pacific Union Club, came idling into his mind: "Remember! You're not an actor! You're a preacher." He smiled as he recalled Scofield's irritation at the idea, and his own. How ridiculously impossible it had seemed then and seemed to-day! And it was still so irritating as to stir him into getting up and walking away from the little chapel in the direction of the street car. Yet his mind reverted to the closed door.

"Won't they be disappointed, though? Those children!"

At the corner he turned and looked back as if to make sure. Yes, there was the weather-worn streak upon the door, at that reckless angle which proclaimed the mood of the man who placed it there.

"And they nailed up God!" Hampstead commented grimly, swinging upon his car.

That afternoon at five o'clock he left for Los Angeles.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

It was three o'clock on Thursday afternoon, and John was sitting happily in the Mitchell living-room in Los Angeles, waiting for Bessie to come from school. Mrs. Mitchell stood on the threshold, dressed for the street save for her gloves, at one of which she was tugging.

"I have always felt, Mr. Hampstead, that you were a very good influence for Bessie," she was saying guilefully, "and I do wish you would talk her out of that university idea. She graduates from High in June, you know; and she talks nothing, thinks nothing, dreams nothing but university, university, uni-v-e-r-s-i-t-y!" Mrs. Mitchell's elocutionary climax was calculated to convey a very fine impression of utter weariness with the word and with the idea; but John, who had flushed with gratification at the crafty compliment, would not be swerved by either guile or scorn from an instinctive loyalty to Bessie and her ideals.

"I'm afraid I couldn't do that," he said soberly. "My heart wouldn't be in it. Bessie has a wonderful mind. You should give her every advantage."

"Well, talk her out of Stanford, then," compromised Mrs. Mitchell, as if in her mind she had already surrendered, as she knew she must. "She's determined to go there. Stanford is a kind of man's school, from what I hear. Lots of the Phrosos are going to U.C."

"But if I rather favor Stanford myself?" suggested Hampstead, feeling his way carefully.

The front door opened and closed, and John's heart leaped at the sound of a light footstep in the hall. As if hearing voices, the owner of the footsteps turned them towards the living room.

Book strap in hand, wearing a white shirt waist and skirt of blue, with the brown crinkly hair breaking out from under a small straw hat worn jauntily askew, Bessie paused upon the threshold, her eyes a-sparkle with expectancy.

"John!" she exclaimed, with a little shriek of joy. "You—you old dear!" and she came literally bounding across the room to greet him as he rose and advanced eagerly.

Hampstead thought he had never seen such a glowing picture of animal health and exuberance of life.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Mitchell, addressing her daughter with chiding in her tones. "Why don't you throw your arms around him and be done with it?"

Bessie blushed, but John covered her confusion by exclaiming:

"I almost did that myself, Mrs. Mitchell, I was so glad to see her!" Whereupon he laughed hilariously, it was such a good joke; and Bessie laughed, turning her face well away from her mother, while Mrs. Mitchell laughed most heartily of all at the thought of John Hampstead

putting his arms around any woman, except, of course, as he might have done in the practice of his late profession.

"And now," declared Mrs. Mitchell, as she managed the last button of her glove, "I must abandon you to yourselves; but don't sit here paying compliments. Get out into the air somewhere."

"Oh, let's," assented Bessie, with animation. "Only wait till I change my hat!"

"Don't," pleaded John. "I like that one."

"But I have another you'll like better," called Bessie over her shoulder, for already she was racing out of the room past her mother.

"Good-by. Have a good time!" Mrs. Mitchell lifted her voice toward her daughter racing up the stairs, and then turning, waved her ridiculous folding sunshade at John as she adjured: "Give her your very best advice!"

"Never doubt it," echoed John, with the sudden feeling of a man who is left alone in a house to guard great riches.

"How do you like it?"

Bessie had taken a whole half-hour to change her hat, but her dress had been changed as well, to something white and filmy that reached below the shoe-tops and by those few inches of extra length added a surprising look of maturity to the pliant youthfulness of her figure. This was heightened by a surplice effect in the bodice forming a V, which accentuated the rounded fullness of the bosom and gave a hint of the charm and power of a most bewitching woman, ripening swiftly underneath the artless beauty of the girl.

"Wonderful!" John exclaimed rapturously, rising as she entered.

Bessie's mood was lightly happy. His was deeply reverent, and there was a world of devotion and tenderness in the look he gave her, which thrilled through the girl like an ecstasy.

All the past was coming up to John's mind, all the long past of their friendship with its gradual ripening into normal, all-comprehending love, but still he was searching her uplifted face as if for a final confirmation of the oneness of the vision of his love with this materialization of youth and woman mingling; for he must make no mistake this time.

Yes, the confirmation was complete. It was the true face of his dream. In it was everything which he had hoped to find there. Marien Dounay had made woman mean more to him than woman had ever meant before. But here in the upturned, trusting face of Bessie, with its sparkle in the eyes and its sunny witchery in the dimples, there was something infinitely richer and more satisfying than experience or imagination had been able to suggest.

Here, he told himself reverently, was every blessing that God had compounded for the happiness of man. And it was his,—modestly, trustfully his. Every detail of her expression and her beauty, every subtly playing current of her personality, made him know it. He had but to declare himself and reach out and take her like a lover.

But, strangely, he could do neither. An awe was on him. He felt like falling down upon his knees and thanking God, but not like taking her; not like touching her even, though he could not resist that when Bessie extended frankly both her hands, quite in the old manner of cordial, happy comradeship. John took them in his, and as she returned his touch with the warm frank clasp that was characteristic of her hearty nature, he got anew the sense of the woman in her. It swept over him like an intoxication that was rare and wonderful, like no rapture he had ever known before—half-spiritual but half wholly human—therefore with something in it that frightened him.

"Bessie," he asked, abruptly, "could we get away from here quickly—in a very few minutes—away from men and houses and things?"

Bessie looked surprised. "Of course; we're going out, aren't we?"

"But quickly," urged John, "just a mad impulse, just a romantic impulse; the feeling that I want to get you out of doors. You are like a flower to me, just bursting into beautiful bloom. Better still, a wonderful fruit, which in some sheltered spot has grown unplucked to a rich tinted ripeness. You are so much a part of nature, so utterly unartificial, that it seems I must see you and enjoy you first in a setting of nature's own."

This was the frankest acknowledgment of her beauty and its appeal to him that John had ever made. It seemed to Bessie that he made it now rather unconsciously; but she saw that he felt it and was moved by it. To see this gave her another delicious thrill of happiness. Indeed her girlish breast was all a-tremble with joys, with curiosities, with expectancies. She, too, felt something wonderful and intoxicating in this slight physical contact of her lover's fingers. She felt herself

upon the verge of new and mysterious discoveries and recognized the naturalness of the instinct to meet them under the vaulted blue with the warm sun shining and the tonic breezes blowing past.

"Your impulse is right, John," Bessie answered, with quick assent and an energetic double shake of the hands that held her own, and they went out into the sunny street.

Not far from the Mitchell residence, on the western hills of Los Angeles, is a little, painted park, with a maple-leaf sheet of water embanked by closely shaved terraces of green, and once or twice a clump of shrubbery crouching so close over graveled walks as to suggest the thrill of something wild. From one of these man-made thickets a toy promontory juts into the lake. Upon this point, as if it were a lighthouse, is a rustic house, octagonal in shape, with benches upon its inner circumference. Embowered at the back, screened half way on the sides, and with the open lake before, this snug structure affords a delicious sense of privacy and elfin-like seclusion, provided there be no oarsmen pulling lazily or tiny sailboat loafing across the watery foreground.

This day there was none. The stretch of lake in front stared vacantly. The birds twittered in the boughs behind, unguardedly. The perfume of jasmine or orange blossoms or honeysuckle or of love was wafted through the rustic lattices; and here John and Bessie, seated side by side, were able to feel themselves alone in the universe.

But it was so delightful just to have each other thus alone and know that at any moment the great words so long preparing might be spoken, that instinctively they postponed the blissful moment of avowal, with vagrant talk on widely scattered subjects. Indeed, it seemed to each that any word the other spoke was music, and anything was blissful that engaged their minds in mutual contemplation. But nearer and nearer to themselves the subjects of conversation drew until they talked of their careers.

John, they agreed, was going to be something big,—very, very big; though he still did not know what, and in the meantime he was going to make money, yet not for money's sake.

As for Bessie, she, too, had developed an ambition and surprised John into delightful little raptures with her statement of it.

"This country has been keeping bachelor's hall long enough," she dogmatized, placing one slim finger affirmatively in the center of one white palm. "Women are going to have more to do with government. Here in California we'll be voting in a few years. When it comes, John, I'm going to be ready for it."

The idea seemed so strange at first,—this dimpled creature voting,—that John could not repress a smile. But Bessie, her blue eyes round and sober, was too earnest to protest the smile.

"Father's going up the line; you know that, of course," she affirmed. "He'll be a big man and rich almost before we know it; but they're not going to make any social buzz-buzz out of little Bessie. That's why I'm aiming at Stanford. I'm going in for political economy. When woman's opportunity comes, there are lots of women that will be ready for it. I'm going to be one of them."

Bessie nodded her head so emphatically that some crinkly brown locks fell roguishly about her ears, and John was obliged to smile again; but for all that the big man was very proud of the purpose so seriously announced. Besides, with Bessie's manner more than her words there went an impression of the growing depth and dignity of her character that was to John as delightful as some other things his eyes were boldly busy in observing. But presently these busy observations and reflections kindled in him again an overwhelming sense of the wealth of woman in this aspiring, dimpled girl. With this went an exciting vision of the bliss which life holds in store for any mutually adapted man and woman where each is consumed with desire for the other.

"Bessie!" he broke out impulsively, arising quickly and looking down into her upturned, intent face. "Doesn't everything we've just been talking about seem unimportant?"

Bessie's features expressed wonder and delightful anticipation.

"Beside ourselves, I mean," John went on, and then added impetuously: "To me, this afternoon, there is just one fact in the universe, Bessie, and that fact is YOU!"

The light of a shining happiness kindled like a flash on the girl's face, and she threw out her hands to him in the old impulsive way.

"Just one thing I feel," John rushed along, seizing the outstretched hands and playfully but tenderly lifting her until she stood before him, "just one thing that I want to do in the world above everything else, and that is to love you, Bessie, to love you!"

The words as he breathed them seemed to come up out of the deeps of a nature rich in knowledge of what such love could mean.

Bessie, her face enraptured, did not speak, but her dimples behaved skittishly, and there was a sharp little catch of her breath.

"Just one ambition stands out above every other," continued the man with a noble earnestness—"the ambition to make you happy—to protect you, to worship you, and to help you do the things you want to do in the world. For marriage isn't a selfish thing! It doesn't mean the extinction of a woman's career in order that a man may have his. It is the surrender of each to the other for the greater happiness and the higher power of both."

Suddenly a choke came in the big man's voice.

"That's what I feel, my dear girl," he concluded abruptly, with an excess of reverence in his tones, "and that's what I want to do!"

As he spoke, John had lifted her hands higher and higher till one rested on each of his shoulders. Man and woman, they looked straight into each other's eyes, as they had that day upon the cliff, but this time it was his lip that quivered and his eyes that misted over.

Bessie, sobered for a moment almost to a sense of unworthiness, as she felt all at once what it meant for a great-hearted man to so declare himself to a woman, saw something in that growing mist which impelled her to immediately reward the tenderness of such devotion with a frank confession of her own.

"Well," she breathed naïvely, "you have my permission to do all those things. I'm sure, John, the biggest fact, the biggest love, the biggest career in the world for me is just you!"

Bessie accompanied the words with an ecstatic little shrug of the shoulders and a self-abandoning toss of the head.

Reverently John pressed his lips upon hers and held her close for a very, very long time; while a thrill of indescribable bliss surged over and engulfed him. His embrace was gentle, even reverent; but it seemed he could not let her out of his arms. Here at last was one treasure he could never surrender; one renunciation he could never make.

"And to think," sighed Bessie, after a long and blissful silence, finding such rapture in nestling in those strong arms that she was still unwilling to lift her head from where she could feel the beating of his happy heart, "to think how long we have loved each other without expressing it; how loyal we have been to each other's love even before we had grown to recognize it for what it truly was."

Bessie looked up suddenly. It seemed to her that John's heart had done a funny thing; that it staggered and missed a beat.

But John ignored her look. His face was set and stubborn. He changed his position slightly and gathered her yet more determinedly in his arms, so that Bessie felt again how strong he was, and how much it means to woman's life to add a strength like that.

"Do you know, John," she prattled presently, out of the deepening bliss which this enormous sense of security inspired, "do you know that I used to fear for you? For me rather! To fear," she exclaimed with a happily apologetic little laugh, "that you might fall in love with Marien Dounay!"

But the laugh ended in a choke of surprise, when Bessie felt the body of the big man shiver like a tree in a blast.

"Why? Why? What is the matter, John?" she asked in helpless bewilderment, for the odd face with a profile like a mountain had taken on a look of pain, and while she questioned him, he put her from him and with a low groan sank down upon the bench.

* * * * *

The little summer house was still undisturbed by the rude, annoying outer world; but its atmosphere had subtly changed. A chill wind blew through the shrubbery and the fragrance of bush and flower was gone. Even the sun, as if he could not bear to look, had dropped behind the hill; for something had edged between the lovers.

Bessie's artless words made John remember as very, very near, what, during this delicious hour in her presence, had seemed to be worlds and worlds behind him, in fact made him feel his shame and guilt so deeply that he could no longer hold her in his arms. Then the story of his infatuation for Marien Dounay came out, as he had always felt it must, sometime, for the purging of his own soul, even if it were she who would suffer most,—the old, old law of vicarious suffering again!

Bessie listened with white, set face, while John resolutely spared himself nothing in the telling, but when the look of hurt and pain took up its abode permanently in those mild blue eyes, a feeling of yet more terrible misgiving overtook him and he would have checked the story if he could. But once started, his natural shrinking from hypocrisy compelled him to tell the truth.

"You can never know how I have reproached myself for it," he concluded. "I have suffered agonies of remorse. Wild with love of you, and the impulse to declare that love, I have stayed

away six months. It seemed to me at first that I could hardly get my own consent to come at all from her to you; that I must doom myself to perpetual loneliness to expiate my sin. And yet, Bessie," John made the mistake of trying to extenuate, "it was probably not altogether unnatural, knowing man as I begin to know him."

To the young girl, facing the first bitter disillusionment of love, it came like a flash of intuition that this last was true; that men were like that—all men! They were mere brutes! This intuition maddened the girl, and her disturbed emotions expressed themselves in a burst of flaming anger.

"You may go back to Marien Dounay," she exclaimed hotly. "I do not want her left-overs."

"But," protested John, with something of that sense of injury which a man is apt to feel if forgiveness does not follow soon upon confession, "you do not understand!"

"I understand," retorted Bessie with blazing sarcasm, "that you fell hopelessly in love with this woman; that you embraced her, kissed her, worshipped the ground she trod on; that you proposed to marry her almost upon the spot; that she refused you and drove you from her; that for a month you wrote me letters of hypocritical pretense; that when she finally not only repulsed you but revealed herself to you as a woman without character, you considerately revived your affections for me."

John felt that in this storm of words some injustice was being done him; yet he could not deny that such an outburst of wrath upon Bessie's part was natural, and he humbled himself before the blast.

In the vehemence of her demonstration, Bessie had arisen, and after the final word stood with her back to her lover, looking out upon the little lake which suddenly seemed a frozen sheet of ice.

"Bessie!" John murmured huskily, after an interval.

"Don't speak to me, don't!" she commanded hoarsely, without turning her head.

John obeyed her so humbly and so completely that she began to wonder if he were still there, or if he had sunk through the ground in the shame and mortification which she knew well enough possessed him.

When she had wondered long enough, she turned and found him not only there but in a pose so abject and utterly remorseful that her heart softened until she felt the need of self-justification.

"You were my god," she urged. "You inspired me! I worshipped you! I thought you were as fine a man as my own father—and finer because you had a finer ambition. I thought you were grand, noble, strong!" Bessie stopped with her emphasis heavy upon the final word.

"Is not the strong man the one who has found in what his weakness lies?" John pleaded humbly.

But as before, his attempt at palliation seemed to anger her unaccountably, and she turned away again with feelings too intense for utterance—with, in fact, a dismal sense of the futility of utterance. She wanted to get away from John. She wished he would not stand there barring the door. She wished he would go while her back was turned. A sense of humiliation greater than had possessed him, she was sure, had come over her. If the lake in front had been sixty feet deep instead of six inches, she might have flung herself into it.

"But you love me!" pleaded John from behind her, his voice coming up out of depths.

"Do you think I would care how many actresses you lost your dizzy head over if I didn't?" retorted Bessie petulantly, and instantly would have given several worlds to recall the speech.

"No! No!" she continued, stamping her foot angrily, "I don't love you, I love the man I thought you were."

"All the same, I love you," groaned John, rising up to proclaim his passion hoarsely and then flinging himself again upon the bench, where with head hanging despondently, he continued: "I love you, and I don't blame you for hating me, and you can punish me as long as you want and in any way you want. You can even try to fall in love with some one else if you like. Marry him if you want to. I love you, and I'll keep on loving you. No punishment is too great for the thing I've done."

The effect of this speech on the outraged Bessie was rather alarming to that indignant young lady. When John began to heap the reproaches higher upon himself, she felt a return to sympathetic consideration for him that was so great she dared not trust herself to hear more of them.

"Take me home!" she commanded hurriedly, walking swiftly by him, but with scrupulous care that the swish of her white skirts should not touch the bowed head as she passed, and no more trusting herself to a second glance at that dejected tawny mop of hair than to hear more of his

self-indictment.

CHAPTER XVIII THE HOUSE DIVIDED

After parting from Bessie at her father's door, John spent twenty-four hours in dumb agony at his hotel, devoting much time to uncounted attempts to frame a letter to her. But the one which finally went by the hands of a messenger was a mere cry that broke out of his heart. All it brought back was an answering cry,—four pages with impetuous words rioting over them. There were splotches of ink where the pen had been urged too recklessly, and as John held it up to the electric light, he tried to imagine there were watery stains upon it.

That night Hampstead left Los Angeles for San Francisco and spent an aimless Saturday brooding upon the ocean beach, needing no sight of the jutting Cliff House rocks upon which his lips had first touched Bessie's to embitter his reflections. Sunday morning, however, as early as nine o'clock, found him threading the graveled paths of the little park in Encina, and taking his place upon the rustic bench across from the dingy chapel. The cleat remained on the door. God was still nailed up!

John could not help thinking that he, too, was rather nailed up. Drawing Bessie's last letter from his pocket, he held it very tenderly for a time in his hand, then opened it to the final paragraph, which his eyes read dimly through a mist that overspread his vision like a curtain of fog.

"I shall always love you, John," her pen had sobbed, "—always; or at least, it seems so now. But you have hurt me in what touches a woman nearest. I have tried to understand—I think I have forgiven—but that full confiding trust!—Oh, John!"

The letter didn't cut off hope exactly; but it didn't kindle any bonfires, either. As John read it, he felt forlorn and helpless, and perceived that he had made rather a mess of things generally.

And, in the meantime, there was absolutely nothing more important for him to do than to sit on the park bench before this wretched-looking, dishonored little church and watch to see whether any children came to Sunday school.

Yes,—two were coming now. One was a little girl of six or seven, in a smock immaculately white. She was bareheaded, but her flaxen locks were bound with a bright blue ribbon that just matched the blue of her eyes. Her stockings were white, and her shoes were patent leather and very shiny. She walked with precise, proud steps, and looked down occasionally at the glinting tips of her toes to make sure that they were still unspotted. Once she stopped and touched them daintily with the handkerchief she carried in her hand, and then glanced up and around swiftly with a guilty look.

By her side walked little brother. He might have been four. He might have been wearing his first pants; his feet might have been uncomfortable; the elastic cord on his hat might have been pinching his throat most irritatingly, and probably was; but for all of that he trudged along sturdily, as careful of his four-year-old dignity as his sister obviously was of her motherly office.

He stretched his legs, too, to take as long steps as she, which was not so difficult, because his sister minced her gait a little.

Together they swung around the corner, and their feet pattered on the board walk leading across the sod to the chapel. Involuntarily they stopped a moment where Elder Burbeck had borrowed the plank, then stepped over the hole and mounted with confident, straining steps to the platform. The sister was now a little in advance, one hand holding her brother's and lifting stoutly as he struggled to surmount the unnatural height.

But the door of the church was closed. This nonplussed the little lady for just a second, after which she thrust up her chubby hand and gave the knob a turn. The door did not respond. She rattled the knob protestingly, and then, looking higher, saw the plank nailed across.

At this the small miss stepped back confounded, to the accompaniment of childish murmurings. Little brother did not understand. He clamored to be admitted to his "Sunny Kool." The little woman tried again, but the door baffled her most indifferently. However, after a moment of wondering dismay, this tiny edition of the feminine retreated no farther than to turn and sit down upon the steps, first dusting them carefully, and inducing little brother to sit beside her. Strength had been baffled, but faith was still strong.

"The eternal woman!" commented John reverently. "So Mary waited at the tomb."

But other children were coming, and soon a fringe of little bodies was sitting around the platform, and soon a border of little feet decorated the second step, the girls' feet neatly, daintily composed; the boys' feet restless, clumsier, beating an insistent tattoo as they awaited the appearance of some grown-up who could admit them or explain.

"Teacher! Teacher!"

One little girl set up the shout, and like a bevy the smaller children swarmed across the street and into the park to meet a very slender girl, perhaps sixteen years of age, with her light brown hair in half a dozen long, rolling curls that, snared at the neck by a wide ribbon, hung half way down her back.

Attended eagerly by this childish court, the babble of their voices rising about her, the girl mounted the steps, stood a moment in confusion before the locked and barred door, then looked about her helplessly, almost as the children had done.

"This is my cue," John declared with decision, rising from his seat and crossing to the chapel.

"My name's Hampstead," he began, taking off his hat to the girl. "I belong to the First Church, Los Angeles."

"How do you do, Brother Hampstead," she responded, in a voice that expressed instant confidence, while her large eyes, blue as the sky, lighted with pleasure and relief. "I am Helen Plummer, teacher of the infant class."

"You seem to be embarrassed," John proceeded.

"Whatever shall I do?" confessed the young lady, looking at the barred door, at her charges about her, and at John.

John laid his hand upon the plank at the end where it projected beyond the edge of the little, coop-like vestibule, and gave it a tentative pull. It did not spring much. Burbeck's nails had been long, and he had driven them deep. But John was strong. He swung his weight upon the end of the plank and it gave a little. He swung harder, and it yielded more. Presently he heard a squeaking, protesting sound from the straining nails, and increased his efforts till the veins knotted on his forehead.

"Bet y' he can't," speculated an urchin whose chubby toes were frankly barefoot and energetically digging into the sod of the lawn.

"Bet yuh he will," instantly countered another, shifting his gum.

"Oh, I do hope you can!" sighed the fairy thing with the curls down her back and the eyes like the sky.

That settled it for John. This plank was coming off. Nevertheless, there was a pause while he mopped his brow and considered. The result of these considerations was to fall back for reinforcement on two cobbles of unequal size chosen from the gutter, the larger of which he used as a hammer while the smaller served as a wedge, till, with a final wrench, the plank came free.

But Elder Burbeck had locked the door.

"A hairpin?" queried John of the sky blue eyes.

"I have not come to hairpins yet," blushed the teacher of the infant class.

John remembered the buttonhook on his key ring, and after a few moments of vigorous attack with that humble instrument the bolt shot accommodately to one side and the door swung open.

"Thank you so much!" exclaimed the blue eyes, though the red lips of pliant sixteen said never a word, but framed themselves in a very pretty smile.

John acknowledged the smile with one of his broadest. At the same time, he reflected that Miss Helen's failure to regard as seriously unusual either the barred door or its violent opening was significant of the state to which affairs in the little church had come; and it was with a grim sense of duty well performed that the big man followed the trooping children into the chapel and looked about him.

The building was small, yet somehow it appeared larger inside than out. The utmost simplicity marked its furnishings. The seats were divided by two aisles into a central block of sittings and two side blocks. The pulpit was a mere elevated platform at one side, flanked by lower platforms, one of which supported a cabinet organ. The dull red carpet upon the floor was dreary looking; but the walls and ceilings were neatly white, giving a suggestion of lightness and cheer quite out of harmony with the circumstances under which John had entered it.

The twenty or more children massed themselves, as if by habit, upon the front seats, and presently, with Helen at the organ, Hampstead had them singing lustily one song after another, while the size of the audience increased by occasional stragglers until, during the fourth song, two women appeared, each rather breathless, and one with unmistakable evidences of having got

hurriedly into her clothes. John felt the eyes of the women upon him suspiciously, and noticed that neither spoke to the other, and that they took seats on opposite sides of the church.

At the end of the song, he walked over to the older of the two ladies, who somehow had the look of a wife and mother in Israel, and said:

"My name's Hampstead,—First Church, Los Angeles."

"I'm Sister Nelson," replied the lady, a trifle stiffly. "I teach a class of boys. But I thought the church was closed till I heard the organ. Are you a minister?"

"Me? No!" And John smiled at the thought, but he also smiled engagingly. Mrs. Nelson instantly liked and accepted him and allowed her stiffness to melt somewhat.

"I just happened in," John explained, as he turned to cross toward the young lady on the other side, who appeared, he thought, to eye him rather more suspiciously after such cordial exchange with Mrs. Nelson.

"My name's Hampstead," he began. "First Church, Los Angeles. I just happened in."

"I'm Miss Armstrong," replied the lady, with conviction, as if it were something important to be Miss Armstrong. "I was teaching a class of girls before Brother Aleshire left; or rather, was driven away!" and the lady darted a look that ran across the little auditorium like a silver wire straight at the uncompromising figure of Sister Nelson. "I thought there wasn't to be any Sunday school until I heard the organ."

"Guess I'm responsible for that," replied John. "I just kind of butted in."

Miss Armstrong did not ask John if he were a minister. She knew it was unnecessary after he said "butted in." But she also felt the warmth of his engaging smile and yielded to it after a searching moment, for he really did look like a well-meaning young man.

Before the pulpit, and in front of the central block of chairs where the children were gathered, was a huge irregular patch in the carpet. This patch was about mid-way between the two outer plots of chair-backs, in the midst of one of which, like a solitary outpost, sat the watchful Mrs. Nelson, while Miss Armstrong performed grim sentinel duty in the other.

To this patch in the carpet, as to the security of neutral ground, John returned after establishing his identity and status with the two ladies, and from that safely aloof position, after a moment of hesitancy, ventured to announce:

"Since we seem somewhat disorganized this morning, I suggest that Sister Nelson take all the boys, and Sister Armstrong take all the girls, while Miss Helen will take the little folks, as usual."

It was evident from their respective expressions that Mrs. Nelson did not know about this idea, and that Miss Armstrong also had her doubts; but the children settled it. The tots rushed for the small platform on the left of the pulpit which had some kindergarten paraphernalia upon it, while the larger boys charged for Sister Nelson and began to arrange the loose chairs in a circle about her. The larger girls made the same sort of an advance upon Miss Armstrong.

Within five minutes, preliminaries were got out of the way, heads were ducked toward a common center, and there rose in the little church that low buzz of intense interest, possibly more apparent than real, which an old-fashioned Sunday school gives off at recitation period, and which is like no other sound in the world in its capacity to suggest the peaceful, bee-like hum of industry and contentment.

Standing meditatively in the center of the open space before the pulpit, thrilling with pleasure at the situation, feeling somehow that he had created it, John heard with apprehension a quick heavy step in the little entry, saw the swinging inside doors give back, and observed the stern, red face of Elder Burbeck confronting him across the backs of the middle bank of chairs.

The Elder had a fighting set to his jaw; he had his undertaker hat upon his head; and he glared at John accusingly as if he instantly connected him with the policy of the open door. But as if to make sure first just what mischief had resulted, Elder Burbeck's glance swept the room, taking in by turns Miss Armstrong with her girls, Sister Nelson with her boys, and Miss Helen with her kindergarteners.

As the Elder gazed, his expression changed perceptibly, and he reached up and took off his high hat, lowering it slowly, but reverently.

John, who had been standing perfectly still upon the patch, meek but unabashed, experienced an odd sensation as he witnessed this manoeuvre. It was dramatic and as if some presence were in the room which the Elder had not expected to find there. Yet, notwithstanding this, the apostle of the *status quo* turned level, accusing eyes upon John across the tiers of chairs, and began to advance down the aisle upon the right where Sister Nelson had seated herself. John, at the same moment, began a strategic forward movement upon his own account, so that the two met

midway.

"You broke open the house of the Lord," charged Elder Burbeck sternly.

"You nailed it up," rebutted John flatly, his features grave and his whole face clothed in a kind of dignity that to Elder Burbeck was as disconcerting as it was impressive.



"You nailed it up," rebutted John flatly.

The Elder opened his mouth to speak but closed it again without doing so. Something in the very atmosphere was a rebuke to him. Perhaps it was the presence of the Presence! He had indeed nailed up the house of the Lord! He thought he had done a righteous thing, but under this young man's eyes, burning with an odd spiritual light, before his calm, strong face, and in the presence of these children, the accusation smote the Elder deep. He began to suspect that he had done a doubtful act.

"Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins," piped a high voice sharply at his elbow, and Elder Burbeck started guiltily, as if his conscience had shouted the sentiment aloud. It was only one of Sister Nelson's boys singing out the text; nevertheless, the Elder was as shaken as if he had heard a voice from on high.

But at this juncture John Hampstead put out his hand cordially. Elder Burbeck took it—tentatively, almost grudgingly,—and was again dismayed to feel how strong that hand was and to observe how, without apparent effort, it shook him all over, as it had shaken him that day upon the walk outside. Yet the Elder mustered once more the spirit of protest.

"The church was closed by order of the District Evangelist," he urged, but his urging, even to himself, sounded strangely lacking in force.

"It was opened in the name of Him who said 'Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not,'" replied the interloper, quietly and emphatically, but not offensively.

In the meanwhile the subtle cordiality of John's manner did not abate but seemed rather to grow, for, still clinging to the Elder's hand, Hampstead walked with him back down the aisle to the open space before the pulpit. Burbeck felt himself strangely subdued. He was minded to rebel, to flame up; but somehow he couldn't. Yet Sister Nelson's eye was upon him, and it would imperil his own leadership to appear beaten by this mild-mannered young man who assumed so much so coolly and executed his assumptions so masterfully. The alternative strategy which suggested itself to the mind of the Elder was to take the lead in showing that he recognized the intrusion of Hampstead as somehow an intervention from which good might come. To make this strategy effective, however, action must be immediate; but the shrewd Elder was easily equal to that. Sniffing the air critically for a moment, he announced, loudly enough to be heard by all, even by Sister Nelson, busy with her boys:

"You need some windows open, Brother Hampstead! You go on with your superintending; I'll attend to that myself."

Immediately the Elder laid his tall hat upon the pulpit steps and busied himself with opening the windows at the top.

John watched him with carefully concealed amazement, until an unmistakable awe settled in upon him; for here was obviously the exhibition of a mystery,—the demonstration of a power within him not his own. Here was something he had not done; yet which had been done through him, through the presence of the Presence.

As the lesson hour proceeded, a trickling stream of adults began to filter in. Their attitude, any more than Burbeck's had been, was not that of people who enter a house of worship. Surprise, excitement, conflict was written on their faces. They took seats in one side section with Elder Burbeck and Miss Nelson, or upon the other side with Miss Armstrong; and then, between fierce looks across the abyss of chair-backs at the "disturbing element,"—the other side in a church quarrel is always that,—they bent a curious watchful eye on Hampstead.

At first the notes of the organ had notified those in the immediate neighborhood that the house of God was no longer nailed up. Members of each party, fearful that the other might gain an advantage, began at once to spread the news in person and by telephone, so that now all over Encina women were struggling with hooks and eyes and curling irons, and men were abandoning Sunday papers and slippers on shady porches, shaving, dressing, and rushing in hot haste to the battle line.

When the children filed out, the opposing groups of adults remained buzzing among themselves like angry hornets, but with no more communication between the two ranks than bitter looks afforded.

John, extremely desirous of getting well out of the zone of hostilities, was actually afraid to leave these belligerent Christians alone together. He thought they might break into pitched battle; the women might pull hair, the men swing chairs upon each other's heads. His fears were abruptly heightened by a series of violent bumps on the steps outside, followed by a trundling sound in the vestibule as if a cannon were being unlimbered. Instantly, too, every face in the little chapel turned at the ominous sounds, but John was puzzled to observe that the expression of even the bitterest was softened at the prospect.

This was explained in part when there appeared through the swinging inner doors not the muzzle of a fieldpiece, but a lady in a wheel chair, who, though her dark hair had begun to silver, was dressed in youthful white and had about her the air of one who refused to allow mere invalidism to triumph over the stoutness of her spirit.

Her vehicle was propelled by a solemn looking Japanese, and as if by long understanding, one man slipped forward immediately from each faction, and the two made a way among the chairs for the Oriental to roll his charge to the exact center of the unoccupied middle bank of sittings.

Bestowing on each helper a look of gratitude from her dark eyes, which were large and luminous, the lady sent a benignant smile before her round the church like one whose presence sweetens all about it. Evidently she was one member of the congregation who observed a scrupulous neutrality while holding the affection and regard of all.

"The Angel of the Chair!" murmured Miss Plummer in John's ear, as she passed to a seat with Miss Armstrong.

John looked again at the form in the chair, so frail and orchid-like, with its delicately chiseled

face and its expression of courageous spirituality. Remembering how the features of all had softened at the sound of the wheels, he felt that she well deserved the title. This impression of her saintly character was somehow heightened by a chain of large jet beads ending in a cross of the same material, which the whiteness of the gown outlined sharply upon her breast; so that John found himself instinctively leaning upon her as a possible source of inspiration and relief.

From her position of carefully chosen neutrality, the Angel of the Chair immediately beckoned Miss Armstrong to her from one side and Elder Burbeck from the other. Each approached, without in any way recognizing the presence of the other; and Miss Armstrong was apparently asked to detail what had happened, Burbeck's part, it would seem, being to amend if the narrative did his faction less than justice.

The story finished, and the Elder nodding his assent to it, the Angel of the Chair dismissed her informants and turned a welcoming glance on John, who advanced with extended hand, but judging that his formula of introduction was now unnecessary.

"I am Mrs. Burbeck," the lady said pleasantly in a rich contralto voice.

Hampstead all but gasped. This delicate, spirituelle creature that hard, red-faced partisan's wife! It seemed impossible.

But Mrs. Burbeck was composedly taking from her lap a twist of tissue paper from which she unrolled a simple boutonniere, consisting of one very large, very corrugated and very fragrant rose geranium leaf, upon which a perfect white carnation had been laid.

"Do you know, Mr. Hampstead," she went on placidly, "what I am going to do?" and then, as John looked his disclaimer, continued: "I have always been allowed the privilege of bringing a flower for the minister's button-hole. Brother Ingram would never take his flower from any one else. When the rain kept me away, he would not wear a flower at all. Brother Aleshire also took his flower from me."

"But," protested John, in sudden alarm, "I am not a minister at all, you know. I just happened in, and I assure you that all I am thinking of now is a way to happen out."

The Angel, it appeared, was a woman with deeps of calm strength in her.

"You have been a real minister in what you have done this morning," she said contentedly, entirely undisturbed by John's embarrassed frankness.

"But how am I going to get out from under?" gasped the young man, feeling more and more that he could trust this woman.

The Angel of the Chair smiled inspiringly.

"The Scripture has no rule for getting out from under," she suggested quietly, "but there is something about not letting go of the plow once you have grasped the handles."

The Angel was looking straight up at John now, searching his eyes for a moment, then adding significantly:

"I do not think you are a quitting sort of person."

A quitting sort! John could have blessed this woman. In two sentences she had felt her way to the principle he had tried to make the very center of his character,—loyalty to duty and everlasting persistence. Some people rather thought he was a quitting sort. John knew he was not, and to prove it bent till his buttonhole was in easy reach of the hands uplifted with the flower.

"And what," he asked, "does the minister do when he has received this decoration from the Angel of the Chair?"

It was Mrs. Burbeck's turn to feel a flush of pleasure at this appellation from a stranger.

"Why," she smiled, her large eyes lighting persuasively, "he goes into the pulpit and announces a hymn."

"Which I am not going to do," declared John, "because I should not know what to do next."

"In that hour it shall be given you," quoted the lady.

Now it was very strange, but when Mrs. Burbeck quoted this, it did not seem like an appeal to faith at all, but the simple statement of a fact. It chimed in, too, with that odd suggestion of the presence of the Presence, which had come to John a while ago.

Feeling thereby unaccountably stronger, and endued with a sort of moral authority as if he had just taken Holy Orders because of the carnation which bloomed so chastely white upon his breast, John squared his shoulders and mounted into the pulpit. There was something that God wanted to say to these people, and he accepted the situation as an obvious call to him to say it, but when he essayed to speak, awe came upon him, as it had a while before.

"Brethren," he confessed humbly, in a voice barely audible to all, "I am not a preacher. I haven't got any text, and I don't know what to say, except just perhaps to tell you how I happened

to be here this morning."

Then he told them simply and unaffectedly but with unconscious eloquence how he happened to see the church nailed up and how it sounded like the echo of the blows upon the cross; how, this morning, with a sad ache in his own heart, the thought of the faith of little children disturbed by that brutal plank upon the door had brought him all the way over here from his home in San Francisco and led him to do what he had done. He even told them of his meditative comparison between the houses of people that looked so happy and the house of God that looked so unhappy.

But while John was relating this modestly, yet with some of the fervor of unction and some comfortable degree of self-forgetfulness, he was interrupted by a sound like a sob, and looking down beyond Elder Burbeck to where Sister Nelson sat, he was surprised to see a handkerchief before her eyes and her shoulders trembling. Over on the other side, too, handkerchiefs were out, so that John suddenly realized that he or somebody had touched something.

Who had done it? What had caused it? Once more there came to the young man that eerie consciousness of a power within him not himself, and the feeling frightened him.

"That's all I have to say, brethren," he declared abruptly, his voice growing suddenly hollow. "I am terrified. I want to get away!"

Without even the singing of a hymn, John lifted his hand, bowed his head, and murmured something that was to pass for a benediction.

CHAPTER XIX

HIS NEXT ADVENTURE

Yet once out of the pulpit, John's sense of terror seemed to leave him. With some of the people coming forward to press his hand and even to wring it; with the Angel of the Chair giving him a wonderful look from her luminous eyes, he began to feel strangely, happily satisfied with himself,—as though adrift upon an unknown sea but without fear and joyously eager for the next adventure.

That adventure came when blue-eyed Helen of the Infant Class said pleadingly:

"Oh, Brother Hampstead! Will you call on Sister Showalter this afternoon and read a chapter? She is very ill and lonely."

"Yes," assented John recklessly. "But explain who it is that's coming—a book agent—to read to her."

John had no idea who Mrs. Showalter was; but they gave him a number. He had no idea what a professional clergyman reads to a sick woman; but that afternoon he pushed his little New Testament in his hip pocket somewhat as Brother Charles Thompson Campbell used to do, and went out upon his errand.

A faded, hollow-eyed, middle-aged woman met him at the door, with a face so somber that in his instant thought and ever after, John dubbed her the Gloom Woman.

"My name is Hampstead," he explained. "I called to see the sick lady."

"My mother!" answered the woman, in tones as somber as her countenance. "She has been asking for you for an hour. She is very low to-day. The doctor is with her and he is apprehensive."

Through air that was close with a sickish, sweetish smell, accounted for by large vases of flowers and by a small Chinese censer with incense burning in it, past furnishings, that were meager, stuffy, and old-fashioned, John was conducted to a large square room with the blinds drawn low. In the center of this room was a huge black walnut bedstead, with the head rising pompously high. By the far side of the bed sat a professional looking man in the fifties, with his chin buried in his hand and his eyes meditatively fixed upon a very old and dreary face amid the banked-up pillows,—a face of purplish hue that seemed without expression except for a lipless, sunken mouth, and eyes that glowed dully under sagging heavy lids.

"Mother!" said the woman, speaking loudly, as if to waken a soul from the depths, "this is Brother Hampstead!"

The aged eyes roamed the shadows anxiously for a moment, while a withered purple hand felt its way about upon the coverlet till John touched it timidly with his. Instantly and convulsively the old fingers gripped the young, with a pressure that to the caller was damp and deathly.

The woman appeared to John almost lifeless. He felt embarrassment and resentment. Why didn't they tell him she was like this?

The hand was tugging at him, too, like a sort of undertow, pulling him down and over. The

watery old eyes were fixed upon him. John's embarrassment increased. What did the poor creature want? To kiss him? What does a minister do in such a case, he wondered, sweat breaking out on his brow.

"I think she wants to say something; bend low so you can hear her," suggested the mournful voice of the Gloom Woman. John bent over till he felt the patient's hectic breath upon his cheek, and shrank from it.

"The minister of God!" croaked the voice so faintly that the words barely traveled the necessary six inches to his ear.

No man ever felt less like the minister of God. Hampstead was hot, flustered, self-conscious, almost irritated.

But again he felt the hand like an undertow, tugging him down.

"Read to me!" croaked the ghost of a voice.

This was something to do. A curtain was raised slightly so that the visitor could see, and he read the twenty-third Psalm and the twenty-fourth.

As Hampstead read, his embarrassment departed. He began to find a joy in what he was doing. He let his rich voice play upon the lines sympathetically and had a suspicion that he could feel the strength of the sick woman reviving as he read.

"She likes to have the minister pray with her," said the voice of the Gloom Woman from the background, when the reading was concluded.

Again John stood gazing helplessly, till the old hand dragged him down, and sinking upon his knees beside the bed, he found that words came to him, and he lost himself in them. His sympathy, his faith, his own sore heart and its needs, all poured themselves into that prayer.

Once or twice as words flowed on, Hampstead felt the old hand tugging, as though the undertow were pulling at it, and then he noticed after a time that he did not feel these tuggings any more; but when the prayer was finished and he rose from his knees, the grip of the hand did not release itself. Instead, the fingers hung on, rather like hooks, so that John darted a look of inquiry at the purplish face upon the pillows. To his surprise, the chin had dropped and the eyes had closed sleepily.

The doctor, who had been sitting with his hand upon the pulse, gently placed the wrist which he had held across the aged breast and stood erect, with an expression of decision which no one could misread.

"Oh!" sobbed a voice from the gloom.

Hampstead felt a sudden sense of shock, and his knees swayed under him sickeningly. That was death there upon the pillow; and that was death with its bony hooks about his palm. Sister Showalter had gone out with the undertow that pulled at her while he was praying.

John lifted his hand helplessly.

"It—it doesn't let go," he whispered.

The doctor glanced at the embarrassed Hampstead searchingly, then reached over and straightened the aged fingers.

"Young man," said the physician earnestly and even reverently. "She clung to you as she went down into the waters. For a time I felt your young strength actually holding her back, and then your words seemed to make her strong enough to push off boldly of her own accord. It is a great thing, my friend," and the doctor seemed deeply affected, "to have strength enough and sympathy and faith enough to rob death of its terror for a feeble soul like that—a very great thing!"

The earnestness of the doctor brought a lump into John's throat.

"Thank you, sir," he murmured, but immediately was lost in looking curiously at the thing upon the pillows.

"You have another duty," said the physician, nodding toward the shadows at the back, where a single heart-broken wail had been followed by a convulsive sobbing.

John went and stood beside the Gloom Woman.

"Mother is go—h-h-gone!" she sobbed.

"Yes," said Hampstead simply.

And somehow he didn't feel embarrassed at all now by the presence of death. He did not hesitate as to what to do. He just put out his hand and laid it in a brotherly way on the woman's shoulder, noticing as he did so that it was a frail, bony shoulder, and that it trembled as much from weakness as with emotion.

"Let the tears flow, sister," he suggested, "it is good for you."

And the tears did flow, like rivers, and all the while John's speech was flowing in much the

same way, and with tears in it, until presently the woman looked up at him, surprised both at the manner and the matter of his speech. Was it he who had spoken,—this man who said he was only a book agent?

John too was surprised at his words, at their tone, at the superior faith and wisdom which they expressed. He really did not know he was going to say them. When spoken, it did not seem as if it could have been he that had uttered them, and he had again that awesome sense of a power within him not himself.

"You *are* a minister of God!" declared the Gloom Woman with sudden conviction.

Hampstead trembled. This was what the dead had whispered to him. It frightened him then, it frightened him now. He was not a minister of God. He was a man misplaced. He wanted to get out and fly. Yet before he could check her, the Gloom Woman had raised his hand and kissed it.

This made him want to fly more than ever; but he managed first to ask: "Is there anything more that I can do?"

There was, it seemed, and he did it; and then, getting into the outside as expeditiously as possible, he filled his lungs with long, refreshing drafts of the sun-filtered ozone and found his footsteps leading him, as if by a kind of instinct of their own, down one of the short side streets to where the waters of the Bay lapped soothingly against the sea-wall.

But the Bay zephyrs could not wash that series of vivid experiences, half-ghastly and half-inspiring, out of mind.

He had blundered, all unprepared, into the presence of death. His sense of the fitness of things revolted. He was unworthy—unable—unclean. He—a book agent! a rate clerk! an actor! who had held Marien Dounay in his arms and felt his body thrill at the beating of her heart!

Yet this old woman had called him a minister of God! This Gloom Woman too had called him the same. Minister! Minister! What was it? Minister meant to serve. A servant of God! But he had not served God! At least not consciously. He had only served humanity a little. He had served the old woman as a prop to her fears, like an anchor to her soul when she drifted out into the deeper running tide that ebbs but never floods. He had served the Gloom Woman when he stood beside her while she opened the tear-gates of her grief.

It was very little! Yet that much he had really served. To reflect upon it now gave him a sense of elation greater than when he had beaten Scofield and his tariff department; greater than when he had quelled the mob at the People's; greater than when he had crushed Marien in his arms like a flower; greater even than when Bessie had looked her love into his eyes.

He began to perceive that his life was surely mounting from one plane to another and reflected that he had reached the highest plane of all to-day when the Angel of the Chair had pinned upon his coat the badge of Holy Orders; when this other saint, sinking into the dark tide, had hailed him a minister of God! Highest of all, when this Gloom Woman, out of her soul's Gethsemane, had wrung his hand and kissed it so purely and also hailed him as Minister of God!

For some weeks the little chapel in Encina, its troubles and its troubled members, continued to exercise a strange fascination over John. Each Sunday he shepherded the Sunday school and talked a blundering quarter of an hour to the older folk who gathered; while between Sundays he devoted an astonishing portion of his time to visiting these wrangling Christians in their homes, for the ambition to heal this disgraceful quarrel had taken hold on him like some knightly passion.

And in the midst of all these busy comings and goings, odd, half-humorous reflections upon his own status used to break in upon John's mind. Not a self-respecting church in the communion, he knew, but would have eyed him askance because he had been an actor. Only this little helpless church, whose condition was so miserable it could not reject any real help, accepted him; and that merely in a relation that was entirely unofficial and undefined. Still a sense of his fitness for this particular task grew upon him continually; and it was really astonishing how every experience through which he had passed had equipped him for his peacemaker task: most of all those pangs endured because of his break with Bessie, which, although eating into his heart like an acid, yielded a kind of ascetic joy in the pain as if some sort of character bleaching and expiation were at work within him.

In the meantime, an arbitration committee consisting of the District Evangelist, Brother Harding, and Professor Hamilton, the Dean of the Seminary, was at work upon the affairs of the little church. Both wings consented to this, but with misgivings, since the one man they were really coming to trust was Hampstead himself; and when the night for the report of the arbitration committee arrived, each faction turned out in full strength, with suspicions freshly

roused, and all a-buzz with angry conversation as if the church were a nest of wasps.

"Things are pretty hot," remarked the Dean under his breath, coming up to read the report.

"They are awful," groaned the District Evangelist.

John presided, standing carefully on his neutral patch in the carpet, and was dismayed and sickened by this new and terrible display of feeling. He had come to know a very great deal about these people in the last few weeks; he had seen how some of these men struggled to make a living; how some of these women bore awful crosses in their hearts; how sickness was in some houses, cold despair in others; how much each needed the strength, the joy, the consolation of religion, and how large a mission there was for this church and for its minister.

But the Dean was reading his report now, in a high, lecture-room voice. It was very brief.

"As for the matters at issue," it confessed, "your committee finds it humanly impossible to place the responsibility for this regretful division. It believes the only future for the congregation is in a wise, constructive, forward-moving leadership which can forget the past entirely.

"It finds that such a leadership now exists in one thoroughly familiar with the difficulties of the situation and enjoying the confidence of both factions; and it recommends that this congregation make sure the future by calling to its pastorate the one man whom the committee believes supremely fitted for the task, our wise and faithful brother, John Hampstead."

The congregation had not thought of Hampstead as a minister. He had not permitted them to do so. To them this recommendation was a surprise.

But to John it was a shock! His face turned a faded yellow. His eyes wandered in a hunted way from the face of the Dean to that of the Evangelist, and then slowly they swept the congregation to meet everywhere looks of approval at the Dean's words.

"But," he protested breathlessly, like a man fighting for air, "I am not a minister. I am a book agent. I have been an actor. I am unfit to stand before the table of the Lord, to hold the hand of the dying, to speak consolation to the living beside the open grave! I am unfit—unfit—for any holy office!"

But his desperate protestation sounded unconvincing even to himself. He had been doing some of these things already and with a measure at least of acceptance. All at once it seemed as if there was no resisting, as if a trap had been laid for him and for his liberties; and he struck out more vehemently:

"Think what it means, you young men! I ask you especially—" and John held out his hands towards them, scattered through the audience—"What it means to abandon life and the world by donning the uniform of the professional clergyman! Wherever you go, in a train, in a restaurant, upon a street, you are no longer free, but a slave—to forms and to conventions. You must live up, not to your ideal of what a minister is, but to the popular ideal of how a minister should appear. It is a vow to hypocrisy!

"It is a vow also to loneliness. The minister is cut off from the life of other men. No man thereafter feels quite at ease in his presence, but puts on something or puts off something, and the minister never sees or feels the real man except by accident.

"For a few weeks," and John lowered his voice to a more tempered note, "I have been happy to do some service among you; but I was free! As I walked down the street I wore the uniform of business. No man could say: 'There goes a priest; watch him!'

"Listen!" In the silence John himself appeared to be listening to some debate that went on within himself, and when he began to speak once more it was with the chastened utterance of one who takes his hearers into a sacred confidence.

"I have had ambitions, brethren, and I have given them up. I have had a great love and all but lost it. Failures have humbled me. Disappointment and surrenders have taught me some of the true values of life. I have tried to gain things for myself and lost them. When I think of seeking anything for myself again, after my experiences, I feel very weak and can command no resolution; but when I think of seeking happiness for others, for little children in particular, for wives and mothers, for all women, in fact, with their capacity to love and trust; for striving, up-climbing men—yes, and the weak ones too, for I have learned that the flesh is very weak—when I think of seeking the good of humanity at large, I feel immensely strong and immensely determined. For that I am ready to bury my life in the soil of sacrifice, but not professionally!

"I hate sham. I hate professionalism. I am done with part-playing. I will not do it. I cannot be your minister!"

John's last words rang out sharply, and the audience, seeing that the heart of a man with an experience had been shown to them, sat breathless and still expectant.

In the silence, the voice of the District Evangelist was presently audible.

"Brother Hampstead," he was saying quietly, "is a man I don't exactly understand, but I think in his very words of protest he has given us the reasons why he should be a minister, and he has revealed to us why he has gained your confidence. Because of his humility and his sincerity, I feel that I can trust him. You feel that you can."

"But," protested John, with a gesture of desperation, "I am not educated for the ministry."

"You have something more needed here than education," interjected the Dean of the Seminary, still in his lecture-room voice. "Besides, the seminary is but ten miles away, by street car. You may complete the full three years' course at the same time you are making this little church into a big one!"

Something in John's breast leaped at the prospect of a college course, and the idea of making a little church into a big one appealed to his inborn passion for definite achievement; yet with it all came once more the feeling that he was being hopelessly and helplessly entangled.

"But," he struggled, looking with moist, appealing eyes, first at Hamilton and then at Harding, "I have not been ordained, and I have no call!"

"No call?" queried Dean Hamilton, laughing nervously, as was his way of modifying the intensity of the situation. "Your capacity to do is your call."

"Being honest with yourself, do you not believe that you can save this church?" argued Brother Harding.

John felt that he could, but his soul still strained within him, and his eyes roved over the audience, the corners of the room and the very beams in the ceiling, as if seeking a way of escape.

Suddenly a man stood up in the back of the church.

"Will he take a side?" this man demanded excitedly, with hoarse impatience. "What side is he on?"

The very crassness of this partisan creature, so seething with personal feeling that he understood nothing of the young man's agony of soul, lashed the tender sensibilities of Hampstead like a scourge, so that all his nature rose in protest. From a figure of cowering doubt, he suddenly stood forth bold and challenging.

"No!" he thundered. "I will not take a side! The curse of God is upon sides, and every man and every woman who takes a side in His church! I will take the Lord's side. I challenge every one of you who is willing to leave his or her petty personal feeling in this controversy, for to-night and forever, to come out here and stand beside me. I place my life career upon the issue. I will let your coming be my call. If you call me, I will answer. If you do not, God has set me free from any responsibility to you."

The questioning partisan sank down abashed before such prophetic fervor. John stood waiting. No eye looked at any other eye but his. The silence was electric and pregnant, but brief, broken almost immediately by a low, rumbling sound and the rattle of wheels against chairs. The Angel of the Chair, propelling her vehicle herself, was coming to take her place beside John.

She had barely reached the front when the tall form of Elder Burbeck was seen to advance stiffly and offer his hand to Hampstead.

The venerable Elder Lukenbill, goat-whiskered and doddering, leader of the Aleshire faction, hesitated only long enough to gloat a little at this spectacle of his rival, Burbeck, eating humble pie, and then, prodded from behind, arose and careened on weak knees down the aisle.

Others began to follow, till presently it seemed that the whole church was moving; everybody stood up, everybody slipped forward, or tried to. Failing that, they spoke, or laughed, or sobbed, or shook hands with themselves or some one near; then craned on tiptoe to see what was happening down where half the church was massed about the two elders, about the Dean and the Evangelist and John.

Abruptly the tall forms of these men sank from view; then the front ranks of people, crowding around, also began to sink, almost as ripe grain bows before a breeze, until even the people at the back could see that Brother Hampstead was kneeling, with the yellow crest of his hair falling in abandon about his face.

The long, skeleton hand of Elder Lukenbill was sprawled over John's bowed head, overlapped aggressively by the stout, red fingers of Elder Burbeck, while the dapper digits of the Dean of the Seminary capped and clasped the two hands and tangled nervously in the tawny locks themselves.

"With this laying on of hands," the Dean was saying, still in that high lecture-room cackle, although his tone was deeply impressive, "I ordain thee to the ministry of Jesus Christ!"

When, succeeding this, the voice of the District Evangelist had been heard in prayer, there

followed an impressive waiting silence, in which no one seemed to know quite what to do, except to gaze fixedly at the face of John Hampstead, which continued as bloodless and as motionless as chiseled marble; until, bowed in her chair, as if she brooded like a real angel over the kneeling congregation, the rich contralto voice of Mrs. Burbeck began to sing:

"Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee,
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love."

Presently her voice changed to "Nearer My God to Thee", while other voices joined until the whole church was filled with the sound, and when the last note had died, the very air of the little chapel seemed tear-washed and clear.

In this atmosphere John Hampstead arose, and when one hand swept back the yellow mass of hair, a kind of glory appeared upon his brow. Once an actor, once a man of ambition, he was now consecrated to the service of humanity.

But he had not surrendered his love for Bessie Mitchell, and Marien Dounay was still in the world, mounting higher and higher toward the goal she had imperiously set for herself.

CHAPTER XX

A WOMAN WITH A WANT

Five years walked along, and great events took place. The earthquake seized the San Francisco Bay district and shook it as a dog shakes a rat. Fire swept the great city on the peninsula almost out of existence; it made rich men poor, and hard hearts soft—for a few days at least—and by shifting populations and business centers, affected the east side of the Bay almost as much as the west, so that in all that water-circling population there was no business and no society, no man or woman or child even, that was thereafter quite as it or he or she had been.

In this seething ferment of change nothing altered more than the circumstances of John Hampstead. He had buried himself and found himself. He had sought relief in a self-abandoning plunge into obscurity, yet never had a minister so humble gained such burning prominence. The town hung on him. Men who never went to church at all leaned upon him and upon the things they read about him from day to day.

He had gone upon a thousand missions of mercy; he had fought for his lambs like a lion; he had faced calumny; he had dared personal assault. He had triumphed in all his conflicts and stood out before this sprawling, half metropolitan, half-suburban community of half a million people as a man whom it trusted—too much almost.

Under his ministry in these five years, the wretched little chapel had grown into the great All People's Church. To attend All People's was a fad; to belong to it almost a fashion. The newspapers daily made its pastor into a hero, and the moral element in the population looked upon him as its most fearless champion and aggressive leader.

But into this situation and into All People's one morning a woman came walking, with power to shake it more violently than an earthquake could have done.

The choir was just disposing of the anthem. The Reverend John Hampstead sat, but not at ease, in his high pulpit chair, which, somehow, this morning reminded him of the throne chair of Denmark upon its stage in that barn of a theater which at this very instant was only five years—and five miles—distant; the chair from which he used to arise suddenly to receive the rapier thrust of his nephew, Hamlet. This morning a vague uneasiness filled him, as if he were about to receive a real rapier thrust.

The minister's sermon outline was in his hand, but his eye roamed the congregation. It took note of who was there and who was absent; it took note of who came in; but suddenly the eye ceased to rove and started forward in its socket.

Deacon Morris was escorting a lady down the right-center aisle. To distinction of dress and bearing the newcomer added a striking type of beauty. Her figure was tall, combining rounded curves and willowy grace. In the regularity of its smooth chiseling, her profile was purely Greek. The eyes were dark and lustrous, the cheeks had a soft bloom upon them, the lips were ripely

red; and if art had helped to achieve these contrasts with a skin that was satiny smooth and of ivory creaminess, it was an art contributory and not an art subversive.

"More beautiful than ever!" murmured the minister with the emphasis of deep conviction.

The lady accepted a sitting well to the front. Her head was reverently bowed for an interval and then raised, while the black eyes darted one illuminative glance of recognition at the man in the pulpit, a glance that made the minister start again and confess to himself an error by admitting beneath his breath: "No, not more beautiful—more powerful!"

Lengthened scrutiny confirmed this judgment. Soft contours had yielded, though ever so slightly, to lines of strength. There was greater majesty in her bearing. She was less appealing, but more commanding. John reflected that it was rather impossible it should be otherwise. The man or the woman who fights and conquers always sacrifices lines of beauty to those muscle clamps of strength which seem to sleep but ill-concealed upon the face.

And Marien Dounay had conquered! In five years she had mounted to the top. With the memory of her latest Broadway triumphs still ringing, this very day her name would be mentioned in every dramatic column in every Sunday paper in America. To have uttered that name aloud in this congregation would have caused every neck to crane.

Alone conscious of her presence, John found himself counting the cost of her success. Part of that cost he could see tabulated on her face. Another part of it was the grisly and horrible intimation to the loathsome Litschi, which he had overheard on the unforgettable night in the restaurant. He found himself assuming that she had paid this latter price and experienced a feeling of revulsion at recalling how once this woman's mere presence, the glance of an eye, the touch of a hand, the purring tones of her voice, had been sufficient to melt him with unutterable emotions. This morning, gazing at her through that peculiar mist of apprehension, almost of fear, that had been clouding his mind since before her entry, John knew that she was a more dangerous woman now than then; and yet the same glance showed that she was not dangerous to him, for the dark eyes looked at him hungrily, with something strangely like adoration in them, and there was an expression of longing upon the beautiful face.

When he stood up to preach, she followed his every movement and appeared to drink down his utterance thirstily. Skilled now in spiritual diagnosis, the minister of All People's read her swiftly. She had gained—but she had not gained all. Something was still desired, and, he could not help but believe, desired of him. Having coldly driven him from her with a terrible kind of violence, she had come back humbly, almost beseechingly.

So marked was this suggestion of intense longing that the feeling of horror and revulsion which had come to Hampstead with the entry of the actress gave way entirely to an emotion of pity and a desire to help, and he tried earnestly to make his sermon in some degree a message to the woman's heart.

The position of the Reverend John Hampstead in All People's Church and in the community round about was due to no miracle, but had grown naturally enough out of the strong heart of the man and his experiences.

When, for instance, in the early days at the chapel, John missed the Pedersen children from the Sunday school, and found their mother in tears at home because the children had no shoes, and that they had no shoes because Olaf gambled away his weekly wage in "Beaney" Webster's pool room where race-track bets were made, and poker and other gambling games were played, all in defiance of law,—and when he found the police supine and prosecutors indifferent,—the practical minded young divine sent Deacon Mullin—who, to his frequent discomfiture resembled a "tin can" sport more than a church official—into Beaney's to bet upon a horse. When the Deacon's horse won, and Beaney all unsuspecting paid the winnings over in a sealed envelope, the next Sunday night John took the envelope into the pulpit and shook it till it jingled as he told the story which next morning the newspapers printed widely, while the minister himself was swearing out a warrant for the arrest of Beaney.

That was the beginning, but to John's surprise it was not the end. Beaney did not plead guilty meekly. He fought and desperately, for this meddlesome amateur clergyman had lifted the cover on a sneaking underground system of petty gambling, of illicit liquor selling, and of graver violations of the moral laws, which ramified widely. Attacked in one part, all its members rallied to a defence of the whole that was impudent, determined and astonishingly powerful.

Hampstead was unknown, his church small and wretched and despised. His sole weapon was the newspapers who would not endorse him, but who would print what he said and what he did. What he said was not so much, but what John Hampstead did was presently considerable, for a

few public-spirited citizens put money in his hand for detectives and special prosecutors, and he spent more hours that year in police courts than he did in his church.

In the end he won. The lawless element, sore and chastened, acknowledged their defeat, while the forces of good and evil alike recognized thus early the entry into the community of a man whose character and personality were henceforth to be reckoned with.

But while these battlings earned John publicity and high regard, they also won him hate and trouble. The work cost him tremendous expenditure of energy and sleepless nights. It made enemies of men whose friendship he desired. It brought him threats innumerable. A stick of dynamite was found beneath his study window. Yet John's devotion made him careless of personal danger. He trembled for Rose and Dick and Tayna; he trembled for the man who had crept through the shadow of the palms to plant that stick and time that fuse, which mercifully went out; but somehow he did not tremble for himself.

Besides, out of the shadow of danger, there seemed to reach sometimes the flexing muscles of an omnipotent arm. As, for instance, when an arrested gambler, out upon bail, came into his study one night with intent to kill. At first the minister was talking on the telephone, and some chivalric instinct restrained the would-be assassin from shooting his nemesis in the back.

Next John laughed at the preposterous idea of being killed, failing to understand that the threat was earnest or to perceive how much his caller was fired by liquor. Such merriment was unseemly to the man on murder bent; he found himself unable to shoot a bullet into the open mouth of laughter, and fumbled helplessly with his hand behind him and his tongue shamefacedly tied until the minister directed his mind aside with a question about his baby, following quickly with sympathetic talk about the man's wife and mother, until the spirit of vengeance went out of him, and he broke down and cried and went away meekly with a parting handshake from his intended victim.

It was only after the man had gone that John felt strangely weak with fright and bewildered by an odd sense of deliverance.

Yet all these battles were only a part of John's activities; nor did they grow out of a fighting spirit, but out of a sympathetic nature, out of his passion for the hurt and helpless, and his brave pity for the defenceless.

His impulsive boldness, his ready tact, and his disposition to follow an obligation or an opportunity through to the end, no matter where it led, had made him father confessor to men and women of every sort and the unofficial priest of a parish that extended widely on the surface and in the underworld of the life about him.

Naturally, All People's was extremely proud of its pastor, of his broad sympathies and his devoted activities. Impressionable ladies felt that there was something romantic in seeing him stand yonder in the pulpit, so grave and priestly; in seeing him come down at the end of the service, so approachable to all; and in taking his hand, not knowing whether some archcriminal had not wrung it an hour before he entered the pulpit, or whether last night those firm fingers might not have smoothed back the hair from the brow of some dying nameless woman in a place about which nice people could scarcely permit themselves to think.

There was even excitement in attending the church, because one never knew who would be sitting next,—some famous personage or some notorious one,—for Doctor Hampstead won his friends and admirers from the strangest sources imaginable.

As to pulpit eloquence, there was admittedly seldom a flash of it at All People's. By an enormous digestive feat, John had assimilated that seminary course of which the Dean had spoken, boasting that he read his Greek Testament entirely through in the three years, upon the street cars that plied between his home and the seat of theological learning. But this did not make of Hampstead a strong preacher, although the impression that he might be, if he chose, was unescapable. His passion, he declared, was not to preach the gospel but to *do* the gospel. People sat before him spellbound, not by his eloquence, but by a sense of mysterious spiritual forces at work about them. At times, the mere exhalations of the man's sunny personality seemed sufficient to account for all his influence; at others there was that mysterious feeling of the Presence.

But as the membership grew and the sphere of its pastor's influence extended, there began to be less and less of his personality left for expenditure upon that "backbone of the church" which had been there longest and felt it first.

More than once Elder Burbeck took occasion to voice a protest over this. John put these protests aside mildly until one day, when the minister's nerves had been more than usually frazzled by a series of petty annoyances, the Elder blunderingly declared that the church paid the

minister his salary and was entitled to have his services.

"Is that the way you look at it?" asked John sharply. "That you pay me my salary? Then don't ever put another coin in the contribution box. I thought you gave the money to God, and God gave it to me. I do not acknowledge to you or to any member of this church one single obligation except to be true in your or their soul's relation. I owe you neither obedience nor coddling nor back-smoothing."

"But you don't realize," urged the Elder. "These things were well enough when our church was small. But now it is big. It occupies a dignified position in the community, and all this riff-raff that you are running after—"

"Riff-raff!" John exploded. "Jesus gathered his disciples from the riff-raff! His message was to the riff-raff! He said: 'Leave the avenues and boulevards and go unto the riff-raff!' What is any church but riff-raff redeemed? What is any sanctimonious, self-satisfied Pharisee but a soul on the way to make riff-raff of himself again? What gave this church its dignified position in the community? Did you, when you nailed the plank across the door?"

Elder Burbeck flushed redder than ever and turned stiffly on his heel, not only inflamed by the crushing sarcasm of this rebuke, but stolidly accepting it as one more evidence that in his heart this minister of All People's was much more human and much less godlike than many gaping people seemed to think. Both the resentment and the inference the Elder stored up carefully against a day which he felt that he could see advancing, while the minister, too intent upon his work to scan the horizon for a cloud, hurried away upon another of his errands to the riff-raff.

With this fanatic ardor of personal service now highly developed, it was inevitable that the appeal in the eyes of Marien Dounay should act like a challenge upon the chivalrous nature of John Hampstead.

CHAPTER XXI

A CRY OF DISTRESS

At the close of the service, Doctor Hampstead moved freely and affectionately among his people, according to his habit. To the Angel of the Chair, who during all these five years had been his spiritual intimate and practical counselor, until in his regard she stood frankly canonized, went the last hearty handclasp, after which the minister hurried to where the actress still waited in her pew. Save for a dapple-whiskered janitor tactfully busy in the far-off loft of the choir, the two were alone in the large auditorium.

"Miss Dounay," John began in sincere tones, extending his hand cordially, "I congratulate you heartily on the splendid success that you have won."

He felt a sense of real triumph in his heart, that after what had passed between them he was able to greet her like this in all sincerity, although she had helped greatly by receiving him with that odd look of worshipfulness which he had discerned from the distance of the pulpit.

"Thank you, but please do not congratulate me," the actress exclaimed quickly, while a look of pain came undisguised into her eyes, and with a mere shrug of those expressive shoulders she hurled aside all pretense at formal amenities. "Oh, Doctor Hampstead," she began, breathing his name in tones of respect that deepened into reverence, and frankly confessing herself a woman in acute distress by adding impulsively:

"I have gained everything we once talked about, and yet I believe I am the unhappiest woman in the world."

There was almost a sob in her voice as she uttered the words, and the minister looked at her intently, with his face more gravely sympathetic than usual.

"I am trying to revive something," she hurried on, as if there was relief in thus hastily declaring herself, "trying to get back something. You alone can help me. My happiness, my very life, it seems to me, depends upon you. Will you come to see me this afternoon at the Hotel St. Albans, say at four?"

"I should like to," responded the minister frankly, his desire to help her growing rapidly; "but I have a funeral this afternoon."

"Then to-night," the actress urged, "after your sermon is done?"

As if anxious to forestall refusal, she gave him no chance to reply, but continued with some display of her old vivacity of spirit: "We will have a supper, as we did that night you came in after

the play. Julie is still with me, and another maid, and a secretary, and sometimes my 'personal representative.' Oh, I have quite a retinue now! Do say you will come, even though it is an unseemly hour for a ministerial call," she pleaded, and again her eyes were eloquent.

But it was not the hour that made John hesitate. He felt himself immune from charges of indiscretion. He knew that despite his youthful thirty years, he seemed ages older than the oldest of his congregation, a man removed from every possibility of error; one whose simple, open life of day-by-day devotion to the good of all who sought him seemed in itself a sufficient armor-proof against mischance.

He came and went, in the upper and in the underworld, almost as he would; saw whom he would and where he would. Jails, theaters, hotels, questionable side entrances, boulevards and alleys were accustomed to the sight of his comings and goings. If the stalwart figure of the man loomed at midnight in a dance hall on the Barbary Coast of San Francisco or in the darkest alleys of an Oakland water-front saloon, his presence was remarked, but his purpose was never doubted. He was there for the good of some one, to save some girl, to haul back some mother's boy, to fight side by side with some man against his besetting sin, whether it be wine or woman, or the gaming table. Therefore he could go to call on Marien Dounay at ten o'clock at night at the Hotel St. Albans as freely as on a brother minister at noon.

What had made him suddenly withhold his acceptance of the invitation was the entry of something of the old lightness of spirit into her tones for a moment, accompanied by the suggestion of a supper. He knew enough of the whimsical obliquities of Marien Dounay's nature to appreciate that he must meet her socially in order to minister to her spiritually; but he did not propose that the solemn purposes of his call should be made an opportunity for entertainment or personal display.

However, Marien had instantly divined her mistake. "Doctor Hampstead!" she began afresh, and this time her voice was low and her utterance rapid. "My season closed in New York last Saturday night. I was compelled to wait over three days to sign the contract for my London engagement. The moment that was out of the way, I rushed entirely across this country to see you! I arrived this morning. I came here at once. Oh, I must talk to you immediately and disabuse your mind of something—something terrible that I have waited five years to wipe out."

She clasped her hands nervously, and her luminous eyes grew misty, while she seemed in danger of losing her composure entirely, an unheard-of thing for Marien Dounay.

Her imploring looks and the impetuous earnestness of her appeal were already leading John to self-reproach for the sudden hardening of his judgment upon her; but it was the last sentence that decided him. He knew well enough what she meant, and something in him deeper than the minister leaped at it. If she could wipe out that grisly memory, the earliest opportunity was due her, and it would relieve him exactly as if a smirch had been wiped from the brow of womanhood itself. Besides, there had always been to him something puzzling and incomprehensible about that scene in the restaurant, which, as the years went by, was more and more like a horrible dream than an actual experience.

"I will come, Miss Dounay," he assured her gravely.

"Oh, I am so glad!" the woman exclaimed with a little outstretching of her hand, which would have fallen upon John's on the back of the pew, if it had not been raised at the moment in a gesture of negation as he said:

"But please omit the supper. I am coming at your call—eagerly—happily—but not even as an old friend; solely as a minister!"

This speech was so subtly modulated as to make its meaning clear, without the shadow of offense, and Marien's humbly grateful manner of receiving it indicated tacit acknowledgment of the exact nature of the visit.

Nevertheless, the minister found that in thus specifying he had written for himself a prescription larger than he could fill. Between the whiles of his busy afternoon and evening he was conscious of growing feelings of curiosity and personal interest that threatened to engulf the loftier object of his intended call. Old memories would revive themselves; old emotions would surge again. The spirit of adventure and the spice of expectancy thrust themselves into his thought, so that it was with a half-guilty feeling that he found himself at the hour appointed in the hotel corridor outside her room. He was minded to go back, but stood still instead, reproaching himself for cowardice. His very uncertainty gave him a feeling of littleness.

Eternal Loyalty was still and forever to be his guiding principle; and should he not be as true to this actress who had appealed to him, who perhaps was to tell him something that would prove she had a right to appeal to him, as to any other needy one? Should he shrink because of

the irresistible feeling that it was more as a man interested in a woman than as a priest to confess a soul, that he found himself before her door? Should all of his experience go for nothing, and was his character, strengthened by years and chastened by some bitter lessons, still so undependable that he dared not put himself to the test of this woman, even though her mysterious power was so great that she could command a man's love and deserve his hate, yet send him away from her without a hurt and feeling admiration mingled with his horror!

For a man with John Hampstead's chivalrous nature to put a question like this to himself was to answer it in the affirmative. Temptation comes to the minister as to other men, and it had come to John. But had not Marien Dounay herself taught him of what weakness to beware? That flesh is flesh? That juxtaposition is danger? Besides, should not the disastrous consequences which had followed from his contacts with the woman have made him forever immune from the effect of her presence?

John approached and knocked upon the door.

His knock was greeted with a sound like the purr of an expectant kitten, and the knob was turned by Marien herself, with a sudden vigor which indicated that she had bounded instantly to admit him.

Her manner, in most startling contrast to that which she had displayed at the church, was sparkingly vivacious; but her dress was more disconcerting than her manner; in fact, to the minister, it seemed that very same negligee gown whose pleats of shimmering black with their splotches of red, had clung so closely to her form in those never-to-be-forgotten hours in the little apartment on Turk Street in San Francisco. Her hair, too, flowed unconfined as then. The picture called up overwhelming memories, against which the minister in the man struggled valiantly.

"I have not worn it since, until to-night," the woman purred softly, happy as a child over his glance of recognition; but when Hampstead, in uncompromising silence, stood surveying her critically, she asked archly and a bit anxiously, "Are you shocked?"

"Well," he replied a trifle severely, "you must admit that this is not sackcloth and ashes."

"It is my soul, not my body, that is in mourning," Marien urged apologetically, trying the effect of a melting glance, after which, walking half the length of the room she turned again and invited him to lay off his overcoat and be seated. John could not resist the playful calculation of her manner without seeming heartless; and yet he did resist it, standing noncommittally while his eyes sought the circumference of the room inquiringly.

"And look!" went on Marien enthusiastically, for she was trying pitifully by sheer force of personality to recreate the atmosphere of their old relationship in its happiest moments. "See, here is the Roman chair, or at least one like it; and there the divan, piled high with cushions; I am as fond of cushions as ever. You shall sit where you sat; I shall recline where I reclined. We will stage the old scene again."

"Not the old scene," replied the minister, with quiet emphasis, feeling just a little as if he had been trapped.

Still his strength was always sapped on Sunday night; and no doubt in utter weariness, one's power of resistance is somewhat lowered. Besides, Marien was so beautiful and so winning in manner; her arms gleamed so softly in their circle of silk and filmy lace, and there was in the atmosphere of the room an abundance of an indefinable something which was like a rare perfume and yet was not a perfume at all, but that effect of lure and challenge which her mere presence always had upon the senses of this man.

Moreover, it seemed so fitting to see this exquisite creature happy instead of sad that it would have taken a coarser nature than John Hampstead's to break in brutally upon her whimsical happiness of mood. He judged it therefore the mere part of tact to remove his overcoat.

"Julie!" called Marien, and there was a not entirely suppressed note of triumph in her tone.

The little French maid appeared with suspicious promptness from behind swinging portières to receive the coat and to give the big man, whom she had always liked, shy welcome upon her own account.

True to her nature, Miss Dounay's every movement was theatrical. She stood complacently by until the maid had done her service and withdrawn. Then pointing to the Roman chair, she said to Hampstead:

"Sit there and wait. I have something to show you, something beautiful—wonderful—overwhelming almost!"

Hesitating only long enough to see that the minister, although a bit suspicious, complied politely with her request, Marien, with dramatic directness, and humming the while a teasing

little tune, followed Julie out through the portières, but in passing swung the curtains wide as an invitation to her caller's eyes to pursue her to where she stopped before a chiffonier which was turned obliquely across the corner of the large inner room.

Marien's shoulder was toward John, but the mirror beyond framed her face exquisitely, with its hood of flowing hair and the expansive whiteness of her bosom to the corsage, while the long dark lashes painted a feathery shadow upon her cheeks as her eyes looked downward to something before her on the chiffonier. For a moment she stood motionless, as if charmed by the sight on which their glance rested. Then, using both hands, she lifted the object, and instantly the mirror flashed to the watching man the picture of a swaying rope of diamonds. They seemed to him an aurora-borealis of jewels, sparkling more brilliantly than the light of Marien's eyes, as she held them before her face for an instant, and then, with a graceful movement which magnified the beauty of her rounded arms and the smoothly-chiseled column of her throat, threw back the close-lying strands of her hair to fasten the chain behind her neck.

For another second the mirror showed her patting her bosom complacently, as if her white fingers were loving the diamonds into the form of a perfect crescent, which, presently attained, she surveyed with evident satisfaction. Turning, she advanced toward her guest with hands at first uplifted and then clasped before her in an ecstasy of delight, while she laughed musically, like a child intoxicated by the joy of some long anticipated pleasure.

Upon a man whose love of beauty was as great as John Hampstead's, the effect was shrewdly calculated and the result all that heaven had intended.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed, leaping up to meet her as she advanced. "Splendid! Magnificent!"

Each adjective was more emphatically uttered than the last.

Satisfied beyond measure with the effect of her diversion, the calculating woman drew close with a complete return of all her old assurance and stood like a radiant statue, a happy flush heightening on her cheeks, while the minister, entirely unabashed, feasted his eyes frankly on the beauty of the jewels and the snowy softness of their setting. When, after a moment, Marien made use of his hand as a support on which to pivot gracefully about and let herself down with dainty elegance into the midst of her throne of cushions, Hampstead stood, a little lost, gazing downward at the vision as though spellbound by its loveliness.

For a moment the actress was supremely confident. Breathing softly, her dark eyes swimming like pools of liquid light, into which her long lashes cast a fringe of foliate shadows, she contemplated John Hampstead, tall, strong, clean, healthful looking, his yellow hair, his high-arched viking brows, the look of kindness and the cast of nobility into which the years had moulded his features, until it seemed to her that she must spring up and drag him down to her lair of cushions like a prize.

But she made no impulsive move. Instead, she breathed softly: "Doctor Hampstead, will you touch that button, please?"

John complied courteously, but mechanically, as if charmed. The more brilliant lights in the room were instantly extinguished. What remained flowed from the shrouding red silk of the table lamp so softly that while all objects in the room remained clearly distinguishable even to their detail, there was not a garish beam anywhere.

It was a fitting atmosphere for confession, and even the diamonds in this smothered light seemed suddenly to grow communicative, to multiply their luster, and to break more readily into the prismatic elements of color.

"More and more beautiful," Hampstead murmured, passing a hand across his brow.

"Sit down!" Marien breathed softly, motioning toward the Roman chair.

Hampstead was surprised to find how near the divan the inanimate chair appeared to have removed itself. Had he pushed it absently with his leg, as he made place for her, or had she, or had the thing itself—insensate wood and leather and plush—felt, too, the irresistible thrall of this magnetic, beauty-dowered creature who snuggled amid these silken panniers?

"I do not know diamonds very well," the minister confessed, sinking down into the chair.

"Look at them," Marien said, with a delightful note of intimacy in her voice, at the same time lowering her chin close, in order to survey the jewels as they lay upon her breast.

In John's eyes, this downcast glance gave Marien an expression that was Madonna-like and holy, and this again deepened his feeling of pity for her heartaches, and his anxiety to help her in what it was her whim to mask from him for the moment with all this childish play of interest in her jewels and in her own beauty. But it also disposed him to humor her the more, removing all sense of restraint when he followed the glance of her eye to where the more brilliant stones of the pendant lay in the snowy vale of her bosom, or when, leaning closer still, he could see that

their intermittent flashing facets were responding to the pulsing of her heart.

"And what is the amber stone?" he asked innocently.

"Amber!" Marien laughed. "It is a canary diamond, the finest stone of all. It alone cost four thousand dollars."

"Four thousand dollars!" The minister drew in his breath slowly. "It had not occurred to me that there were such jewels outside of royal crowns and detective stories," he stammered. "Four thousand dollars! What did the whole necklace cost?"

"Twenty-two," the actress answered almost boastfully, again bending to survey the blazing inverted arch of jewels.

"Thousand?" The minister's inflection expressed his incredulousness.

"Thousand," Marien iterated with a complacent drop of the voice, and then, while the fingers of one hand toyed with the pendant, went on: "I have a perfect passion for diamonds! That canary stone has temperament, life almost. Perhaps it is a whim of mine, but it seems to me that it reflects my moods. When I am downcast, it is dull and lusterless; when I am happy, it flashes brilliantly, like a blazing sun.

"It is influenced by those whom I am with. It never burned so brilliantly as now. Your presence has an effect upon it. Cup your fingers and hold it for a moment, and see, after an interval, if its luster does not change."

Astonished at the feeling of easy intimacy which had been established between them so completely that he saw no reason at all why he should refuse, Hampstead did as he was bidden, although to hold the brilliant stone it was necessary for the heads of the two to be drawn very close, so that the tawny, wavy, loose-lying locks of the minister and the dark glistening mass of the woman's hair were all but intertwined, while the four eyes converged upon the diamond, and the two bodies were breathless and poised with watching.

Presently the man felt his vision swimming. He saw no single jewel, but a myriad of lights. He ceased to feel the gem in his hollowed fingers, and was conscious instead of a soft, magnetic glow upon the under side of his hand.

In the same instant, he became aware that Marien's eyes no longer watched the stone, but were bent upon his face, and he felt a breath upon his cheek as her lips parted, and she murmured softly:

"John."

This word and touch together gave instant warning to the Reverend Doctor Hampstead of the spell under which he was passing,—a spell mixed in equal parts from the responsiveness of his own nature to all beauty of form, animate or inanimate, and from the subtle sympathy which the rich, seductive personality of Marien Dounay had swiftly conjured. The shock of this discovery was entirely sufficient to break the potency of the charm.

"It did seem to change, I thought," the minister said casually, at the same time slipping his hand gently from beneath the jewel.

By the slightly altered tone in his speech and the easy resumption of his pose in the chair, Marien perceived that the minister and his purpose was again uppermost in her caller.

As for John, slightly irritated with himself, and yet feeling it still the part of tact to show no irritation with Marien, he guided the situation safely past its moment of restraint.

"You said there was something you wished to tell me," he reminded her gently; then added gravely: "That is why I came to-night. I was to be your father-confessor."

The considerateness of Hampstead's tone and manner was as impressive as it was compelling. Marien's face became instantly sober, and she fidgeted for a time in silence as if it were increasingly difficult to broach the subject, but finally she labored out:

"You misunderstood me horribly once—horribly!"

With this much communicated, she stopped as abruptly as she had begun, while a frightened look invaded her liquid eyes.

"Misunderstood you," Hampstead iterated gently, but with firmness, "I understood you so well that except through an impersonal desire to be helpful, I should never have come here."

The very dignity and measured self-restraint of the minister's utterance robbed the woman of her usual admirable self-mastery. She cowered with timid face amid her pillows, as her mind leaped back to that night in the restaurant with Litschi, and the terrible lengths to which she had gone to shock this same big, dynamic, ardent Hampstead from his pursuit of her.

As if it were compromising himself to sit silent while he read her thoughts and heard again in his own ears that terrible speech, the minister went on to say sternly:

"You know that I shrank then, as from a loathsome thing, at the price you were willing to pay

for your success. I must forewarn you that the memory does not seem less abhorrent now than the fact did then."

When Hampstead bit out these sentences with a fire of moral intensity burning in his eyes, the quivering figure upon the cushions shuddered and shrank.

"Oh, John!" a broken voice pleaded. "Did I ever, ever say those hateful words? Can you not conceive that they were false? That they were spoken with intent to deceive you, to drive you from me, to leave me free to make my way alone, unhampered, as I knew I must?"

The minister, his face still white and stern, his gray eyes beaming straight through widening lids, declared hotly: "No! I cannot conceive that a good woman would voluntarily smirch herself like that in the eyes of a man who loved her for any other single purpose than the one which she confessed, an ambition that was inordinate and—immoral. That thought was in your speech, and by Heaven"—he shook an accusing finger at her—"I believe it was in your purpose!"

The woman cowered for a moment longer before Hampstead's gaze, then a single dry sob broke from her, while one hand covered her eyes, and the other stretched gropingly to him, across the pillows.

"I had the purpose," she admitted haltingly. "I confess it. Is it not pitiful?" and the lily hand which had felt its way so pleadingly across the embroidered cushions opened and closed its fingers on nothing, with a movement that was convulsive and appealing beyond words.

"Pitiful," the minister groaned. "My God, it is tragic!"

"Yes," she went on presently, in a calmer voice that was more resigned and sadly reminiscent: "I purposed it."

And there she stopped. Her tone was as dry as ashes. This man had surprised her by revealing a startling amount of moral force, which had quickly and easily broken down her coolly conceived purpose to make him believe that his sense of hearing had played him false that night in the restaurant. She had, however, confessed only to what she knew he knew; but the roused conscience of the preacher of righteousness detected this and was not to be evaded. He proposed to confront this woman with her sin.

"You confess only to the purpose?" John demanded accusingly.

The glance of the woman fell before his blazing eye. She had meant to answer boldly, triumphantly; but the sudden fear that she might not be believed made her a coward, and forced the realization that she must not attempt to deceive this man in anything.

"Sometimes one says more than one is able to perform," she whispered weakly. "Sometimes a woman names a price, and does not know what the price means, and when the time of settlement comes, will not pay it—cannot pay it—because there is something in her deeper, more overruling than her own conscious will, something that refuses to be betrayed!" The last words were torn out of her throat with desperate emphasis.

John sat watching the woman critically, with an all but unfriendly eye, while she struggled over this utterance, yet the very manner of it compelled him to believe in her absolute sincerity at the moment. Her revelation was truthful, no doubt, but just what was she revealing? The substance was so contrary to his presumption that his comprehension was slow.

"You mean," he began doubtfully—

Marien took instant courage in his doubt; he was almost convinced.

"I mean," she exclaimed, leaping up with an expansive gesture of her arms, while the jewels, like her eyes, blazed with the intensity of her emotion: "*I mean that I never paid the price!*" Her voice broke into a wild crescendo of laughter that was half delirious in its mingled triumph and joy. Hampstead himself arose involuntarily and stood with a look first of amazement, and then almost of anger, as he suddenly seized her wrists, holding them close in his powerful grasp, while he demanded in tones hoarse with a pleading that was in contrast to his manner:

"Marien, are you telling me the truth?"

The woman faced his searching gaze doubtfully for an instant; then seeing that the man was actually anxious to believe her, she swayed toward him, weakened by relief and joy, as she cried impulsively:

"It is the truth! It is the truth! Oh, God knows it is the truth!"

The fierceness of the minister's grip upon her wrists instantly relaxed, and he lowered her gently to the cushions, where she sat overcome by her emotions while he stood gazing at her as on one brought back from the dead, expressions of wonder and thanksgiving mingled upon his face.

But presently a reminiscent look came into Marien's eyes, and she began to speak rapidly, as if eager to confirm her vindication by the summary of her experiences.

"It was hard, very hard," she began. "It commenced in that first careless, ignorant year I told you about. I was fighting it all the time; fighting it when you were with me. That was really why I broke out of Mowrey's Company. Men—such beasts of men!—proffered their help continually, but not upon terms that I could accept. It seemed, eventually, that I must surrender. I taught myself to think that some day, perhaps when I stood at last upon the very threshold—" she paused and looked over her shoulder at some unseen terror. "But the time never came. I burst through the barriers ahead of my pursuing fears."

The actress ceased to speak and sat breathing quickly, as if from the effects of an exhausting chase.

Hampstead turned and walked to the window, where, throwing up the sash, he stood filling his lungs deeply with delicious, refreshing draughts of the outside air. Coming back, he halted before her to say in tones of earnest conviction:

"Marien"—he had called her Marien!—"I feel as if the burden of years had been removed. Few things have ever lain upon my heart with a more oppressive sense of the awful than this vision of you, so beautiful and so possessed of genius, consecrating yourself with such noble devotion to a lofty, artistic aim, and yet prepared to—to—" His words faded to a horrified whisper, and finding himself unable to conclude the sentence, he reached down and took her hand in both of his, shaking it emotionally while he was able presently to say reverently and with unctious:

"God has preserved you, Marien. You owe Him everything."

"It was you who preserved me," she amended, with jealous emphasis and that look again of hungry devotion which he had seen first in the church. "It is you to whom I owe everything."

"I preserved you?" Hampstead asked, now completely mystified, as he remembered with what scornful words and looks she had whipped him from her presence. "I do not understand. We pass from mystery to mystery. Is it that which you said you must tell me?"

"No. I have told you what I wanted to tell you."

The woman was again entirely at her ease, shrugging her beautiful shoulders and yawning lazily,—a carefully-staged and cat-like yawn, in which she appeared for an instant to show sharp teeth and claws, and then as suddenly to bury them in velvet.

The minister stood gazing at her doubtfully.

CHAPTER XXII

PURSUIT BEGINS

Both recognized that the time had come to close the interview, and each was extremely pleased with its result. Marien had demonstrated to her complete satisfaction that this minister was still a man; that his flesh was wax and would therefore melt. She believed that to-night she had seen it soften.

As for John: He believed that this evening had witnessed a triumph for his tact and his moral force. His sympathy was wholly with the woman. Convinced afresh that there was something sublime in her character, he determined to give her every opportunity to reveal herself to him, and to spare no effort upon his own account to redeem her life from that ingrowing selfishness which he felt sure was making her unhappy now and might ultimately rob her of all joy in its most splendid achievements.

"I shall save three o'clock to-morrow for you," Miss Dounay proposed, as if reading the minister's purpose in his eye.

But John Hampstead was a man of many duties, whose time was not easy to command.

"At three," he objected, "I am to address a mother's meeting.

"At four then," Marien suggested, with an engaging smile.

"At four I have to go with a sad-hearted man to see his son in the county jail," John explained apologetically, as he scanned his date book.

"At five!" persisted Marien, the smile giving way before a shadow of impatience.

John laughed.

"It must seem funny to you," he declared, "but I have an engagement at five-thirty which makes it impossible to be here at five. The engagement itself would seem funnier still; but to me it is not funny—only one of the tragedies into which my life is continually drawn. At that hour I am to visit a poor woman who lives on a house boat on the canal. Monday is her husband's pay

day, and he invariably reaches home on that night inflamed with liquor, and abuses the woman outrageously. I have promised to be with her when he comes in. I may wait an hour, and I may wait half the night."

"Oh," gasped Marien, with a note of apprehension. "And suppose he turns his violence on you?"

"Why, then I shall defend myself," John answered, good-humoredly, "but without hurting Olaf."

"I am likely to spend the night on that canal boat," he added, "and in the morning Olaf will be ashamed and perhaps penitent. He may thank me and ask me to meet him at the factory gate next Monday night and walk home with him to make sure that his pay envelope gets safely past the door of intervening saloons."

"But why so much concern about unimportant people like that?" questioned Marien, her eyes big with curiosity and wonder.

"Any person in need is important to me," confessed John modestly.

"But how can you spare the time from the regular work of the church?"

"That is my regular work."

Marien paused a moment as if baffled.

"But—but I thought a minister's work was to preach—so eloquently that people will not get drunk; to pray, so earnestly that God will make men strong enough to resist temptation."

"But suppose," smiled John, "that I am God's answer to prayer, his means of helping Olaf to resist temptation. That is the mission of my church, at least that is my ideal for it; not a group of heaven-bound joy-riders, but a life-saving crew. There are twenty men in my church who would meet Olaf at a word from me and walk home with him every night till he felt able to get by the swinging doors upon his own will."

Marien's eyes were shining with a new light.

"That is practical religion," she declared.

"Cut out the modifier," amended John. "That *is* religion! There are," he went on, "even some in my congregation who would take my watch upon the canal boat; but I prefer to go myself because—"

"Because," Marien broke in suddenly, "because it is dangerous." Her glance was full of a new admiration for the quiet-speaking man before her, in whose eyes burned that light of almost fanatical ardor which she and others had marked before.

"More because it is a delicate responsibility," the minister amended once more. "Tact that comes with experience is essential, as well as strength."

"And do you do many things like that?" Marien asked, deeply impressed.

"Each day is like a quilt of crazy patchwork," John laughed, and then added earnestly: "You would hardly believe the insight I get into lives of every sort and at every stage of human experience, divorces, quarrels, feuds, hatreds, crimes, loves, collapses of health or character or finance—crises of one sort or another, that make people lean heavily upon a man who is disinterestedly and sympathetically helpful."

"And your reward for all this busyboding?" the actress finally asked, at the same time forcing a laugh, as if trying to make light of what had compelled her to profound thought.

"A sufficient reward," answered John happily, "is the grateful regard in which hundreds, and I think I may even say thousands, of people throughout the city hold me: this, and the ever-widening doors of opportunity are my reward. These things could lift poorer clay than mine and temper it like steel. The people lean upon me. I could never fail them, and they could never fail me."

The exalted confidence of the man, as he uttered these last words, which were yet without egotism, suggested the tapping of vast reservoirs of spiritual force, and as before, this awed Marien a little; but it also aroused a petty note in her nature, filling her with a jealousy like that she had experienced in the church when she saw John surrounded by all those people who seemed to take possession of him so absolutely and with such disgusting self-assurance.

Manoeuvring her features into something like a pout, she asked mockingly:

"And since you would not leave your mother's meeting and your jail-bird and your wife-beater for me, is there any time at all when an all-seeing Providence would send you again to the side of a lonely woman?"

The minister smiled at the irony, while scanning once more the pages of his little date-book. "To look in after prayer meeting about nine-thirty on Wednesday night would be my next opportunity, I should say," he reported presently.

"Wednesday!" complained Marien. "It is three eternities away. However," and her voice grew crisp with decision, "Wednesday night it shall be. In the meantime, do you speak anywhere? I shall attend the mother's meeting, if you will tell me where it is. I shall even come to prayer meeting; and," she concluded vivaciously; "you will be borne away by me triumphantly in my new French car, which was sent out here weeks and weeks ago to be tuned up and ready for my coming."

On Wednesday night Miss Dounay made good her word. When the little prayer-meeting audience emerged from the chapel room of All People's, it gazed wonderingly at a huge black shape on wheels that rested at the curb with two giant, fiery eyes staring into the night.

The old sexton, looking down from the open doorway, saw his pastor shut into this luxurious equipage with two strange women, for Marien was properly accompanied by Julie, and nodded his head with emphatic approval.

"Some errand of mercy," he mumbled with fervency. "Brother Hampstead is the most helpful man in the world."

Nor was this the last appearance of Marien Dounay's shining motor-car before the door of All People's. It was seen also in front of the palm-surrounded cottage on the bay front, where John Hampstead lived with his sister, Rose, and the children, and enjoyed, at times, some brief seclusion from his busy, pottering life of general helpfulness.

Once the car even stopped before the home of the Angel of the Chair, perhaps because Hampstead had told Marien casually that of all women Mrs. Burbeck had alone been consistently able to understand him, and the actress wished to learn her secret. But the Angel of the Chair, while quite unabashed by the glamour of the actress-presence, nevertheless refused entirely to be drawn into talk about Brother Hampstead, who was usually the most enthusiastic subject of her conversation. Instead she spent most of the time searching the depths of Miss Dounay's baffling eyes with a look from her own luminous orbs, half-apprehensive and half-appealing, that made the caller exceedingly uncomfortable; so that Marien would have accounted the visit fruitless and even unpleasant, if she had not, while there, chanced to meet the young man known to fortune and the social registers as Rollo Charles Burbeck.

Rollo was the darling son of the Angel and the pride of the Elder's heart. Tall, blond, handsome, and twenty-eight, endowed with his mother's charm of manner and a certain mixture of the coarse practicality and instinct for leadership which his father possessed, the young man had come to look upon himself as a sort of favorite of the fickle goddess for whom nothing could be expected to fall out otherwise than well. Without money and without prestige, in fact, without much real ability, and more because as a figure of a youth he was good to look upon and possessed of smooth amiability, Rollie, as his friends and his doting mother called him, had risen through the lower rounds of the Amalgamated National to be one of its assistant cashiers and a sort of social handy-man to the president, very much in the sense that this astute executive had political handy-men and business handy-men in the capacity of directors, vice-presidents, and even minor official positions in his bank.

But there were, nevertheless, some grains of sand in the bearings of Rollo's spinning chariot wheels.

In his capacity as an Ambassador to the Courts of Society, he had the privilege of leaving the bank quite early in the afternoon, when his presence at some daylight function might give pleasure to a hostess whose wealth or influence made her favor of advantage to the Amalgamated National. He might sometimes place himself and a motor-car at the disposal of a distinguished visitor from outside the city, might dine this visitor and wine him, might roll him far up the Piedmont Heights, and spread before his eye that wonderful picture of commercial and industrial life below, clasped on all sides by the blue breast and the silvery, horn-like arms of the Bay of San Francisco.

All these things, of course, involved expenditures of money as well as time. The bills for such expenditures Rollo might take to the president of the bank, who wrote upon them with his fat hand and a gold pencil, "O.K.—J.M." after which they were paid and charged to a certain account in the bank entitled: "Miscellaneous." This, not unnaturally, got Rollie, in the course of a couple of years, into luxurious habits. After eating a seven-dollar dinner with the financial man of a Chicago firm of bond dealers, it was not the easiest thing in the world to content himself the next day with the fifty-cent luncheon which his own salary permitted. Furthermore, Rollo, because of his standing at the bank and his social gifts, was drawn into clubs, played at golf, or dawdled in lunches, yachts, or automobiles with young men of idle mind who were able to toss out money like confetti. It was inevitable that circumstances should arise under which Rollo also had to toss,

or look to himself like the contemptible thing called "piker." Consequently, he frequently tossed more than he could afford, and eventually more than he had.

To meet this drain upon resources the debonair youth did not possess, Rollie resorted to undue fattening of his expense accounts, but, when the amounts became too large to be safely concealed by this means from the scrutiny of J.M., he had dangerous recourse to misuse of checks upon a certain trust fund of which he was the custodian. He did this reluctantly, it must be understood, and was always appalled by the increasing size of the deficit he was making. He knew too that some day there must come a reckoning, but against that inevitable day several hopes were cherished.

One was that old J.M., brooding genius of the Amalgamated National, might become appreciative and double Rollie's salary. Yet the heart of J.M. was traditionally so hard that this hope was comparatively feeble. In fact, Rollie would have confessed himself that the lottery ticket which he bought every week, and whereby he stood to win fifteen thousand dollars, was a more solid one. Besides this, hope had other resources. There were, for instance, the "ponies" which part of the year were galloping at Emeryville, only a few miles away, and there were other race tracks throughout the country, and pool rooms conveniently at hand. While Rollie was too timid to lose any great sum at these, nevertheless they proved a constant drain, and the only real asset of his almost daily venturing was the doubtful one of the friendship of "Spider" Welsh, the bookmaker.

Rollie's first test of this friendship was made necessary by the receipt of a letter notifying him that the executors of the estate which included the trust fund he had been looting would call the next day at eleven for a formal examination of the account. Rollie at the moment was more than fifteen hundred dollars short, and getting shorter. That night he went furtively through an alley to the back room of the bookmaker.

"Let me have seventeen hundred, Spider, for three days, and I'll give you my note for two thousand," he whispered nervously.

"What security?" asked the Spider, craft and money-lust swimming in his small, greenish-yellow eye.

"My signature's enough," said Rollie, bluffing weakly.

"Nothin' doin'," quoth the Spider decisively.

Cold sweat broke out on Rollie's brow faster than he could wipe it off.

"I'll make it twenty-five hundred," the young man said hoarsely.

Spider looked interested. He leaned across the table, his darting, peculiar glance shifting searchingly from first one of Rollie's eyes to the other, his form half crouching, his whole body alert, cruelty depicted on his face and suggesting that his nickname was no accident but a sure bit of underworld characterization.

"Make it three thousand, and I'll lay the money in your hand," said the Spider coldly.

Rollie's case was desperate. He drew a blank note from his pocket, filled it, and signed it; then passed it across the table. But with the Spider's seventeen hundred deep in his trousers pockets, the feeling that he had been grossly taken advantage of seemed to demand of Rollie that his manhood should assert itself.

"Spider, you are a thief!" he proclaimed truculently.

"I guess you must be one yourself, or you wouldn't want seventeen hundred in such a hell of a hurry," was Spider's cool rejoinder, as he practically shoved Rollie out of his back door.

Now this retort of Spider's was quite a shock to Rollie; but there are shocks and shocks. Moreover, when the executors upon their scheduled hour came to Rollo Charles Burbeck, trustee, and found his accounts and cash balancing to a cent, which was exactly as they expected to find them, why this in itself was some compensation for taking the back-talk even of a bookmaker.

But the next day Spider Welsh's roll was the fatter by three thousand dollars, and the trust account was short the same amount.

Thereafter, and despite good resolutions, the size of the defalcation began immediately to grow again, although Rollo, if he suffered much anxiety on that account, concealed it admirably. He knew that under the system he was safe for the present, and outwardly he moulted no single feather, but wore his well tailored clothes with the same sleek distinction, and laughed, chatted, and danced his way farther and farther into the good graces of clambering society, partly sustained by the hope that even though lotteries and horse races failed him, and the "Old Man's" heart proved adamant, some rich woman's tender fancy might fasten itself upon him, and a wealthy marriage become the savior of his imperiled fortunes.

It was while still in this state of being, but with that semi-annual turning over of dead papers again only a few weeks distant, Rollo was greatly amazed to blunder into the presence of Marien Dounay in his mother's sun-room at four o'clock one afternoon, when chance had sent him home to don a yachting costume. A little out of touch with things at All People's, the young man's surprise at finding Miss Dounay tête-à-tête with his own mother was the greater by the fact that he knew a score of ambitious matrons who were at the very time pulling every string within their reach to get the actress on exhibition as one of their social possessions.

Because young Burbeck's interest in women was by the nature of his association with them largely mercenary, and just now peculiarly so on account of his own haunting embarrassment, he was rather impervious to the physical charms of Miss Dounay herself. He only saw something brilliant, dazzling, convertible, and exerted himself to impress her favorably, postponing the departure upon his yachting trip dangerously it would seem, had not the two got on so well together that the actress offered to take him in her car to shorten his tardiness at the yacht pier.

After this, acquaintance between the two young people ripened swiftly. Because John Hampstead was so busy, Marien had an abundance of idle time upon her hands. Agitated continually by a cat-like restlessness, seeking a satiety she was unable to find, the actress had no objections to spending a great deal of this idle time upon Rollo. He rode with her in that swift-scudding, smooth-spinning foreign car. She sailed with him upon the bay in a tiny cruising sloop that courtesy dubbed a yacht. More than once she entertained Rollie with one of these delightful Bohemian suppers served in her hotel suite, sometimes with other guests and sometimes flatteringly alone.

Rollie enjoyed all of this, but without succumbing seriously. His spread of canvas was too small, he carried too much of the lead of deep anxiety upon his centerboard to keel far over under the breeze of her stiffest blandishments; but all the while he held her acquaintance as a treasured asset, introducing her to about-the-Bay society with such calculating discrimination as to put under lasting obligations to himself not only Mrs. von Studdeford, his friend and patron, but certain other carefully chosen mistresses of money.

As for Marien, her triumphs were still too recent, her vanity was still too childish, not to extract considerable enjoyment from being Exhibit "A" at the most important social gatherings the community offered; but her complacency was at all times modified by moods and caprices. She would disappoint Rollie's society friends for the most unsubstantial reasons and appeared to think her own whimsical change of purpose an entirely sufficient explanation. Sometimes she did not even bother about an explanation, and her manner was haughty in the extreme.

Her most vexatious trick of the kind was to disappear one night five minutes before she was to have gone with Rollie to be guest of honor at a dinner given by Mrs. Ellsworth Harrington. The hostess raged inconsolably, taking her revenge on Rollie in words and looks which, in her quarter, proclaimed thumbs down for long upon that unfortunate, adventuring youth.

"Take me about nine hundred and ninety-nine years to square myself with that double-chinned queen," muttered Rollie, standing at eleven o'clock of the same night upon the corner opposite the Hotel St. Albans and looking up inquisitively at the suite of Miss Dounay, which was on the floor immediately beneath the roof.

The young man's hat was pushed back so that his forehead seemed almost high and, in addition to its seeming, the brow wore a disconsolate frown.

"Looks as if I'd kind of lost my rabbit's foot," he murmured, relaxing into a vernacular that neither Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. von Studdeford, nor other ladies of their class would have deemed it possible to flow from the irreproachable lips of Rollo Charles Burbeck. Yet his friends should have been very indulgent with Rollie to-night! The world had grown suddenly hard for him. The executors were due again to-morrow; and his deficit had passed four thousand dollars.

So desperate was his plight that for an hour that afternoon Rollie had actually thought of throwing himself upon the mercy of Mrs. Ellsworth Harrington, who had hundreds of thousands in her own right, and who might have saved him with a scratch of the pen. Her heart had been really soft toward Rollie, too, but Marien's caprice to-night had spoiled all chance of that. Nothing remained but the Spider. Rollie had an appointment with him in fifteen minutes.

But in the meantime he indulged a somber, irritated curiosity concerning Miss Dounay. Since staring upward at her windows brought no satisfaction he had recourse to the telephone booth in the hotel lobby, and got the information that Miss Dounay was out but had left word that if Mr. Burbeck called he was to be told he was expected at ten-thirty and there would be other guests.

That meant supper, and a lively little time. No doubt the actress would try to make amends. Well, Rollie would most surely let her. He had no intention of quarreling with an asset, even

though occasionally it turned itself into a liability. But it was now past ten-thirty, ten forty-seven, to be exact, and his engagement with the Spider was at eleven. However, since his hostess was still out, and therefore would be late at her own party, his prospective tardiness gave the young man no concern.

But, on leaving the telephone booth and advancing through the wide lobby of the hotel, young Burbeck was surprised to see Miss Dounay's car driven up to the curb. There she was, the beautiful devil! Where could she have been? Yet, since Rollie's curiosity and his wish for an explanation of her conduct were nothing like so great as his desire to avoid meeting her until this business with the Spider was off his mind, he executed an oblique movement in the direction of the side exit; but not until a shoulder-wise glance had revealed to him the stalwart form of the Reverend John Hampstead emerging first from the Dounay limousine.

"The preacher!" he muttered in disgusted tones, "I thought so. She's nuts on him; or he is on her, or something. Say!" and the young man came to an abrupt stop, while his eyes opened widely, and his nostrils sniffed the air as if he scented scandal. "I wonder if she tried the same line of stuff on the parson, and he's falling for it? It certainly would be tough on mother if anything went wrong with her sky pilot."

However, Rollie's own exigencies were too great for him to forget them long, even in contemplating the prospective downfall of a popular idol, and he made his way to his engagement.

Rollie was a long time with Spider. Part of this delay was due to the fact that the Spider was broke. He did not have forty-two hundred dollars, nor any appreciable portion thereof. Another part of the delay was due to the fact that Spider took some time in elaborating a plan to put both Rollie and himself in possession of abundant funds. The plan was grasped upon quickly, but, being a detestable coward, Rollie halted long before undertaking an enterprise that required the display of nerve and daring under circumstances where failure meant instant ruin.

However, there was at least a gambler's chance, while with the executors to-morrow there was no chance. Inevitably, therefore, the young man, white of face, with a lump in his throat and a flutter in his breast, gripped with his cold, nerveless hand the avaricious palm of Spider, and the bargain was made. Even then, however, there was a stage wait while an emissary of the Spider's went on a dive-scouring tour that in twenty minutes turned up a short-haired, scar-nosed shadow of a man who answered to the name of the "Red Lizard", a designation which the fiery hue of his skin and the slimy manner of the creature amply justified.

Once out of Spider's place, Rollie lingered in the alley long enough to screw his scant courage to the place where it would stick for a few hours at least; and at precisely half-past eleven, looking his handsome, debonair self, his open overcoat revealing him still in evening dress, and with his silk hat self-confidently a-tilt, he sauntered nonchalantly through the lobby of the Hotel St. Albans to an elevator which bore him skyward.

The pride of the Elder and the son of the Angel, the social ambassador of the Amalgamated National, was prepared once more to do his duty by his fortune.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAPRICIOUS WOMAN

With more than a month of odd hours invested upon Marien Dounay, the Reverend John Hampstead had reluctantly made up his mind that failure must be written over his efforts in her behalf.

She had never told him the secret want which was making her unhappy. Her manner and her mood varied from flights of ecstasy, bordering on intoxication of spirit, to depths of depression which suggested that the gifted woman was suffering from some sort of mania. She was always eager to see him, always clamoring for more of his time, and yet after the first week or so he never left her presence without being made to feel that her hours with him had been a disappointment.

To tell the truth, he had himself been greatly disappointed in her. She appeared to him altogether frivolous, altogether worldly. He was completely convinced that she had not only toyed with him years ago, but was toying with him now, although of course, in an entirely different way.

For five days he had not seen her, but hating to give up entirely, and finding himself one evening in the vicinity of the Hotel St. Albans, he ventured to run in upon her for a moment. She

was decked as if for an evening party in a dress of gold and spangles, as conspicuous for an excess of materials in the train as for an utter absence of them about the arms and shoulders, which, on this occasion, even the blaze of diamonds did not redeem from a look of nakedness to the eyes of the minister,—a mental reaction which any student of psychology will recognize as ample evidence that John Hampstead, man, had passed entirely beyond the power of Marien Dounay, woman.

Miss Dounay received her caller with that low purr of surprise and gladness which was characteristic, and instantly proposed that they go out for a ride on the foothill boulevard, and a dinner at the Three Points Inn.

While the minister had not planned to give her an evening, this was one of the rare occasions when he had leisure time at his disposal, and since he had resolved to make one last effort to help the woman, he decided to accept the invitation.

The evening, however, was not a success. The dinner was good, the roads were smooth, the night air was balmy and full of a thousand perfumes from field and garden; but Miss Dounay's mood, at first merry, sagged lower and lower into a kind of sullen despair, in which she reproached the minister bitterly for his failure to understand her.

François, the chauffeur, had, by command of his mistress, stopped the car on the curve of the hill, at a point where the bright moon made faces as clear as day, and, having climbed down as if to look the car over, they heard his boot heels grow fainter and fainter on the graveled road as he tactfully ambled off out of earshot.

Hampstead was still patient.

"I have been so earnest in my desire to help you," he said, by way of broaching the subject again.

"You cannot help me," Marien snapped. "Something bars you. Your church, your position, all these foolish women who are in love with you, this whole community which has made a 'property' god of you,—they are to blame! They stand between us. They prevent you from seeing what you ought to see. They make you blind. You think you are humble. It is a mock humility. Under its guise you hide a lofty egotism. You think you are a preacher; you are not. You are still an actor, playing your part, and playing it so busily that you have ceased to be genuine. All this sentiment which you display for the suffering and needy and distressed is a worked-up sentiment. It goes with the part you play. It makes you blind, false, hypocritical!"

"Miss Dounay!" exclaimed the minister sharply.

But beside herself with chagrin and disappointment, the woman ran on with growing scorn, as she asked sneeringly: "Do you not see that all this gaping adoration is unreal? That a touch would overthrow you? A single false step, and the newspapers which have made you for the sake of a front-page holiday would have another holiday, and a bigger one, in tearing you down?"

Hampstead gritted his teeth, but he could not have stopped her.

"Can you imagine what would be the biggest news story that could break to-morrow morning in Oakland?" she persisted. "It would be the fall of John Hampstead. Can't you see it?" she laughed derisively. "Headlines a foot tall? Can't you hear the newsboys calling? Can't you see the 'Sisters' whispering? Can't you see the gray heads bobbing? The pulpit of All People's declared vacant! John Hampstead a by-word and worse—a joke! Can't you see it?"

Not unnaturally, the minister was angry.

"No," he said sharply, "and you will never see it, for I shall not take that single false step of which you speak."

"Oh, you really would not need to take it," sneered the actress, with a sinister note in her voice, "a man in your position need not fall. He may only seem to fall."

It seemed to John that the woman was actually menacing him.

"François!" he called sharply.

The chauffeur's heels came clicking back from around the turn, and in a silence, which upon Miss Dounay's part might be described as fuming, and upon the minister's as aggressively dignified, the couple were driven back to the hotel, arriving in time for Rollie Burbeck to emerge from the telephone booth, to observe the car, and to avoid its occupants.

With almost an elaboration of scrupulous courtesy, the minister helped Miss Dounay from the automobile, walked with her to the elevator, and ascended to the doorway of her apartment, where, extending his hand, he said sadly, in tones of finality, but without a trace of any other feeling than regretful sympathy: "I still desire to befriend you as I may. But I shall not be able to come to you again."

To his surprise, Marien answered him with something like a threat!

"It is I," she rejoined quickly, "who will come to you. I do not know how it is to happen yet, but I will come, and when I do—if I am not much mistaken—you will be happier to receive my call than you ever were to receive one in all your life before!"

Again there was menace in her tone, and never had she looked more imperiously regal than as she stood holding the loop of her train in the left hand, the right upon the knob of the door, the shimmering evening cloak pushed back to reveal her gold and spangled figure, standing arrow straight, while the dark eyes shot defiance.

Neither had she ever been guilty of a more studied or effective bit of theatricalism than when, immediately following this insinuating speech, the actress noiselessly propelled the door inward, revealing the presence of a group of men in evening dress posed about the room in various attitudes of boredom. As the door swung, these men turned expectantly and with quick eyes photographed the picture of the minister in the hall, his sober, perplexed gaze set upon the figure of the beautiful woman, whose features had instantly changed as she made her entrance upon an entirely different drama.

"Ah, my neglected guests!" exclaimed the actress in tones of mild self-reproach. "You will forgive my not being here to receive you, when you know the reason. Doctor Hampstead has been showing me some of the more interesting and unusual phases of that eccentric parish work of his, over which you Oaklanders rave so much. And now, the dear good man was hesitating in the hall at intruding upon our little party. I have insisted that he shall be one of us. Am I not right, gentlemen?"

Several of Miss Dounay's guests were well known to Hampstead personally, and the readiness with which they dragged him within attested to the clergyman's wide popularity among quite different sorts of very much worth-while persons, for, as a matter of fact, Miss Dounay's guests were rather representative. The group included an editor, an associate justice of the Supreme Court, a prominent merchant, a capitalist or two, and other persons, either of achievement or position, to the number of some eight or ten.

Their presence witnessed not only that Miss Dounay, in her liking for a virile type of man, had made quick and careful selection from those she had met during her short stay in the city, but also testified to the readiness with which this type responded to the Dounay personality.

That no other woman was present, and that the actress should assume the entire responsibility of entertaining so many gentlemen at one time, was entirely in keeping with her particular kind of vanity and the situations it was bound to create.

Standing in the center of the room, wearing that expression of happy radiance which admiration invariably brought to her face, her bare shoulders gleaming, her jewels blazing, she rotated upon her heel till her train wound up in a swirling eddy at her feet, out of which she bloomed like some voluptuous flower, while a chorus of "Oh's" and "Ah's" of laughing adulation followed the revolution of her eyes about the circuit; for the guests knew that to their hostess this little gathering was a play, and their part was to enact a vigorously approving audience.

"Gentlemen," she proposed, "you are all in evening dress; but I,"—and she shrugged her bewitching shoulders naïvely,—"I have been in this gown for ages—until I hate it. Will you indulge me a little longer?" And she inclined her head in the direction of the red portières through which she had gone that first night to don the diamonds for Hampstead.

Of course the gentlemen excused her, and Miss Dounay achieved another startling theatricalism by reappearing in an astonishingly short time, offering the most surprising contrast to her former self. The yellow and spangles were gone. In their place was the simplest possible gown of soft black velvet, with only a narrow band passing over the shoulders and framing a bust like marble for its whiteness against the black. The dress was entirely without ornament, presenting a supreme achievement of the art of the modiste, in that it appeared not so much to be a gown as a bolt of velvet, suddenly caught up and draped to screen her figure chastely but beautifully, at the same time it revealed and even emphasized those swelling curves and long lines which lost themselves elusively in the baffling pliancy of her remarkable figure. The hair was worn low upon the neck, and the jewels which had blazed in her coiffure like a dazzling crown were no longer in evidence. With them had gone the pendants from her ears, and that coruscating circlet of diamonds from the neck, which was her chief pride and most valuable single possession. There was not even a band of gold upon her arms, nor a ring upon her tapering finger. Hence what the admiring circle seemed to see was not something brilliant because bedizened, but a creature exquisite because genuine, a beauty depending for its power solely upon nature's comeliness.

No woman with less beauty or less art, desiring to be admired as Marien Dounay passionately

did, could have dared this contrast successfully. No one who knew men less thoroughly than she would have understood that for a purely professional artist to attain this look of a simple womanly woman was the greatest possible triumph, stirring every instinct of admiration and of chivalry.

And whatever was at the back of the trick Miss Dounay had played—and there was generally something back of her caprices—in thrusting John Hampstead, with whom she had practically quarreled, into this group of guests, she appeared to forget him entirely in the succession of whims, moods, and graces with which she proceeded to their entertainment.

For one thing, she admitted them to the large room which served as her boudoir, into which they had seen her go in gold and spangles to emerge like a miracle in demure black velvet.

Of course, there was an excuse for thus titillating the curiosity of vigorous men with that lure of mysterious enchantment which lurks in the boudoir of a lovely woman, and the excuse was that the room, while half-boudoir, was also half-studio, and held tables on which were displayed the models of the stage sets and the costumer's designs for Miss Dounay's coming London production.

As the actress had divined, the inspection of these fascinating details of stagecraft interested her guests as much as the display of them delighted her.

In the hour which ensued before the supper, a collation that in its variety and substance again proved how well the actress comprehended the appetite of the male, two or three guests arrived tardily. The earliest of these to enter was Rollo Charles Burbeck, who came in ample time to roam about the room of mystery at will with the remainder of the guests. Indeed, he stayed in it so much that its enchantment for him might have been presumed to be greater than for the others.

Before the supper, too, one of the guests craved the liberty of departing. This was the Reverend John Hampstead. The farewell of his hostess was gracious and without the slightest reminiscence of anything unpleasant, but he was prevented from more than mentally congratulating himself upon the change in her manner toward him by the fact that in walking some ten feet from where he touched the fingers of his hostess to where a butler-sort of person, borrowed from the hotel staff, stood waiting with his overcoat, Doctor Hampstead came face to face with Rollie Burbeck, who was just emerging from the boudoir-studio with a disturbed look upon his usually placid face, as if, for instance, he had seen a ghost.

In consequence, the minister moved down the corridor to the elevator, not pondering upon his own perplexities, but thinking to himself, "I wonder now if that young man is in any serious trouble. It would break his mother's heart—it would kill her if he were."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DAY OF ALL DAYS

Next morning Doctor Hampstead was up bright and early, clad in his long study gown and walking, according to custom, beneath his palm trees, while he reflected on the duties of the day before him. This was really the day of all days for him, but he did not know it.

An unpleasant thought of Marien Dounay came impertinently into mind, but he repressed it. He had failed with her. A pity! Yes; but his work was too big, too, important, for him to permit it to be interfered with longer by any individual.

Besides, there were with him this morning thoughts of a totally different woman, whose life was as fresh and beautiful as the dew-kissed flowers about him. Five years of unswerving devotion on his part had all but wiped from her memory the admission of her lover which had so hurt the trusting heart of Bessie. That confiding trust, the loss of which her pen had so eloquently lamented, had grown again. The very day was set. In four months John Hampstead would hold Bessie Mitchell in his arms, and this time it seemed to him, more surely than it had that day in the little summer house by the tiny painted park in Los Angeles, that he would never, never let her out of them.

In the midst of these reflections, a thud sounded on the graveled walk at the minister's feet. It was the morning paper tightly rolled and whirled from the unerring hand of a boy upon a flying bicycle. The minister waved his hand in response to a similar salute from the grinning urchin, then turned and looked at the roll of ink and paper speculatively. That paper was the world coming to sit down at breakfast with him, and tell him what it had been doing in the past twenty-

four hours. It had been doing some desperate things. The wide strip of mourning at the end of the bent cylinder, indicating tall headlines, showed this. The paper had come to him to make confession of the world's sins. This was right, for he was one of the world's confessors.

But with this thought came another which had occurred to him before. This was that he had won his confessor's gaberdine too cheaply. He had gained his position as a deputy saviour of mankind at too small a cost. Sometimes he questioned if he were not yet to be made to suffer—excruciatingly—supremely—if, for instance, Bessie were not to be taken from him. Yet he knew, as he reflected somewhat morbidly to this effect, that such a suffering would hardly be efficient. It must be something within himself, something volitional, a cup which he might drink or refuse to drink. The world's saviour was not Simon of Cyrene, whom they compelled to bear the cross, but the man from the north, who took up his own cross. True, Hampstead had thought on several occasions that he was taking up a cross, but it proved light each time, and turned into a crown either of public or of private approbation. Yet the cross was there, if he had only known it, in the tall black headlines on the paper rolled up and bent tightly and lying like a bomb at his feet.

However, instead of picking up the paper, he strolled out upon the sidewalk and down for a turn upon the sea-wall. The lately risen sun shot a ray across the eastern hills, and the dancing waters played elfishly with its beams, as if they had been ten thousand tiny mirrors. A fresh breeze was blowing, and as the minister filled his lungs again and again with the wave-washed air, it seemed as if a great access of strength were flowing into his veins. It flowed in and in until he felt himself stronger than he had ever been before in his life.

With this feeling of strength, which was spiritual as well as physical, came the desire to test it against something big, bigger than he had ever faced before. All unconscious how weak his puny strength would be against its demands, he lifted his arms towards the sky like a sun-worshiper and prayed that the day before him might be a great day.

Then leaving the sea-wall, the minister walked with swinging, quite un-gownly strides up the sidewalk and turned in between the green patches of lawn before his own door, picking up the paper and unrolling it as he mounted the porch. On the step before the top one he paused. The black headline was before his eye.

"DOUNAY DIAMONDS STOLEN" was its screaming message.

The minister was quickly gutting the column of its meaning, when a step upon the graveled walk behind startled him into turning suddenly toward the street, where between the polished red trunks of the palms and under their spreading leaves which met overhead, he saw framed the figure of Rollie Burbeck, halting uncertainly, with pale, excited face. This expression, indeed, was a mere exaggeration of the very look Doctor Hampstead had last seen upon it; but he did not immediately connect the two.

"Your mother!" exclaimed the clergyman apprehensively, for that precious life, always hanging by a thread which any sudden shock might snap, was a constant source of anxiety to those who loved the Angel of the Chair. "Something has happened to her?"

"No! To me!" groaned the young man hoarsely, hurrying forward as the minister stepped down to meet him.

"Something awful! Can I see you absolutely alone?"

"Why, certainly, Rollie," replied the minister with ready sympathy. "Come this way."

Hastily the minister led his caller around the side of the wide, low-lying cottage to the outside entrance of his study.

"Is that door locked?" asked Rollie, as, once inside the room, he darted a frightened glance at the doorway connecting with the rest of the house.

Although knowing himself to be safe from interruption, the minister tactfully walked over and turned the key. He then locked the outer door as well, lowered the long shade at the wide side window, and snapped on the electric light.

"No eye and no ear can see or hear us now, save one," he said with sympathetic gravity. "Sit down."

Rollie sat on the very edge of the Morris chair, his elbows on the ends of its arms, while his head hung forward with an expression of ghastliness upon the weakly handsome features.

"You saw the paper?" he began.

The minister nodded.

"Here they are!" the young man gulped, the words breaking out of him abruptly. At the same time there was a quick motion of his hand, and a rainbow flash from his coat pocket to the blotter upon the desk, where the circlet of diamonds coiled like a blazing serpent that appeared to sway and writhe as each stone trembled from the force with which Burbeck had rid himself of the

hateful touch. The minister started back with shock and a sudden sense of recollection.

"Oh, Rollie," he groaned, and then asked, as if not quite able to believe his eyes: "You took them?"

"I—I stole them," the excited man half-whispered.

"Why?" questioned Hampstead, still wrestling with his astonishment.

"Because I am short in my accounts," Rollie shuddered, passing a despairing hand across his eyes. "I have to have money to-day, or I am ruined."

"But you could not turn these into money. You must have been beside yourself."

"No!" replied the excited man, with husky, explosive utterance; "the scheme was all right. Spider Welsh was going to handle 'em for me. We were to split four ways. But the Red Lizard fell down."

"The Red Lizard?" interrupted the minister; for he knew the man who bore the suggestive title.

"Yes. He was to hang a rope down from the cornice on the roof of the hotel, opposite her window, so it would look like an outside job, and he didn't do it. I got the diamonds easy enough—easier than I expected—you know how that was, with all those people coming and going in that room. But I went to bed and couldn't sleep for thinking about the rope. I got up before daylight and went down to see if it was there. So help me God, there's no rope swinging. That makes it an inside job; it puts it up to the guests. By a process of elimination, they'll come down to me. I am ruined any way you look at it, and the shock will kill mother!"

The minister studied the face of his caller critically. Did he love his mother enough to greatly care on her account, or was this merely an afterthought?

"What am I going to do?" the shaken Rollie gasped hoarsely, his eyes fixing themselves in helpless appeal upon the clergyman.

"The thing to do is clear," announced the minister bluntly. "Take these diamonds straight back to Miss Dounay. Tell her you stole them. Throw yourself on her mercy."

A sickly smile curled upon the young man's lip.

"Her mercy?" he repeated. "Do you think that woman has any mercy in her? She has got the worst disposition God ever gave a woman. She would tear me to pieces."

The young fellow again lifted a hand before his eyes, shuddering and reeling as though he might faint.

With a feeling almost of contempt, Hampstead gripped him by the shoulder and shook him sternly.

"Your situation calls for the exercise of some manhood—if you have it," he said sharply. "Tell me. Why did you come here?"

"To get you to help me out!" the broken man murmured helplessly, twisting his hat in his hands. "That was all. I won't lie to you. You've never turned anybody down. Don't turn me down!"

"It was on your mother's account?"

"No, I'm not as unselfish as that. It's just myself. I don't know what's the matter with me. I've lost my nerve. I had it all right enough when I took 'em, except for just a minute after; that's when I met you going away, and with that damned uncanny way of yours you dropped on that something was wrong. But I had my nerve all right; I had it till I got out there on the street this morning and that rope wasn't swinging there over the cornice. Damn the Red Lizard! All I ask is to get out of this, and then to get him by the throat!"

Surely the man had recovered a portion of his nerve, for at the thought of the failure of his partner in crime, his face was suffused with rage, and his weak, writhing hands became twisting talons that groped for the throat of an imaginary Red Lizard.

At sight of this demonstration, Hampstead leaned back in his chair, with the air of one whose interest is merely pathological, observing the phenomena of a soul in the throes of incurable illness. His face was not even sympathetic.

"You have come to the wrong place," he said briefly.

"You won't help me out?"

"Not in your state of mind—which is a mere cowardice in defeat—mere rage at the failure of an accomplice. I should be accessory after the crime."

"Not even to save my mother?" whined the wilted man.

"I should be doing your mother no kindness to confirm her son in crime."

Young Burbeck sat silent and baffled, yet somehow shocked into vigorous thought by the notion that he had encountered something hard, a man with a substratum of moral principle that was like immovable rock.

For a moment the culprit's eyes wandered helplessly about the room and then returned to the rugged face of the minister, with so much of gentleness and so much of strength upon it. Looking at the man thus, Rollie had a sudden, envious wish for his power. This man had a strength of character that was enormous and Gibraltar-like.

"You can help me if you will!" he broke out wretchedly, straining and twisting his neck like a man battling with suffocation.

"Yes," said the minister quietly, his eyes searching to the fellow's very soul, "I can—if you will let me."

"Let you?" and a hysterical smile framed itself on the young man's face. "My God, I will do anything."

"It's something you must *be*, rather than do," explained the physician to sick souls, once more deeply sympathetic, and leaning forward, he continued significantly: "I want to help you, not for your mother's sake, nor your father's, but for your own whenever you are ready to receive help upon proper terms. You have come here seeking a way out. There is no way out, but there is a *way up!*"

The cowering man shook his head hopelessly. He had not courage enough even to survey a moral height.

For a moment the minister studied his visitor thoughtfully, wondering what could make him see his guilt as he ought to see it; then abruptly he drew close and began to talk in a low, confidential tone. Almost before the surprised Rollie could understand what was taking place, the Reverend John Hampstead, to whom he had come to confess, was confessing to him; this man, whom he had thought so strong, was telling the story of a young girl's love for him; of his weak infatuation for another woman, of the heart-aches that half-unconscious breach of trust had occasioned him, and worst of all, the pangs it had cost the innocent girl who loved him and believed in his integrity with all her impressionable heart.

There was a moisture in the minister's eye as he concluded his story, and there was a fresh mist in Rollie's as he listened.

But the clergyman passed on immediately from this to tell modestly how, when the death of Langham had imposed the lives of Dick and Tayna on him like a trust, he had been true to it, although at the cost of his great ambition; but that afterward this surrender had brought him all the happiness of his present life as pastor of All People's, while the hope of winning that first love back had been given to him again.

"And so," Hampstead concluded, "to be disloyal to a trust has come to seem to me the worst of all crimes; while to be true to one's obligations appears to me as the highest virtue. In fact, the whole active part of my creed could be summed up pretty well in this little idea of trust.

"Trust is almost the highest thing in life. It is the cement of civilization. Trust is the very foundation of banking. You believe in banking, don't you? In the principle? The idea that hundreds of people trust some banker with their surplus funds, and he puts those funds at the service of the community as a whole through loaning them to persons who redeposit them, to be reloaned and redeposited again, so that the bank, a bundle of individual trusts of rich and poor, becomes one of the fulcrums upon which civilization turns?"

Burbeck listened rather dazed. "I never thought of the principle," he faltered after a minute, "I thought of it as a job."

"Well, you see the point, don't you? It's rather a high calling to be a banker. Now in this case the dead man whose fund you have looted trusted the bank; the bank has trusted you, and you have stolen from the bank. Miss Dounay has trusted you, and you have stolen her diamonds. You see at what I am getting?"

Hampstead paused and glanced penetratingly into the face of Rollie, who had been a little swept out of himself, as much in wonder at the new insight into the life of the minister as at the convincing clarity of the lesson conveyed.

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully and with an air of conviction, "that I am not to think of myself as merely a thief, but as something worse,—as a traitor to many sacred trusts."

"Exactly," exclaimed the minister with satisfaction at the sign of moral perception growing. "To shield a thief from exposure is possibly criminal. To help a man repair the breaches of his trust, to put him in the way of never breaking another trust as long as he lives, that is the true work of the ministry. If it is for that you want help, Rollie, you have come to the right place."

"I did not come for that," admitted the young fellow, strangely able to view himself objectively as a sadly dispiriting spectacle. "I came, as you said, in cowardice, because I didn't know which way to turn, desiring only to find a way out. Somehow, I felt myself a victim. You

make me see myself a crook. I came here feeling sorry for myself. You make me hate myself. You make me want to be worthy of trust. You give me hope. I have a feeling I never had before, that I am not much of a man, that I am not equal to a man's job. But tell me what I must do to repair the breaches in my trust, and let me see if I think I can do them."

Burbeck's manner had become calmer, and something of the grayness of despair had left his face, but now at the recurrence of all his perplexities, he presented again the picture of a man cowering beneath a mountain that threatened to fall upon him.

"First of all, you must go back to Miss Dounay with her diamonds," prescribed the minister seriously. "If you have not manhood enough to face her with your confession, I do not see the slightest hope for your character's rehabilitation."

"But the executors!" exclaimed Rollie, with the sense of danger still greater than his sense of guilt. "They will be checking me up at eleven. I've got to cover the shortage, or I'm lost. J.M. would be more terrible than Miss Dounay. It would not be vengeance with him. He'd send me to San Quentin, entirely without feeling, just as a matter of cold duty. He'd shake hands and tell me to look in when I got out. That's J.M."

"Yes, I think it is," said the minister, pausing for a moment of thought. His body was balanced and rocking gently in the swivel chair, his hands were held before him, the tips of the thumb and fingers of the right hand just touching the tips of the thumb and fingers of the left hand and making a rudely elliptical basket into which he was looking as if for inspiration.

Rollie, waiting,—hoping, without knowing what to hope,—had begun to study Hampstead's face with a respectful interest he had never felt before. He noticed the dark shadows beneath the gray eyes, and that lines were beginning to seam the brow, while just now the broad shoulders had a bent look. For the first time it occurred to him that Hampstead's work might be hard work, and he began to feel a kind of reverence for a man who would work so hard for other people, and to reflect that it was noble thus to expend one's energies,—noble to be true to trusts of any sort. It was admirable. It was worthy of emulation. A sudden envy of Hampstead's character seized him, and he began, in the midst of his own distress, to think how one proceeded to get such a character. By the simple process of being true to trusts, the minister had suggested. But this seemed rather hopeless for Rollie. His chance had gone—unless! His mind halted and fastened its hope desperately to this grave, silent, meditative face.

The minister was considering very delicate questions: trying to decide how much weight the slender moral backbone of this softling could carry, asking whether by leaning upon the side of mercy, by taking some very serious responsibility upon himself, he might not shelter him from the consequences of his crime while a new character was grown.

But such questions are not definitely answerable in advance, and it was neither Hampstead's usual magnanimity nor his leaning toward mercy, but his moral enthusiasm for the rehabilitation of lost character that impelled him to take a chance in his decision.

"When do you say they will be upon your books?" he asked abruptly.

"Before twelve, sure; by eleven, probably," was Rollie's quick, nervous answer.

"And how much is your defalcation?"

"Forty-two hundred," sighed Rollie.

"The expedient is almost doubtful," announced the minister solemnly, and with evident reluctance; "and I do not say that the time will not come—when you are stronger, perhaps—when you must tell Mr. Manton that you were once a defaulter; but that bridge we will not cross this morning, and in the meantime, I will let you have the money to cover your shortage."

"Brother Hampstead!" gulped Rollie, reaching out both hands, while his soul leaped in gratitude. It was also the first time he had ever called Hampstead "Brother" except in derision.

The minister waved away this demonstration with a gesture of self-deprecation, and a smile that was almost as sweet as a woman's lighted up his face, while he took from a drawer of his desk a small, flat key, familiar to Rollie because he had seen it before, and many others resembling it.

"Here," said Hampstead, "is the key to my safe deposit box in the Amalgamated National vault. In that box is eleven hundred dollars. It is not my money, but was provided by a friend for use in a contingency which has not arisen. I feel at perfect liberty to use it for this emergency. As you will remember, there is already on file with the vault-room custodian my signed authorization for you to visit the box, because you have served as my messenger before. You will be able, therefore, to gain unquestioned access to it the minute the vaults are open, which as you know is nine o'clock. Take the envelope marked 'Wadham currency.' In the meantime I will go to a friend or two, and within thirty minutes after the bank's doors open, I will bring you another envelope

containing thirty-one hundred dollars."

Rollie listened as a condemned man upon a scaffold listens to the reading of his reprieve.

"How can I thank you?" he croaked finally, clutching at the minister's hand.

"You don't thank me," adjured Hampstead, towering and strong, while he gripped the pulseless palm of Burbeck. "Don't thank me! Do your part; that's all."

Rollie clung to the strong hand uncertainly for a few seconds until he himself felt stronger, when his face seemed to lighten somewhat.

"You have a wonderful way with you, Doctor Hampstead," he exclaimed. "You have put conscience into me this morning—and courage."

"Both are important," smiled the minister.

At this moment, Rollie, who was beginning to recover his presence of mind, did one of those innocent things which thereafter played so important a part in the tragical chain of complications which followed from this interview. The act itself was no more than to select from a small tray of rubber bands upon the study desk, the only red one which happened to be there, and to snap it with several twists about the neck of the vault-box key, remarking as he did so:

"For ready identification. There are sometimes several of these keys in my possession at once."

The minister nodded approvingly. "I suppose," he commented, "other people make use of you as a messenger to their boxes."

"Half a dozen of the women have that habit," the young man observed.

"Trusted!" exclaimed the minister impulsively, laying a cordial hand upon the young man's shoulder. "You have been greatly trusted. It is a rare privilege, isn't it?"

Rollie nodded thoughtfully.

"And these?" questioned Doctor Hampstead, motioning to where the diamond necklace curled, appearing to Rollie less like a serpent now and more like a strangler's knot.

"I'm afraid of them," said the young man with a shudder. "Couldn't—couldn't you take them back to her and tell the story?"

The clergyman shook his head solemnly.

"I cannot confess your sins for you," he averred. "If you are not man enough for that, we might as well stop before we begin."

Hampstead's tone was final.

"You are right," admitted Burbeck, in tones of conviction; "you are right."

But still he could not bring himself to touch the diamonds, and stood gazing as if charmed by the evil spell they wrought. Sensing this, the minister took up from his desk a long envelope which bore his name and address in the corner, opened it, lifted the sparkling string by one end, dropped it inside, moistened the flap, sealed it, and handed it to Burbeck.

"There," he exclaimed, "you don't even have to touch them again. Go straight to her hotel."

"Oh, but I cannot," exclaimed Rollie, apprehension trembling in his tones. "I shall not dare to leave the bank until the shortage is covered. The executors might come in ahead of time, and I must be there to stall them off, if necessary. But I might telephone to Miss Dounay."

"Telephones are leaky instruments," objected Hampstead, with a shake of his head.

"Or send her a note," suggested Burbeck.

"Notes miscarry," controverted the minister sagaciously, "and they do not always die when their mission is accomplished. Since you are taking my advice, I would say summon all your self-control, contain your secret in patience during the hours you must wait until your shortage is made good, and you can leave the bank to see Miss Dounay in person. You must do your part entirely alone, for my lips are sealed."

"Sealed?" questioned Rollie, not quite comprehending.

"Yes, the secret is your own. Think of your confession as made to God!"

"You mean that you would never tell on me, no matter what happened?"

"Just that. The liberty is not mine. I can only expect you to be true to your trust as I am true as a minister to mine."

This was an idea Rollie could not grasp readily. It was taking away a prop upon which he had meant to lean.

"But," he argued, "you make it possible for me to take your money and that of your friends and keep it, if you don't have some kind of a club over me."

"Exactly," replied the minister. "I want no club over you, Rollie. You must be a free agent, or else I have not really trusted you. Your right action would mean nothing if compulsory. You must be true to your trust from some inner spiritual motive."

But Rollie was still groping. "And if I should, for instance, steal the money you give me?"

"You would know it, and I, and one other," replied the minister, raising his eyes devoutly.

Rollie swept his hand across his face slowly, with a gesture of bewilderment. This minister was taking him to higher and higher ground. He began to feel as if he had been led up to some transfiguring mountain peak of moral eminence.

"It is the highest appeal which could be made to the honor of another," he breathed in tones approaching awe.

"Exactly," declared Hampstead again with that air of finality, "and if I should fail to be true to my part of the trust, what has passed between us this morning has been the mere compounding of a felony and not the act of a priest of God looking to the regeneration of a soul."

In a wordless interval, Rollie Burbeck pressed the minister's hand once more and departed, his face still wearing a veiled expression as if he had not quite caught the import of all that had been said.

But neither, for that matter, had the minister; although he was never surer of himself than now, when he ushered his guest out of the side door with a cheery, courage-giving smile, and hastened in to his greatly delayed breakfast.

With a thoughtful air and a feeling of intense satisfaction in his breast, he unfolded his napkin, broke his egg, and sipped his coffee, still with no suspicion that this was the day of all days for him, or that he had just sawed and hammered the cross which might make his title clear to saviourhood.

CHAPTER XXV HIS BRIGHT IDEA

Young Burbeck's desk at the Amalgamated National was in an open space behind a marble counter. About him in the same open space were desks of two other assistant cashiers. Back of these were the private offices of the cashier, the president and the vice-president, as well as one or two reception rooms. Beyond the marble counter was a broad public aisle, on the farther side of which the tellers and bookkeepers worked, screened by the usual wire and glass. The safe deposit vaults were in the basement and reached by a stairway from the open lobby on the first floor.

Hurrying from the minister's house, Burbeck reached his desk at ten minutes before the hour of nine. This left him ten minutes of waiting before he could get the eleven hundred dollars of the Wadham currency; and waiting was the very hardest thing he could do under the circumstances. He was the first of the assistant cashiers to arrive, but the cashier, Parma, heavy-jowled, with dark wall eyes, was visible through the open door of his office, checking over some of the auditor's sheets with a gold pencil in his pudgy hand. His thick shoulders and broad, unresponsive back somehow threw a chill of apprehension into Rollie. What brought that old owl down here at this time of the morning, he wondered.

The colored porter, resplendent in his uniform of gray and brass, advanced with obsequious courtesy and proffered a copy of the morning paper. Rollie snatched at it with a sense of relief, but the relief was only momentary. There was the hateful headline again. It had been hours, days, weeks since he saw that headline first, while standing on the street and looking up for the rope that was to be swinging over the cornice of the Hotel St. Albans. Couldn't they get something else for a headline? Why, of course not. The paper had been on the street but three hours. That headline must hold sway till the noon edition. Besides, it was a good headline.

Rollie grasped the paper firmly with both hands, threw his head back, and pretended to read; but he was not reading. He was looking to see if his hands trembled. Unmistakably they did. They trembled so the paper rattled as if it were having a chill. But pshaw! There was really little to read anyway, beyond the headline. The news had come in too late to make a story for the morning papers. It only said that Miss Dounay had been entertaining some friends and on retiring at half-past two had chanced to notice that her diamond necklace was missing. A search failed to reveal it in the apartment. She at once notified the police. That was all. No word as to who was present, who was suspected, whether a guest, or a servant, or a burglar, or whether any clue had been discovered. There had been no time for that. That would be the story for the afternoon papers. They would find out all about Miss Dounay's movements the night before, and all about her party, and who was present. They would interview each guest, and get a statement

from him. They would be sure to interview John Hampstead. Rollie had a sudden feeling of security as he thought of their investigating Hampstead. It was amazing what a rocklike confidence a man could feel in Hampstead.

But they would also interview him—Rollie Burbeck. Because he was so readily accessible, they would interview him first. What would he tell them? How would he bear himself? Would his voice tremble when he tried to talk, as now his hands trembled when he tried to hold the newspaper?

At this very moment the diamonds were in his inside coat pocket. Could he receive the reporters with his usual urbanity, sit smiling nonchalantly, and recite the incidents of the evening, suggest theories and clues, express his righteous indignation at the crime,—all with that envelope and its contents rustling under every movement of his arm? Could he?

To the young man's tortured imagination, the necklace became again a serpent. He could feel it crawling there over his heart, could hear it hissing and rattling as if about to strike. Then it ceased to be a serpent, and was a nest of birds. He knew that every time a reporter asked a question, one of those birds would stretch its wings and call "Cuckoo."

There! It said "Cuckoo" just then. Was the bank haunted? Rollie looked up frightened. Cold sweat was on his brow. Not his hands alone but his whole body trembled. He was really in a very bad way. Could a man have delirium tremens, just from fright? Rollie didn't know, but if a reporter came in just then, he was sure that he would take out the diamonds and hurl them at the news gatherer.

Speaking of delirium tremens, he wished he had a good stiff highball. He must slip out presently long enough to get one. Worse than reporters would be coming round, too. Detectives would come. Chief of detectives Benson might come in person. Rollie disliked Benson and mistrusted him. Benson went on the theory that it takes a crook to catch a crook! When it came to inducing a crook to talk, he was a very handy man with a club. Benson would at once scour the pool rooms and hop joints. Suppose he got the Red Lizard in the dragnet. Suppose he hit the Red Lizard a clip or two with that small, ugly billy that was generally in Benson's pocket when he went to the sweat room; or suppose he kept Red's 'hop' away from him for a few hours? Or suppose Benson happened to know in that uncanny way of his that he, Rollie, had done business with Spider Welsh? He might just walk into the bank and search Rollie on suspicion. And Rollie would have to submit, would have to seem to invite him, almost. His teeth were chattering at the thought.

Discovery—disgrace—conviction—ruin—that was the sequence of the ideas. Stripes! Ugh! Just when the way out, "the way up," was opening to him, too. Discovery, now that a moral hope was gleaming, would be infinitely more terrible than an hour ago, when he was only a rat burrowing from a terrier.

He tried to shake himself together. He must brace up and play the game with a cool head, or he could not play it at all. One thing was clear. The diamonds must be got out of his possession temporarily. But where should he put them? In his desk? Anywhere about the bank? Benson would find them if he started a search, and if Benson didn't search, some one in the bank might stumble upon them accidentally, and then the cat would be out of the bag for fair.

There was a police whistle now! The agitated young man looked about, startled, and then laughed at himself. It was not a police whistle at all. It was the first clear, bell-like note of the bank clock, beginning the stroke of nine.

With a sensation of relief that for a few minutes waiting was over and there was occupation for mind and body, Rollie took the minister's key and strolled in the most casual manner he could command down to the vault room.

"Doctor Hampstead's box," he announced, exhibiting his key. The vault clerk turned to his card index as a mere matter of form, for he remembered well enough Rollie's authorization, and read upon the card of the Reverend John Hampstead his signed permission for Rollo Charles Burbeck to do with his box "as I might or could do if personally present." The clerk stepped inside the vault, scanned the numbers and tiers, and thrust his master-key into the proper lock. Rollie slipped the minister's key into its own place, turned it, and the door flew open. The vault clerk returned to his stand outside the door. Rollie took the box and walked into one of the private rooms provided for the safe deposit patrons. In a moment he was ripping open the envelope marked "Wadham Currency", which he found exactly as the minister had described it.

At sight and feeling of the money in his fingers, a great wave of hope surged over Rollie. It was a solid assurance of escape. With this assurance, there came to the young man a sharp, definite impulse to begin at once the work of character building. As an initial step, he wrote upon

one of his personal cards: "I.O.U. \$1,100," and signed it, not with his initials, but boldly in vigorous chirography, to express the stoutness of his purpose, with the whole of his name, "Rollo Charles Burbeck." When putting this card carefully back in the envelope from which he had extracted the currency, and placing the envelope on the top of the papers in the box, the young man experienced a fine glow of satisfaction. He had done a good and honorable act in this bold assumption of his debt and in thus leaving the written record there behind him.

But when Rollie took up the currency from the table and slipped the long, thin package into his inside pocket, his fingers came in contact with that other envelope, the presence of which, under the strain of what he must go through this morning, threatened to break down his nerve completely.

With the preacher's box lying there open before him, came a sudden inspiration. What safer place for the Dounay jewels than in it? Doctor Hampstead's character put him absolutely above suspicion. He was the one guest at the supper before whose door no process of elimination would ever halt to point the finger of suspicion. His box, at the moment, was the safest place in the world for the Dounay diamonds.

Rollie was all alone in the closed room. No glance could possibly rest on him; yet, as furtively as if a thousand eyes were peering, he slipped the envelope containing the diamonds from his pocket into the box and heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the lid cover the package from his sight. Returning to the vault room, he locked the box in its chamber and went upstairs to his desk in quite his usual debonair manner.

With a new feeling of confidence which made him bold and precise in all his movements, Rollie laid the safe deposit key, with its innocent little red rubber band about it, exactly in the center of the blotter upon his desk, where it might be every moment under his eye. Then, in the most casual way in the world, he pinned a penciled note to the stack of bills representing the "Wadham currency" and sent it by one of the bank messengers across the wide aisle to a receiving teller's cage. When it arrived, the gap in his financial fences had narrowed to thirty-one hundred dollars. This lessening of the breach increased his self-control and strengthened his resolution. He had only to wait now until the minister appeared with the additional currency, and then at the first opportunity he would slip down to the vault, get the diamonds, and go straight to Miss Dounay.

And in the meantime his premonition that reporters would lean heavily upon him for information about the actress's supper party proved correct. When he talked to these reporters, Rollie noticed that it gave him a fresh sense of security to let his eye turn occasionally to where the little flat key with the red band about it lay upon his desk, lay, and almost laughed. It was really such a good joke to think where the diamonds were.

What made this joke better was that each reporter shrewdly inquired whether Rollie thought the diamonds had actually been stolen, or whether this might not be the familiar device of dramatic press agents. Begging in each instance that he be not quoted, Rollie admitted that of course the whole affair might be no more than the latter.

Yet after the reporters had gone, Rollie wished he had not done this. It was clever, but it was not just to the woman to whom he was going to make his first exhibition of new character by returning her jewels and making a plea for mercy. That was not going to be an easy job—that confession? Besides, everything depended on whether she would grant his plea or not. Rollie stared again at this angle; for Miss Dounay might hand him over to Benson. Once more he had that distasteful vision of a chalky head and a suit of stripes. The thought produced a physical sensation as if his whole body were being stung by nettles.

But here came a big man down the aisle, his features expressing grave consideration, and his gray eyes twinkling with evident satisfaction. It was Doctor Hampstead. Courage and increase of confidence seemed to come into the office with the minister, and more was imparted by his cordial hand-clasp, as he leaned close and asked in a low voice:

"You got the Wadham currency?"

"Yes," Rollie answered eagerly and in an excited whisper told how he had laid the foundation stone of his new character by his I.O.U. left in the place of the currency.

"That is good," agreed the minister, his face beaming. "The right start, my boy, exactly."

Then, with a replica of that smile, sweet as a woman's, with which he had two hours before passed over his vault key to Rollie, he now placed in his hands an envelope like that which had contained the Wadham currency, only thicker. The young man seized it gratefully, but with fingers trembling so he could hardly get behind the flap of the envelope.

"It is there," said the minister, a little gurgle of emotion in his own throat.

"It is here," mumbled Rollie woodenly, a surge of relief and gratitude rising so high in his breast that it felt like a tense hard pain, and for a moment stifled the power of speech so that for want of words he reached out and touched the hand of the minister caressingly with his clammy fingers.

Hampstead, happier, if possible, than Rollie, understood his emotion.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Courage, boy, courage!" At the same time he laid a hand upon the young man's arm, with a pressure almost of affection. With the word and touch came clarity both of thought and feeling.

"Will you excuse me three or four minutes, Brother Hampstead?" Rollie inquired, the sudden leap of joy in his heart that the embezzlement was now to be legitimately wiped out so great that he could not this time stop to send the money across by a messenger.

The minister smiled understandingly, and Rollie stepped out of the little gate and across to the teller's window.

When he returned, old J.M. himself had come out of his office and was chatting with the minister. There was nothing unusual about this, since wherever Hampstead went persons of every sort were anxious to get a word with him. Presently Parma too joined the group at Rollie's desk. Of course the topic of conversation was Miss Dounay and her diamonds, for both the president and the cashier had learned that the minister and their own social ambassador were present at the supper, which every hour became more famous. In the midst of this conversation, a telephone call for Mr. Manton was switched to Rollie's desk.

"Yes," said the president, talking into the 'phone. "We will send a man over to represent us. Are you ready now?"

The bank president hung up the telephone and turned to Rollie. "Step right over to the Central Trust, Burbeck, and see us through on those transfers, will you? They are waiting now."

There was nothing for Rollie to do but to go immediately, much as he desired to whisper one more word of gratitude to the minister, and to receive the additional installment of moral strength which he felt sure would follow from a few quiet minutes with this man on whom his soul had begun to lean so heavily.

"Certainly, Mr. Manton," he answered, and then as he reached for his hat, he turned to the minister, saying: "Shall I find you here when I return?"

"That depends on how long before you return," laughed the minister, but the blandness of his expression indicated that he was in no hurry, and Rollie went out expecting to see him again in a few minutes.

But the matter of the transfers was not so easily dispatched. Over one detail and another the young man was held for nearly forty minutes. The delays, too, were of that vexatious sort which detained him without employing him; so that most of the irritating interval could be and was devoted to a consideration of his own very private and very pressing affairs.

Giving up hope of finding the minister in the bank upon his return, he addressed both his thoughts and his fears to the subject of Miss Dounay and her diamonds. The prospective interview with this passionate, self-willed, and no doubt wildly excited woman loomed before him oppressively, and the nearer it drew, the more ominous it seemed. A man going unarmed to return a stolen cub to a tigress in a jungle lair would be going upon a mission of peace and safety compared to his. He feared that in her passionate vehemence she would never permit him to get the full truth before her. How was he to turn aside the impact of her sudden burst of rage? She would assault him—tear him! If that curious Morocco dagger he had seen some of the guests fumbling with last night were at hand, she might even kill him.

The idea occurred to him that he had best lie to her, or at least begin by lying to her; that he might play the rôle of restorer of her diamonds, and put her under a debt of gratitude, explaining that the thief had brought them to him to borrow money on them; then, in the softer mood that would come through joy over their prospective recovery, he might elaborate the story, touch her sympathies, and make his full confession. She might even be happy enough over their recovery to cease the hunt for the criminal, and thus make confession unnecessary. That in itself would be a great relief.

Yet the common sense, if not the moral sense, of the young man rejected a proposal to lay the bricks of new-found honesty in the mortar of a lie. If he were true to the trust which Hampstead had reposed in him, he would walk straight into Miss Dounay's apartments and say, "Here are your diamonds. I am the thief. I throw myself upon your mercy!" This was what he resolved to do.

Reentering the bank, young Burbeck walked first to the open door of Mr. Manton's office. That gentleman was engaged with a caller, but the shadow at the door caused his eye to rove in

that direction. Rollie waved his hand; J.M. nodded. The transfers had been accomplished; the president had taken note of that fact, and the assistant cashier's mission was discharged.

Rollie went immediately to his desk. There was a litter of papers representing matters of greater or less importance which had required attention during the interval of his absence from the office. He sifted them quickly. Some received his penciled O.K. and went into a basket for the messenger; two or three took him on errands to other desks about, or to the windows opposite; the rest went into a drawer. He had not removed his hat from his head, for he proposed to go immediately to Miss Dounay before the remnants of his fast oozing resolution could entirely trickle away.

But when he turned to pick up the vault key which his eye had seen so many times this morning, it was not at hand. He removed everything from the desk, he searched every nook and cranny of it. He took up the waste-basket, dumped the contents upon his desk, and examined every scrap and fold of envelope or paper. He even got down upon his knees and made sure the key was not upon the carpet, going so far as to move the desk. The key had disappeared. He searched his own pockets, realizing that when he left the bank that was where the key should have been placed.

In the excitement of the moment when Hampstead had brought in the money that saved him from being a defaulter, and in the disconcerting presence of J.M. and Parma, when he wanted to be alone with his benefactor, and especially with the more disconcerting instruction to go out and look after the transfers, he had, for the time being, forgotten the key. Now it was not to be found.

Rollie stood nonplussed first, and then aghast. His guilty conscience instantly suggested that some one had seen or suspected his visit to the vault and what had occurred there. This idea brought a rush of blood to the head. He was dizzy and had almost an attack of vertigo. Yet with a few clearing minutes of thought, the explanation leaped plainly into mind. Doctor Hampstead had taken the key. In the interval while Rollie was at the teller's window, he must have seen it lying there upon the desk, recognized it by the red rubber band, and having been assured that the key had served its purpose, had done the perfectly natural thing of dropping it in his pocket, and thinking no more of it.

Where was the minister now? Until Rollie could find him and get the key, he could make no confession to Miss Dounay.

CHAPTER XXVI

UNEXPECTEDLY EASY

Following his instincts rather than any rule of sense, Rollie hurried out upon the street, posted himself upon a conspicuous corner, and for several minutes indulged the wildly improbable hope that he might spy the minister passing in the throng. When a little reflection had convinced him that this was time wasted, he made a hasty inventory of near-by places where his benefactor might have gone, and even went so far as to hurriedly visit two of them, threading the tables of the Forum Café, where sometimes Hampstead ate his luncheon, and scanning the chairs in the St. Albans barber shop, where from time to time the dominie's tawny fleece was shorn.

But by this time a new probability forced itself into the distracted young man's consciousness. This was that the minister had gone to pay his sympathetic respects to Miss Dounay and condole with her over her loss. Rollie was so near the Dounay apartment that to go upstairs and inquire if the minister were there would have been easy, but the peculiar circumstances made it difficult. Indeed only to recall how near he was to that fearsome lair of the tigress threw him into cold shivers and made him fly to the safer vantage ground of the telephone upon his own desk at the bank. But even merely to inquire for the Reverend John Hampstead from there was hard. In his nervous state, depleted by gloomy forebodings and now unfortified by the possession of the diamonds, Rollie felt utterly unequal to even a long-distance contact with that high-powered personality. All the morning he had been in terror lest she herself should call him up. All the morning he had known that in his character as an interested friend he should have telephoned to her. Now, the moment she recognized his voice, he would be taxed with this breach! What was he to say? Why, that he had not telephoned because he was intending to call in at the first moment he could get away from the bank, and that he would be up very soon now. She would be sarcastic, but the explanation would positively have to do. Besides, he had to locate the minister! and so, struggling to command a tone of indifference, he gave the St. Albans

number.

Of course Julie or the secretary would answer, anyway. But evidently Miss Dounay, in her highly aroused mental state, was keeping an ear upon the telephone bell, for it was her own animated note that rasped at him through the instrument. It appeared, mercifully, that she did not recognize his voice,—a fact which at first relieved him, but on later reflection, at the conclusion of the incident, shook his remaining self-confidence still further to pieces, for it showed how completely out of hand he had allowed himself to get.

When, moreover, Rollie launched his timid inquiry if the Reverend John Hampstead was there, he got a negative so sharp that the receiver seemed to bite his ear. He broke the connection hastily and sat eyeing the telephone apprehensively, expecting the mouthpiece to open like a solemn eye, scan him inquiringly, and report to Miss Dounay. When it did not, he shrugged his shoulders and elongated his neck to get rid of that noose-like feeling which had just come upon him from nowhere. He had not killed anybody. What was the noose for, then? But this reflection got a most disagreeable answer: "It would kill your mother to know you are an embezzler and a thief. You would then be her murderer." Again he shrugged himself free of the distasteful sensation. "Buck up, Burbeck," he commanded himself, "or you are done for." Once more he grabbed the telephone, and this time more determinedly, for in the midst of his misery one really first-class inspiration had come to him: this was to communicate with the county jail. The minister was really much more likely to have friends in the county jail than in the St. Albans; and it was a safe wager that he went there more frequently. Rollie knew the jailer well.

"Hello—Sam," he called. "This is Rollie. Has Doctor Hampstead been there this morning?"

"Yeh!"

"There now?"

"Nope."

"Know where he went?"

Evidently Sam turned to some one else in the room for information. Rollie heard a voice answering him and caught the words "San Francisco" and "Red Lizard."

"Did you get that?" called Sam into the 'phone. "He's gone to San Francisco."

"Yes,—but what's that got to do with the Red Lizard?"

"He came down to see the Red Lizard."

"The Red Lizard!" Rollie could not restrain a gasp, and then wondered if gasps are transmitted over the telephone—but went on to ask: "Is the Red Lizard in?"

"Yeh!"

"What for?"

Rollie was clinging to the telephone now like a drowning man to a rope's end.

"He got in some kind of a row with a service elevator man at the St. Albans last night and landed on him with the brass knucks. This morning the judge gave him three months in the county."

Rollie clenched his teeth, and his shoulders rocked for a moment. So that was what happened to the Red Lizard! What a long time ago last night was! How many things had happened! Last night he was a crook and a defaulter. To-day he was an honest man, and his accounts would bear the scrutiny of an X-ray. Now if only those diamonds—

But Sam had gone right on talking.

"We think Doctor Hampstead went to San Francisco on some sort of errand for the Lizard—Red's got a woman sick over there or something. But, say, the parson telephoned his house before he left here, and they can tell you sure."

"All right, thanks."

"So long, Rollie!"

Gone to San Francisco! Worse and worse. Rollie huddled in his chair. But there was still a grain of hope. Sam might be mistaken, or the trip might be a short one, or the minister might have left a telephone number that would reach him.

But the voice of Rose Langham dashed these hopes one by one. Her brother had gone to San Francisco on an uncertain quest; he would not be back until very late at night, and he had no idea himself where in the city his search would lead him.

For the second time that day Rollie found himself in a state bordering on physical collapse. The very stars were fighting against him. After the strain of a year in which the fear of detection, however masked, had always been present, his nerves were in none too good condition, anyway. The events of the last twenty-four hours had racked them to the limit of self-control. And yet, when safely past the danger of discovery of his defalcation, the growing sense of the enormity of

the crime of theft had brought him to a point where in sheer self-defense he felt he must seize the jewels and literally fling them at their owner. Now, goaded, tricked, tantalized, defeated—everything was in a conspiracy against him! It was enough to drive a man insane. Burbeck felt himself very near the maniacal point. Again he was seeing things. One moment the street outside was full of patrol wagons, all ringing their gongs at once, while platoons of police were marching and surrounding the bank. Another moment he had decided to anticipate the police by rushing out to the corner by the plaza, tossing his hat high in the air, and shouting and shrieking until a crowd had gathered, when he would exhibit the diamonds and proclaim himself the thief.

But he was spared the possibility of this insane freak by the fact that he could not exhibit the diamonds. They were in the vault. Damn the vault! To hell with them! To hell with everything! To hell with himself! That was where he was going!

Suddenly he looked up, trembling. Mercer, the assistant cashier whose desk was next to his own, must have overheard him. But no, Mercer was calmly writing. He had heard nothing, because nothing had been spoken. Rollie had been thinking in shouts, not speaking. And yet he looked about him wonderingly, like a man coming out of a temporary aberration.

"I will be shouting it next," he said to himself. "I am getting dotty; I'll burst if I have to hold this much longer. I'll burst and give the whole thing away."

His hat had been pushed back from his brow; he drew it forward and down until it shaded his face, and then with his jaws set in the most determined mood he could muster, he walked out of the bank and piloted his steps, with knees that were sometimes stiff and sometimes tottering, in the direction of the Hotel St. Albans.

Without waiting to be announced, he went up and knocked at the door of Miss Dounay's apartment. It was opened a mere crack to reveal a nose and a bit of an eyebrow. This facial fragment belonged to Julie, and with it she managed to convey an expression at once forbidding and inquisitorial.

"Oh, la la!" she exclaimed, after her survey. "It is the handsome man. Come in," and the door swung wide. "Madame will be glad to see you. Perhaps you bring the diamonds."

Julie said all this in her slight but charming accent with an attempt at good-humored vivacity, but that last was a very embarrassing remark to a caller in young Mr. Burbeck's delicate position. It caused one of his knees to knock sharply against the other as he manoeuvred to a position where he could lean against a heavy William-and-Mary chair, and thus remain standing until Miss Dounay should enter the room; since to sit down and then rise again suddenly was a feat that promised to be entirely beyond him.

Moreover, light as had been Julie's manner, Rollie saw that her appearance belied it. Her eyes were red, her sharp little nose was also highly colored, and in her hand was a tight ball of a handkerchief that had been wetted to such compactness by tears.

Mercifully Miss Dounay did not leave time for the young man's apprehensions to increase. She entered almost as Julie disappeared, wearing something black and oddly cut, a baggy thing, like a gown he remembered once seeing upon a sculptress when at work in her studio. It was the nearest to an unbecoming garb that he had ever known Marien to wear, and yet unbecoming was hardly the word. It did become her mood, which was somber. Her face was pale, and there were shadows beneath her eyes. She looked subdued, defeated even; but by no means broken. There were hard lines about her mouth, lines which Rollie had never seen there before. She wore a sullen expression, and a passion that was volcanic appeared to smoulder in her eyes. She greeted him rather perfunctorily, as if her mind had been brooding and, after bidding him be seated and sinking herself upon a couch, cushion-piled as usual, shrouded herself again in a state of aloofness which reminded him of the weather when a storm is brooding.

Rollie had expected her to be raging like a wild woman,—alternately hurling anathemas at the thief for having stolen her gems and heaping denunciations upon the police because they had not already captured the criminal and recovered the necklace.

Her apparent indifference to that subject only emphasized to Rollie what he had before observed,—that it was impossible ever to forecast the mind of this woman upon any subject, or under any circumstances. At the same time, the young man was extremely grateful for this abstraction, because it made what he had to do vastly easier.

"I suppose," he ventured huskily, "you are worried to death about your diamonds."

The sentence drew one lightning flash from her eyes, and that was all.

"To tell you the truth, I have hardly thought of them," she snapped.

Rollie sat with open mouth, totally unable to comprehend, staring until his stare annoyed her.

"I say I have hardly thought of them," she repeated, with an asperity entirely sufficient to

recall the young man from his amazement at her manner to the real object of his visit.

"But wouldn't you like to get your diamonds back?" he asked perspiringly.

"Of course, silly!" the actress replied, not bothering to conceal the fact that she regarded Burbeck as a child, sometimes useful and sometimes a nuisance. Apparently, she had hailed his advent because her ill humor required a fresh butt, Julie's face having indicated clearly that she had been made to suffer to the breaking point.

But Rollie was in no position to insist upon niceties of speech or manner. He had a trouble compared to which all other troubles of which he had ever conceived were nothing at all. He was haunted by a terrible fear, and to escape its torture he plumped full in the face of it by blurting:

"I have come to tell you that you are going to get your diamonds back."

If Marien's demeanor were a pose, it must have proved that she really was what her press agents claimed,—the greatest actress on the English speaking stage. She did not start, or speak. For a few seconds not even the direction of her glance was changed. Then her face did shift sufficiently for the black piercing eyes to stab straight into Rollie's, while her brows were lifted inquiringly. The glance said, "Well, go on!"

The young man obeyed desperately: "I am an ambassador for the—"

Still Miss Dounay did not speak; she did not move nor change an expression even; and yet Rollie felt himself interrupted. He could not tell how this was done, but he was sure that this woman had detected him in the first note of insincerity and by a thought-wave had emphatically said, "Don't lie to me!"

All at once, too, he realized that this motionless, marble-lipped creature sitting there before him was more implacable, more potential for evil than the raging tigress he had expected to confront. He felt somehow that she was not a woman, but a super-devil into whose clutches he was being drawn. He even had a sense that he was not going to be allowed any increased issue of moral stock on the ground of telling this woman the truth. He was going to tell her the truth because he had to, because she hypnotized it out of him.

"I say," he began, and stopped to wet his lips, but found his tongue so furred that it could not function in that behalf. "I say," he went on again, croaking hoarsely, "that I am the thief."

"You? The banker?"

Rollie fell to wondering how blue vitriol bites. Certainly it could not be more biting than the sarcasm in look and tone with which the woman had asked this question.

"Yes, I—"

The young man was going to prepare the soil for throwing himself upon her mercy—this woman whom he was now positive knew no such thing as mercy—by telling her about his defalcation; but in the wooden state of his mind, one quivering gleam of intelligence suggested that it was quite unnecessary to tell her anything about his defalcation; that it might give her an added set of pincers for the torture she might choose to inflict.

"Yes, I stole them," he affirmed doggedly. "And I am going to bring them back."

"Going to?" she asked, again making the fine shade of her meaning clear with the slightest expenditure of sound.

"Yes, a little accident happened."

"An accident!" The woman's eyes blazed, her cheeks were aflame, and her whole attitude expressive of menace. "You didn't lose them?"

"I only lost control of them for a few hours through a bit of stupidity," he confessed, and hurried on to explain: "For safe keeping this morning I locked them in John Hampstead's safe deposit box, and he went off with the key. He's wandering around the tenderloin of San Francisco now on an errand for a man in the county jail, and they don't even expect him home before tomorrow morning. We can get them—"

Again Rollie felt himself mentally interrupted, although Miss Dounay had not spoken.

This time, however, her features did change unmistakably. She had been listening with a cynical expression that somehow suggested the manner of a cat about to pounce; and suddenly this manner had departed. It was succeeded by a look of surprise and then of thoughtful interest, followed by that indefinable something which bade him cease to speak. He paused abruptly with his tongue in air, as it were; yet she neither spoke nor looked at him. Her features were a sort of moving picture of complex and swift-flying mental processes which succeeded one another with astonishing rapidity and ended in a queer expression of glory and triumph, while she stiffened her body and drew a full breath so quickly that the air whistled in her narrowing nostrils.

Then, as if becoming suddenly aware of the visitor's presence, Miss Dounay turned her eyes directly upon him and exclaimed, with a manner quite the most pleasant she had yet displayed:

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Burbeck. Something you said started such an interesting train of thought."

Her cordiality extended to the point of reaching out a hand and laying it reassuringly upon Rollie's arm, while she asked, and this time with a tone of real consideration:

"Will you be kind enough to tell me again, very carefully, and a little more in detail, just why you couldn't bring the diamonds to-day?"

Rollie, greatly relieved at this softening in Marien's mood at the very point where he had feared she might actually leap on him and throttle him, retold the story, only being careful to omit all reference as to why he chanced to be visiting Doctor Hampstead's box, and why Doctor Hampstead happened to come into his office so that he might pick up the key, as he did.

"What an odd coincidence!" commented Marien, when the recital was finished. Actually, she was laughing. Rollie's heart went out to her completely. He felt a sting of self-reproach at the harshness of his judgment of her, and was sensible of a new charity growing in his life for all mankind. It was really going to be made easy for him to take "the way up." He felt like singing a little psalm of thanksgiving.

"And the minister has no idea that the diamonds are in his vault?" that mercurial lady inquired, with a chuckle.

"Not the least in the world," assured Rollie, anxious to relieve his benefactor of any slightest odium of indiscretion.

"And when did you say Doctor Hampstead was expected home from San Francisco?"

Miss Dounay had stopped laughing and had an intent look, as if desiring to understand something very clearly.

"Perhaps the last boat to-night—possibly not till to-morrow morning."

"Then there is no way of getting the jewels until to-morrow morning?"

"None at all," confessed Rollie. "But as a matter of fact, they are perfectly safe there—safer than they are in your own apartment."

"So I should say," Miss Dounay observed dryly, "unless I revise my guest list."

Rollie flushed.

"That was coming to me," he confessed, frowning at himself. "That and much more."

His tone was serious and full of bitter self-reproach. Miss Dounay's surprisingly indulgent attitude emboldened him to pursue the disagreeable subject farther.

"I have not told you," he went on, "that I came to ask you for mercy."

"Do you not perceive that you are getting it without asking?" the actress replied, with a liquid glance that was really full of gentleness and sympathy.

"Of course," Rollie averred. "But I am so grateful that I did not want you to think I could take it for granted. I was in a terrible position, Miss Dounay. The crime was not accidental, but deliberate; that it miscarried was the accident. But that your diamonds are to be restored to you, and that I myself am on my way to a sort of character restoration, if I ever had any, which I begin to doubt, is all due to one good friend whom I saw to-day, and who is also a good friend of yours."

Again Rollie was interrupted; but this time there was nothing intangible about it.

Miss Dounay's face grew suddenly hard; cruel lines that were tense and threatening appeared about her mouth, while her eyes bored straight into his, as she exclaimed: "Never mind about that now. As for the theft: you need never hear from me one word about what you have done. The only injunction that I lay upon you is to keep absolute silence about it yourself. Remember, no matter what comes to pass, you know nothing and have nothing to say. So long as you are silent, I will protect you absolutely. Break the silence, and you will go where you belong!"

Of all the hard glances Miss Dounay had given young Burbeck, the look which accompanied this last menacing sentence was positively the hardest. A spasm of mortal terror wrung the young man's heart, as he saw how deliberately implacable this woman could be, and how completely he was in her power.

But presently, Miss Dounay, as if suddenly ashamed of her outburst of feeling over so slight an occasion, broke into radiant smiles, took Rollie by the arm, and led him a few steps in the direction of the door. Her manner was gracious and almost affectionate, proclaiming that at least as long as all went well with her moods, the whole wretched incident was past and forgotten absolutely.

As if to make this emphatically clear, she inquired:

"And when is it that you go out with Mrs. Ellsworth Harrington upon her launch party?"

"With Mrs. Harrington's launch party?" Rollie asked, in a dazed voice, his mind groping as at some elusive memory.

"Yes," the actress replied crisply. "You told me yesterday you were going out to-day with her party for a cruise on the Bay."

"Yesterday!" confessed Rollie dreamily. "By Jove, so I did. But," and as though it made all the difference in the world, "that was yesterday!"

"And isn't to-day to-day?" Miss Dounay asked significantly. "Going to buck up, aren't you?" she continued with intimate friendliness of tone. "You are still to continue as the Amalgamated's social ambassador?"

"Why, of course," the young man replied, although weakly, for after what he had passed through of hope and fear in the past few hours and even the past few minutes, he felt quite unequal to any such prospect as the immediate resumption of his social duties.

But it was a part of the swiftly forming plans of the strong willed woman that he should take them up immediately, and she cleverly recalled his mind to the necessity of special attention to Mrs. Harrington's projects by inquiring tentatively: "I suppose Mrs. Harrington was very much put out because I did not attend her dinner last night?"

"I should say!" confessed Rollie, turning a wry face at the memory.

"Suppose," suggested Miss Dounay in calculating tones, "that I went with you upon her launch party this afternoon."

"You? Oh! Miss Dounay!" Rollo exclaimed, with another of his looks of dog-like gratefulness. "Could you be as good as that? Why, say!" and the young man's enthusiasm actually began to kindle. "You'd undo the damage of last night and fix me with her for life. Positively for life; because," and he hesitated while an expression half ludicrous and half painful crossed his face; "because you are ten times as big a social asset now that—that—" he could not bring himself to finish the sentence.

But Miss Dounay relieved him of his embarrassment by appearing not to notice and broke in with a practical question:

"What time does the launch leave the pier?"

"At four. It is now one-thirty."

For a moment Miss Dounay's brow was threaded with lines of thought, as if she were making calculations and tying the loose ends of some project together in her mind.

"Yes," she said, her face clearing and a look of impish happiness coming into her eyes, "I can go. It will be a delightful relief. I have been bored beyond measure by my own company to-day. Come here at three-thirty and François will take us to the pier."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FIRST ALARM

Doctor Hampstead was more successful than he had dared to hope in his quest for the woman of the underworld to whom the Red Lizard, from his position in the county jail, acknowledged a tardy obligation. By five o'clock the sufferer was located, her condition inquired into, and the services of a nurse from the Social Settlement near by arranged for, with instructions that the minister be notified of any serious change in the patient's condition.

His breast warmed comfortably with the sense of duty done, the clergyman made his way toward the water front, congratulating himself that he would get the six o'clock boat and be at home in time for dinner; but as he walked through the ferry building, his eye was caught by a headline in one of the evening papers. "MINISTER TO BE ARRESTED" it proclaimed in tall characters of glaring black; and he reflected cynically at the eagerness with which the headline makers seize upon that word "minister" or any of its synonyms. It made the black letters blacker when they spelled minister, priest, or clergyman.

Wondering what preacher could have got himself in trouble, and feeling a slight sense of resentment at the creature, whoever he might be, to have thus brought notoriety and possible dishonor upon the calling, Doctor Hampstead bought a copy of the paper from fat Hermann of the crutch and red face, who has stood so many years at the ferry gate; but reading no farther than the headline, he doubled the paper in his hand and elbowed his way through the crowd to a seat on the exposed upper deck of the ferryboat. Wearied from the exertions of his day, the minister found temporary diversion in watching the fountains of humanity gushing up the stairways. Many of the people he knew, and those who saw him nodded as they passed. Once or twice it struck him that there was something peculiar in these glances of recognition, a startled

look of surprise or wonder that he could not quite understand. Occasionally the bold look of a man he did not know but who apparently recognized him had in it a quality of cynicism or of gloating.

With a disagreeable feeling of embarrassment which he did not undertake to explain, the minister turned away from the crowd and fell to watching the sweep of bay and the plowing craft upon it. The fresh salt breeze was very grateful to his face and lungs after the noisome alleys through which his mission had taken him. The water this evening was amethyst blue, and under the prows of the passing boats broke into foam of marble whiteness. The sky above was a pure turquoise, except towards the west, where the descending sun kindled a conflagration of glory in the low-lying clouds. All this wealth of refreshing color and the tonic in the stiffening breeze made the world not only seem fresh and pure, but full of power; as if to give assurance that the ocean and the coming night were big enough and strong enough to swallow all the unpleasantness and all the weakness and wickedness of men, and send the sun up to-morrow morning upon a new day that was fresh and pristine, like the day of creation itself.

Hampstead remembered his prayer of the morning that this particular day might be a great one, and felt a trifle disappointed. In a kind of a way it had been big. Rollie Burbeck had come to him, broken and cowering. He had helped him; he believed he had saved him. Surely, for the time being, he had saved that gifted mother of his from the awful shock of knowing that her son was a defaulter and a thief. True, he had plunged heavily in rescuing that boy; yet the money came from people who believed in Hampstead sufficiently to give him of their surplus wealth for just such ventures. If the effort failed, they would regret the loss of the man more than the loss of the money.

Yet the minister really believed that Rollie was going to take the "way up", and assuring himself once more of this, fell to wondering how Miss Dounay received the penitent when he brought back the diamonds, and whether she had acted generously or spitefully. Speculating next whether the story of the return of the diamonds had been given to the newspapers yet, and anxious to know how they had handled it, if it had, Hampstead bethought him of the paper in his hand and unfolded it for inspection.

But the make-up of the front page forced his attention back upon the matter of the minister who was to be arrested. The sub-head startled him, for it contained his own name, while the opening sentence revealed that it was himself who was to be arrested, and that the occasion of the arrest was the charge that he had stolen the Dounay diamonds.

At the first impact of this astounding piece of news, an exclamation of amazement broke from the minister's lips; but immediately his teeth were set hard as his eye dived down the column, lapping up the words of the story by sentences and almost by paragraphs.

Miss Dounay, it appeared, had gone to the office of District Attorney Miller at three o'clock that afternoon by appointment, and had there sworn to a complaint, charging him, the Reverend John Hampstead, with the theft of her diamond necklace, valued at twenty-two thousand dollars. There were a few lines of an interview with District Attorney Miller, in which that official stated that at first he had not regarded Miss Dounay's charges seriously, but that the actress was so emphatic in her demand for the warrant of arrest that he had not felt himself justified in refusing it. At the same time, the District Attorney expressed his personal belief in the innocence of the minister.

An attempt to serve the warrant immediately, the story said, had been frustrated by the temporary absence of the Reverend Hampstead in San Francisco upon one of his accustomed missions of mercy.

The article concluded with the statement that while it was generally known that Doctor Hampstead was one of Miss Dounay's guests on the night before, the report that he had been charged with the theft of the diamonds was everywhere received with a smile, and there was some harsh criticism of the District Attorney for issuing a complaint, the only effect of which must be to gratify the enemies of the clergyman, and to lessen his influence, thus hampering him in the good work he was doing in the community. This would be all to no purpose, since even a preliminary hearing must be sufficient to show that there was no evidence against him, and that the complaint itself was due to the extravagant suspicion of a highly nervous woman, laboring under great emotional strain.

That the actress herself, a woman of moods and caprices, had no adequate appreciation of the seriousness of her act in thus attacking the character of Doctor Hampstead was made evident to the reporters, when a telephone call to her apartments revealed that in the very hour when an endeavor to serve the warrant of arrest was being made, the actress was leaving her hotel in the

company of a well-known young business man for a pleasure cruise upon the Bay.

The minister saw with satisfaction how completely the facts as developed had been edited into a story, the assumptions of which were entirely favorable to him. That was good. It was also right. That in itself would show this reckless woman that the people would refuse to believe ill of him upon the word of any mere stranger.

Nevertheless, reflection on the sheer impudence of the woman's attack made Hampstead angry, and with a quick, nervous movement he crushed the paper into a ball and hurled it over the side.

Was there ever a story of blacker ingratitude? Was there ever a weaker, more craven specimen of a man? Was there ever a more clever, more devilish woman?

So this was the way she made good her threat. She had set this trap, had persuaded Rollie to pretend to steal the diamonds and to make a false confession to him, during which the minister had actually sealed the diamonds in one of his own envelopes. John wished he could be sure whether the young rascal actually took the diamonds away with him, as he appeared to do, or whether he didn't drop them in a drawer of the desk or about the study, where a search would reveal them.

With facial expression quite unministerial Hampstead's mind raced on to the question whether the story of the defalcation was also trumped up? But at this point his excited mental processes halted, puzzled for a moment; and then abruptly his face cleared, as he saw the untenableness of his suddenly conceived theory. No; it would not do. Rollie had undoubtedly been perfectly sincere, and this scheming Jezebel of a woman had merely taken advantage of him in the moment of confession, and made him either consciously or unconsciously, and perhaps helplessly, a tool of her desperate vengeance.

And vengeance for what? Hampstead kept asking himself that, and never got farther with an answer than the rage of a self-centered, heartless woman at his failure to pay the supreme tribute to vanity by making love to her as once he had done, and giving her the gloating satisfaction of spurning him as she had spurned him before. This was the extent of his crime against her, and this bold, bald attempt to destroy him was the punishment she had devised. Heavens! Had the woman no sense of responsibility at all? No consciousness of all the terrible harm she would be doing to so many others besides himself if she succeeded in ruining him? Think of the men and women who trusted him, the young boys and girls to whom he was pointed out as a shining example, the struggling people who found inspiration and courage in the spectacle of his own dauntless battlings for the right.

John felt that it was not egotism to think of himself in this way. He knew it as a fact because he had to know it, because men told him so continually, and because it was a supremely steadying influence upon his own life. He dared not swerve. Rollie Burbeck was not the only man in the community who owed him for escape from a fall, or who was toiling laboriously upward, with an eye on the minister climbing far above and turning cheerfully to beckon or lower an Alpine rope for part of the weakened climber's load.

And the Dounay woman knew all of this. Some of it he had shown to her in the hope that it would be an inspiration. Some of it she had seen for herself. But now, in her malice and hatred, she took no account of all that. Unable to make him swerve, she was wickedly determined to hurl him down. And having used Rollo Burbeck this far, John had no doubt at all that her genius would be entirely equal to using him still further, by binding him to absolute secrecy as to his knowledge of the minister's innocence.

But this thought brought home another with shocking force,—the realization that Rollie, the one man who could vindicate him of this charge must not vindicate him! For Rollie to speak and ruin himself seemed only fair, rather than for the minister to be ruined; yet for the young man to confess would be a terrible blow to the mother,—would in fact most likely kill her. That was unthinkable. That blow must be prevented at all hazards.

But even eliminating the mother, and supposing the young man too craven to speak out for himself, Hampstead knew, thinking back a few hours, that on his honor as a minister he had sealed his own lips concerning the young man's confession; he had hinged his appeal to the moral consciousness of that misguided youth upon his own fealty as a priest of God to the sacred trust of confession. How presumptuous this afternoon sounded that speech which he had made to the wretched penitent this morning with such easy assurance.

Yet, presumptuous or not, Hampstead's reasonings had led him quickly to the one outstanding fact: His knowledge of who did steal the diamonds could never be used in his defense. His vindication must depend solely on the inability of Miss Dounay to prove her case.

This in itself put him in a negative and an unnatural position, an all but helpless position. His nature was aggressive. He was a fighter, not a "stander." Instead of vindication, he could never get more than a Scotch verdict of "not proven." He would have to face the community with that. Well, thank God, he was strong enough for that; strong enough to simply stand and endure! Yes, testing his moral fiber by the best judgment he could form of what the strain would be like, he felt equal to the load. In the consciousness of this strength, his shoulders stiffened with pride and a sort of eagerness to take up their burden. A sense of triumph even came to him. This self-deluding woman should see how strong he was, and how unshakable was the faith of the community in the integrity of his character.

But when the minister, rather calmed by having hardened himself thus against what appeared to be coming upon him, lifted his eyes suddenly from the deck, he was disconcerted to observe a group of people eyeing him curiously at a distance of some dozen or twenty feet. These were people whom he did not recognize, but some one of them evidently knew him and had pointed him out to the rest. He reflected that they must have been watching him for some time. No doubt they had observed his demeanor as he read the paper, and afterwards when he tossed it away in anger. He must have made quite an exhibition of himself, and it gave him a creepy sensation to catch these curious, unfeeling eyes upon him as if they viewed the struggles of a fly in a spider's web. It made him feel that he was entangled, and he began to realize what a diversion his entanglement would afford this whole metropolitan community, and that to-night, through the headlines in the papers, everybody was watching him just as these people were. He reflected, too, that there is a fascination about watching the fall of a tall tree, of a tall flagpole, or of a tall human being. At the moment Hampstead did not feel so very tall; yet he knew that deservedly or undeservedly, he was upon a position of eminence, and his fall would afford an interesting spectacle.

However, he did not intend to fall. Rising vigorously from his seat, the minister confronted with a smile the group who had been gazing at him. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said pleasantly, and walked toward the front of the boat.

"Some nerve, what!" was a comment that broke out of the group as he passed it. Whether the words were meant for his ears or not, they reached them and caused another smile.

"I'll show them nerve!" he mused, with foolish but very human pride.

Mingling in the crowd which trampled and elbowed its way off the boat, the minister was careful to bear himself with open-eyed good cheer. He kept his chin up, a self-confident smile upon his face, and his eyes roving for a sight of familiar faces. Whenever he caught the eye of an acquaintance, the greeting he bestowed was hearty and betokened a man without the slightest cause for anxiety of any sort.

Nevertheless, it was disturbing to perceive that people rather avoided his eye. Generally quite the reverse was true, and it was rare upon the boat that some one did not approach him and fall into conversation. Yet so subtle is that mysterious psychology of the social impulse that now a mere publication of the fact that he was to be arrested, even accompanied, as it was, by the statement that nobody believed him guilty, had yet sufficient influence to make him shunned. What a silly world it was, after all!

But in making the transfer from the ferry to the suburban train, there was a walk of two hundred feet, with a news stand on the way, and then fresh disillusionment lay in wait for Doctor Hampstead, in the form of a later edition of another Oakland paper.

"CLERIC FLIES ARREST," bawled this headline stridently.

The minister's lip curled sarcastically at sight of this, but he bought the paper, reading as he walked to the car steps. But the sub-head was more disturbing. "Hampstead's Premises Searched," it declared, the types seeming to scream the words exultantly.

Searched—and in his absence! This was outrageous! More; it was alarming, for there were papers in his study which he had good reason for keeping from the eyes of the police. Fortunately, however, the most important of these were in the safe deposit box. He felt deeply grateful now for this box, the key to which was in his pocket; and after a sympathetic thought for Rose, Dick, and Tayna, and the excited, bewildered state in which they must have received the officers, the clergyman turned his mind to a contemplation of this new account in detail, and thereby got his first real taste of what an unfriendly attitude on the part of a newspaper can make of the most innocent circumstances.

Up to now, the minister, his utterances, his denunciations, even his moral crusades, had been popular. The papers had put the most favorable construction upon all his acts. Their columns and their headlines had done him respect and honor. But now this paper had put every circumstance

in the worst possible light. It cleverly touched up those scenes in the picture which looked incriminating and left the others unilluminated, until one would never gather from the story that there was any reason to doubt the guilt or the guilty flight of the minister.

Hampstead attributed this to mere unfriendliness, never suspecting that in one hour between editions an editor could have subtly sensed a popular readiness to accept the worst view of his case, and deliberately pandered to it as a mere matter of commercial newsmongering; nor that this unfavorable account was to be accepted as the first straw blown up in a hurricane of adverse criticism which would rise and sweep over the city and blow its very hardest in the aisles of All People's Church itself.

The effect of this narrative upon Hampstead's mind was unspeakably oppressive, and he looked up from its perusal with relief and pleasure at finding a well-known physician in the seat beside him. The doctor was prominent in the work of one of the Encina churches, and had been particularly sympathetic with Hampstead in campaigns against petty crime. The minister had a right, therefore, to feel that this man was one of his friends; yet the physician greeted him with a self-conscious air and immediately relapsed into silence. Hampstead endured this until the humor of the situation forced itself upon him.

"Oh, cheer up," he laughed, poking the physician with an elbow. "You probably know worse people than diamond thieves."

The doctor also laughed and disclaimed any sense of gloom, but his was an embarrassed merriment, and he refrained from meeting the eye of the minister. However, after another interval of silence, as if feeling that he should at any rate say something, he reached over and laid a patronizing hand upon the minister's knee.

"Of course, Doctor Hampstead," he suggested, "every one is confident you will be able to prove your innocence."

The minister made an ejaculation that was short and sharp.

The doctor looked at him with surprise, as if questioning whether he heard aright.

"Under the law, I thought a man was presumed to be innocent, and that his accusers had to prove his guilt," went on Hampstead.

The doctor flushed slightly, and while his eyes roved through the car window, declared:

"Well, I am afraid, Doctor Hampstead, you will find that a public man against whom a charge like this is hurled is presumed to be guilty until he proves himself innocent."

"That is your attitude?" inquired Hampstead coldly.

"Oh, by no means," protested the physician.

"It is his attitude all the same," commented the minister to himself, somewhat bitterly, as he descended from the train at the station nearest his home.

"How does he take it?" asked one sage citizen, crowding into the vacant seat beside the physician, while a second leaned over from behind to hear the answer.

"Very much worried," replied the doctor, as gravely and as oracularly as he would have pronounced upon another man's patient. "Very much worried!"

"Would you believe," the physician inquired presently of the first citizen, with a hesitating and extremely confidential air, "would you believe that Doctor Hampstead would say 'hell'—outside of a sermon, I mean?"

"No," answered the man addressed, "I would not," and his eyebrows were lifted, while his whole face expressed surprise, shock, and a desire for confirmation.

"Well," concluded the doctor enigmatically, "neither would I." And that was all Doctor Mann did say upon the subject, yet citizen number one, while casting the dice with citizen number two at the Tobacco Emporium on the corner next the railroad station to see which should pay for their after-dinner smoke, communicated in confidence that the Reverend Hampstead had, in the stress of his emotion, uttered an oath; in fact, and to be specific, had said that his persecutors, all and singular, and this actress woman in particular, could go to hell!

This conference between citizen one and two may have been overheard. An inference that it was so overheard might have been drawn from the columns of *The Sentinel*, which next morning concluded its story of the remarkable developments of the night with the observation that the character of the minister was evidently cracking under the strain, since last night upon the suburban train, when a friend addressed him with a solicitous inquiry, the accused clergyman had broken into a stream of profane objurgations loud enough to be heard above the roar of the train in several seats around. It was added that the reverend gentleman quickly regained control of his feelings and apologized for his form of expression by saying that he had been overworked for a long time and the developments of the day had seriously upset him.

John Hampstead read this particular paragraph in *The Sentinel* with a sense of utter amazement at the wicked mendacity of public rumor, since what he had said to Doctor Mann was merely "Humph!" uttered with sharp and scornful emphasis.

But there was a far bigger story than that in the morning *Sentinel*. It had to do with those things which happened between the hour when John Hampstead dropped from his train, a little irritated with Doctor Mann, and the hour when he went to bed, but not to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII THE ARREST

As the perturbed minister, hurrying from the train, turned into the short street leading toward his home upon the Bay-side, he was charged upon by Dick and Tayna, both of whom, in the state of their emotion, forgot High School dignity and came rushing upon their uncle with feet thudding like running ostriches. Tayna's cheeks were red as her Titian hair with flaming indignation, and her eyes burned like lights, while her full red lips pouted out: "Isn't it a shame?"

"It's a darn piece of blackmail, that's what it is, and it's actionable, too!"

This oracular verdict, of course, came panting from the lips of Dick, who, over-exerted by his run, stood with arms akimbo, hands holding his sides, and his too heavy head tipping backward on his shoulders, while with scrutinizing eye he studied the face of his uncle.

As for Hampstead, in the devoted loyalty of these fatherless children and the distress of mind which each exhibited, he entirely forgot the sense of hot injustice and wrong burning in his own breast. All the emotion he was then capable of turned itself into sympathy for them and solicitous anticipations as to the effect of the whole wretched business upon his sister Rose. With a sweep of his strong arms, he gathered the two young people to his breast, printing a kiss on Tayna's cheek, which he found burning hot, and squeezing Dick until the stripling gasped and struggled for release as he used to do when a squirming youngster. With his arms still affectionately about the shoulders of the two, Hampstead walked on down the street, palm-studded, with flower-bordered skirts of green on either side and the blue vista of the Bay showing dimly in the growing dusk.

Rose was waiting on the piazza. Her face was very calm, yet to John's keen eye, it bore a look of desperately mustered self-control. With the ready intuition of her sex, she had divined far more completely than her brother how desperate and dangerous was the struggle upon which he was entering, and she was determined to give him every advantage that sympathy, poise, and unwavering loyalty could supply.

"It's all right, Rose, all right," he hastened to assure her, as the steps were mounted. "A mere extravagance of an excited woman that the papers have made into a great sensation. It will melt away like fog. We are helpless for a few days until I can demand and receive a hearing upon preliminary trial. That will show that they have no case at all. Until then, we must simply stand and be strong."

Rose was already in her brother's arms, yet his speech, instead of reassuring her, made the tears flow.

"It is so—so humiliating to think of you defending yourself," she protested, "to hear you talk of their inability to make out a case. It seems so—so lowering, as if you were going to be put on trial just like a criminal."

"Why," replied John, "that's just what it all means. *Just like a criminal!*"

He said the thing strongly enough, but after it came a choke in the throat. He had not really comprehended this before. He had thought of making his defense from the standpoint of the popular idol that he was. As a matter of fact, he was going to trial like any criminal. His vantage ground was merely that of the prisoner at the bar. This prepared him for what Rose had to say next; for subtly perceiving that her brother had sustained an additional shock, her own self-control revived. Wiping her eyes, she turned to lead the way within.

"They," she said solemnly, "are waiting in the study."

"They?" inquired Hampstead.

"There are four men in there," Rose replied. "They want," and her voice threatened to break, "they want you!"

At this bald putting of the horrible fact, Tayna burst into a wail of woe and flung her arms about her uncle, whom she had followed into the hall.

"There, there, girl, don't cry," urged her uncle soothingly. "There is no occasion for it; this is annoying but not necessarily distressing. It is a mere formality of the law which must be complied with. Run along now, all of you, and wash the tears out of your eyes. I will be with you in five minutes. Let us sit down to a happy, cheerful dinner. I confess I am a little upset myself, but not too disturbed to be hungry," and with a weak attempt at grimacing humor, the big man laid a hand upon the region of his diaphragm.

In his study, as Rose had forewarned him, the minister found four men: Searle, Assistant District Attorney; Wyatt, Deputy Sheriff; and two city detectives.

Searle was a suave, resourceful man and the one assistant in the District Attorney's office whom Hampstead had found himself unable to trust; and that rather because of his personal and political associations than for any overt act of which the minister was cognizant.

Wyatt was a bloated person, amiable in disposition, whose excess of egotism was coupled with a paucity of intelligence, yet wholly incorruptible and with an exaggerated sense of duty that made him a capable officer,—a thing with which his breeding, which was obtrusively low, did not interfere.

Hampstead was able to master his feelings sufficiently to greet the quartet urbanely, if not cordially.

"A disagreeable duty, I assure you," conceded Searle.

"A disagreeable experience," laughed Hampstead, but with no great suggestion of levity.

"I guess I don't need to read this to you, Doc," said the Deputy Sheriff, as he opened to Hampstead a document drawn from his pocket. "It is a warrant for your arrest."

The minister took the document and glanced it through, his eyes hesitating for a moment at the name of the complaining witness.

"Alice Higgins?" he asked, with an inquiring glance.

"The true name of the complaining witness and accuser," replied Searle.

"Oh, I see," assented John.

It had never occurred to him that Marien Dounay was only a stage name. Was there anything at all about this woman that was not false, he wondered.

John returned the warrant to Wyatt and caught the look in that officer's eye. A sense of the horrible indignity of arrest came over the minister, a perception of what it meant: this yielding of one's liberty, of one's body to the possession of another, who might be a coarser and more inferior person than one's self. With a guilty flush, John thought how many times in his crusades against the gamblers and small law-breakers he had procured the swearing out of complaints that led to the arrest of scores of men. He had marveled at the venomous hatred which those men later displayed toward himself, regarding him as the author of a public disgrace put upon them, and not upon them alone but upon their families also. Now he understood.

"The bail is fixed at ten thousand dollars," explained Searle smoothly. "When we got your telephone message that you would be home at seven o'clock, I took the liberty of arranging for Judge Brennan to be in his chambers at nine to-night so that you could be there with your bondsmen and not have to spend the night in jail."

"That was very considerate of you," assented the minister, a huskiness in his tone despite himself.

The night in jail! The very idea. And ten thousand dollars bail! He had expected to be released upon his own recognizance. Again that disagreeable intimation of being treated like a common criminal came crowding in with a suffocating effect upon his spirit. But he rallied, exclaiming with another effort at easy urbanity: "Very well, I acknowledge my arrest, and it will be unnecessary to detain you gentlemen further. I shall be glad to meet you with my bondsmen in the judge's chambers."

The Deputy Sheriff coughed in an embarrassed way, but stood stolidly before his prisoner.

"I am sorry, Doctor Hampstead," explained Searle, "but we shall have to search you. Benson's men here will do that."

"Search me?" exclaimed Hampstead, with a sudden sense of insult. "By the appearance of things," he added, while casting a sarcastic look at the signs of disorder about, "I should think this farce had been carried far enough. You did not find the diamonds here. You do not expect to find them upon my person, do you?"

The speaker's tones witnessed a natural indignation and considerable irritability.

"I got to do my duty," replied Wyatt stubbornly, making a sign to the two detectives, who immediately arose and advanced upon the minister.

For an instant the situation was exceedingly tense. Hampstead was a very strong man, and

his resentment at what seemed an insult put upon him with malice, was very hot. But good sense triumphed in the interval of thought which the officers diplomatically allowed.

"Oh, of course," he exclaimed with a gesture of submission, "you men are only cogs. Once the machinery of the law is put in motion, you must turn with the other wheels. Pardon my irritation, gentlemen, but the situation is unusual for me and rather hard. I feel the injustice and indignity of it very keenly."

"We appreciate your situation perfectly," said Assistant District Attorney Searle smoothly. "As you say, we are all of us cogs."

Yet the actual search of his person, once entered on, seemed to Hampstead to proceed rather perfunctorily, although at the same time he got from the faces and manner of all four an impression of something they were holding in reserve.

"What is this?" asked one of the detectives dramatically, holding up a long, narrow key with a red rubber band doubled and looped about the neck, which he had just extracted from the minister's pocket.

"That is the key to my safe deposit box at the Amalgamated National," replied Hampstead, naturally enough.

"Then," said Wyatt bluntly, "we've got to search that box."

The minister was instantly on his guard.

Some play of eyes between the four men, accompanied by a subtle change in the expression of their faces, warned him that they must have been apprised of the existence of this box and that the key was the real object of their personal search. Hampstead resolved hastily to defeat them.

"I decline to permit it," he declared shortly. "There are very private papers in that box, things which have been communicated to me in the utmost confidence, and I would not be justified in permitting you—or any one else—to handle them. Under the rules of the bank, without my consent or an order of court, you could not reach the box."

"I have that order of court here," said Searle, speaking up quickly, but with cold precision of utterance, "in a search warrant directed particularly to your safe deposit box."

Like a flash, Hampstead thought that he understood.

"So that is what you are here for, Searle?" he snapped sarcastically, turning and confronting the Assistant District Attorney. "I never have trusted you. I couldn't understand your presence here or your interest in this silly charge; but now I comprehend fully. You have taken advantage of it to get your eyes on the perjury case I have against your bosom friend, Jack Roche. Well, I warn you! This is where I stop and fight!"

But Searle refused to get angry at this bald impugnement of his integrity and motives. No doubt it was his confidence in an ultimate and complete humiliation of the minister that enabled him to maintain an unruffled demeanor while he suggested blandly:

"Perhaps you ought not to proceed further, Doctor Hampstead, without the advice of a lawyer."

The proposal touched the minister in his pride.

"A lawyer?" he objected scornfully. "Thank you, no! My cause requires no expert advocacy. In my experience of the past four years, I have learned quite enough about court practice to cope with this ridiculous burlesque without professional assistance."

Searle, playing his cards deliberately, took advantage of the minister's assumed acquaintance with legal lore to suggest with alacrity:

"You know then, Doctor, that it is useless to fight a court order of this sort, as you spoke of doing in your excitement a moment ago. I think, with the attorneys of your Civic League, you have gone through a safe deposit box or two upon your own account, by means of just such a search warrant as I now exhibit to you."

Again Hampstead's second thought assured him that he was powerless to resist.

"Yes," he confessed resignedly to Searle's speech, after the necessary interval for consideration, "I suppose I must admit it. When I spoke of fighting, I spoke in heat; partly because I feel the gross injustice and bitter wrong this senseless charge is doing to innocent people other than myself, who am also innocent, and partly because, as I have already told you, I utterly distrust your motive in making the whole of this search. You must be as well aware as I that this charge is the work of a woman who, to speak most charitably, is beside herself with excitement."

But Searle only smiled, and observed with urbanity unruffled.

"I am sorry, Doctor, that you distrust me. You may have the privilege, of course, of being present when we examine the contents of the box."

"Naturally I shall insist upon that," said the minister.

"In that case," Searle added with significant emphasis, "I think your observations will convince you that we are solely concerned in a search for the diamonds."

"As I like to believe well of all men, I shall hope so," countered the minister; and then, since the demeanor of the officers made it clear there was no more searching to be done, he continued, after a glance at his watch: "If I am to meet Judge Brennan and yourself with my bondsmen at nine o'clock, I suggest that we go from there direct to the bank vaults. They are accessible until midnight, as you doubtless know."

"Very good, Doctor," replied Searle in that oily voice which indicated how completely to his satisfaction affairs were progressing.

"And now," suggested the minister, with a nod toward the street door, "as the hour is late, I will ask you gentlemen to excuse me."

Searle darted a look at Wyatt.

"Very sorry, Doc, but I got to stay with you," volunteered the deputy, "and hand you over to the judge."

Once more the flush of offense mounted to the cheek of Hampstead. Hand him over to the judge! How galling such language was when used of him! Again he recalled with compunction how many arrests he had caused without an emotion beyond the satisfaction of an angler when he hooks a fish. But he—John Hampstead—minister, preacher, pastor of All People's; a shining light in a vast metropolitan community! Surely it was something different and infinitely more degrading for him to be arrested than for a mere plasterer, or mayhap a councilman? He had a greater right than they to be wrathful and resentful. Besides, they were guilty. Judges, juries, or their own confessions, had unflinchingly so declared. He was innocent, spotlessly innocent of the charge against him. His defenselessness proceeded from relations of comparative intimacy with the actress, and his priestly knowledge of the guilty person. Yet the thought of this helped humor and good sense to triumph again, over his rising choler.

"Oh, very well," he exclaimed, half-jocularly, half-derisively. "Make yourself at home; all of you make yourselves at home. We are accustomed to an unexpected guest or two at the table. Be prepared to come out to dinner. Listen, if you like, while an arrested felon telephones to his friends, seeking bondsmen. You may hear secret codes and signals passing over the wire. You may even wish to put under surveillance the gentlemen with whom I communicate."

"Doctor! Doctor!" protested Searle, with hands uplifted comically. "Your hospitality and your irony both embarrass us. The detectives and I will be on our way. Wyatt will have to do his duty."

"As you please," exclaimed Hampstead, who was fast recovering his poise; "quite as you please."

With this speech he held open the outside door and bade the three departing guests good evening; and then, while the Deputy waited in the room, the clergyman was busy at the telephone until he had the promise of three different gentlemen of his acquaintance to meet him at Judge Brennan's chambers at nine that night and qualify as his bondsmen in the sum of ten thousand dollars.

This much attended to, dinner became the next order; but it was not a very happy affair. There had never been a time when the little family group, bound together by ties that were unusually tender, wished more to be alone at a meal. Now, when the superfluous presence was the official representative of the very thing that had plunged them into gloom, the situation became one of torture. Food stuck to palates. Scraps of conversation were dropped at rare intervals and upon entirely extraneous subjects in which nobody, not even the speakers, had the slightest interest. At times there was no sound save the audible enjoyment of his food by their guest, for the Deputy Sheriff, accustomed to the ruthless thrust of his official self into the personal and sometimes the domestic life of individuals, was quite too crass to sense the embarrassment and positive pain his presence caused and was also exceedingly hungry.

In this general silence, the grating of wheels on the graveled walk outside the study door sounded loudly.

"Mrs. Burbeck!" exclaimed Hampstead in some surprise. "She never came to me at night before. Finish your dinner, Deputy. If you will excuse me, I must receive one of my parishioners in the study."

"Sorry, but I can't excuse you, Doc," replied Wyatt jocularly; "but if you'll excuse me for just a minute, while I get away with this second piece of loganberry pie, I'll be with you."

"Be with me?" asked the minister, color rising. "Do you mean that you will intrude upon the privacy of an interview with a helpless lady in a wheel chair who comes to see me alone?"

Wyatt's fat cheek was bulging, and there were tiny streams of crimson juice at the corners of the lips; but he interrupted himself long enough to reply bluntly: "I ain't agoin' to let you out of my sight. Orders is orders, that's all I got to say."

"But tell me, Wyatt, who gave you such orders?" queried the minister, with no effort to conceal his irritation.

"Searle. And they were give to him," answered the Deputy phlegmatically, his fat-imbedded eyes intent upon the white and crimson segment of pastry on his plate.

"And who gave such orders to him?" persisted Hampstead.

"If you ask me—" began the Deputy, and then exasperatingly blotted out the possibility of further speech by the transfer of the dripping triangle to his mouth.

"Well, I do ask you," declared the minister curtly.

"He got 'em from Miss Dounay."

"And is that woman running the District Attorney's office?" questioned the minister scornfully.

"Search me!" gulped Wyatt, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I had one look at her. She's got eyes like a pair of automatics. You take it from me, Doc," and Wyatt laid his unoccupied hand upon the sleeve of the minister, "if she's got anything on you, compromise and do it quick; if she ain't, fight, and fight like h—." Wyatt stopped and shot an apologetic glance around the table. "Scuse my French," he blurted, "but you know what I mean."

"Yes," said the minister, holding his head very straight, "I realize that you do not mean to insult me."

"Insult you?" argued the Deputy, overflowing with satisfied amiability. "After coming over here to arrest you, and you givin' me a dinner like this? Pie like this? Well, I guess not. I'm bribed, Doc, that's what I am. I got to go in that room with you when you see the old lady; but I'll hold my thumbs in my ears, and I won't see a d— there I go again." Once more Wyatt's apologetic look swept around the table.

"Mrs. Burbeck is in the study," announced the maid.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ANGEL ADVISES

Because locomotion was not easy for her, it was to have been expected that the conferences between John Hampstead and Mrs. Burbeck, which, especially in the early days of his pastorate, had been so many, would take place in that lady's home; and they usually did. But as time went on, her own independence of spirit and increased consideration for the minister led Mrs. Burbeck frequently to prefer to come to him. To make this easy, two planks had been laid to form a simple runway to the stoop at the study door. When, therefore, the minister entered his library to-night, closely followed by Wyatt, he found that good woman waiting in the wheel chair beside his desk. The object of her call showed instantly in an expression of boundless and tender solicitude; and yet the clergyman immediately forgot himself in a conscience-stricken concern for his visitor.

"You should not have come," he exclaimed quickly, sympathy and mild reproach mingling, while a devotion like that of a son for a mother was conveyed in his tone and glance.

Truly, Mrs. Burbeck had never looked so frail. All but the faintest glow of color had gone from her cheeks; her eyes were bright, but with a luster that seemed unearthly, and her skin had a transparent, wax-like look that to the clergyman was alarmingly suggestive, as if the pale bloom of another world were upon her cheeks, which a single breath must wither.

Making these observations swiftly as his stride carried him to her, the minister, speaking in that rich baritone of melting tenderness which was one of Hampstead's most charming personal assets, concluded with: "You are not well. You are not at all well."

"Oh, yes," the Angel answered, "I am well."

Although she spoke in a voice that appeared to be thin to the point of breaking, her tone was even, and her senses proclaimed their alertness by allowing her eyes to wander from the face of the minister and fix themselves inquiringly over his shoulder on the unembarrassed, stolid man at the door.

"Tell her not to mind me, Doc," interjected Wyatt in a stuffy voice. At the same time an exploratory thumb brought up a quill from a vest pocket, and the deputy began with entire assurance the after-dinner toilet of his teeth, while his eyes roamed the ceiling and the tops of

the bookcases as if suddenly oblivious of the presence of other persons in the room.

"Yes," said the minister reassuringly, "we will not be disturbed by Mr. Wyatt's presence. He is merely doing his duty."

"You are—?" Mrs. Burbeck hesitated with an upward inflection, and the disagreeable word unuttered.

"Yes," replied the minister gravely, his inflection falling where hers had risen. "I am."

"Oh, that woman! That woman!" murmured Mrs. Burbeck, "I have mistrusted her and been sorry for her all at once. But it was Rollie that I feared for."

There was a sigh of relief that was as near to an exhibition of selfishness as Mrs. Burbeck had ever approached; after which, mother-like, she lapsed into a rhapsody over her son.

"Rollie," she began, in doting accents, "is so young, so handsome, so responsive to beauty of any sort; so ready to believe the best of every one. I feared that he would fall in love with her and ruin his business career—you know how these theatrical marriages always turn out—or that she would jilt him and break his heart. Rollie has such a sensitive, expansive nature. He has always been trusted so widely by so many people. Since that boy has grown up, I have lived my whole life in him. Do you know," and she leaned forward and lowered her voice to an impressive and exceedingly intimate note; "it seems to me that if anything should happen to Rollie, it would crush me, that I should not care to live,—in fact should not be able to live."

Tears came readily to the limpid pools of her eyes, and the delicately chiseled lips trembled, though they bravely tried to smile.

Hampstead sat regarding her thoughtfully, love and apprehension mingling upon his face. It suddenly reoccurred to him with compelling force that the most awful cruelty that could be inflicted would be for this delicate and fragile woman, who to-night looked more like an ambassadress from some other existence than a thing of flesh and blood, to know the truth about her son. Seeing her thus smiling trustfully through her mother-tears, thinking of all that her sweet, saint-like confidences had meant to him, Hampstead felt a mighty resolve growing stronger and stronger within him.

But for once Mrs. Burbeck's intuitions were not sure, and she misconstrued the meaning of her pastor's silence.

"Forgive me," she pleaded in tones of self-reproach. "Here I am in the midst of your trouble babbling of myself and my son. Yet that is like a mother. She never sees a young man's career blighted but she grows suddenly apprehensive for the child of her own bosom. Now that feeling comes to me with double force. I love you almost as a son. Consequently, when I see my boy out there in the sun of life mounting so buoyantly, and you, so worthy to mount, but struggling in mid-flight under a cloud, I feel a mingling of two painful emotions. I suffer as if struck upon the heart. My spirit of sympathy and apprehension rushes me to you, yet when I get to you, my doting mother's heart makes me babble first of my boy. And so," she concluded, with an apologetic smile, "you see how weak and frail and egotistic I am, after all."

"But," protested Hampstead, who had been eager to break in, "my career is not blighted. I am not under a cloud. It annoyed me to-night upon the boat and train to discover how suddenly I was pilloried by my enemies and avoided by my friends. They seem to take it for granted that I am already smirched; that to me the subject must be painful, and as there is no other subject to be thought of at the moment, hence conversation will also be painful. Because of this I am a pariah, to be shunned like any leper."

With rising feeling, the young minister snatched a breath and hurried on.

"Now, Mrs. Burbeck, I do not feel like that at all. I have put myself in the way of sustaining this attack through following the course of duty, as I conceived it. I need not assure you that I am innocent of a vulgar thing like burglary. I need not assure the public. It is impossible that they should believe it. Nevertheless, I have seen enough in the papers to-night to show how they will revel at seeing me enmeshed in the toils of circumstance. To them it is a rare spectacle. Very well, let it be a spectacle. It is one in which I shall triumph. I propose to fight. I feel like fighting." His fist was clenched and came down upon the arm of his chair, and his voice, though still low, was full of vibrant power.

"I feel that I have the right to call upon every friend, upon every member of All People's, upon every believer in those things for which I have fought in this community, to rally to my side to fight shoulder to shoulder in the battle to repel what in effect is an assault not upon me, but upon the things for which I stand."

Mrs. Burbeck's expressive eyes were floating full with a look that verged from sympathy toward pity.

"You will have to be a very expert tactician," she said soberly, drawing on those fountains of ripe wisdom, so full at times that they seemed to mount toward inspiration; "if you are to make the public think of your embarrassment in that way. It is going to look at this as a disgraceful personal entanglement of a minister with an actress!"

Hampstead writhed in his chair. Nothing but the depth of his consideration for Mrs. Burbeck kept him from exclaiming vehemently against what he deemed the enormous injustice of this assumption.

"She's right, Doc; right's your left leg," sounded a throaty voice, which startled the two of them into remembering that they were not alone.

"Why, Wyatt!" exclaimed the minister reprovingly, turning sharply on the deputy.

"Excuse me, Doc," Wyatt mumbled abjectly. "I just thought that out loud. All the same, she's wisin' you up to somethin' if you'll let 'er. Some of these old dames that ain't got nothin' to do but just set and think gets hep to a lot of things that a hustlin' man overlooks."

Hampstead was disgusted.

"Don't interrupt us again, please, Wyatt," he observed, combining dignity and rebuke in his utterance.

But Wyatt, influenced no doubt by the look almost of fright on Mrs. Burbeck's face, was already in apologetic mood.

"Say," he mumbled contritely, "you're right, Doc. I'm so sorry for the break that, orders or no orders, I'll just step out in the hall while you finish. But all the same, you listen to her," and he indicated the disturbed and slightly offended Mrs. Burbeck with a stab of a toothpick in the air, "and she'll tell you somethin' that's useful."

"Thank you very much, Wyatt," replied the minister in noncommittal tones, but with a sigh of relief as the deputy withdrew from the room.

Yet he had a growing sense of depression. Wyatt's boorish, croaking interruption had thrown him out of poise. Mrs. Burbeck's exaggerated sense of the gravity of the matter weighed him down like lead, and the more because an inner voice, sounding faintly and from far away, but with significance unmistakable, seemed to tell him her view was right. Nevertheless, his whole soul rose in protest. It ought not to be right. It was a gross travesty on justice and on popular good sense.

Mrs. Burbeck, looking at him fixedly, noted this change in spirit and the conflict of emotions which resulted. Reaching out impulsively, she touched the large hand of the man where it lay upon the desk.

"I feared you would take it too lightly," she reflected. "Youth always does that. For this world about you to turn and gnash you is mere human nature, which it is your business to understand. Has it never occurred to you that the same voices who upon Sunday cried out: 'Hosannah, Hosannah to the son of David!' upon Friday shouted: 'Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!'"

"But I am innocent," Hampstead protested, though weakly.

"And so was He," Mrs. Burbeck replied simply.

"But He was worthy to suffer. I am not," murmured Hampstead humbly.

"Sometimes," suggested the sweet-voiced woman, "suffering makes us worthy."

"But," affirmed the minister, his fighting spirit coming back to him, "I can prove my innocence!"

The face of Mrs. Burbeck lighted. "Then you must," she said decisively. "You give me hope when you say that. It was to tell you that I came, fearful that you would rely upon the public to assume your innocence until your guilt was proven. Alas, they are more likely to assume the contrary, to hold you guilty until you prove yourself innocent."

"I have been made to see that already," replied Hampstead. "At first, no doubt, I did underestimate the gravity of the situation. You have helped me to appraise its dangers more accurately."

But Mrs. Burbeck had more important advice to give.

"Yes," she went on half-musingly, because tactfulness appeared to suggest that form of utterance, "you will have to vindicate yourself absolutely. It is a practical situation. The danger is not that you will be convicted and sent to jail. Nobody believes that, I should say. The danger is that a question-mark will be permanently attached to your name and character. The Reverend John Hampstead, interrogation point! Is he a thief, or not? Did he compromise himself, or not? Is he weak, or not? This is the thing to fear, the thing that would condemn you and brand you as stripes brand a convict."

For a tense, reflective moment the minister's lips had grown dry and bloodless; and then he

confessed grudgingly: "I begin to see that you are right."

"You should begin your defense by a counter-attack," Mrs. Burbeck continued, feeling that the man was sufficiently aroused now to appreciate the importance of vigorous defensive actions. "Declare your disbelief that the diamonds have actually been stolen. Get out a warrant of search, and you will probably find them now concealed among her effects. At any rate this counter-search would hold the public verdict in suspense; and it would be like your well-known aggressive personality. If the search fails to reveal them, if her diamonds really are stolen, your complete vindication must depend upon the capture and exposure of the real thief."

Hampstead wiped his moist brow nervously. It was uncannily terrible that this woman of all persons in the world should say this to him. However, he had sufficient presence of mind to urge:

"But how unjust to force a contract like that upon me."

"It is unjust," admitted the Angel of the Chair. "Yet the innocent often suffer injustice, and you must realize that you are not immune. That is your only course, and I came specifically to warn you of it. Prove there was no theft, or get the thief!"

There was snap and sparkle in Mrs. Burbeck's eyes. Despite her physical frailty, her spirit was stout, and her conviction so forcefully conveyed that the minister delivered himself of a gesture of utter helplessness.

"I cannot do either," he said, half-whispering his desperation. "Yet I think I appreciate better than you how sound your advice has been. But there are reasons that I cannot give you, that I cannot give to any one, why the course which you suggest cannot be followed. I must go another way to vindication; but," and his voice rose buoyantly, "I will go and I will get it."

Mrs. Burbeck received with misgivings her pastor's complete rejection of the advice she had offered, yet some unconscious force in the young minister's manner swept her on quickly against her judgment and her will to an enormous increase of faith, both in the strength and the judgment of the man. As for Hampstead, he concluded his rejection by doing something he had never done before. That was to lean low, his face chiseled in lines of gravity and devotion, and taking the delicate hand of Mrs. Burbeck, that in its weakness was like a drooping flower, lift it to his lips and kiss it.

"Conserve all your spirit," he said solemnly, still clinging tenderly to the hand. "It may be that I shall have to lean heavily upon you."

"You may have my life to the uttermost," she breathed trustfully, never dreaming the thought unthinkable which the words suggested to her pastor and friend. But an extraneous idea came pressing in, and Mrs. Burbeck raised toward the minister, in a gesture of appeal, the hand his lips had just been pressing, as she pleaded: "And do not think too hardly of the woman. She loves you."

"Loves me!" protested Hampstead, with a ghastly hoarseness. "The woman is incapable of love—of passion even. She is all fire, but without heat—though once she had it. She is a mere blaze of ambition. All she cared for was to bring me to my knees, to dangle me like a scalp at her waist."

Mrs. Burbeck steadied him with a glance from a mind unimpressed.

"Be sorry, very sorry for her!" she insisted gravely. "Acquit yourself of no impatience—not even a reproachful look, if you can help it. She is to be pitied. Only the malice of unsated love could do what she has done. Show yourself noble enough, Christ-like enough, to be very, very sorry for her!"

"We got to go if we get there by nine!"

It was the smothered voice of Wyatt, calling through the door.

CHAPTER XXX THE SCENE IN THE VAULT

Silas Wadham, mine-owner; William Hayes, merchant, and E. H. Wilson, capitalist, subscribed to Hampstead's bond. Each was a big man in his way; each had unbounded faith in the integrity and good sense of the minister. They were not men to be swept off their feet by mere surface currents. They laughed a little and rallied John upon his plight, yet he knew somehow by the bend of the jaw when they dipped their pens in ink and with clamped lips subscribed their signatures, that these men were his unshakably.

One circumstance might have seemed strange. None of them were members of All People's.

Yet this was not because there were not men in All People's who would have qualified as unhesitatingly; but because John had a feeling that he was being assailed as a community character rather than as a clerical one.

Within ten minutes the formalities in Judge Brennan's chamber were concluded, Hampstead was free, but as he turned to Searle waiting suavely, backed by the suggestive presence of the two detectives, there came suddenly into his mind the memory that Rollie Burbeck's I.O.U. for eleven hundred dollars was in his safe deposit box in the envelope marked "Wadham Currency." This was a chaos-producing thought. If Searle once got an eye on that card, it would start innumerable trains of suspicion, each of which must center on the young bank cashier. In his present state, that boy was too weak to resist pressure of any sort. He would crumble and go to pieces, And yet, it was not the thought of the exposure and ruin of this spoiled young man that moved Hampstead to another of those acts which only riveted the chains of suspicion more tightly upon himself. It was the vision of the mother who only an hour before had murmured tremulously: "If anything should happen to him, I should not be able to live."

"Searle!" exclaimed the minister passionately. "You must not proceed with this. If you are a man of any heart, you will not persist against my pleadings. I tell you frankly there are secrets in that box which, while they would do you no good, could be used to ruin innocent men—guilty ones, too, perhaps; but the innocent with the guilty."

Hampstead was speaking hoarsely, his voice raised and trembling with an excitement and lack of nerve control he had never exhibited before in public.

The prosecutor's face pictured surprise and even gloating, but his eyes expressed a purpose unshaken.

"Confidences in my possession must be respected," Hampstead went on, arguing vehemently. "The confidences of a patient to his physician, of a penitent to his priest, are respected by the law. Because some of these confidences happen to be in writing, you have no right to violate them."

"And I tell you I have no intention to violate them," Searle returned testily. "My order is a warrant of search for a diamond necklace."

"And I tell you I will not respect the order of the court," blazed the minister. "You shall not examine the box!"

Judge Mortimer was startled; the bondsmen, although surprised by the minister's show of feeling, were sympathetic.

"I do not care whether you consent or not," Searle rejoined sarcastically. "I have the key, and I have the order of court, which the vault custodian must respect. I have done you the courtesy to meet you here so that you might be present when the box was examined. You must be beside yourself to suppose that I can be swayed from my duty, even temporarily, by an appeal like this."

"I think, Doctor, you should have the advice of your attorney on this," suggested Mr. Wilson considerately; and then turning to the Assistant District Attorney, observed sharply: "It seems to me, Searle, that this is rather a high-handed procedure."

But this remark of the practical Mr. Wilson had an instantly calming effect upon the minister.

"No, no," Hampstead exclaimed, turning to his friend; "I do not want an attorney. I do not need an attorney. I should only be misunderstood. It is the thought of what might result to innocent people through an examination of this box that stirs me so deeply."

"All the same, I think we had better have an attorney immediately," declared Wilson. "I can send my car for Bowen and have him here in fifteen minutes."

"An attorney," commented Searle brusquely, "could do nothing except to get an order from a Superior Court judge enjoining the bank from obeying the search warrant of this court. He would be lucky if, at this time of night, he caught a judge and got that under two or three hours. I will be in that box in five minutes. Come along, if you want to."

Searle moved toward the door, followed by the two detectives, his purpose perfectly plain; yet the minister hung back, for the first time so confused by entangling developments that he could not see where to put his foot down next.

"I think, Doctor Hampstead," advised Mr. Wadham kindly, "that since the District Attorney has matters in his own hands, you had better go with him and witness the search. If you do not object, we shall be glad to accompany you. Our presence may prove helpful later."

Because his mind ran forward in an absorbed attempt to forecast and forestall the probable developments from the impending discovery of the clue against Rollie, the minister still paused, until his silence became as conspicuous as his inaction.

"Oh, yes, yes," he exclaimed, suddenly aware of the waiting group about him. "Yes, by all

means, go with me. What we must face, we must face," he concluded desperately, with an uneasy inner intimation that he was saying perhaps the wrong thing. Yet with the vision of Mrs. Burbeck's saintly, smiling face before him, Hampstead, usually so calm and self-controlled, had little care what he said or how he said it so long as his mind was busy with some plan to fend off this frightful blow from her.

Mr. Wadham was a man of mature years and fatherly ways. He took the young minister's arm affectionately in his, and urged him forward in the wake of Searle, who had already moved out into the wide hall accompanied by the two plain-clothes men. Hayes and Wilson, still sympathetic, but no longer quite comprehending the undue excitement of the young divine in whose integrity their confidence was so great, fell in behind.

Once before the custodian of the vault, another evidence of the thoughtfulness of Searle appeared. John R. Costello, attorney of the bank, was conveniently on hand to read the warrant of the court and to instruct the custodian of the vault upon whom it was served that it was in proper form and must be obeyed.

Because the number of witnesses was too large to be accommodated in the rooms provided for customers, the inspection of the minister's box was made upon a table in the vault room itself. In the group of onlookers, Hampstead, because of his commanding figure, his remarkable face, and his very natural interest in the proceedings, was the most conspicuous presence. As naturally as all eyes centered on the box, just so they kept breaking away at intervals to scan the face of the big man who stood before them in an attitude of embarrassed helplessness. He was obviously making a considerable effort to control himself. Only Searle was sure that he understood this. But at the same moment, two of the bondsmen, the kind-hearted Wadham and the shrewd, practical Wilson, appeared to observe this attitude and to detect its significance. They exchanged questioning glances, and were further mystified when for a single moment a look of confident reassurance flickered like the play of a sunbeam upon the face of the minister.

That was in his one selfish moment, when he recalled how the search of the box, after all these excessive precautions of the District Attorney's office, could only recoil upon their case like a boomerang; but his countenance shaded again to an expression of anxious helplessness as Searle paused dramatically a moment with his hand upon the box. Then the hand lifted the hinged cover, revealing the contents.

As if from a nervous eagerness to come quickly at the object of his search, the Assistant District Attorney turned the box upside down and emptied its contents on the table; and yet, when this was done, nothing appeared but papers.

Searle attempted to open none of them. Proceeding with deliberate care, as if to vindicate himself in the eyes of the bondsmen from the suspicion of the minister that he might be on a "fishing expedition", he merely took up each piece singly and precisely, felt it over with his long, thin fingers and laid it by, until at length but two envelopes remained. The first of these was long and empty looking and gave evidence that the flap had been rudely, if not hastily, torn open. Searle held it in his hand now.

Hampstead's heart stood still; he knew that this must be the envelope which had contained the Wadham currency, hence between this attorney's thumb and forefinger, screened by one thickness of paper, lay the card that was the clue to Rollie Burbeck's crime. But the moment of suspense passed.

Submitting it to the same inquisitive finger manipulation as the others, yet not looking within it nor turning it over to read what might be written on the face, Searle laid the Wadham envelope on the pile of discards.

"Thank God," gulped Hampstead, yet with utterance so inchoate that Hayes, the third bondsman, standing nearest, did not catch the words, but a few minutes later, discussing the matter with Wilson, said: "I heard the apprehensive rattle in his throat just before Searle came to that last envelope."

But in the meantime, Hampstead was asking himself suspiciously what was this last envelope? He thought he knew by heart every separate document that was in the box, and he could not recall what this might be.

"You must be convinced by now," argued Searle, as if deliberately heightening the suspense, while he turned a straight glance upon the minister, "that I had no object in inspecting the contents of this box except to search for the diamonds."

"And you have not found them!"

This was obviously the remark which should have come in triumphant, challenging tones from the minister. As a matter of fact, it came quietly, and with a sigh of relief, from Silas

Wadham.

The minister did not speak at all, did not even raise his eyes to meet the glance of Searle. His gaze was fixed as his mind was fascinated by the mystery of the last lone envelope.

"Not yet," replied Searle significantly to Wadham's interjection, but instead of disappointment there was that quality in his tones which heightens and intensifies expectancy. At the same time he took up the envelope by one end, but, under the weight of something within, the paper bent surprisingly in the middle and the lower end swung pendant and baglike, accompanied by the slightest perceptible metallic sound. Every member of the group of witnesses leaned forward with an involuntary start. Triumph flooded the face of Searle. With his left hand he seized the heavy, bag-like end and raised it while the envelope was turned in his fingers bringing into view the printing in the corner.

"This envelope bears the name and address of the Reverend John Hampstead," he announced in formal tones. "I now open it in your presence."

Nervously the Assistant District Attorney tore off the end of the envelope, squinted within, and exclaimed: "It contains—" His voice halted for an instant while he dramatically tipped the envelope toward the table and a string of fire flowed out and lay quivering before the eyes of all—"the Dounay diamonds!"

The jewels, trembling under the impulse of the movement by which they had been deposited upon the table, sparkled as if with resentful brilliance at having been thus darkly immured, and for an appreciable interval they compelled the attention of all; then every eye was turned upon the accused minister.

But these inquisitorial glances came too late. Amazement, bewilderment, a sense of outrage, and hot indignation, had been reeled across the screen of his features; but that was in the ticking seconds while the gaze of all was on the envelope and then upon the diamonds and their aggressive scintillations. Now the curious eyes rested upon a man who, after a moment in which to think, had visioned himself surrounded and overwhelmed by circumstances that were absolutely damning,—his own conduct of the last few minutes the most damning of all. His face was as white as the paper of the envelope which contained the irrefutable evidence. His eyes revolved uncertainly and then went questioningly from face to face in the circle round him as if for confirmation of the conclusion to which the logic of his own mind forced him irresistibly. In not one was that confirmation wanting.

"But," he protested wildly, and then his glance broke down. "It has come," he murmured hoarsely, covering his face with his hands. "It has come!"

His cross had come!

Some odd, disastrous chain of sequences which he had not yet had time to reason out had fixed this crime on him. By another equally disastrous chain of sequences, he must bear its guilt or be false to his confessor's vow. Especially must he bear it, if he would shield that doting mother who trusted him and loved him.

As if to hold himself together, he clasped his arms before him, and his chin sunk forward on his breast. As if to accustom his mind to the new view from which he must look out upon the world, he closed his eyes. The heaving chest, the tense jaws, the quivering lips, and the mop of hair that fell disheveled round his temples, all combined to make up the convincing picture of a strong man breaking.

Not one of those present, crass or sympathetic, but felt himself the witness to a tragedy in which a man of noble aspirations had been overtaken and hopelessly crushed by an ingrained weakness which had expressed itself in sordid crime.

Even the hard face of Searle softened. With the diamonds gleaming where they lay, he began mechanically to replace the contents of the box. But at the first sound of rustling papers, the minister appeared to rouse again. He had stood all alone. No one had touched him. No one had addressed him. The most indifferent in this circle were stricken dumb by the spectacle of his fall, while his friends were almost as much appalled and dazed as he himself appeared to be.

"I suppose," he said with melancholy interest, at the same time moving round the table to the box, "that I may take it now."

"Certainly, Doctor," replied Searle suavely, yielding his place. Nevertheless, there was a slight expression of surprise upon his face, as upon those of the others, at the minister's sudden revival of concern in what must now be an utterly trifling detail so far as his own future went. Hampstead appeared to perceive this.

"There are sacred responsibilities here," he explained gravely, with a halting utterance that proclaimed the deeps that heaved within him; "which, strange as it may seem to you gentlemen,

even at such an hour I would not like to forget."

Taking up a handful of the papers, he ran them through his fingers, his eye pausing for a moment to scan each one of them, and his expression kindling with first one memory and then another, as if he found a mournful satisfaction in recalling past days when many a man and woman had found peace for their souls in making him the sharer in their heart-burdens,—days which every member of that little circle felt instinctively were now gone forever.

Last of all his eye checked itself upon the envelope marked "Wadham Currency." Allowing the other papers to slip back to their place in the box the minister turned his glance into the open side of this remaining envelope. It was empty, save for a card tucked in the corner.

"This thing appears to have served its purpose," he commented absently, as if talking to himself. Then casually he tore the envelope across, and then again and again; finer and finer; yet not so fine as to excite suspicion. Looking for a wastebasket and finding none, he was about to drop the fragments in his coat pocket.

"I will take them," said the vault custodian, holding out his hand. To it the minister unhesitatingly committed the shredded envelope and card which contained the only documentary clue to any other person than himself as the thief of the Dounay diamonds. A few minutes later, this clue was in the wastebasket outside. The next morning it was in the furnace.

The group in the vault room broke away with dispirited slowness, as mourners turn from the freshly heaped earth. Behind all the minister lingered, as if unwilling to leave the presence of his dead reputation.

But the man's appearance somewhat belied his mood. He was thinking swiftly. This was no uncommon plot which had overtaken him. It was conceived in craft and laid with power to kill. The diabolical cunning of the scheme was that it forced him to be silent or to be a traitor. The indications were that he had been betrayed outrageously; but he did not know this positively, therefore he could venture no defense at all against this black array of circumstances. It might be only some terrible mistake, and for him to venture more now than the most general denial might bring about the very calamities he was trying to avert. He dared not even tell the truth: that he did not know the diamonds were in the box. Especially, he dared not say that he did not put them there.

For the first time an emotion like fear entered his soul, but it passed the moment the priestly ardor in him saw which way his duty lay. If Rollie had grossly sold him into the power of the actress at the price of his own escape, he felt more sorry for the poor wretch than before. He was glad that he had destroyed the I.O.U., discovery of which might have incriminated the young man helplessly, and he resolved to continue upon his mission as a saviour, even though he himself were lost. It suddenly occurred to him with doubling force that this was what it meant to be a saviour.

With this conviction firmly in his mind, Hampstead turned to Wilson, Wadham, and Hayes, who had been waiting in considerate silence, and led the way upward to the dimly lighted lobby of the bank, feeling himself grow stronger with every step he mounted; for the maze of complexities in which he found himself had quickly reduced itself to the simple duty of being true to trust. Eternal Loyalty was again to be the price of success.

As his friends gathered about him on the upper floor for a word of conference, they were astonished at the change in his expression. It was calm and even confident; while a kind of spiritual radiance suffused his features.

"My friends," the minister began in an even voice, that nevertheless was full of the echo of deep feeling, "I can offer you no explanation of the scene to which you have just been witnesses. It is almost inevitable that you should think me guilty or criminally culpable. I am neither!" The affirmation was made as if to acquit his conscience, rather than as if to be expected to be believed.

"But," and his utterance became incisive, "there is nothing to that effect which can be said now."

"Something had better be said now," blurted out the practical Wilson flatly, "or this story in the morning papers will damn you as black as tar."

"Not one word," declared the minister with quiet emphasis, "can be spoken now!"

In Hampstead's bearing there was a notable return of that subtle power of man mastery which had been so important an element in his success. Before this even the aggressive, outspoken Wilson was silent; but the three men stood regarding John with an air at once sympathetic and doubtful. They were also expectant, for it was evident from the minister's manner that he was deliberating whether he might not take them at least a little way into his

confidence.

"Only this much I can indicate," he volunteered presently. "A part of what has happened I understand very clearly. A part I do not understand at all. In the meantime, some one, but not myself, is in jeopardy. Until the confusion is cleared, or until I can see better what to do than I see now, I can do nothing but rest under the circumstances which you have seen enmesh me to-night. Of course, it is impossible that such a monstrous injustice can long continue. I hold the power to clear myself instantly, but it is a power I cannot use without violating the most sacred obligation a minister can assume. I will not violate it. I must insist that not one single word which I have just hinted to you be given to the public. Silence, absolute and unwavering silence, is the course which is forced upon me and upon every friend who would be true to me, as I shall seek to be true to my duty."

The three friends heard this declaration rather helplessly. In the presence of such a lofty spirit of self-immolation, what were mere men like themselves to say, or do? Obviously nothing, except to look the reverence and wonder which they felt and to bow tacitly to his will. Hampstead knew instinctively and without one word of assurance that these men, at first overwhelmingly convinced of his guilt by what they had seen, and then bewildered by his manner, now believed in him absolutely. It put him at ease with them and gave him assurance to add:

"I know that not one of you is a man to desert a friend in the hour of his extremity, and no matter what happens I believe your faith in me will not falter. You will understand my wish to thank you for what you have done and may do, and to say good-by for to-night. My burning desire now is to get by myself and try to comprehend what has happened and what may yet happen before this miserable business is concluded."

Cordially taking the hand of each, while the men one after another responded with fervent expressions of faith and confidence, the minister turned quickly upon his heel, crossed the street, and leaped lightly upon a passing car.

Silence! Silence! Unwavering silence! The car wheels seemed to beat this injunction up to him with every revolution. Silence for the sake of others, some of whom were supremely worthy, one at least of whom might be wretchedly unworthy! Above all, silence for the sake of his vow as a vicar of Christ on earth. What was it to be a Christian if not to be a miniature Christ,—a poor, stumbling, tottering, stained and far-off pattern of the mighty archetype of human goodness and perfection? According to his strength, he, John Hampstead, was to be permitted to suffer as a saviour of a very small part of mankind and in a very temporary and no doubt in a very inadequate way, the virtue of which should lie in the fact that it pointed beyond himself to the one saviour who was supremely able. He, too, must be "dumb before his shearers", not stubbornly, not guiltily, and not spectacularly, but faithfully and for a worth-while purpose,—the saving of a man.

For a change had come swiftly in the relative importance of the motives which determined his course. With the actual coming of his cross, he had caught a loftier vision. It was not to save the few remaining weeks or months or years of the life of a saintly and beautiful woman that he was to stand silent even to trial, conviction, and disgrace. It was to save the soul of a man, a wretched, vain, ornamental and unutilitarian sort of person, but none the less unusually gifted in many of his faculties, perhaps wanting only an experience like this to precipitate the better elements in his nature into the foundation of such a character as his mother believed him to possess.

This change of emphasis strengthened Hampstead enormously. It gave him calm and resolution, increasing self-control and fortitude, a dignity of bearing that promised at least to remain unbroken, and a sense of the presence of the Presence which it seemed could not depart from him.

When John reached home, he found Rose, Dick, and Tayna waiting anxiously. A sight of his face, with the new strength and dignity upon it, allayed their apprehension, but the solemnity of manner in which he gathered them about him in the study roused their fears again. Briefly he related how the diamonds had been discovered in his safe deposit vault. Sternly but kindly he repressed the hot outburst of Dick; sympathetically he tried to stem the tears of Tayna, but before the pale face and the dry, fixed eyes of Rose he stood a moment, mute and hesitant, then said with tender brotherliness:

"Old girl, in the silence of waiting for my vindication, it is going to be easier for you and the children to trust me than for others. But even for you it will be hard. Others can withdraw from me, can wash their hands of me; and they may do it. You cannot, and would not if you could."

Rose clasped her brother's hand in silent assurance; but Hampstead went on with saddened

voice to portray what was to be expected.

"You will all have to bear the shame with me. In fact, my shame will be yours. You, Rose, will be pointed out upon the street as my sister. Tayna, at school to-morrow, may encounter fewer smiles and some eyes that refuse to meet hers. Dick will have some hurts to bear among his fellows, for he has been loyally and perhaps boastfully proud of me. I have only this to ask, that you will each walk with head up and unafraid, with no attempt at apology nor justification, and with no unkind word for those who in act or judgment seem unkind to me."

The feeling that they were to be honored with bearing a part of the burden of the big man whom they loved so deeply stirred the emotions of the little group almost beyond control. Dick moved first, clutching his uncle's hand.

"You bet your life!" he blurted, then turned and bolted from the room. Tayna next flung her arms about her uncle's neck and wet his cheek with scalding tears, then dashed away after Dick. Last of all, Rose stood with her hands upon his shoulders. She was taller for a woman than he for a man, and could look almost level into his eyes.

"My brother!" she said significantly. "My strong, noble, innocent"—and then a gleam of light shot into her eyes as she added—"my triumphant brother!"

"My bravest, truest of sisters!" The big man breathed softly, and drawing the woman to him imprinted that kiss upon the forehead which, seldom bestowed, marked when given his genuine tribute of respect and affection to the woman who, older than himself by ten years, had been the mother to his orphaned youth and had created the obligation which, uncharged, he none the less acknowledged and had striven to repay by a life of conscientious devotion to her and to her children.

The door closed after her "Good night", and John stood alone glancing reflectively about the long, book-lined room. Here many of his greatest experiences had come to him. Here he had caught the far-off kindling visions of that rarely human Galilean, with his rarely human group about him, trudging over the hills, sitting by the side of the sea, teaching, healing, helping. Here he had caught the vision of himself following, afar off, two thousand years behind, but following—teaching, healing, helping—in His name.

The telephone rang, its sharp, metallic jingle shocking the very atmosphere into apprehensive tremors. Yet instantly recalled to himself and to the new height on which he stood, Hampstead lifted the receiver with a firm hand and replied in an even, measured voice: "*The Sentinel?*—Yes—Yes—No—There is nothing to say—Absolutely!—I do."

The receiver was hung up. The only change in Hampstead's voice from the beginning to the end of this conversation, the larger part of which had taken place upon the other end of the line, was a deepening gravity of utterance. In a few moments the 'phone rang again. It was *The Press*. The papers all had the story now. The Oakland offices of the San Francisco papers were also clamoring. Each wanted to know what the minister had to say to the damning discovery of the diamonds in his box.

For them all Hampstead had the same answer: "I have nothing to say—yet." Some of the inquisitors cleverly attempted to draw the clergyman out by suggesting that there was plenty of opportunity for a countercharge that the diamonds had been planted in his box, since it was improbable in the last degree that a man of ordinary intelligence would conceal stolen diamonds in a safe deposit box held in his own name, the key to which he carried in his own pocket; but the self-controlled man at the other end of the telephone fell into no such trap. To direct attention to an inquiry as to who had visited his vault, or might have visited it, during the time since the diamonds were stolen was the last thing the minister would do. Already he had reasoned that the vault custodian on duty in the morning, knowing that Hampstead had not been to the vault during the day, but that Assistant Cashier Burbeck had, would do some excogitating upon his own account; but the minister reflected that this would not be dangerous, since the custodian, sharing in the very great confidence which Rollie enjoyed, would conclude that this young man had been made the innocent messenger for depositing the diamonds in the vault, and for the sake of unpleasant consequences which might result to the bank, would no doubt keep his mouth tightly shut.

The last call of all came from Haggard, whose city editor had just told him that the minister declined any sort of an explanation. Haggard was managing editor of *The Press* and Hampstead's true friend.

"Do you know what this does to your friends?" demanded Haggard passionately. "It makes them as dumb as you are. I know you; you've got something up your sleeve. But this case isn't going to be tried in the courts. It's being tried in the newspapers right now. Once the court of

public opinion goes against you, it's hard to get a reversal. And it's going against you from the minute this story gets before the public—our version of it even—for we have got to print the news, you know. We've never had bigger."

Some sort of a protest gurgled from Hampstead's lips.

"Oh," broke out Haggard still more impatiently, "I think the majority have too much sense to believe you're a common thief; but they're going to be convinced you're a damned fool. A public man had better be found guilty of being a thief than an ass, any day. Now, what can I say?"

"I am very sorry," replied Hampstead in a patient voice, "but you can say nothing—absolutely nothing."

CHAPTER XXXI A MISADVENTURE

Counting back from the scene in the vault room of the Amalgamated National, which took place at about nine-thirty, it was five and one-half hours to the time when Marien Dounay and Rollie Burbeck had steamed out with Mrs. Harrington upon her luxurious launch, the *Black Swan*, which was so commodious and powerful that it just escaped being a sea-going yacht.

But now, after the lapse of this five and one-half hours, neither Marien nor Rollie had returned, and only one of them had an inkling of what might have been happening in their absence. Information from the Harrington residence that the *Black Swan* would return to the pier about ten-thirty, caused a group of hopeful young men from the newspaper offices to take up their station on the yacht pier slightly in advance of that hour. But their wait was long, so long in fact that one by one they gave up their vigil and returned to their respective offices with no answer as yet to the burning question of what had led Miss Dounay to suspect that her diamonds were in the minister's safe deposit vault. But the distress and disappointment of the reporters was nothing like so great as the distress and disappointment upon the *Black Swan*, although for a very different reason.

The evening with Mrs. Harrington and her guests had begun pleasantly enough. The party itself was a jolly one, and so far as might be judged from outward appearances, Miss Marien Dounay was quite the jolliest of all; excepting perhaps Mrs. Harrington herself who was elated over the unexpected appearance of the actress; and Rollie, over its effect in immediately restoring him to the lost favor of his hostess. As many times as it was demanded, Miss Dounay told and retold the story of the loss of her jewels. She was the recipient of much sympathy and of many compliments because of the admirable fortitude with which she endured her loss.

Rollie thought Miss Dounay appeared able to dispense with the sympathy, but perceived that she greatly enjoyed the compliments. That she should keep the company in ignorance that her diamonds were to be recovered and continue to enact the rôle of the heroine who had been cruelly robbed of her chief possession, did not even surprise him. It was her affair entirely since she had bound him to secrecy, and whatever the motive, in the present state of his nerves, he was exceedingly grateful for it; having meantime not a doubt that the disclosure would be made ultimately in a manner which would permit the actress to gratify to the full her childish love of theatrical sensation.

The cruise began with a run far up San Pablo Bay toward Carquinez Straits, followed by a straightaway drive out through the Golden Gate to watch the sun sink between the horns of the Farallones; but here the heavy swells made the ladies gasp and clamor for a return to the shelter of the Bay. Re-entering the Gate as night fell, there was good fun in playing hide-and-peek from searchlight practice of the forts on either side the famous tideway, and some mischievous satisfaction in lounging in the track of the floundering, pounding ferryboats, and getting vigorously whistled out of the way. It was even enjoyable to grow sentimental over the phosphorescent glow of the waves in the wake or the play of the moonbeams on the bone-white crest at the bow. But after an hour or so of this, when it would seem that all of these things together with the tonic of the fresh salt breeze had made everybody wolfishly hungry, Mrs. Harrington's butler, expertly assisted, opened great hampers of eatables and drinkables, and began to serve them in the cabin which would have been rather spacious if the crowd had not been so large.

"Calmer water, James, while supper is being served!" Mrs. Harrington had ordered with a peace-be-still air.

James communicated the order to the captain, who understood very well that Mrs. Harrington was a lady to be obeyed. But it happened that there was a very fresh breeze on the Bay that night, and that a swell which was a kind of left-over from a gale outside two days before was still sloshing about inside, so that "calmer water" was not just the easiest thing to find, though the captain looked for it hard.

"Calmer water, James, I said!" Mrs. Harrington directed reprovingly, after an interval of watchful impatience, accompanying the observation by a look that shot barbs into the eye of the butler. A close observer would have noticed—and James was a close observer of his mistress—that Mrs. Harrington's neck swelled slightly, and that a flush began to mount upon her cheeks.

James knew this pouter-pigeon swelling well and its significance. Mrs. Harrington *must* now be obeyed. Calmer water had to be had, if it had to be made.

"Back of Yerba Buena, it is calmer," the lady concluded, with an increase of acerbity.

James lost no time in conveying this second command and a description of its accompanying signal, to the captain.

"'Behind the Goat,' she said," James concluded.

Now this island which humps like a camel in the middle of the San Francisco Bay is known to the esthetics as Yerba Buena, but to folks and to mariners it is Goat Island. James was folks; the captain was a mariner. Mrs. Harrington might have been esthetic.

"She draws too much to go nosin' round in there," replied the captain reluctantly, and explained his reluctance with a mixture of emphasis and the picturesque, by adding, "Behind the Goat it's shoal from hell to breakfast."

"She said it," replied James truculently; and stood by to see the helm shift.

"In she goes then, dod gast her!" muttered the captain.

"So much calmer in here under the sheltering lee of Yerba Buena," chirped Miss Gwendolyn Briggs, another quarter of an hour later.

"Why, to be sure," assented the hostess, as with a provident air she surveyed her contented and consuming guests who were ranged like a circling frieze upon the seat of Pullman plush which ran round the luxurious cabin, with James and his two assistants serving from the long table in the center.

It has been hinted that Mrs. Harrington was inclined to stoutness. She was also inclined to Russian caviar. Having seen her guests abundantly supplied, she lifted to her lips a triangle of toast, thickly spread with the Romanof confection. James stood before her, supporting a plate upon which were more triangles of toast and more caviar in a frilled and corrugated carton.

But quite abruptly Mrs. Harrington, who was proper as well as expert in all her food-taking manners, did an unaccountable thing. She turned the toast sidewise and smeared the caviar across her wide cheek almost from the corner of her mouth to her ear. At the same moment James himself did an even more unaccountable thing. He lurched forward, decorated his mistress's shoulders with the triangles of toast, like a new form of epaulette and upset the carton of caviar upon her expansive bosom, where the dark, oleaginous mass clung helplessly, quivered hesitantly, and then began to roll away in tiny, black spheres and to send out trickling exploratory streams, the general tendency of which was downward.

Nor was Mrs. Harrington alone in this sudden eccentricity of deportment. Over on the right Major Hassler, florid of person and extremely dignified of manner, was filling the wine glass of Mrs. Marston Conant, when abruptly he moved the mouth of the bottle a full twelve inches and began to pour its contents in a frothy gurgling stream down the back of the withered neck of John Ray, a rich, irascible, slightly deaf, and sinfully rich bachelor, who at the moment had leaned very low and forward to catch a remark that the lady next beyond was making. As if not content with the ruin thus wrought, Major Hassler next swept the bottle in a dizzy, cascading circle round him, sprinkling every toilet within a radius of three yards, and after dropping the bottle and flourishing his arms wildly, ended by plunging both hands to the bottom of the huge bowl of punch on the end of the table nearest him.

The only palliating feature of these amazing performances of Major Hassler, of James, and of Mrs. Harrington, was that nearly everybody else was executing the same sort of scrambling, lurching, colliding, capsizing, and smearing manoeuvres upon their own account. For a moment everybody glared at everybody else accusingly, and then Ernest Cartwright, sitting on the floor where he had been hurled, offered an interpretation of the phenomena.

"We struck something!" he suggested brightly.

"By Gad!" declared Major Hassler with sudden conviction, as he straightened up and viewed his dripping hands and cuffs with an expression quite indescribable. "By Gad! That's just what I

think!"

"James!" murmured a voice almost entirely smothered by rage.

James, despite the horrible fear in his soul, dared to turn his gaze upon his mistress, when suddenly a spasm of pain crossed the lady's face.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, my heart!" Wrath had given way to fright, and the hue of wrath to pallor.

In the meantime, the *Black Swan* was standing very still, as still as if on land,—which to be exact was where she was. From without came the sound of waves slapping idly against her sides, and then she shivered while the screws were reversed and churned desperately. From end to end of the cabin there were "Ohs" and "Ahs," and shrieks of dismay, with short ejaculations, as the guests struggled to their feet and stood to view the ruin which the sudden stoppage of the craft had wrought upon toilets, dispositions, and the atmosphere of Mrs. Harrington's happy party.

The next half hour, to employ a marine phrase, was devoted to salvage of one sort and another. One thing became speedily clear. The *Black Swan* had her nose fast in most tenacious clay. No amount of churning of the screw could drag her off. And no amount of tooting of whistles brought any sort of craft to her assistance. She was stuck there till the tide should take her off. The tide was running out. By rough calculation, it would be eight hours till it came back strong enough to lift up her stern and rock her nose loose.

It was an unpleasant prospect.

With Mrs. Harrington sitting propped and pale in the end of the cabin, her guests tried to cheer her by making light of their plight and the prospect; but as the waters slipped out and out from under the *Black Swan*, till she lay on the bottom with a drunken list, and the hours crept along with dreary slowness through the tiresome night, one disposition after another succumbed to the inevitable and became cattish or bearish, according to sex. But the very first disposition of all to go permanently bad was that of Marien Dounay. Young Burbeck thought he understood to the full her capacity to be disagreeable, but learned in the first hour that this was a ridiculously mistaken assumption.

Nor could any mere petulance on account of weariness or cramped quarters among people who under these circumstances speedily became a bore to themselves and to each other, account for her behavior. Never had Rollie seen so many manifestations of her feline restlessness, or her wiry endurance. When other women had sunk exhausted to sleep upon a cushion in a corner, or upon the shoulders of an escort who obligingly supported the fair head with his own weary body, Miss Dounay sat bolt and desperate, staring at the myriad shoreward lights as if they held some secret her wilful eyes would yet bore out of them.

Though Rollie loyally tried, as endurance would permit, to watch with Marien through the night, sustaining snubs and shafts with humble patience and venturing an occasional dismal attempt at cheer, the first sign of relaxation in Miss Dounay's mood was vouchsafed not to him but to François.

This was when at eight o'clock the next morning, after toiling painfully up the steps at the landing pier, her eyes fell upon the huge black limousine, with the faithful chauffeur, his arms folded upon the wheel, his head leaning forward upon them, sound asleep. He had been there since ten-thirty of the night before. Other chauffeurs had waited and fumed, had sputtered to and fro in joy-riding intervals, and had gone home; but not François. A smile of pride and satisfaction played across Miss Dounay's face at this exhibition of faithfulness,—and especially in the presence of this jaded, dispirited crowd.

"François," Miss Dounay exclaimed, prodding his elbow until his head rolled sleepily into wakefulness, "I could kiss you!"

However, she did not. Rollie opened the door, Miss Dounay stepped back, motioned into the comfortable depths Mrs. Harrington and as many other of the ladies as the car would accommodate, and was whirled away.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE COWARD AND HIS CONSCIENCE

On the theory that his duty as an escort still survived, Rollie was given a seat upon the limousine beside François; but at the door of the St. Albans Miss Dounay dismissed him as curtly as if she had quite forgotten that he was now or ever of any importance to her.

While to escape a breakfast with that thistle-tempered lady on such a morning would, under ordinary conditions, have been a distinct relief, this morning it appealed to Rollie as merely palliative. It was a mercy, but no more. He did not expect to know one single sensation of real relief until he saw Miss Dounay holding her precious diamonds once more in her hands. It was his intention, after a hasty breakfast, to make the swiftest possible transit to the residence of the Reverend John Hampstead and there secure the loan of a certain key and rush back to the bank. Within, say, seven minutes thereafter, he anticipated that this taste of true relief would come to him.

It was twenty minutes past eight as he crossed the wide lobby of the hotel. His physical condition was far from enviable. He was clad in a baggy-elbowed, wretchedly wrinkled, and somewhat stained yachting suit. He had not slept since the night before, in which, he now recalled, he had not slept at all. During this extended period of wakefulness he had been upset and out of his orbit. Yet all this while the world had been rocking along, provokingly undisturbed by his troubles, and right now a big new day was hurrying on. The cars were banging outside, and the newsboys were making a devil of a racket about something, their cries filling the street and ringing vibrantly into the lobby from without. Everything was strident and noisy, jarring upon his nerves. His first instinct was a dive for the bar, but he stopped before the door was reached. He was on a new tack. He resolved not to drink to-day. He had signed no pledges; but he felt that a highball was not in keeping with what he proposed to do.

Instead he veered toward the grillroom and ordered a pot of hot, hot coffee with rolls. To fill the impatient interval between the order and the service, he snatched eagerly at the morning paper in the extended hand of a waiter. At the first glance his eyes dilated, and his lips parted.

When the coffee came, he was still absorbed. The dark liquid was cold before he swallowed it, mechanically, in great gulps. It was well the chair had arms, or his body might have fallen from it. His mind was reeling like a drunken thing as he tried to grasp the process by which a woman's malice had used him for a vicious assault upon the man who had saved him when he stood eye to eye with ruin.

Slowly Burbeck's muddled intelligence groped backward over the events of yesterday. What a fool, he! How clever, she! How demoniacally clever! No wonder she forgave him so lightly; no wonder she cooed so ecstatically once she found the diamonds were in the preacher's vault! No wonder she had made sure that he went upon the yachting party, even to the point of going herself. It was to keep him out of reach until her diabolical plot against Hampstead could take effect. And no wonder she sat bolt and staring at the shore lights all the long night through.

But why did she plot against Hampstead? What was between the clergyman and herself? Why did Hampstead not strike out boldly and clear himself at one stroke, by the mere opening of his lips? He not only had not defended himself, but the papers declared he had a guilty air, that he fought against the opening of the box, and bore himself in a manner that convinced even his bondsmen he was guilty.

But the newspaper chanced to relate as an interesting detail how the minister had quickly recovered his self-possession, to the extent of rearranging the contents of his box after their handling by Assistant District Attorney Searle, and that he had even casually destroyed one paper with the remark that it was something no longer to be preserved.

This almost accidental sentence gave Rollie the strangest feeling of all. He knew what it must have been that was destroyed,—the evidence of his own indebtedness, to explain which would inevitably lead to his exposure. This, too, accounted for the preacher's protest and his apparent guilty fear. He could not know the diamonds were in the box; he did know the I.O.U. was there. He had destroyed it at the very moment when the discovery of the diamonds must surely have convinced him that the culprit he was shielding had betrayed him like a Judas.

"And yet he stands pat!" breathed Rollie huskily, while the greatest emotion of human gratitude that his heart could hold swelled his breast almost to bursting.

"I didn't know they made a man that would stand the gaff like that," he confessed after a further reflective interval.

Burbeck's first instinct was to rush to the telephone and acquit himself in the minister's mind of all complicity in the plot; for inevitably Rollie thought first of himself. But thought for himself recalled the threat of Marien Dounay. How fiercely she had warned him that his secret was not his own, but hers! He grasped the significance of her threat now as she had shrewdly calculated that he would. Let him murmur a word, let him attempt, no matter how subtly or adroitly, to set in motion any plan that would loosen the tightening coils about John Hampstead, and this woman would turn her crazy vengeance on him, would fasten his crime upon him, would do a baser thing

than that,—would make it appear that he had deliberately placed the diamonds in the minister's vault, thus causing her innocently to do him this grave injustice. Thus in his exposure he would not be contemplated with indulgent sadness as a gentleman weakling who had descended to vulgar crime to make good another crime as heinous; but, on the contrary, would be regarded hatefully, repulsively, with loathsome scorn and withering contempt, as a despicable ingrate base enough to shift his guilt to the shoulders of the one who had rescued him.

Before this prospect, fear paralyzed every other impulse of his heart, every faculty of his brain. His head was aching violently. He pressed his hands against his temples, and wondered how he could get quietly out of here and where he could fly.

A secluded room of this very hotel suggested the surest isolation. He got up-stairs to the writing room, where a hastily scrawled note to Parma, the cashier, made the night upon the Bay the excuse for his absence from the bank for the day. Another to his mother,—he dared not hear her voice telling him of what had befallen her beloved pastor,—that he was too weary even to come home and would sleep the day out in Oakland, leaving his exact whereabouts unknown to avoid the possibility of disturbance.

Mustering one final rally of his volitional powers, Rollo approached the desk and registered as some one not himself before the very eyes of the clerk, who knew him well and laughingly became accessory to the subterfuge.

Once within the privacy of his room, the impulse to telephone to John Hampstead and tell that distracted man a thing which he would be greatly desiring to know, came again to the young man; but in part exhaustion and in part cowardice led him to postpone that simple act till he had slept, rested, thought.

A few minutes later, with shades darkened and clothing half removed, he buried his feverish head among the pillows and sought to bury consciousness as well. But the latter attempt was a failure, for the young man found himself prodded into the extreme of wakefulness,—thinking, thinking, thinking, until he was all but mad. Out of all this thinking gradually emerged one solid, unshifting fact. This was the character of John Hampstead. He, Rollo Burbeck, might be a shriveling, paltering coward; Marien Dounay might be only a beautiful fiend; but John Hampstead was a strong, unwavering man. John Hampstead would stand firm!

Buoying his soul on this idea, Rollie dropped off to feverish slumber. But the sleeper awoke suddenly with one question hooking at his vitals. Was any man physically equal to such a strain? Was John Hampstead still standing firm like the huge human bulwark he had begun to seem?

Shrill cries floated upward from the street, sounding above the persistent whang of car wheels upon the rails. These were the voices of the newsboys crying the noon edition.

Rollie rose uncertainly and tottered to the telephone, where he asked that the latest papers be sent up to him, and awaited their coming in an ague of suspense and fear.

When they were received, he found little upon the front of either but the story of the minister's arrest for the theft of the diamonds and the finding of the jewels in his box, coupled with fresh emphasis upon his exhibition of the demeanor of a guilty man. It flowed up and down the chopped-off and sawed-out columns, liberally besprinkled with photographs of the chief actors in the drama, then turned upon the second page and spread itself riotously, in various types.

Through these paragraphs the mind of young Burbeck scrambled like a terrier digging for a rat, pawing his way desperately to make sure of the answer to his one, all-consuming question: Was the preacher still standing? The first paper declared accusingly that he was; that, like a guilty man taking advantage of technicalities, he refused to speak. The second paper affirmed the same, but with even greater emphasis, though without the meaner implication.

In the spread-out story there were set forth details and conjectures innumerable that would have interested and amazed Rollie, if his mind had been able to grasp them at all; but it was not. It fastened upon the one thing of ultimate significance in his present water-logged state. Hugging in his arms the papers which conveyed this supreme assurance to him, as if they had been the spar to which his soul was clinging, he rolled over upon the bed with a sigh of intense relief and sank instantly into long and unbroken sleep.

Hunger wakened him at eight in the evening; but instead of ringing for food, he asked for the evening papers. Again their message was reassuring. His nerves were stronger now; his soul was gaining the respite which it needed. He dispatched a messenger to his home for fresh linen and a business suit, turned on the water in the bath, arranged for the presence of a barber in his room in fifteen minutes, and the service of a hearty dinner in the same place in thirty.

The refreshment of invigorating sleep, plus the spectacle of John Hampstead, that Atlas of a

man, standing rock-like beneath the world of another's burden, had inspired Rollie sufficiently to enable him to resume once more the pose of his presumed position in life. To be sure, he was still under the spell of his fear,—and could not see himself as yet doing one thing to weaken the pressure upon his benefactor.

For this dastardly inactivity he suffered a flood of self-reproaches, but stemmed them with reflections upon the irreproachable character of the minister, and his impregnable position in the community. He reflected how futile and puerile all the endeavors of the newspapers to involve this good man in scandal must prove. How ridiculous the idea that he could be a common thief! How suddenly the wide, sane public, after a day or two's debauch of excitement, would turn and bestow again their unwavering confidence upon this man and laurel his brow with fresh and more permanent expressions of their regard for his high character. Reflections like this, winged by his own inside knowledge of the true greatness of the victim, together with the soothing influence of a bath, the ministrations of a skilled barber, and the sedative effects of a good dinner, sent young Burbeck to his home somewhere about ten o'clock in the evening, to all appearances quite his usual, happy-looking self.

The telephone had apprised his mother of his coming, and she had remained up to meet him.

"Oh, my son!" she murmured happily, as he laid his smooth cheek against hers and mingled his wavy brown hair with the silvering threads of her own dark tresses.

The young man gave his mother a gentle pressure of his hands upon her shoulders, then turned his face and kissed her cheek, but ventured no word. A sense of blood guiltiness had come upon him at the contact of her presence.

"Of course you have seen what that woman and the papers are doing to Brother Hampstead," his mother observed sadly.

"Yes," replied the young man, in a tone as dejected as hers.

"They are tearing his reputation to pieces," the mother went on. "There is hardly a shred of it left now. Like vultures they are digging over every detail of his life and putting a sinister interpretation upon the most innocent things. The worst of it is that even our own people begin to turn against him. Some of the people for whom he has done the most and suffered the most are readiest with their tongues to blast his character. It is a sad commentary upon the way of the world."

"Still," urged Rollie, "the man is strong; his character is so upright; his purposes are so high and so unselfish that no permanent harm can come to him. His enemies must sooner or later be confuted, and he will emerge from all this pother—" Pother: it took great resolution for Rollie to force so large a fact into so small a word—"a bigger and a more influential man in the community, even a more useful one than before."

Mrs. Burbeck listened to this tribute from her beloved son to her beloved minister with a joy that was pathetic. She had never known him to speak so heartily, with such unreserved admiration before. It told her things about the character of her son she had hoped but had not known. Yet she felt herself compelled to disagree with her son's conclusions.

"That is where you are wrong, my boy," she said, again in tones of sadness. "The public mind is a strange consciousness. If it once gets a view of a man through the smoked glasses of prejudice, it seldom consents to look at him any other way. Remove to-morrow every vestige of evidence against Brother Hampstead, and, mark my words! the fickle public will begin to discover or invent new reasons why, once having hurled its idol down, it will not put him up again."

"You take it too seriously, mother," suggested Rollie half-heartedly, after a moment of silence.

"No, I do not," Mrs. Burbeck replied, shaking her head gravely. "The worst of it is the man's absolute silence. If he would only say something. There must be some sort of explanation. If he took the diamonds, there must have been some laudable reason. This morning there were literally tens of thousands of people hoping for such an explanation and ready to give to him the benefit of every doubt. There are fewer such to-night. There will be fewer still to-morrow.

"If somebody else stole them, and Brother Hampstead, to protect the thief, planned to hold them temporarily while immunity was gained for the coward, he must see now that he made a terrible mistake, that for once he has carried his extravagant leniency entirely too far. If this theory is correct, the thief must have fled beyond the very reach of the newspapers, or be insane, or a drug fiend, or something like that. I cannot conceive of any human being so base, or in a position so delicate that he would not instantly make a public confession to spare his benefactor."

Rollie had turned and was looking straight at his mother, almost reproachfully, certainly protestingly, at the torture she was causing him. She saw this strange look and stopped.

"Oh, my boy," she exclaimed. "You are so sympathetic. How proud, how selfishly happy it makes me to feel that nothing like this can ever come upon my son!"

But Rollie's eyes had shifted quickly to a picture on the opposite wall, and he braced himself desperately against these bomb-like assaults of his mother upon his position.

"Yes," he said after an interval, "it must be pretty hard on Hampstead." But though he made this remark seem natural, his brain was again reeling. With mighty effort he forced himself to give the conversation another turn by a question which had been fascinating him during the whole day.

"Tell me," he asked, "how is father taking it?"

"Very hardly," Mrs. Burbeck confessed. "You know your father: so proud, so exact and scrupulous in all his dealings, with his word better than the average man's bond, yet not lenient toward the man who errs. He thinks everybody good or bad, every soul white or black. When Brother Hampstead was prosecuting law-breakers in court, father was proud of him; but when he goes off helping jail-birds and fallen women, father is harsh and utterly unsympathetic.

"Last night when the first charge appeared, father was greatly incensed, because at last, he said, Brother Hampstead had done the thing he always feared, brought the church into a notoriety that was unpleasant. This morning, at the story of the diamonds in the vault, he was dumbfounded. To-night he talks of nothing but that, whatever the outcome, All People's shall clear its skirts of the unpleasantness by requesting Brother Hampstead's resignation."

"Resignation!" Rollie gasped. "Resignation—simply for doing his duty! Why," he burst out excitedly, "that would be treachery! It would be the act of Judas. Don't let father do it, mother," he pleaded. "Don't let him put me in that position!"

A wild look had come into the young man's face as he spoke.

"You? In what position?"

Mrs. Burbeck was surprised at the expression on her son's face.

For a moment Rollie floundered wildly.

"Why, you see—I—I believe in Hampstead. I—I have told the bank that he is all right, no matter what happens. I don't want my own father reading him out of the church, do I?"

Mrs. Burbeck's perplexity gave way to smiling comprehension, which was met by relief and some approach to composure upon the features of her son, who felt that he had escaped the eddy of an appalling danger.

"Naturally," replied Mrs. Burbeck soothingly. "What a loyal nature yours is! By the way, Rollie," and the force of a new idea energized her glance and tone; "it is only half-past ten. Wouldn't it be fine of you to just run over and give Brother Hampstead a pressure of the hand to-night, and tell him how loyally your heart is with him in this trying situation? It would mean so much to him coming from a strong, successful, young man of the world like you, whose position he must admire so much!"

Rollie's face went white, and his eyes roved despairingly. It must have been well for the mother's peace of mind, as it certainly was for his, that, having asked her question, instead of studying his face while she waited for the answer, she let her eyes fall to the seal ring she had given him upon his twenty-first birthday, and busied herself with studying out again the complexities of the monogram and holding off the hand itself to see how handsomely the ring adorned it.

"I think I'd rather not to-night, mother," Rollie replied, as if after a moment of deliberation. "This thing works me up terribly—you can see that—and I'm a bit short on sleep yet. If I went to see Brother Hampstead to-night, I'm sure I shouldn't sleep a wink afterward. Besides, my coming might alarm him. It might make him think his plight is worse than it is; it would be so unusual."

Again the mother-love surged above any other emotion. "You are right," she admitted, caressing his hand. "It was only an impulse of mine, anyway. You must be tired, poor boy."

"Pretty tired, mother," he confessed truthfully; then stooped and kissed her upon the cheek and seemed to leave the room naturally enough, although in his soul he knew that he fled from her presence like a criminal from his conscience.

CHAPTER XXXIII THE BATTLE OF THE HEADLINES

Hampstead was determined not to show the white feather. The morning after the discovery of the

diamonds in his box, he made the effort to go about his daily duties unconcernedly and even happily, with a smile of confidence upon his face. His bearing was to proclaim his innocence. But it would not work. Crowds gaped. Individuals stared. Reporters hounded. The very people who needed his help and had been accustomed to receive it gratefully, appeared to shrink from his presence. At the homes where he called, an atmosphere of restraint and artificiality was created. He tried to thaw this and failed dismally; it was evident that the recipients of his attentions also tried, but also failed, for all the while their doubts peeped out at him.

After half a day the minister gave up and sat at home—immured, besieged, impounded. He was like a man upon a rock isolated by a deluge, the waters rolling horizon-wide and surging higher with every edition of the newspapers.

Oh, those newspapers! John Hampstead had not realized before how much of modern existence is lived in the newspapers. So amazingly skillful were they in sweeping away his public standing that the process was actually interesting. He found himself absorbed by it, viewing it almost impersonally, like a mere spectator, moved by it, swayed to one side or the other, as the record seemed to run. The description of the scene in the vault room, even as it appeared unembellished in Haggard's paper, overwhelmed him.

"It is the manner of a thief hopelessly guilty," he confessed.

On the other hand, when Haggard's paper in an editorial asked argumentatively: "Why should this man steal? What need had he for money in large sums?" John's judgment approved the soundness of such a defense. "There were a score," affirmed the editorial, "perhaps a hundred men who had and would freely supply Doctor Hampstead with all the money necessary for the exigencies of the work to which he notoriously devoted all his time. As for his personal needs, the man lived simply. He had no wants beyond his income."

"True—perfectly true. A good point that," conceded Hampstead to himself.

But that evening one of the San Francisco papers reported that at about the time the diamonds were stolen, the Reverend Hampstead had approached various persons in Oakland with a view to borrowing a large sum of money without stating for what the money was required. The paper volunteered the conjecture that the minister, through speculation in stocks, had overdrawn some fund of which he was a trustee, and of which he was presently to be called upon to give an accounting; hence the desperate resort to the theft of the diamonds and the temporary holding of them in his vault, boldly counting on his own immunity from suspicion.

This conjecture was extremely damaging. It skillfully suggested a logical hypothesis upon which the minister could be assumed to be a thief; and so high had been the man's standing that some such hypothesis was necessary.

As Hampstead read this, he felt the viciousness of the thrust. It was false, but it had the color of an actual incident behind it. Some clerk, bookkeeper, or secretary to one of the men who had so promptly enabled him to meet Rollie's defalcation, seeing the comparatively large sum in cash passed to the hand of the minister, had done a little thinking at the time and when the arrest came had done a little talking.

Yet the morning papers of the next day had apparently forgotten this incident. They were off in full cry upon a much more dangerous trail by digging deeper into the relations between the minister and the actress. As if from hotel employees, or some one in Miss Dounay's service, one of them had elicited and put together a story of all the calls that Hampstead had made upon Miss Dounay in her hotel during the five weeks she had been at the St. Albans. This story made it appear that the minister had become infatuated with the actress, and that he had sought every means of spending time in her company.

It was skillfully revealed that Miss Dounay at first had been greatly attracted by the personality and the apparent sincerity of the clergyman; but as her social acquaintance in the city rapidly extended and the work upon her London production became more engrossing, she had less and less time for him, and was finally compelled to deny herself almost entirely to the divine's unwelcome attentions, notwithstanding which the clergyman still found means of forcing himself upon the actress. One such occasion, it appeared, had prevented the appearance of Miss Dounay at a dinner given by a very prominent society lady of the town, where the brilliant woman was to have been the guest of honor. Some one had even recalled that the minister was not an invited guest at the dinner during which the diamonds were stolen. He had presented himself, it seemed, after the affair was in progress and departed before its conclusion.

But it was left to one of the evening papers of this day to explode the climactic story of the series. The writers of the morning story had been careful to protect the conduct of Miss Dounay from injurious inference; but now the *Evening Messenger* went upon the streets with a story that

left Miss Dounay's character to take care of itself, and purported boldly to defend the minister.

PREACHER NOT THIEF, boldly ventured the headlines. The report declared that an intimacy of long standing had existed between the minister and the actress. The public was reminded of what part of it had forgotten and the rest never knew, that John Hampstead had himself been an actor. The narrative told how the minister had made his professional debut in Los Angeles by carrying this same Marien Dounay in his arms in *Quo Vadis*, night after night, in scene after scene, during the run of the play; and hinted broadly of an attachment beginning then which had ripened quickly into something very powerful, so powerful, in fact, that when Hampstead was playing with the "People's", an obscure stock company in San Francisco, Miss Dounay had broken with Mowrey at the Grand Opera House, because he refused to have the awkward amateur in his company, and had herself gone out to the little theater in Hayes Valley and lent to its performance the glamour of her name and personality, merely to be near the idol upon whom her affections had fixed themselves so fiercely.

Actors now playing in San Francisco who had been members of the People's Stock at the time remembered that the couple succeeded but poorly in suppressing signs of their devotion to each other, and the stage manager, now retired, was able to recall how in the garden scene of *East Lynne*, Miss Dounay had deliberately changed the "business" between Hampstead and herself in order that she might receive a kiss upon the lips instead of upon the forehead as the script required.

This mosaic of truth and falsehood related with gustatory detail a violent quarrel between the two which occurred one night in a restaurant prominent in the night life of the old city, the result of which was that Miss Dounay cast off her domineering and self-willed lover entirely.

"After a few weeks," the article observed soberly, "the broken-hearted lover surprised his friends by renouncing the stage and entering upon the life of the ministry as a solace to his wounded affections."

In support of this, it was pointed out that the minister had never married nor been known to show the slightest tendency toward gallantries in his necessarily wide association with women.

The glittering achievement of vindication was next attempted by the *Messenger's* story. This admittedly was theory, but it was set forth with confidence and particularity, as follows:

"The return of the actress, in the prime of her beauty and at the very zenith of her career, upon a visit to California, which had been her childhood home, not unnaturally led to a revival of the old passion. For a time the two were running about together as happy as cooing doves. Then a clash came. This was over the question of the harmonizing of the two careers. Obviously, Miss Dounay could not be expected to give up hers, and the minister was now so devoted to his own work that he found himself unwilling to make the required concession upon his part.

"A serious disagreement resulted. The actress was a woman of high temper. It had been the custom to deposit her diamonds in the minister's box as a matter of protection. On the night of the party, she had committed them to him, as usual. But the next morning, angered over the clergyman's failure to keep an appointment with her, the actress, in a moment of reckless passion, had charged him with stealing them. Under the circumstances, Hampstead, as a chivalrous man, declined to speak, knowing full well that sooner or later the woman's passion would relent, and she would release him from the awkward position in which he stood."

There were holes in this story. At places it did not fit the facts; as for instance, the minor fact that by common agreement the minister did not leave the dinner party until considerably after twelve, consequently at a time when the bank vault was inaccessible. There was also the major fact that the theft of the diamonds was discovered and reported at two o'clock in the morning, and not the next day "after the minister's failure to keep an appointment with the actress had angered her."

But these trifling discrepancies were disregarded by the eager rewrite man, who threw this story together from the harvesting of half a dozen leg-weary reporters.

Nor did they matter greatly to Hampstead. He read the story with whitening lips. He recognized it as the sort of vindication that would ruin him. It made his position a thousand times more difficult. It was infinitely harder to keep silence when the very truth itself was blunderingly mixed to malign him.

Nor did the public mind the discrepancies greatly. The *Messenger's* story was a triumph of journalism. It was the most eagerly read, the most convincingly detailed explanation of what had occurred. The public absorbed it with a sense of relief that at last it had learned how such a man as John Hampstead could have fallen as he had. The story even excited a little sympathy for the minister by revealing the unexpected element of romance in his life. Nevertheless, its publication

upon the evening of the third day after the minister's arrest battered away the last pretense of any considerable section of the popular mind that, whatever the outcome of his trial, Hampstead was any longer a man entitled to public confidence.

Flying rumor, published gossip, and vociferous assault upon one side, combined with guilty silence upon the other, had absolutely completed the work of destruction. The reputation of the pastor of All People's was hopelessly blasted. Even to the minister, sitting alone like a convict in his cell, this effect was clearly apparent. The question of whether he was a thief or not a thief had faded into the background of triviality. The issue was whether he, a trusted minister, while occupying his pulpit and bearing himself as a chaste and irreproachable servant of mankind, had yielded to an intrigue of the flesh. The indictment did not lie in definite specifications that could be refuted, but in inferences that were unescapable.

The riot of reckless gossip had made the preacher's honor common. Anything was believable. Each single incident became a convincing link in the chain of evidence that John Hampstead was an apostate to the creed and character he espoused.

The minister in his study, his desk and chair an island surrounded by a sea of crumpled newspapers, harried on every side by doubt and suspicion so aggressive that it almost forced him to doubt and suspect himself, laid his face upon his desk.

This was more than he had prayed for. This was no honored cross that he was asked to bear. It was a robe of shame to be put upon him publicly. To be sure, it was loose, ill-fitting, diaphanous, but none the less it was enveloping. It did not blot out, yet it ate like a splotch of acid.

But suddenly the man sat up, and for the first time since the startling disclosure in the vault room, a look of terror shot into his eyes, terror mixed with pain that was indescribable. It was a thought of the effect of this last story upon the mind of Bessie that had stabbed him. Bessie had grown wonderfully during these five years. She had completed four years at Stanford and one year of post-graduate work in the University of Chicago. To-morrow, if he had the date right, she would be receiving her degree. The beauty of her character and the beauty of her person had ripened together, until John's imagination could think of nothing so exquisite in all the universe as Bessie Mitchell. And after the degree and a summer in Europe, she was coming back to California and to him! Together they were going to enter upon a life and the making of a home that was to be rich in happiness for both of them, and as they fondly hoped, rich in happiness for all with whom they came in contact.

Reflecting that in this last week Bessie would be too busy to read the newspapers, John had chivalrously thought to tell her nothing of what was befalling him, that she might set out happily upon her European journey. But now had come this alleged vindication, which was the most terrible assault of all, with its disgusting insinuations. He felt instinctively that Bessie would see that story, because it was the one of all which she ought not to see. Seeing it, he assured himself, she would believe it, more fully than any one else would believe it. John knew that despite his own years of steadfast devotion and despite her own constant effort to do so, she had never quite wiped out the horrible suspicions engendered by his confession of the brief attachment for Miss Dounay. He suspected it was a thing no woman ever successfully wipes out. This damnable story would revive that suspicion convincingly. It was inevitable that Bessie should believe that Marien Dounay's presence had revived the old infatuation, and that he had yielded to its power.

This reflection left Hampstead with his lips pursed, his cheeks drawn, sitting bolt and rigid like a frozen man.

In this polar atmosphere the telephone tinkled. The minister answered it with wooden movements and a wooden voice:

"No, nothing to say—yet."

Always the "yet" was added. "Yet" meant the minister's hope for deliverance. The reporters who had heard that "yet" so many times in the three days began to find in it something pathetic and almost convincing. But though the minister had added it this last time from sheer force of habit, the hope had just departed from him. With his love-hope gone, there was nothing personally for which John Hampstead cared to ask the future. Time, for him, was at an end. He was not a being. He was an instrument.

But as if to remind him for what purpose he was an instrument, he had barely hung up the 'phone when there was a faint tap at the outer entrance of his study, followed at his word of invitation by the figure of a man who, with a furtive, backward glance as if afraid of the shadows beneath the palm trees, slipped quickly through the narrowest possible opening, closed the door and halted uncertainly, his eyes blinking at the light, his hands rubbing nervously one upon the

other. The man was carefully dressed and tonsured. There was every evidence that to the world he was trying to be his old debonair self, but before the minister he stood abject and pitiable.

"Rollie!" exclaimed Doctor Hampstead, leaping up.

"She haunted me!" the conscience-stricken man faltered helplessly, sinking into a chair. "She threatened to denounce me right there in the bank, if I dared to communicate with you." Again there was that frightened look backward to the door.

An hour before, when the minister had not yet reasoned out the effect upon Bessie of this awful story of his alleged relations with the actress, he would have leaped upon Rollie vehemently, so anxious to know how the diamonds got into his safe-deposit box as almost to tear the story from the young man's throat.

But now he had the feeling that there was no longer anything at stake worth while. All in him that quickened at the sight of his visitor was a sort of clinical interest in the state of a soul.

As Rollie told his story, the minister gasped with relief to learn that his own plight was due to no Judas-like betrayal, but that the young man was, like himself, a victim of this scheming, devilish woman, and he listened with sympathetic eagerness while the narrator depicted brokenly the frightful conflict between fear and duty through which he had passed during the two days gone.

But with the narrative concluded, the duty of each was still plain. The silence must be kept. Moreover, in this revulsion of feeling from doubt to active sympathy, the minister perceived that things were going very hardly with the young man. Knowing Miss Dounay now rather well, he was able to understand, even without explanation, the paralyzing fear which had kept Rollie dumb for these three days, and to realize that his coming even tardily was a sign of some renaissance of moral courage. This perception quickened both the minister's sympathy and his interest in his duty. He was able to interrogate the young man considerably and to put him gradually somewhat at his ease, and this so tactfully as to make it seem to Rollie that, his delay in coming was half a virtue and that the act of coming itself was a supreme moral victory which gave promise of greater victories to come.

But it did not require this exhibition of magnanimity to bring young Burbeck to finish his story with an outpouring of the bitter self-reproaches he had for two days been heaping upon himself.

"I never realized before what a despicable coward sin or crime can make of a man," he concluded. "This spectacle of you bearing uncomplainingly upon your back the burden of my guilt before this whole community sets something burning in me like a fire. It has given me courage to come here. Sometimes in the last few hours I have almost had the courage to come out and tell the truth, to denounce this devilish woman for what she is, and to take my guilt upon myself."

For a moment Rollie's eyes opened till a ring of white appeared about the iris, and he shifted his position dizzily.

"But," exclaimed the minister with sudden apprehension and an outburst of great earnestness, "you must not. You must consider your mother. I command you to consider her above everything else! I should forbid you to speak for her sake, if nothing else were involved. I do want you to become brave enough to take this guilt upon yourself, if circumstances permit it; but, they do not permit. Besides," and the minister shook his head sadly, "even that would now be powerless to relieve me from these awful consequences. I might be proved spotlessly innocent of the charge of theft, and yet my reputation would still be hopelessly ruined. It has cost me all, Rollie—all!"

The minister and the penitent, the innocent and the guilty, drew together for the moment linked by that bond of sympathy which invariably exists when one man suffers willingly in the cause of another, and is heightened when the sufferer winces under the pain.

"Even," the minister labored on, "even that hope of Her, of which I told you the other day, has been torn from me."

Rollie's face turned a more ghastly white.

"That?" he murmured huskily.

"That!" assented the minister, with a grave, downward bend of the head.

"It is too much," groaned the young man in real agony of spirit. "Nothing, nothing that is at stake is worth that—can be worth that."

For a moment Hampstead was silent.

"To be loyal, Rollie, to be true to the highest duty is worth everything."

This was what he would have liked to say; it was what he believed; it was what he meant to demonstrate by his course of action; but for the moment he could not say it. Instead, he

swallowed hard and looked downward, toying with a paper-knife upon his desk. But his visitor was going now. There was no reason why he should stay, and the minister, as he held open the door, was able to say warningly: "Remember! Not one word for the sake of your mother's life."

"But you," protested the young man, his eyes again staring wildly.

"You are to try not to think of me," declared Hampstead, with low emphasis, "except as my own steadfastness in my duty—if I am able to be steadfast—may help you to be steadfast in yours. Rollie! We understand each other?"

But the young fellow only shook his head negatively with a growing look of awe and wonder in his eyes, then turned and slipped hastily away. He did not understand this man—the bigness of him—at all; but he found himself leaning on him more and more heavily and felt some spiritual cleansing process digging at the inside of himself like the scrape and bite of a steam shovel.

As for the minister, once he was free to think of himself alone, he perceived that Rollie's story had set him free of silence. It supplied the gap in his knowledge which had made him dumb. There was a real defense which could now be offered. Now, too, that there was again some prospect of vindication, he felt his desire for vindication grow.

Up to the present he had waived arraignment on the charge, and had twice secured the customary two days' postponement of the hearing upon preliminary examination. But immediate action should now be taken. Accordingly he located Judge Brennan at his club by telephone and the Assistant District Attorney Searle at his residence, and without explanation asked that the time for his arraignment and preliminary hearing be set as soon as possible.

Next morning the papers presented as the most startling development of the Hampstead Case the fact that the minister had announced himself prepared to go to trial, and the preliminary hearing had been set for Saturday at ten o'clock in Judge Brennan's court room.

Public interest centered, of course, upon the nature of the minister's defense. There was even observable something like a turn of the tide in his favor. Rumor, suspicion, and innuendo for the time had played themselves out. Shrewd managing editors—keen students of mass psychology that they were—discerned signs that these ebbing cross-currents of doubt and uncertainty might sweep suddenly in the opposite direction, and they were alertly prepared to switch the handling of the news if the popular appetite changed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A WAY THAT WOMEN HAVE

Friday for John was a day of impatience, its tedious hours consumed in turning over and over in his mind the story he would tell upon the witness stand and the plea he would make to the court for a dismissal of the complaint against him; when the day was finished, John found his mind in a rather chaotic state, and it seemed to him that little had been accomplished.

But if little happened that day in Encina which was of moment to his cause, there was an interesting sequence of events transpiring in Chicago, which had at least some relation to the matter; for this was the day upon which the degrees were being conferred.

The assembly hall of the great university was large, and every seat was taken. The huge platform was decked, studded, draped and upholstered with professors, assistant professors and presidents, all in mortar boards and gowns, the somber black of the latter relieved by the rich colors of the insignia indicating the rank or character of their respective degrees.

The presence of all this banked and massed doctoral dignity made the atmosphere of the hall to reek with erudition. The vast number of individuals in front felt their puny intellects dwarfed to pigeon's brains. Hitherto some of them had rather congratulated themselves that they knew the multiplication table and the rule of three. Now their instinct was to grovel.

Yet not all of that assemblage were so impressed. Robert Mitchell was not. Huge of chest, thick-fingered, heavy-shouldered, amiable of his broad countenance, shrewd of eye, and growing thin of that curly brown thatch which had been one of Hibernia's gifts to his ensemble, he surveyed the scene with a critic's air.

Not that Mitchell scorned the pundits of learning. Being the vice-president of a transcontinental line of railroad and therefore necessarily a man of wide acquaintance and of wide employment of the talents of mankind, he knew there were occasions when even he must wait upon the pronouncements of some spectacled creature of the laboratory. Still, he could not help reflecting that he would like to see that pale, gangling pundit on the end try to calculate the

exact instant in which to throw the lever to make a flying switch. He would like further to see that fellow with a dome that loomed like a water-tank on the desert try to pick up a string of car numbers as they ran by him on the track, and see how many he could carry in his head and carry right.

In fact, everything about the function expressed itself to Mitchell in terms of traffic. Quite a haul, this. The seats in it came from Grand Rapids, no doubt; or perhaps from Manitowoc. The rate from Grand Rapids was nineteen cents a hundred or thereabouts; from Manitowoc it was twenty,—practically an even basis. But on a trans-continental haul now, to San Francisco for instance, common point rates applied, and Manitowoc had an advantage of five cents a hundred unless—unless the Michigan roads rebated the Michigan manufacturers something of their share in the division of the through rate. Of course, rebates were illegal; but you never could exactly tell what an originating line might not do to keep a sufficient amount of business originating. Take his own line, now, for instance, and borax shipments from the Mojave Desert as against the Union Pacific with borax shipments from Death Valley.

Thus the mind of the great master of transportation roved on while professors rose and droned and presented round rolls to never-ending strings of candidates; but at length there appeared in the serpentine line going up for Master's degrees one presence which took the glaze of speculation from the eye of Mitchell.

The world at large has often noted the anomalous fact that a Doctor's cap and gown does not appear to detract greatly from the masculinity of a man. If anything, it makes a beard, a brow, or the pale, unprosperous furze upon a lip look more virile than otherwise; but that same cap and gown will deceitfully rob a woman of something of the indefinable air of her femininity. It gives her an ascetic cast, and asceticism is unwomanly. But there are exceptions. Some types of women's faces look just a little more fetchingly feminine and bewitchingly alluring under a mortar-board cap than beneath any other form of headdress.

The eye of the railroad man rested now with benevolence and satisfaction upon the shapely, ripened figure of such a woman. Glowing upon her features was a youth and a feminism so vital as to seem that nothing could overcome them. Her eyes were blue and bright; her hair was brown and crinkly; while dimples that refused to be subdued by the dignity of the occasion kept continually upon her features the suggestion of a smile about to break.

But with these evidences of sunny personality, there went stout hints of substantial character. The forehead was good and finely arched to stand for brains. The chin was perhaps a trifle wide to permit the finest oval to the countenance, but it suggested balance and power, and proclaimed that what the mind of this young lady planned, her will might be expected to accomplish. In fact, the young lady stood at this moment face to face with the consummation of a five years' programme, and five years is long for youth to hold a purpose.

With swelling satisfaction the railroad man saw the president of the university now addressing his daughter. It was the same Latin formula that had been repeated scores of times already this morning; but now Mitchell made his first effort to grasp it, to reason out its meaning, all the while greatly admiring his daughter's unfaltering courage under the fire of these unintelligible phrases.

The somewhat irrepressible Miss Bessie was, indeed, doing very well. For a moment the dimples had actually composed themselves, and there was a light of high dignity in the eye, as the candidate extended her hand for the diploma and stood meekly while the silken collar was placed about her neck.

"That is a very able man, that Doctor Winton," remarked Mitchell to his wife. "He has got the same way as the rest of them when he talks; but what he says is sense."

Since Mitchell did not know at all what the university president had said, this remark showed that he had fallen back upon his intuitive judgment of men and had swiftly perceived in the university president something of the same practical qualities that go to the making of a business executive in any other walk.

But an excited whisper was just now coming from behind the white-gloved hand of Mrs. Mitchell. "Oh! look!" that lady exclaimed, "she's got her box lid on crooked!"

It was true that Miss Bessie by some restless twitch of her head or some rebellious outburst of a knot of that crinkly hair, had got her mortar board rakishly atilt. Of course, there were other mortar boards askew, but Bessie's was individualistically and pronouncedly listed far to port. And she didn't care. Bessie was so brimming and beaming with the happiness of life that her whole being was this morning recklessly atilt.

But that afternoon, at about the hour of three, in the ample suite of rooms high up on the lake

side of the Annex, which had been occupied by the Mitchells for a week, there was nothing a tilt at all about the soul of Bessie. Her spirits were all a-droop. One single glance around showed that the busy preparation for the European trip had been suspended. Wardrobe trunks stood about on end, their contents gaping, while dresses were draped over screens and chairs and laid out upon beds; but the packers had ceased their work. Mrs. Mitchell, distracted between parental love and the fulfillment of long cherished plans, as well as distressed at the exhibition of petulant and even tearful temper which her daughter had been displaying for an hour, walked restlessly from room to room.

"I tell you, it's California for mine!" that young lady affirmed in school-girlish vernacular, while an impatient foot stamped the floor, a dimpled hand smote wilfully upon the arm of a huge, brocaded satin chair, and the blue swimming eyes burned with a rebellious light.

Neither the language nor the mood would seem to become the beautiful Mistress of Arts; but each testified to the survival of the humanness of the young woman. In justice to her, however, it must be explained that she had not begun this upsetting of father's and mother's and her own cherished plan with impetuous defiances. She had begun gently, with sighs, with remarks about longing for California. She felt so tired; she wished she didn't have to travel now. If she could just go back and walk under the palms and orange trees in dear old Los Angeles; if she could get one great big bite of San Francisco fog, and see a little desert and a mountain or two, before starting out for this junky old Europe, she would be reconciled.

Otherwise, she would not be reconciled. Of course, she would go,—since they had planned it for so long, and since mamma's heart was set upon it;—but she would go unreconciled.

Reconciled! Mrs. Mitchell knew perfectly well what reconciled meant, but she did not know just what Bessie meant by dinging on that word.

After fifteen minutes it appeared that Bessie was through with hints. She had begun to boldly propose, and then earnestly to plead, and finally tearfully to demand that the European trip be postponed two weeks.

"But my child! The trip is all planned. The passages are paid for, everything is ready," protested Mrs. Mitchell.

"But what's the good of being the slave of your plans? You don't have to do a thing you don't want to just because you've planned."

Bessie's lip was full and ripe when she pouted and her voice was freighted heavily with protest and appeal. How pretty her eyelids were when there was a tear quivering on the lashes like a ball of quicksilver. And how really enchanting she looked, as with hair a bit disheveled and color heightening, she went on to argue impetuously:

"What's the good of having a private car? What's the good of being a vice-president's wife and daughter, if you can't change your mind and go galloping out to California when you feel like it? Back to your own home! Back to your own people! Back where the scenery is the grandest in the world! Back where the sky is high enough that you don't have to shoulder the zenith out of the way in the morning so that you can stand up straight and take a full breath."

"Bessie Mitchell!" exclaimed her mother at this juncture, turning on her offspring accusingly. "What has got into you? Something has! You're up to something. What is it?"

Bessie brooked her mother's discerning glance and then dodged it, very much as if that lady had hurled at her the silver-backed hair brush she held in her hand.

"Why," she exclaimed with an air of injured innocence; "nothing has got into me. I was just taking one last look at the California papers, and it made me homesick."

She made a gesture toward a pile of papers that surrounded her chair. Mrs. Mitchell paused and cerebrated. Somewhere about two o'clock of the afternoon, Bessie had stepped to the telephone.

"Send me up the last week of San Francisco and Los Angeles papers," she ordered.

The papers came. She went through the Los Angeles papers first, turning their pages casually, with occasional comments to her mother. And then she started the San Francisco file, scanning this time more swiftly and more casually until upon the very last of them she became suddenly absorbed in uncommunicative silence; after which the musings and the sighings had begun, followed by this absurd proposal, this passionate outburst, and this deadlock of the two women behind entrenchments of newspapers on the one hand and barricades of trunks upon the other.

As between her strong-willed daughter and her strong-willed self, Mrs. Mitchell knew that she generally emerged defeated. So far now she had been defeated—at least to the extent of an armistice. The packers had been stopped, while the argument went on.

But in the meantime Mrs. Mitchell was violating the rules of war by bringing up reinforcements. Mr. Mitchell was on his way over from the Monadnock Building. He would soon settle Miss Bessie; that is, if he did not make a cowardly and instant surrender, because Mrs. Mitchell knew well enough he would rather sit on the rear platform of his private car and watch the miles of steel and cinder stream from under him for ten hours a day for the rest of his life than visit his native sod for five minutes.

When Mrs. Mitchell heard her husband's voice in the next room, she hurried out to fortify him.

Bessie also heard the voice and hurried to the bathroom to remove traces of tears; for tears were not powerful arguments with her father. Smiles went farther and faster. Kisses were the deciding artillery.

Father and mother, advancing cautiously upon daughter's position, found it unoccupied. But the papers were strewn about. Mitchell picked up the one which lay in the chair. His glance was entirely casual, but suddenly his blue eye started and then blazed.

"The hell!" he ejaculated, and read eagerly down the column.

"Well, I be damned!" was his next contribution to the silence.

Mrs. Mitchell stared at her husband in amazement. Then, seizing her reading glass, for a reading glass was so much better form than spectacles, she glanced over her husband's shoulder, read the headline and a few words following.

"The deceitfulness of that child!" she ejaculated, an expression of indignant amazement on her face, while the hand with the reading glass dropped to her hip, and her eyes were turned upon her husband.

"I always knew that boy's good-heartedness would get him into trouble some day," the good woman averred after a moment.

"Well," rejoined her husband, in tones sharp with emphasis, "I'd back up on a freight clear round the world to get him out. Our trip to Europe is off. We go west on nine to-night."

Mr. Mitchell started for the telephone, and Mrs. Mitchell's eye followed him approvingly, a look of sympathy and motherliness triumphing over every other expression upon her face.

Now there wasn't any particular obligation on the part of Robert Mitchell to John Hampstead. Hampstead had merely worked for Mitchell through eight years of faithfulness in small things, which was a way that Hampstead had. But as the Vice-President of the Great Southwestern looked back, those eight years of faithfulness bulked rather large, which, again, was a way that Robert Mitchell had.

As to Bessie! But that is a way that women have. The deeper and the more serious her attachment for John Hampstead had grown, the more guilefully she had concealed that fact from even the suspicion of her parents. Yet now her disguise was penetrated, she sobbed it all out on her mother's shoulder and got the finest, tenderest assurances of sympathy and enthusiastic connivance that could be vouchsafed by one woman to another. The Mitchells were that way. Let hearts and happiness be concerned, and all other considerations of life could ride on the brake-beams.

CHAPTER XXXV

ON PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

But though a very human hope was in his breast, the man who went out to face a public hearing on Saturday morning upon a charge of felony in the city where a week before he had been a popular idol, was not the same man who had stood trembling and bewildered in the vault room.

Rose had noticed first merely a physical change in her brother's appearance, as from day to day the situation became more intense. She saw lines deepen on his face, the knot of pain grow again and again upon his brow, and the whiteness of his skin increase to a point where it ceased to be white and became a parchment yellow, only paler than his tawny hair. But later she became conscious that there was taking place also a spiritual change, a certain rare elevation of the character of the man, giving at times the eerie feeling that this was not her brother, but some transfiguration taking place before her eyes.

When John Hampstead appeared in Judge Brennan's court room, something of this exaltation of character was discernible, even to those who had known the minister casually. Desiring ardently a happy outcome, the man revealed in himself something of a new capacity to endure

yet further reverses.

Rose, Dick, and Tayna had been determined to accompany John and to sit beside him as he faced his accusers; but he forbade this, declaring that it would be construed by his enemies as an attempt to create sympathy.

Yet, despite the stoutness of the clergyman's hope for justice, the sight of the court room, of Judge Brennan upon his bench, the clerk and the official reporter at their desks, Searle, Wyatt, the detectives, the massed spectators,—packed, craning, curious,—and the vast crowd that had surged in the streets about the building and in the corridors, through which way had to be made for him, were all such sinister reminders of the position in which he stood, that for the time being they crumpled the very breastwork of innocence itself.

"The case of the People versus John Hampstead," announced the judge in matter-of-fact tones.

There was a slight movement among the group of attorneys, principals, officers, and witnesses within the rail and before the long table, as they either hitched chairs, or leaned forward with eyes and ears attentive. Outside, the closely packed onlookers breathed short in hushed expectancy.

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up!"

It was the monotonous, unfeeling voice of the clerk who said this, himself arising.

Hampstead, accustomed as his own legal battlings had made him to court formalities and to seeing men arraigned in just this language, failed to comprehend its significance when addressed to him. For an appreciable instant of time he sat unheeding, until every eye in the throng and the glance of every officer of the court stabbing into his face with inquiring wonder, recalled him to his position. Then he arose hastily, with traces of confusion which were so instantly repressed that when necks already craned stretched a little farther, and eyes already staring set their gaze yet more intently on the tall figure of the man, they saw his strongly moulded features as gravely impassive as some weather-blasted granite face upon a mountain.

But for all its massy strength, it was seen again to be a gentle face. The lips were firmly set, but the expression of the mouth was kindly. The eyes were fixed upon the clerk who read the charge against him, while the prisoner listened with a look at once solemn and dutiful, for it seemed that again John Hampstead had risen equal to the height on which he stood.

The tableau was an impressive one. It revealed the majesty of man bowing before the majesty of the law. It seemed to portray at once the ponderousness and the powerfulness of organized government. A woman who was almost a stranger had touched a tiny lever and set the machinery of the law in operation against the most shining mark in all the community; and here was the man, with the guillotine of judgment poised above his head, answerable for his acts with his liberty and his reputation.

In feelingless monotones that galloped and hurdled through the maze of technical phrasings, the clerk read the complaint which charged the minister with the crime of burglary; then, pausing for breath, he asked the formal question:

"Is this your true name?"

"It is," the minister replied quietly, but in a voice of vibrant, carrying quality that must have penetrated to the outward corridor, and seemed to sweep a sense of moral power to every listener's ear.

The voice was answered by a sigh, involuntary and composite, that broke from somewhere beyond the rail. The hearing was on. The unbelievable had come to pass: John Hampstead, pastor of All People's Church, was actually standing trial like a common felon.

Briefly and casually the Court instructed Hampstead to his rights and that he was entitled to be represented by counsel of his own choosing, or to have counsel appointed for him by the Court.

The minister, still standing and speaking with deliberate composure, thanked the Court for its consideration, but stated that without disrespect to the legal profession which he greatly honored, he did not feel that his cause required expert defense; that in his experience he had acquired a considerable knowledge of court practice and would depend upon that, trusting his Honor to put him right if he stumbled into wrong.

The judge nodded comprehension and assent, and the defendant sat down.

"Are the People ready?" inquired the Court.

"We are," answered the crisp, crackly voice of Searle.

"And the defense?"

Hampstead, his arms folded passively, responded with a slight affirmative bow.

"We will call Miss Alice Higgins," announced Searle, his voice this time reflecting that sense of the dramatic which hung over the court room like a cloud, impregnating its atmosphere as if with an electric charge.

The woman known as Marien Dounay had been sitting at the right of Searle, gowned in tailored black, her person stripped of everything that looked like ornament. The wide, flat brim of her hat was carefully horizontal and valanced by a curtain of veiling, which, while black and large of cord, was wide meshed enough to show that the very colors of her cheeks were subdued, as if her whole person were in mourning over the somber duty to which she regretfully found herself compelled. And yet the beauty of her features, adorned by the black and sweeping eyebrows and lighted by the smouldering jet of her eyes, was never more striking than now, when, after standing for a moment, tall and graceful on the raised platform of the witness chair, she sat down, and leaning back composedly, swung about to where her glance could alternate between the eye of the Court who would hear her and that of Searle who would interrogate.

But though her composure appeared complete, and never upon any stage had her magnetic presence more completely centered all attention upon itself than in this melodrama of real life, it was none the less noticeable to the discerning that she had not glanced at Hampstead, whose sleeve her arm must have brushed in passing to the witness chair; and that she still avoided looking where he sat, but six feet distant, his own eyes resting upon her face with an odd, speculative light in them.

"Please state your name, business occupation or profession, and place of residence," began Searle, putting the opening interrogatory in the usual form through sheer force of habit.

"I am an actress by profession. My name is Alice Higgins; my place of residence is New York City."

"In your profession as an actress and to the public generally you are known as Marien Dounay?"

"Yes," replied the witness.

"You are the complainant in this action?"

"Yes."

"I will ask you," began Searle, "if you have ever seen this necklace before?"

He drew from a crumpled envelope that familiar tiny string of fire and offered it to the witness. Miss Dounay took it, passed it affectionately through her fingers, during which the brilliance of the gems appeared to be magnified, and then, holding the necklace by the two ends, dropped it for a moment upon her bosom,—a touch of naturalness that was either the height of art or the supreme of femininity.

"They are my diamonds," she replied.

"And what is their value?"

"Twenty-two thousand dollars."

"Lawful money of the United States?"

"Yes."

"Now, Miss Dounay," continued Searle, "will you be kind enough to relate to the Court when and under what circumstances you first missed your diamonds."

Miss Dounay told her story briefly and skillfully, with an appearance of reluctance when she came to relate the circumstances and facts which pointed to the minister as the thief. She stated that Hampstead had always shown curiosity regarding the diamonds and had especially questioned her concerning their value. As a trusted friend, whom she had known for years, and who during the last several weeks had visited her frequently and become rather frankly acquainted with her personal habits and mode of life, he knew where she kept the diamonds. That so far as she knew, he was the only one of her acquaintances who possessed this knowledge; that she had worn the diamonds in company with him during the evening preceding the supper party, at which she appeared without them; that no one but her guests were in this room in which the diamonds were kept temporarily, and that no one but him, so far as she remembered observing, was in that room alone; that it was her custom to keep the box containing these and other jewels in the hotel safe, and when, after the departure of her guests, she went to the casket to send it down-stairs, it was gone.

Her story done, and to the attorney's complete satisfaction, Searle then put the final formal questions:

"This property was taken against your will and without your consent?"

"Yes."

"This all happened in the City of Oakland, County of Alameda and the State of California?"

"Yes."

"That is all," concluded the prosecutor.

"Cross-examine," directed the Court, turning to the defendant.

"I have no desire to cross-examine," replied the minister quietly, but again with that vibrant, far-carrying note in his utterance.

"You are excused," said the judge to the actress.

With an expression of relief, Miss Dounay left the stand, still without once having directed her gaze at the accused, although he continued from time to time to regard her fixedly with a curious, doubtful look.

"Miss Julie Moncrief," announced the prosecutor.

Red-eyed and frightened, the French maid took the stand. In a trembling voice, and with at least one appealing glance at the minister, who appeared to regard her more sympathetically than her own mistress, the little woman gave her testimony. It told of finding the defendant alone in this room where the guests had been inspecting the models for the London production of the play. He was not near the table upon which the models were displayed, but standing by the chiffonier, with his arm absently thrown across the corner of it, and the hand within a few inches of the small drawer in which the diamonds reposed temporarily.

"What part of his body was toward the chiffonier?" asked the prosecutor.

"His back and side."

"Where was he looking?"

"Out toward the room to which the guests had withdrawn."

"As if watching for an opportunity of some sort?" suggested Searle.

Hampstead started, and his eyes kindled, but he did not speak. The Court, however, did.

"In view of the fact," interposed his Honor, "that Doctor Hampstead is unrepresented by counsel and taking no advantage of a technical defense, I will remind you, Mr. Searle, that your last question calls for a conclusion of the witness. She may testify where he was looking, but she cannot tell what she thinks his actions implied."

"Of course, your Honor, that is right," confessed Searle quickly. "The witness is somewhat hesitant and embarrassed, and the form of my question was inadvertent. Under the circumstances," he added suavely, "I am being especially careful not to take advantage of the defendant."

"That must be apparent to all, Mr. Searle," the judge palavered in return.

"Where was he looking?" queried Searle.

Having been properly coached by the attorney's question and his reply to the judge, the half-frightened girl faltered:

"He was looking out, *as if watching for an opportunity.*"

Color mounted to the cheeks of the judge. Searle looked properly surprised. The defendant smiled cynically.

"Strike out that portion of the answer which involves the conclusion as to why he was looking out," instructed the judge solemnly to the reporter.

"Certainly," exclaimed Searle apologetically. None the less, he was satisfied with his manoeuvre. He knew the effect of the little French girl's conclusion could not be stricken out of the mind of the judge who had heard it expressed, nor out of the mind of the public before whom he was in reality trying his case.

"State what further you observed," directed the attorney. "Did you see him move, or anything?"

"He did not move; he only smiled at me and was still there in the same position when I went out. A few minutes later, I was surprised to see him bidding Miss Dounay good night."

"Strike out that the witness was surprised," commanded the Court sternly, while Julie shivered at the sharpness of Judge Brennan's tone.

"That is all," continued Searle.

"Do you wish to cross-examine?" inquired the judge, directing his glance to Hampstead.

"I do not," replied the minister.

This time the judge looked surprised, and there were slight murmurings, rustlings, and whisperings beyond the rail. The faltering testimony of the little maid had driven another nail deeply in the circumstantial case against the minister, and he had not made the slightest effort to draw it out by the few words of cross-examination that might have broken its hold entirely. He might, for instance, have asked if she saw any one else alone in this room. But the minister did not ask it.

Searle went on piling up his case. The detectives testified to the arrest of the minister, to the search of his person and house, and to the finding of the diamonds in the vault box, after which the jewels themselves were introduced in evidence and marked: People's Exhibit "A", while the envelope which had contained them and bore the minister's name and address upon the corner, became People's Exhibit "B."

Each detective and Wyatt was asked to describe minutely the actions of the minister from the time when the personal search ending in the discovery of the safe deposit key was proposed until the time when the diamonds were exposed to view upon the table in the vault room. By this means, Searle got before the Court the demeanor of the minister as indicating a consciousness of guilt.

Relentless in pursuing this line, Searle put on the defendant's own bondsmen, Wilson, Wadham, and Hayes, compelling them to describe, although with evident reluctance, the impetuous outburst against the opening of the box when the bond was being arranged, and the scene in the vault to which they had been witnesses.

Wilson, chafing at the position into which he was forced, was further roused when Searle exclaimed suddenly:

"I will ask you if the defendant, on or about the day that these diamonds were stolen, did not approach you for the urgent loan of a considerable sum of money."

Wilson glared and was silent.

"Did he, or did he not?" persisted Searle sharply.

"He did," snapped Wilson.

"How did he want it, cash or checks?"

"He wanted cash, but I do not see, Mr. Searle—" he began.

"Excuse me, Mr. Wilson, but I think you do see," replied Searle. "Did you give it to him?"

"I did," replied Wilson, "and I would have given him more—"

"I ask that a part of this answer be stricken out, your Honor, as volunteered by the witness, and not in response to the question," demanded Searle brusquely.

"I think we should not let ourselves become too technical," replied the Court, with a chiding glance at Searle, for Mr. Wilson was a person of some importance in the community.

Searle, slightly huffed, again addressed the witness.

"Did the defendant tell you what he wanted this large sum of money for?"

"No. Furthermore—" began the witness.

"That will do! That will do!" exclaimed Searle rising, and motioning with his hand as if to stop the witness's mouth. "That is all," he added quickly. "Cross-examine."

Wilson turned expectantly to Hampstead. He was aching to be permitted to say more, to offer testimony that would break the force of that which he had just given. But the minister, comprehending fully the generous desire of his friend, merely looked him in the eye and shook his head; for this was one of the trails neither he nor any one else must be permitted to pursue.

Having asked this series of questions of Wilson about the money, apparently as an afterthought, which it was not, Searle then recalled Hayes and Wadham, and put the same questions to them. Each made the same attempt to qualify and enlarge, but each was carefully held to a statement which pictured John Hampstead making desperate efforts among his friends to raise quickly what must have been a very large sum of money, for an unexplained purpose.

Searle felt this to be the climax of his case.

"The People rest," he exclaimed with dramatic suddenness, sitting down and inserting a thumb in his arm-hole, while after a defiant glance at the minister, he turned and scanned the spectators outside the rail for signs of approval of the skillful handling of their cause by him, their oath-bound servant.

But the eyes of the spectators were on the defendant, who now stepped to the platform and stood with upraised right hand before the clerk to be sworn. As he composed himself in the witness chair, his manner was cool and even meditative. The central figure in this tense, emotional drama, which had every significance for himself, he seemed scarcely more than aware of his surroundings.

"My name," he began deliberately, "is John Hampstead. I am thirty-one years old, and a minister of the gospel. I reside in the County of Alameda. I am the person named in this complaint. I was at Miss Dounay's supper party, although I did not stay to supper. I was probably in the exact position described by the maid, for I believe her to be truthful. However, I do not remember the incident, beyond the fact that the group gradually withdrew from this room, and I remained there in reflective mood for a short interval. I saw Miss Dounay's diamonds last that

evening when she excused herself from the company to change her costume. I saw them next the morning after, upon the desk in my study."

The minister paused. The massed audience leaned forward, intent and breathless. Now his real defense was beginning. His manner, balanced and impersonal, was carrying conviction with it. The man was the defendant—the prisoner at the bar—yet he spoke deliberately, as if not himself but the truth were at issue.

"They were brought there," the witness was saying, "by a man who told me that he had stolen them. He appeared to be excited. Indeed, his condition was pitiable. I advised him to immediately return the diamonds to Miss Dounay, confess his crime to her, and throw himself upon her mercy; but there were circumstances which made it impossible for him to act immediately. That is all."

The minister turned from the Court, whom he had been addressing, and faced Searle, as if awaiting cross-examination. The audience had listened with painful interest to the minister's story. The manner of it had unquestionably carried conviction, but its very unbolstered simplicity had in it something of the shock which provokes doubt. This effect was heightened by its extreme brevity and a suggestion of reticence in the narrative.

"Have you concluded?" asked the Court, reflecting the general surprise.

"I have," replied the minister, with the same quiet voice in which he had given his testimony.

"Begin your cross-examination," instructed Judge Brennan.

"Who is the man who brought these diamonds to you?" asked Searle, hurling the question swiftly.

"I cannot tell you," answered the minister gravely.

"Why can you not tell?" The voice of Searle was harshly insistent. "Don't you know who the man was?"

"I do, most assuredly."

"Why can you not tell it?"

"Because the secret is not mine."

"Not yours?" A sneer appeared on the lips of Searle.

"It came to me by way of the Protestant confessional," explained the minister.

"The Protestant confessional! What do you mean by that?" barked the prosecutor.

"Simply," replied the minister, "that the instinct of confession is very strong in every nature moved to penitence and a hope of reform; so that every minister and priest of whatever faith becomes the repository of a vast number of confessions of fault and failure, some trivial and some grave. I used the term 'Protestant confessional' because the Roman Catholic Church erects the confessional to a place of established and formal importance. In most other communions it is merely incidental to pastoral experience, but none the less it is a factor in all effort at rehabilitation of character."

"And you will not give the name, even to protect yourself?"

"It is not," replied the witness, "a matter in which I feel that I have any choice. The confession was not made to me as an individual, but to me as a minister of God. I will hold that confidence sacred and inviolate at whatever cost until the Day of Judgment."

Dramatically, though unconsciously, the witness lifted his right hand, as though he renewed an oath to God.

For the first time, too, the utterance of the defendant had betrayed personal feeling, and for a moment there was a sheen upon his features, as of a man who had toiled upward through shadows to where the light from above broke radiantly upon his brow.

"And you take advantage of the fact that such a confession as you allege is privileged under the law and need not be testified to by you?"

"As I said before," reiterated the minister, with a calm dignity that refused to be ruffled by the sneer in the cross-examiner's question, "I do not feel that the secret is mine."

The impression that at this point the witness was retiring behind intrenchments that were very strong was no more lost upon Searle than upon the spectators, and he immediately attacked from another quarter.

"We are to understand, then, Doctor, that your guilty demeanor which has been testified to by your friends as well as the officers was entirely because you knew the discovery of the diamonds in your box would lend color to the charge made against you?"

This was another trail that Hampstead must not allow to be pursued.

"You are at liberty to make whatever interpretation of my demeanor you wish, Mr. Searle," he replied, a trifle tartly.

"Yes, Doctor Hampstead; we are agreed upon that," rejoined the prosecutor dryly, at the same time making a gallery play with his eyes. "You say," Searle continued presently, "it was temporarily impossible for the man who brought these diamonds to you to return them to Miss Dounay. Why did you not return them yourself instead of placing them in your vault to await the convenience of the thief?"

The insulting scorn of the latter part of this question was meant to be diverting to the audience as well as highly disconcerting to the witness, but the minister smothered the sneer by replying sincerely and courteously:

"I felt, Mr. Searle, that my problem was to rebuild in the man a sense of responsibility to a trust and the courage to act upon a moral impulse. Wisely, or unwisely, I insisted that the entire procedure of restoration should devolve upon the penitent himself. His first spiritual battle was to nerve himself to face the owner of the diamonds."

"Precisely," observed Mr. Searle smoothly, abandoning the jury rail, against which he had been leaning, to balance himself upon the balls of the feet and rub his palms blandly. "And in the meantime, while this thief was gathering his courage, did your consideration for your friend, Miss Dounay, impel you to notify her that the diamonds were in your custody and would be returned to her very soon?"

"Not alone was I impelled to do that," replied the minister; "but the unfortunate man urged such a step upon me. I declined for the same reason. My entire course of action was dictated by a desire to make this man morally stronger by compelling him to assume and discharge his own responsibilities. I was willing to point out the course; but he must walk the way alone. I will forestall your next question by saying that for the same reason I did not notify the police."

Searle was nettled by the easy compactness with which the minister cemented the walls of his defense more closely by each reply to the questions in cross-examination.

"You are aware, Mr. Hampstead," he thundered with a sudden change of tactics, "that the act which you have just set forth, so far from setting up a defense to this charge, proves you guilty under the law as an accessory after the fact."

"I am not aware of it," replied the minister, with distinct emphasis. "My impression was that the law considers not only an act but the intent of the act. The intent of my act was not to conceal a crime, but to reconstruct the character of a man."

Searle darted a hasty and apprehensive glance at the massed faces behind the rail.

"That is all," he exclaimed dramatically, with a cynical smile and an uptoss of his hands, calculated cleverly to portray his opinion of the utter lack of standing such replies as those of the minister could gain him in a court of justice.

Judge Brennan looked at Hampstead. "Have you anything in rebuttal?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied the minister, arising and stepping down to his chair at the long table, where he remained standing while the attentive expression of Court and spectators indicated appreciation that the climax of the defendant's effort was at hand.

The very bigness of the thing the man was trying to do was in some sense an attest of character, and here and there among the onlookers ran little currents of reviving sympathy for the clergyman, who stood waiting quietly for the moment in which to begin his final effort as an attorney in his own behalf.

Keenly sensitive to the subtlest emotions of the crowd, he understood perfectly well that the effect of his testimony had been at least sufficient to secure a verdict of suspended judgment from the spectators; and he expected far more from the balanced mind of the judge; so that it was with a feeling of renewed confidence, almost an anticipation of triumph, that he prepared to make the final move.

"If the Court please," he began dispassionately, as if pleading for a cause that had no more than an abstract meaning for himself, "I desire to move at this time the dismissal of the complaint, upon the ground that the evidence is insufficient to warrant the holding of the defendant for trial before the Superior Court."

The minister stopped for breath, and there was another of those strange, composite sighs from beyond the rail.

"In support of that motion," and a note of growing significance appeared in the speaker's tone, "I argue nothing, except to ask this Court to accept as true every word of testimony spoken by every witness heard upon the stand this morning."

The Court looked puzzled, but the ministerial defendant went on:

"I believe the truth has been spoken by Miss Dounay—by the maid—by the officers—and by my own friends. Yet the facts testified to may be true,"—the minister's voice rose,—and the

inference to which they point be wickedly and damnably false! It is so with this case; for be it noted that I ask your Honor to consider also that my testimony is true. It denies no statement; it controverts no fact in the case of the prosecution. On the contrary, it confirms them; but it also explains them." Again the defendant's voice was rising. "It confirms the facts, but it utterly refutes the inference that this defendant at the bar is guilty. Consider the entire fabric of evidence as a seamless garment of truth, and you can dismiss the complaint with an untroubled brow. Reason is satisfied! Justice is done!"

Hampstead paused, and a shade of apprehension came to his face, for his eye had traveled for a moment to that massed expectancy without the rail.

"The verdict of your Honor is to *me*"—Hampstead in his growing earnestness had abandoned the fictional distinction between the pleader and his client,—"of more than usual importance, for by it hangs the verdict of the people whose interest is attested by those packed benches yonder. Without disrespect to your Honor, I can say that I care more for their verdict than for that of any twelve men in any jury box or any judge upon any bench.

"But under the circumstances the whole people cannot actually judge—they can only be my executioners. They have not heard me speak. They can not look me in the eye, nor observe by my demeanor whether I speak like an honest man or a contemptible fraud. They see me only through a cloud of skillfully engendered suspicion. They hear my voice only faintly amid a clamorous confusion of poisoned tongues. Your Honor must see for them, and speak for them. Your Honor's verdict will be their verdict. I tremble for that verdict. I plead for it!

"I ask your Honor to take account of the difficulty of my position, presuming, as the law instructs the Court to presume, that it is the position of an innocent person. Bound by the most inviolable vow which a man can take, I am unable to offer to you a conclusive defense by presenting the man who committed the crime. He may be in this court room now, cowering with a consciousness of his guilt and in awe at beholding its consequences to the one who has helped him. He may be an officer of this Court; he might be your Honor, sitting upon the bench, which, of course, is unthinkable—yet no more unthinkable to me than that I should be charged with this crime. But though he be here at my very side, I cannot reach out my hand and say: 'That is the man.' I will not touch him nor look at him. Unless he speaks—and I confess that there is an outside reason why I should absolutely forbid him to speak—there is no defense that can be offered, beyond the simple story I have told you.

"May I not, also, without being accused of egotism, remind your Honor that if it is decided that I appear sufficiently guilty to warrant a criminal trial in the Superior Court, my work in this community will be at an end."

The minister was speaking for the first time with a show of deep feeling, and an indulgent sneer appeared upon the lips of Searle. This was not legitimate argument. Yet a mere preacher might not be supposed to know it, and therefore he, Searle, would magnanimously allow the man to talk himself out, if his Honor did not stop him.

But the Court was also complaisant, and the minister went on with passionate earnestness to plead:

"Regardless of the ultimate verdict of a jury, the stigma of a felony trial will be upon me for life. From this very court room I shall be taken to your identification bureau. I shall be weighed, stripped, measured—my thumb prints taken—my features photographed like those of any criminal!"

As Hampstead proceeded, his speech began to be punctuated with spasmodic breaks, as if the prospective humiliation was one at which his sensitive nature revolted violently.

"And those finger prints," he labored—"those measurements—and that photograph—will become a part—of the criminal records—of the State of California—for as long as the paper upon which they are made shall last!"

"No! No!! No!!!" shrilled a hysterical voice that burst out suddenly and ended as abruptly as it began.

Strangely enough it was the complaining witness who had cried out. She had risen and stood with hands outstretched protestingly to the minister, while whispering hoarsely: "It cannot be! It cannot be!"

"Madam!" thundered the minister, viewing the woman sternly, his own emotion of self-sympathy disappearing at this unexpected sign of softness in her, while his eyes blazed indignantly: "That is a police regulation which by long custom has come to have all the force of law. If you doubt it, your accomplice there will so inform you!"

Hampstead, as he uttered the last words, had shifted his blazing glance to Searle, who at first

disconcerted and endeavoring to pull Miss Dounay back into her seat, now rose and turned toward the defendant, his own face aflame, and hot words poised upon his tongue.

But Judge Brennan was rapping for silence.

"Compose yourself, madam!" he ordered sternly.

But before the minister's accusing glance, Miss Dounay was already dropping back into her chair, and as if in dismay at her outbreak, buried her face in her hands, while Searle, quivering with fury, snarled out:

"I resent, your Honor, with all my manhood, the epithet which this defendant has gratuitously and insultingly flung at me."

"Be seated, Mr. Searle," commanded the judge. "Doctor Hampstead's position is very distressing. He will withdraw the objectionable epithet."

"I withdraw it," acknowledged the minister, recovering his poise; yet he said it doggedly and uncompromisingly, qualifying his withdrawal with: "But your Honor will take into account that the manner of the representative of the District Attorney has been offensive to me, though some of the time veiled by an exaggerated pretense of courtesy. It has seemed to me the manner of an accomplice of the complaining witness, and I withdraw the statement more out of respect to this Court than out of consideration for him."

Searle glared, but resumed his seat, giving vent to his temper in a violent jerk of his chair as he dropped into it.

"You may conclude your remarks," observed the Court to Hampstead.

"There is nothing to add," replied the minister, after a reflective interval, "except to urge again that your Honor consider the grave consequences of yielding to a one-sided view of the case. I ask only that truth be honored and justice done!"

With this the defendant sat down.

Miss Dounay appeared to have regained her composure, but, white and still, her glance was now fixed as noticeably upon the face of the defendant as before she had markedly avoided it.

With a hitch to his vest and a forward thrust of the chin, Searle rose to attack the plea of the defendant.

"Your Honor may well ask with Pilate: 'What is truth?'" he began, the manner of his speech showing that while his self-control was admirable, his mood was that vindictive one into which many a prosecutor appears to work himself when arising to assail the cause of a defendant.

"However," he prefaced, "I must first apologize to your Honor for the momentary loss of control on the part of the complaining witness. Your Honor will realize that her emotions were wantonly and deliberately played upon by the defendant in a skillful endeavor to create sympathy for himself. The fact that he succeeded so readily is an eloquent bit of testimony to the sympathetic nature of this estimable and brilliant woman, to the ease with which her confidence is gained, and the painful reluctance with which she performs her duty in this sad case: for any way we view it, it is a sad case, your Honor, and no one regrets more than I the harsh words which must be spoken in the course of my own duty to the people of this county.

"However," and Searle paused for a moment as if both gathering breath and steeling himself for the vicious assault he proposed to make: "Addressing myself to the plea of the defendant for a dismissal of this case, I must say flatly that the motion itself, the argument to support it, and the testimony upon which it is based, constitute the most audacious combination of effrontery and offensive egotism to which a court was ever asked to listen. I congratulate your Honor upon the patience and self-control with which you have contained yourself while permitting this defendant to go on from statement to statement, involving himself deeper in this dastardly crime with every word.

"If, your Honor, in all my days at the bar as a prosecutor, I have ever looked into the face of a guilty man, it is the face of this man!—this egotist!—this boastful braggart!—" As Searle hurled each epithet, he worked his passion higher and shook an offensively, impudently accusing finger at the defendant; "this hypocrite!—this paddler of the palms of neurasthenic women!—this associate of criminals!—this shepherd of black sheep, who now sits here with a sneer upon his lips—lips which have just committed the most appalling sacrilege by seeking to cloak the guilt of a dastardly act with the sacred gown of a priest of God!"

As a matter of fact, there was no sneer discernible to any one else upon the lips of the defendant. At first smiling at the mock-fury into which Searle was lashing himself, they had become white and bloodless under the sting of these heaped-up insults. But this last was more than the man could stand in silence.

"Is my position so defenseless, I ask your Honor," Hampstead interrupted, "that I am

compelled to endure this?"

The judge bestowed a chiding glance upon the attorney, but replied to the minister:

"A certain liberty is allowed the prosecutor."

"But that liberty should not be a license to defame!" protested the defendant.

"Am I to be permitted to proceed with my argument or not?" bawled Searle in his most bullying manner, while he glared at the audacious minister.

"You may proceed," replied the Court, affecting not to notice the disrespect with which it had been addressed.

Searle continued, lapsing now into an argumentative strain.

"The defendant himself has said that the case against him is without a flaw. He has had the effrontery to urge that your Honor accept the testimony against him as true testimony. He has only argued that if we are to believe the witnesses for the prosecution, we are also to believe him. I say—I affirm with all the force at my command—that we are not to believe him at all!

"I ask your Honor to consider first the motive for his testimony. The man is hopelessly involved. The charge of burglary is a simple one, compared with the broader indictment of moral profligacy which the whole community is at this moment prepared to find against him. Ruin stares him in the face. His pose is shattered. His disguise is penetrated. If he goes from this court room to the identification bureau of which he has spoken in his mawkish plea for sympathy, as I believe he will go, he goes to be catalogued with criminals, and to be damned forever in the esteem of his neighbors.

"To avert that, would not your Honor expect this defendant to be willing to perjure himself without a qualm? Will a man who has lived a lie before a whole community for five years hesitate to add another in an endeavor to avert his impending fate? Will a man who has stolen the jewels of his trusted friend hesitate to swear falsely in denial of such an act? Will a man who has worked upon the sympathy of his friends to secure large sums of money for a purpose so doubtful that it is undisclosed— Will he hesitate to work upon the sympathies here by words and implications, by innuendoes that are as false to religion as to fact?

"Your Honor knows that he would not so hesitate. Your Honor knows, through long familiarity with the law of evidence, that the testimony of a defendant in his own behalf, because of his intense interest in the outcome of his case, is always to be weighed with extreme care.

"I believe under such circumstances not only the motives, the springs of action, but the probable mental processes of the witness are to be taken into account. I ask your Honor what a defendant involved in the mesh of circumstantial evidence here presented would probably do under these circumstances. Your own judgment answers with mine that he would probably lie, and exactly as this defendant has lied!"

Again Searle turned and shook his long arm with insulting undulations in the direction of the defendant, after which he continued:

"Turning from probabilities to experience, I ask your Honor out of his memory of years of service upon the bench, what does the arrested thief—taken like this one, with the loot in his possession—what does he do? Why, he either confesses his crime, or he tells you that he is not the thief but an innocent third party, who unwittingly received the loot from the man of straw, whom his imagination and his necessities have created. That latter alternative is the defense of this alleged minister of the Gospel! He had not the honesty to confess, but tells instead that same old lie which criminals and felons have been telling in that same witness chair since this Court was first established.

"Yet this defendant's story has not even the merit of a pretense to ignorance that the goods he held were stolen goods. He boldly admits that he knew they were stolen; that he was personally acquainted with the owner; that he knew the distress of her mind; knew the police departments of half a dozen cities were searching for the jewels, and that the newspapers were giving the widest publicity to the facts and thus joining in the chase for loot and looter. And yet he calmly permits these diamonds to repose in his vault with never a word or hint to calm the distress of his friend or relieve the peace officers of burdensome labors in which they were engaging and the unnecessary expense which they were thus putting upon the taxpayers who support them!

"Why, your Honor, if the witness's own story is true, he has given this Court an abundant ground for holding him to answer to the Superior Court, not indeed upon the exact charge named in that complaint, but as an accessory after the fact to said charge.

"But it is not true. To use his own phrase, it is wickedly and damnably false! So palpably false that it collapses upon the mere examination of your Honor's mind without argument from me.

"Yet I cannot close without calling attention to the sheer recklessness with which this thief and perjurer has heightened the infamy of his position by an act of brazen sacrilege. He has sought to make plausible his weak, unimaginative lie that he received these goods instead of stealing them, by pretending that he received them in his capacity as a religious confessor, under conditions that bound him to a silence which the voice of God alone could break.

"That, in itself, is a claim that should bring the blush of shame to the cheek and rouse the hot resentment of every honest minister and of every honest priest, and make them join with the outraged feelings of honest laymen and of citizens generally in demanding that justice descend upon this man and strike him from the pedestal of self-righteous egotism upon which he stands.

"Turning again for a moment to the question of probabilities: I ask your Honor if it is probable, even thinkable, that any minister, standing in the position of regard in which this minister stood last Sunday morning before the eyes of his people, would deem a crisis like this insufficient to unseal his lips and absolve him from his confessional vows? His very duty to his God and to his congregation, to the poor dupes of his hypocrisy, to say nothing of his duty to himself, would compel him to go upon the witness stand voluntarily and reveal the name of the alleged thief!

"Such a consideration again forces upon any unbiased mind the conviction that this man is not speaking the truth. View him as a thief, and you suspect that his story is a lie. Try to view him as a minister, acting honestly and in good faith, and you no longer suspect, but you deeply and unalterably know that his story is a lie!"

Searle, now at the height of his self-induced passion, as well as at the climax of his argument, stood bent over, his eyes blazing at the judge, his face red, his neck swollen, his features working in rage, and his voice deepening to a bull-like roar, while with an upper-cut gesture of his clenched fist and right arm, he appeared to lift the words to some mighty height and hurl them like a thunder bolt of doom.

The minister, sitting with every muscle taut, as he strained under the viciousness of this assault, felt just before its climax some insensible cause directing his gaze from the face of his official accuser to that of his real Nemesis, the actress, and was surprised to see her crouching like a tigress for a spring, with eyes fixed upon the prosecutor, and a look of unutterable malice, hate, and loathing in their savage beams.

But with this scene thrown for a moment on the screen of his mind, the suddenly sobering utterance of Searle indicated that he was concluding his argument, and the defendant's eyes returned quickly to the attorney's face.

"For these reasons, your Honor," the man was saying, "so patent and bristling from the testimony that I need not even have spoken of them in order to bring them to your attention, I ask you to find that the offense as charged in the complaint has been committed, and that there is sufficient cause to believe the defendant guilty thereof, and to order that he be held to answer before the Honorable, the Superior Court of the County of Alameda and the State of California."

Searle sat down and wiped his brow,—confident that he had added greatly to his reputation by a masterly argument which had sealed the fate of a man, against whom, despite the minister's suspicions, he really had nothing in the world but that instinct for the chase to which, once a strong nature gives up, it may find itself led on to excesses that are the extreme of injustice.

The audience moved restlessly yet silently, shifting cramped muscles tenderly and rubbing strained eyes; but still alert for the issue of the scene which in one hour and fifty minutes had been played from one climax to another.

"You have the opportunity to reply," said the Court, addressing Hampstead.

"The spirit and the manner of this address is its own reply," answered the defendant quickly, believing hopefully that it was.

But the audience, more discerning than the defendant, issued the last of its long-drawn collective sighs, foreseeing that the drama was now at its inevitable end.

In sharp, machine-like tones, the verdict of Judge Brennan was pronounced:

"Held to answer! Bail doubled! Adjourned!"

The gavel fell sharply, and the eyes of the Court darted a warning glance beyond the rail as if to forestall a possible demonstration of any sort. But there was none. A kind of restraint appeared to hold the court and spectators in thrall. Then the official reporter closed his notebook with an audible whisk; the clerk, gathering his papers, snapped them loudly with rubber bands; and the judge arose and started toward his chambers, while Wyatt moved over and took his place significantly by the side of Hampstead. As if this broke the spell, there was a shuffling of many feet, while the minister was immediately surrounded by his bondsmen and a few friends. The

friends pressed his hand and stepped away into the outgoing crowd; but the bondsmen went with him into the judge's chambers, where the new surety was quickly executed. After this, wringing the hand of each of the three men feelingly, Hampstead asked to be excused.

"I have an humiliating experience to undergo," he explained, with a meaningful glance at Detective Larsen who, representing the Bureau of Identification, stood waiting. "I prefer to face that humiliation alone."

"I understand," exclaimed Wilson, his face flushing. "It is a damned outrage! I didn't know such a thing could be done. I thought every man was presumed innocent until proven guilty! Instead of that, they put him in the Rogues' Gallery!"

"You are as innocent as an angel from heaven," averred the white-bearded Wadham extravagantly, as he laid an affectionate hand upon the shoulder of the younger man.

"You are, indeed," echoed Hayes, his voice hoarse with emotion. "I confess again that we doubted for a time, but your character rises triumphant to the test."

The minister was unwilling to trust himself to further speech; for his disappointment with the verdict had been great, and the sympathetic loyalty of these trusted friends made self-control difficult, so with only a nod of comprehension, he turned quickly to where Detective Larsen waited.

It was nearly one hour later when the minister, clothed again, stepped out upon the street. Behind him was his record in the criminal history of the State of California. He had seen his name go into the card index with a wife murderer on one side of him and the author of an unmentionable crime upon the other. With the sickening memory of his loathsome ordeal searing his brain he was only half-conscious of the clatter and bang of the busy city life about him. Mercifully the gaping crowd had dispersed. Hurrying people went this way and that, intent upon their own concerns. But a newsboy, intent, too, on his concerns, thrust the noon edition of *The Sentinel* before the minister's eyes. Seeking the headline by habit, as the eyes of the victim turn to the torturing irons, he read in letters as black and bold as any he had seen that week, the verdict of Judge Brennan.

"HELD TO ANSWER!"

Instinctively Hampstead paused, like a man in a daze, then passed his hand before his eyes to blot the black letters from his sight. In the identification bureau, the meaning of those three words had just been defined to the most sensitive part of his nature in abhorrent and revolting terms. The sight of that headline to be flaunted on every street corner was like seeing these words, with their loathsome connotation, spread upon a banner that arched over the whole sky of life for him. It overwhelmed him with a sense of the public obloquy to which he was now to be subjected.

On the street car, as he rode homeward, the minister felt the eyes of the people upon him,—curiously he knew, derisively he imagined; yet some were in reality sympathetic. The conductor, as he took the clergyman's nickel, touched his hat respectfully, thus subtly indicating that there was some vestige of religious character still outwardly attaching to his person. And a workman, his tools in his hand and the stain of his craft upon his clothes, leaned over and touched the minister upon the arm.

"My boy was playing the ponies in Beany Webster's place," he said. "You saved him for me. I don't care what else you done; if they ever got me on the jury, there's one would never convict you of anything."

The minister recognized the friendliness of the remark with a cordial smile, and put out his hand to grasp gratefully the soiled one of the toiler. That handclasp was immensely strengthening to him. He felt as if he had taken hold of the great, steadying hand of God.

CHAPTER XXXVI A PROMISE OF STRENGTH

Late in the afternoon of this day, which, it will be remembered, was Saturday, the minister had three callers in tolerably prompt succession. The first to appear was the Angel of the Chair, hailing the minister with a smile as if, instead of disgrace, he had achieved a triumph.

Hampstead's sad face lighted with sheer joy at her manner. It was such a relief that she had not come to commiserate him. His mood was extremely subtle. It irritated him to be pitied; it stung him to be doubted. He only wanted to be believed and to be encouraged by those who did

believe him. This fragile blossom of a woman who, with all her gentleness and weakness, had yet in her breast the battling spirit of the martyrs of old, touched just the right note, as after an interval of sympathetic silence, she asked gently, with a voice full of the tenderest consideration, "Can you—can you see it to the end?"

"To the end?"

Hampstead lifted his brows gravely. "You mean—conviction?"

"Yes," she answered with that simple directness which showed that she was blinking no phase of the question. "Is the issue big enough to require such a sacrifice?"

"Oh, I think it is too improbable it could go to that length," Hampstead answered thoughtfully.

"But it might! Is it worth it?" Mrs. Burbeck persisted.

The calm sincerity of her manner poised the question like a lance aimed at his heart.

Hampstead hesitated. He really had not thought as far as this, any farther in fact than the hateful smudge of the thumb print and the picture in the Gallery of Rogues. But now, with her considerately calculating glances upon him, he did think that far, weighing all his hopes, his work, his position at the head of All People's, his priceless liberty, his fathomless love for Bessie, against the pledged word of a priest to a weak and penitent thief, whose soul at this moment trembled on the brink, suspended alone by the spectacle of the integrity of the confessor to his vow.

He weighed his duty to this thief now somewhat as five years before he had weighed his duty to Dick and Tayna against the supreme ambition of his life. The stakes then, on both sides, large as they had seemed, were infinitely smaller than the values at issue now. Looking back, John knew that then he had not only made the right decision, but the best decision for himself. He thought that he was humbling himself; but instead he had exalted himself.

But now the lines were not so sharply drawn. He was renouncing his very position and power to do his duty.

"Is it?"

Mrs. Burbeck half-looked and half-breathed this gentle reminder that she had asked her pastor a question.

"I believe," said the minister, revealing frankly the trend of his thought, "that the nearest duty is the greatest duty; that the man who spares himself for some great task will never come to a great task. I hold that a man ought to be true in any relation of life; and when the issue is drawn between one duty and another, he should try to determine calmly which is the highest duty and be true to that. I shall try to be that in this case—even to conviction!"

The sheen upon the face of the woman as she listened was as great as the glow upon the face of the man as he spoke.

"That is a very simple religion," Mrs. Burbeck concurred happily, "and it contains the larger fact of all religion. That is why Jesus went to the cross; because he was true. That was why the grave couldn't hold him; because he was true. You cannot bury truth, nor brand it, nor photograph it, nor put its thumb prints in a book, nor put stripes upon it."

Hampstead arose suddenly, enthusiasm kindling like the glow of inspiration upon his face. "That is why I still feel free—unscathed by what has happened," he exclaimed. "In a small and comparatively unimportant way it has been given to me to be true. Yes," he said, sitting down again and speaking very soberly, "I shall be true to the end—conviction, imprisonment even. Prison terms do not last forever; and every day spent there will be a witness to the fact that I am true." Exalted enthusiasm had passed on for a moment to a strained note that sounded like fanatical egotism.

As if to check this Mrs. Burbeck asked quietly but with a significance that was arresting:

"Are you strong enough, do you think?"

For a moment the minister was thoughtful and something like a shudder of apprehension swept over him.

"No," he replied humbly. "I begin to confess it to myself. The fear that I will weaken begins to come to me at times."

"That is good," the Angel of the Chair commented surprisingly, gathering her scarf about her shoulders as she spoke. "It is better to be too weak than to be too strong. But strength will be given you. That is what I came to say. I feel strangely weak myself, to-day, and must be going now."

"You should not have come," reproached the minister, as he helped Mori, the Japanese, to wheel her to the door; "and yet I am so glad you did come, for you have made me feel like some

chivalrous champion of eternal right jousting in the lists against an impious Lucifer."

For this the Angel gave him back a smile over the top of her chair, and the minister watched her out of sight, reflecting that in the few days since this strain upon them all began she had failed perceptibly, and recalling that never before had he heard her allude to her weakness or make her physical condition the excuse for anything she did or did not do.

Within a quarter of an hour, so soon almost that it seemed as if he had been waiting for his wife to depart, Elder Burbeck was announced as the second caller at Doctor Hampstead's door.

For the five years of his eldership before the advent of Hampstead, Elder Burbeck had a record in the official board of never permitting any subject to be passed upon without a word from him, nor ever having allowed any question to be considered settled until it was settled according to the dictates of the thing he supposed to be his conscience.

At their first momentary clash on the day when Hampstead, the book agent, had broken open the church which Burbeck had nailed up, the older man thought he sensed in the younger the presence of a spiritual endowment greater than his own. To this the ruling Elder had bowed within himself. Externally, his manner was not changed, nor his leadership affected. To the congregation his submission to the final judgment of the minister was accounted as a virtue. Instead of weakening him, it strengthened his own standing with the membership.

While Burbeck had at times voiced his protests to the pastor at what he felt to be mistaken sentimentalism, and while the protests had been dismissed at times with an unchristian impatience, there was no one to whom the events and disclosures of this terrible week of headlines had been more surprising or more shocking than to the meticulous apostle of the *status quo*. Upon the Elder's metallic cast of mind each revelation impacted with the shattering effect of a solid shot. Through a thousand crevices thus created, suspicion, rumor, and the stream of truths, half-truths, and lies percolated to the bed of reason. His mind was without elasticity. The school of logic in which he had been trained reasoned coldly, by straight lines to rectangular conclusions. There was no place for allowances or adjustments. Once a stitch was dropped, there was no picking it up, and the blemish was in the garment.

So he reasoned now about Hampstead. The minister, having been weak once, must have also been wicked; being brittle, he must have been broken; frail, he must have been fractured. Having been wicked, broken, fractured, this explained his immense sympathy for and capacity to reach other frail, weak, brittle men and women; but it did not justify his pose as a pillar unscathed by fire. Loving All People's as he loved himself, his wife, his brilliant son,—with pride and self-complacence,—Burbeck felt hot resentment at the disgrace which the disclosures and the flood of scandal brought upon the church.

Searle himself had not believed many of the charges he hurled against Hampstead in his concluding speech. Elder Burbeck, who heard that speech from behind the rail, believed it all. Believing it, and believing in his mission to purge the church of this impostor, his zeal roused him to the point where he forgot to be logical. He believed the preacher was a thief, a liar and a hypocrite; and at the same time believed that he had told the truth upon the witness stand in his own defense. But this only made his sin more heinous. He was harboring some crook—some other man, weak, frail, brittle, wicked as himself. That man was necessarily a hypocrite, a whited sepulcher, posing before the community as a pillar of virtue. It would be an act of righteousness to find and expose that man. But who could it be? Somebody at that supper, of course. Now it might be Haggard, managing editor of *The Sentinel*; newspaper men were always suspicious characters, anyway; and surely Hampstead was under obligations to Haggard. Haggard, with all his publicity, had given the minister his first fame, and for years supported him upon his pedestal as a public idol. Yes, it probably was Haggard. But whoever it was, Burbeck undertook in his mind a second mission; to find and expose and brand the thief whom the minister was protecting.

With no more fiery fanaticism did the followers of Mohammed set out with the sword to purge the world of infidels than did Elder Burbeck purpose to purge All People's of its pastor and wring from the lips of Hampstead the secret of another's crime.

He entered the minister's study with a pompous dignity that was ominous. His face was as red, the bony protuberances on his boxlike and hairless skull were as prominent, as ever. His shaggy eyebrows lent their usual fierceness to the steel gleam of his blue eye. His close-cropped gray mustache clung perilously above lips that were straight and unsmiling.

"Good evening, Hampstead," he said, with a falling inflection.

This was the first time he had ever failed to say "Brother" Hampstead.

The minister had risen to greet his visitor, but subtly discerning in the first appearance of the man the mood in which he came, had not advanced, but stood with his desk between them,

waiting.

"How are you, Burbeck!" the minister replied evenly. This was also the first time he had failed to address the Elder as "Brother." He was rather surprised at himself for omitting it now and took warning therefrom that his feelings were poised upon hair triggers.

The Elder saw in the minister's manner instant confirmation of his conclusions. The man had not the spirit of Christ. He met hard looks with hard looks. This was well. It made the Elder's task the easier. He could proceed at once to business.

In his hand he held a copy of the last edition of *The Sentinel*, and now he spread the paper across the desk before the clergyman's eye. The same old headline was there, "HELD TO ANSWER," but in the center of the page was a frame or box which contained a half-tone, a smear, and a short column of black-face type, both words and figures.

Hampstead saw at a glance that it was a printed copy of his Bertillon record. The smear was his thumb print; the picture was his picture, a half-tone of the bald, unretouched photograph of himself which had been made for the Gallery of Rogues, and across the bottom of the picture was a suggestive space, in which was printed: "No.—?" The inference sought to be conveyed was clear. So great was the sense of pain which Hampstead felt that it was reflected in the glance he turned upon the Elder, a glance that came as near to an appeal for pity as any that had yet been in the clergyman's eye. But it met no response from the stern old Puritan.

"Be seated!" the minister said, a trifle sadly.

"I can say what I've got to say better if I stand," replied the Elder tersely. "Of course you'll resign!"

A look of intense surprise crossed the face of Hampstead.

"Resign what?" he asked, with raised brows.

"Why, the pulpit of All People's!"

The minister stared in amazement. Burbeck also stared, but in impatience, during an interval of silence in which Hampstead had full opportunity to weigh again the manner of his visitor and appraise its meaning.

"No," the young man replied within a minute, firmly but almost without inflection, "I shall not resign."

"Then," declared Burbeck aggressively, "the pulpit of All People's will be declared vacant." The Elder's chin was raised, and implacable resolution was photographed upon his features.

Again Hampstead paused, and weighed and sounded the really sterling character of this honest old man, whose pride was as inflexible and undeviating as the rule of his moral life. He saw him not as a fanatical vengeance, but as a father. He thought of Rollie, of the man's pride in his son, and of what a crushing blow it would be to him to know the plight in which that son really stood to-day. It brought to him the memory of something he had read somewhere: "The more you do for a man, the easier it is to love him and to forgive him." His feeling now was not of resentment, but of sympathy. He felt very sorry for the Elder and for the position in which he stood.

"Why, Brother Burbeck," he reproached softly, "All People's would not do that. You would not let them do that. When you have stopped to think, you would not let me resign even. If I am convicted by a jury, I should have to resign; but a jury would not convict, I think. Besides, many things can happen before that. My accuser, who knows I am innocent, might relent. It is even more conceivable that a condition might arise under which the thief could speak out, and I should be vindicated."

The upper lip of Burbeck curled till it showed a tooth and then straightened out again. The minister continued to speak:

"To resign now would amount to a confession of guilt. To force me to resign would be an act of treachery. I am guilty of nothing, proven guilty of nothing. I am assailed because of the whimsical caprice of a half-crazed woman. I am temporarily helpless before that assault because I am faithful to my vows as a minister of All People's, vows which I took kneeling, with your hand upon my head. In spirit I am unscathed, as your own observations must show you. If my reputation is wounded, it is a wound sustained in the course of my duty, and it is the part of All People's and every member of it to rally valiantly to my support. If I were not persuaded that they would do this, I should be gravely disheartened."

The manner in which Hampstead spoke was clearly disconcerting to the Elder. He felt again that consciousness of moral superiority before which he had bowed until bowing had become a habit. But now he had more information. Reason stiffened the back of prejudice. He knew that this assumption of the minister was a pose. His conviction was this time strong enough to avert

its spell; and he answered unmoved, except to deeper feeling, with still harsher utterance:

"Then Hampstead, you will be disheartened! All People's shall never support you again. I have called a meeting of the official board for to-night. I shall present a resolution declaring the pulpit vacant. If they recommend it, it will be acted upon to-morrow morning by the congregation. If they do not receive it, I shall myself bring it before the congregation."

A look of deepening pain crossed the features of the minister.

"Not to-morrow," he pleaded, his voice choking strangely; "not to-morrow. I have been counting greatly on to-morrow. It has been a hard week. Man!" and Hampstead suddenly arose, "man, have you not heart enough to realize what this has been to me. I long passionately for the privilege of standing again in the pulpit of All People's. I want them to see how undaunted in spirit I am. I want them to judge for themselves the mark of conscious innocence upon my face. I want to feel myself once more under the gaze of a thousand pairs of eyes, every one of which I know is friendly. I want the whole of Oakland to know that my church is solidly behind me; that though in a Court of Justice I am 'Held to Answer', in the Court of the Lord and before the jury of my own church, I stand approved, with the very stigma of official shame recognized as a decoration of honor."

Hampstead had walked around the desk. He lifted his hand in appeal and sought to lay it upon the shoulder of the Elder to express the sympathy and the need of sympathy which he felt.

But Burbeck deliberately moved out of reach, replying sternly and perhaps vindictively:

"Hampstead! You do not appear to appreciate your position. You will never again stand in the pulpit of All People's. That is one sacrilege which you have committed for the last time. More than that, I hold it to be my duty to God to wring from your own lips the secret of the man whom you are shielding, and I shall find a way to do it! I—"

But the man's feeling had overmastered his speech. His body shook, his face was purple with the vehemence of anger. He lifted his hand as if to call down an imprecation when words had failed him, then abruptly turned, unwilling to trust himself to further speech, and made for the outside door. It closed behind him with a bang that left the key rattling in the lock.

Perhaps this noise and the sound of the Elder's clumping, heavy feet as they went down the steps, prevented the minister from hearing the chugging of a motor-car as it was brought to a stop in front.

Elder Burbeck, hurrying directly across the street to relieve his feelings by getting away quickly from what was now a house of detestation, almost ran into the huge black shape drawn up before the curb. He backed away and lunged around the corner of the car too quickly to notice the figure that emerged from it, or his emotions might have been still more hotly stirred.

Hampstead, sitting at his desk, trying to think calmly of this new danger which threatened him, and to reflect upon the irony of the circumstance by which the father of the man and the husband of the mother he was risking everything to protect, should become the self-appointed Nemesis to hurl him from his pulpit and wrest the secret from his lips, heard faintly the ring at the front door, heard the door close, and an exclamation from his sister in the hall, followed by silence which, while lasting perhaps no more than a few seconds, was quite long enough for him to forget, in the absorption of his own thoughts, that some one had entered the house. Hence he started with surprise when the inner door was opened, and Rose appeared, her white, strained features expressing both fright and hate. She closed the door carefully behind her and whispered hoarsely: "That—that woman is here!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE TERMS OF SURRENDER

"What woman?" asked Hampstead, in disinterested tones, too deeply absorbed in the half cynical reflection which the mission of Elder Burbeck had induced to realize that there was but one woman to whom his sister's manner could refer.

"That—that woman!" replied Rose again, unable to bring herself to mention the name.

"Oh," exclaimed her brother absently, but starting up from his reverie. "Oh, very well; show her in," he directed. His tone and gesture indicated that nothing mattered now.

Rose was evidently surprised at her brother's instruction and for once inclined to protest the supremacy of his will.

"You are not going to see her again?" she argued.

"I know of no one who should be in greater need of seeing me," John rejoined, with sadness and reproach mingled in equal parts.

"But alone? Think of the danger!"

"Seeing her alone has done about all the harm it could do," the brother replied, with a disconsolate toss of his hands, while the drawn look upon his face became more pronounced. "Show her in!"

Rose turned back with a cough eloquent of dissenting judgment and left the door flung wide. John at his distance sensed her feeling of outrage in the fierce rustling of her skirts as she receded down the hall, and presently heard her voice saying icily: "The open door!"

The minister smiled, with half-guilty satisfaction. His sister had refused Miss Dounay the courtesy of her escort to the study. He suspected that Rose had even refused to look at the visitor again, but having indicated the direction in which the open door stood, had whisked indignantly beyond into her own preserves.

The hour was now something after sunset, and the room was half in gloom. The actress paused inside the door, standing stiffly. Hampstead sat before his desk, his elbows on the arms of his chair, his hands hanging limp, his shoulders drooping, his eyes cast down and fixed. He was again thinking. He had a good many things to think about. The coming of the actress brought one more. He was not utterly despondent, but he had been brought to the verge of catastrophe; perhaps beyond the verge. The woman against whom he had done no wrong, and who had brought him to the precipice, now stood in his room, the place of all places in which he could feel the desolation creeping round his soul like rising waters about a man trapped by the tide in some ocean cavern. But the minister was not now thinking of that. Instead his mind recalled wonderingly that fleeting picture of this woman in court, with her eyes gleaming savagely at Searle and crouching like a tigress about to spring.

As if to call attention to her presence, the actress swung the door noiselessly toward the jamb, until the lock caught it with an audible and decisive snap. The minister reached out a hand and touched a button that flooded the room with light.

Miss Dounay was clad exactly as she had appeared in court, except that she was more heavily veiled, so that the prying light revealed no more of her features than the sparkle of an eye. Hampstead had not risen.

"Well!" he said, quietly but emotionlessly.

"Yes," she replied, in a low, affirmative voice, exactly as if in answer to a question.

"Why did you do it?"

Hampstead asked the question abruptly, but very quietly, and accompanied it with a gravity of expression and a gesture slight but so inclusive that it comprehended the entire avalanche which had been released upon him during the six days which had passed since he had talked with this woman in the limousine upon the moonlit point above the city.

Before replying, the actress raised both hands and lifted her veil. The disclosure was something of a revelation. The features were those of Marien Dounay, but they were changed. There had been always something royal in Marien's glances, but the royal air was gone now: something dominant in her personality, but the dominance had departed. The suggestion, too, of smouldering fire in her eyes was absent; instead there appeared a liquescent, quivering light, in which suffering and the comprehension that comes with suffering combined to suggest helpless appeal rather than the old, imperial air.

This softening of expression had extended to her mouth as well. The lips, as red, as full of invitation as ever, were more pliant; they trembled and formed themselves into tiny undulating curves which suggested and then reinforced the imploring light of the eyes. Her beauty was more appealing because it was no longer commanding, but entreating.

"Why did you do it?" the minister repeated, when his eyes had completed his appraisal, and the woman was still eloquently silent.

"Because I loved you," she answered briefly.

Her declaration was accompanied by an attempt at a smile that was so brave and yet so faltering that it was rather pitiful. But Hampstead, looking at the beautiful shell of this woman who had so vindictively hurled him down, was not in a mood to feel pity. Instead he was merely incredulous.

"Love?" he asked cynically, rising from his seat.

"Yes," exclaimed the woman with convulsive eagerness, as if her voice choked over speaking what her lips, by the traditional modesty of her sex and the mountain of her pride and self-will, had been too long forbidden to utter. "Yes, I have always loved you!"

With this much of a beginning, excitedly and with the air of one whose course was predetermined, the actress plucked off her hat, stabbed the pin into it, and tossed it upon the window seat; then nervously stripped the gloves from her hands; all the while hurrying on with a sort of defensive vehemence to aver:

"I have loved you from the first moment when you held me in your arms long enough for me to feel the electric warmth of your personality. You roused, kindled, and enflamed me! The sensation was delicious; but I resented it. It offended my pride. I had never been overmastered. You overmastered me without knowing it. I hated you for it. You were so—so unsophisticated; so good, so simple, so ready to worship, to admire, to ascribe the beauties of my body to the beauties of my soul. I hated you for that, for my soul was less beautiful than my body, and I knew it. I resisted you and yielded to you; I hated you and loved you; I spurned you and wanted you.

"You were so awkward, so impossible; you had so much of talent and knew so little how to use it. It seemed to me the very mockery of fate that my heart should fasten its affection upon you. I tried to break the spell, and could not. I yielded to my heart. I had to love you, to let myself adore you.

"I thought of taking you with me, but the way was too long; yours was more than talent—far more; it was genius, but buried deep and scattered wide. It would have taken a lifetime to chisel it out and assemble it in the perfect whole of successful art. I shrank before the treadmill task.

"And something else—I was jealous of you!"

Hampstead, who despite his incredulity had been listening attentively, raised his eyebrows.

"Jealous of the artist you might become. Your genius when it flowered would overtop mine as your character overtops mine."

The speaker paused, as if to mark the effect of her words.

"Go on," urged Hampstead impatiently, and for the first time betraying feeling. "In the name of God, woman, if you have one word of justification to speak, let me hear it!"

"I have it," Miss Dounay rejoined, yet more impetuously, "in that one word which I have already spoken—love!" She paused, passed her hand across her brow, and again resumed the thread of her story, still speaking rapidly but with an increase of dramatic emphasis.

"Then came the final ecstasy of pain. You loved me. You demanded me. You charged me with loving you. You told me it was like the murder of a beautiful child to kill a love like ours. You argued, persuaded, demanded—compelled—almost possessed me!"

The woman's face whitened, her eyes closed, and she reeled dizzily under the spell of a memory that swept her into transports.

"But," replied the minister quietly, "you killed our beautiful child."

"No! No!!" she exclaimed, thrusting out her hands to him. "Do not say that! I only exposed it—to the vicissitudes of years, to absence and to a foul slander which my own lips breathed against myself! But I did not kill it! I did not kill it!"

"At any rate, it is dead," replied the man, his voice as sadly sympathetic as it was coolly decisive.

"But I will make it live again," the woman exclaimed desperately. "I love you, John! Oh, God, how I love you!"

She endeavored to reach his neck with her arms, but the minister stepped back, and she stood wringing them emptily, a look in her eyes as if she implored him to understand.

But the minister was still unresponsive.

"It was a queer way for love to act," he protested, and again with that comprehensive gesture which called accusing notice to the ruin pulled down upon him.

"But will you not understand?" she pleaded. "It was the last desperate resource of love. I could not reach the real you. I tried for weeks. I endured insufferable associations. I assumed distasteful interests—all to put myself in your company; to keep you in mine; to create those proximities, those environments and situations in which love grows naturally. Again and again I thought that love was springing up. But I was disappointed. You did not respond. What I thought at first was response was only sympathy. To you I was no longer a woman. I was a subject in spiritual pathology.

"When I saw this, first it irritated, then maddened me. I knew that you were not yourself, that your environment had insulated you. That you were so interested in the part which you were playing,—so absorbed by the duty of being a public idol, that you could not be yourself, the man, the flesh, the heart, I know you are.

"In desperation I resolved to strip you, to hurl you down, to rob you of the public regard, of your church, of everything; to strip you until you were nothing but the man who once held me in

his arms, his whole body quivering, and demanding with all his nature to possess me."

As the woman spoke, her voice had risen, and a half-insane enthusiasm was gleaming on her face, while her fingers reached restlessly after the minister who, as unconsciously as she advanced, receded until he stood cornered against the door.

"Now," she continued, in her frenzied exaltation of mood, "it is done! You see how easily it was accomplished. Nothing should be so disillusioning, so reawakening to you as to observe how light is your hold upon this community, how selfish and insincere was all this public adulation. I, a stranger almost, of whom these people knew nothing, was able, with a ridiculously impossible charge, to brush you from your eminence like a fly.

"Of what worth has it all been? Of what worth all that you can do for people like these? Your very church is turning against you. It will cast you out."

A shade had crossed the brow of Hampstead.

"You think that?" he asked defiantly.

"I know it," Marien replied aggressively. "That square-headed old Elder came to see me this afternoon. Shaking his hand was like taking hold of a toad. Ugh! He wanted to pry into your past through me, the old reprobate!"

"Hush! I will not hear him defamed. He is an honorable and a well-meaning man, against whose character not one word can be breathed."

Marien's eyes flashed. Impatient and regardless of interruption, she continued as though Hampstead had not spoken.

"And he, the father of the man you are suffering to shield, is to be the first to take advantage of your misfortune. The old Pharisee! I nearly told him who the real thief was."

"Miss Dounay!"

The minister's exclamation was short and sharp, like a bark of rage. His face was drawn until his mouth was a seam, and his eyes had shrunk to two shafts of light, "Miss Dounay! That is God's secret. If you had spoken, I should have—" He ceased to speak but held up hands that clenched and unclenched.

The actress was feeling confident now. She had goaded this man to rage. Beyond rage might lie weakness and surrender. She threw back her head and laughed.

"Yes, I will finish it for you. You would have been inclined to strangle me; but I did not tell him. Yet not for your reason, but for mine. So long as you rest under the charge, your enemies gnash; your friends turn from you. Instead of being insulated from me by all, you are insulated from all by me. There is no one left but me. I love you. I am beautiful, rich, with the glamour of success upon me. I can override anything; defy anything. I can be yours—altogether yours. You can be mine—altogether mine. You can leave these shallow, ungrateful gossips and scandalmongers to prey upon each other, while you and I go away to an Eden of our own."

The actress paused, breathless and again to mark effects. The minister's face had resumed its normal benignity of expression. He was gazing at her thoughtfully, contemplatively. Marien took fresh hope, knowing upon second thought now, as she had known all along, that she could not successfully tempt this man by a life of mere luxurious emptiness. Falling into tones of yet more confiding intimacy, she continued:

"Besides, John, I am not jealous of your genius any more. My love has surged even over that. You have still a great dramatic career before you. You shall come into my company. You shall have every opportunity. Within two years you shall be my leading man; within five, co-star with me. Think of it. Your heart is still in the actor's art. Acting is religion. After God, the actor is the greatest creator. He alone can simulate life. The stage is the most powerful pulpit. Come. We will write your life's story into a play. We will play the faith and fortitude which you have shown into the very soul of America, like a bed of moral concrete! Are you not moved at that?"

She paused, standing with head upon one side, and the old, alluring, coaxing glances stealing up from beneath the coquettish droop of her lids.

"No," Hampstead replied seriously. "I am not moved by it at all. Had you made this speech to me five years ago, I should have been in transports. To-day the art of living appeals to me beyond the art of acting. I have no doubt I feel as great a zest, as great a creative thrill in standing true in the position in which you have placed me as you ever can in the most ecstatic raptures of the mimetic art. No, Marien," and his tone was conclusive, "it makes no appeal to me."

The beautiful creature, perplexity and disappointment mingling on her face, stood for a moment nonplussed. The expression of alert and confident resourcefulness had departed. Her intelligence had failed her. Yet once more the old smile mounted bravely.

"But there still remains one thing," she breathed softly, leaning toward him. "That is I.

Everything you have got is gone, or going. I have taken it away from you that I might give you instead myself. You had no room for me last week. You have nothing else but me now. It hurt me to give you pain. I hate Searle. I could have torn his tongue out yesterday. But you will forgive me, John. I did it for love."

Her utterance was indescribably pathetic—indescribably appealing.

"I am not to blame that I love you. You are to blame. No, the God that constituted us is to blame."

Her tones grew lower and lower. The spirit of humbled pride, of chastened submission, of helpless want entered more and more into the expression of her face and the timbre of her soft voice, while the very outlines of her figure seemed to melt and quiver with the intensity of yearning.

"It has been hard to humble myself in this way to you," she confessed. "I tried to win you as once I won you, as women like to win their lovers. But I am not quite as other women. I have to have you! My nature is imperious. It will shatter itself or have its will. I shattered your love to gain my ambition's goal. And now I have shattered your career to gain your love again."

Hampstead, though his consideration was growing for the woman, could not resist a shaft of irony.

"That was a sacrifice you took the liberty of making for me," he suggested.

"But, don't you see, it made me possible for you again," and the actress smiled with that obtuseness which was pitiful because it would not see defeat. She drew closer to him now, well within reach of his arm, and stood perfectly still, her hands clasped, her bosom heaving gently, a thing of rounded curves and wistful eyes, the figure of passionate, submissive, appealing love, hoping—desiring—waiting—to be taken.

Yet the minister did not take her.

But whatever agonies of lingering suspense, of dying hope, and rising despair may have passed through the indomitable woman as she stood in this pose of vain and helpless waiting, there was yet a spirit in her that would not surrender because it could not.

With eyes mournfully searching the depths of the face before her, she began her last appeal.

"And yet, John, there is a sacrifice that I am willing to make that is all my own and none of yours. I will renounce my own ambition, abandon the stage, cancel my engagements, give up that for which I have bartered everything a woman has to give but one thing. I have kept that one thing for you alone. The name of Marien Dounay shall disappear. I will be Alice Higgins again. I will be not an artist but a wife. I will be the associate of your work. You must go from here, of course. I have made your remaining impossible. But we will find some place where men and women need the kind of thing that you can do. It is a great need. There is a sort of glory in your work which I have not been too blind to see. My bridal flowers shall be the weeds of humble service. I will employ my art to bring cheer into homes of poverty, freshness and brightness to the sick. I will try to be God's replica of all that you yourself are. I say I will try!"

She had raised her face now and was searching his eyes again.

"I will do all of this, eagerly, joyously, fanatically, John Hampstead, if it will make it possible for you to love me—as once you loved me," she concluded, with the last words barely audible and sounding more like heart throbs than human speech.

Hampstead, looking levelly into her face, saw that the woman spoke the truth, that she was absolutely sincere.

She saw that he saw it, and with a gesture of mute appeal threw out her hands to him. But they gathered only air and fell limply to her side.

The minister, although his manner expressed a world of sympathy, shook his head sadly. Marien's face grew white, and the red of her lips almost disappeared. A look of blank terror came into her eyes, while one hand, with fingers half-closed, stole upward to the blanched cheek, and the other was pressed convulsively against her breast.

"I have my answer—John!" she whispered hoarsely, after an interval. "I have my answer!"

"Yes, Marien," he replied, sorrowfully but decisively, "you have your answer."

Her eyes, always eloquent, and now with a look of terrible hurt in them, suffused quickly, and it seemed that she would burst into tears and fling herself weakly upon the man she loved so hopelessly. Instead, however, only a shiny drop or two coursed down the cheeks which continued as white as marble; and she held herself resolutely aloof, but balancing uncertainly until all at once her rounded figure seemed to wilt and she would have fallen, had not the minister thrown an arm about the tottering form and with gentle brotherliness of manner helped her to a seat in the Morris chair.

For a considerable time she sat with her face in her hands, silent but for an occasional dry, eruptive sob.

Hampstead, standing back with arms folded and one hand making a rest for his chin, looked on helplessly, realizing that for the first time he was studying this complex personality with something like real comprehension.

While he gazed a purpose appeared to stir again in the disconsolate figure. The dry sobs ceased, and the body straightened till her head found its rest upon the back of the chair; but there the woman relaxed again in seeming total exhaustion with eyes closed and lips slightly parted. Hampstead drew a little closer, as if in tribute to this determined nature which now obviously fought with its grief as it had fought to gain the object of its attachment—indomitably. He had again the feeling which had come to him before, that she was greater, was worthier than he.

"How I have made you suffer!" Marien exclaimed abruptly, at the same time opening her eyes.

"Yes," the minister confessed frankly, while the lines of pain seemed to chisel themselves deeper upon his face with the admission, "you have indeed made me suffer."

"Can you ever, ever forgive me?" she asked, lifting her hand appealingly.

It was a small hand and lily white, with slim and tapering fingers. The minister took it in his and found it as soft as before,—but chilled.

"Yes," he said, gravely and calculatingly, "I do forgive you. The ruin has been almost complete; but I am strong enough to build again!"

"Oh," she exclaimed eagerly, starting up, "do you think you can?"

"Yes," he assured her stoutly, "I know it." He was beginning to feel sorrier for her than for himself. "You, too," he suggested gently, "must begin to build again."

Again her features whitened, and she fell back, pressing her brow with a gesture of pain and bewilderment, a suggestion of one who wakes to find one's self in chaos. It seemed a very long time that she was silent, but with lines of thought upon her brow and the signs of strengthening purpose gradually again appearing about her mouth and chin. When she spoke it was to say with determination:

"Yes; and I, too, am strong enough to build again. In these silent minutes I have been thinking worlds and worlds of things. I have lost everything—yet everything remains—and more. My art shall be my husband; and I will be a greater actress than ever. I shall play with a greater power, inspired and informed by the love which I have lost. I was never tender enough before. The critics charged me with hardness; I hated them for it. I could not understand them. Now I know. I could never play but half a woman's heart. I was too selfish, too proud, too imperious. I regarded love too lightly. That mistake will be impossible now. I know that love is all and all. There is no ecstasy of love's delight of which my imagination cannot conceive; there is no despair which the loss of love may produce that my experience will not have fathomed before this poignant ache in my heart is done."

At first John recoiled a little at this talk of a utilitarian extraction from her bitter experience and his; yet he reflected that it was like the woman. It was but the outcrop of the dominant passion. Since girlhood she had seen herself solely in terms of relation to her art; therefore this attitude now indicated, not a lack of fineness, but her almost noble capacity for converting everything to the ultimate object of the artist. Without such capacity for abandon, there was, he reflected, no supreme artist; and, he reasoned further, no supreme minister—or man, even. To this extent and in this moment, Marien's bearing in defeat was a lesson and a spur to him.

"I shall go widowed to my work," she went on to say, "but it will be a greater work than I could have done before. Then I had an ambition. Now I have a mission! To show women—and men too—the worth and weight and height and depth and paramount value of love."

Hampstead was again deeply impressed with her enormous resiliency of spirit. The woman's heart had been torn to pieces; yet while each nerve and fiber of it was a pulse of pain, she was purposing to bind the thing together and let its every throb be a word of warning to womankind.

"I learned it from you," she explained, almost as if she had read his thoughts. "I understand now the exalted mood in which you spoke a few minutes ago. I am sorry that I have lost you; but I am not sorry that I have hurled you down, since it leaves revealed a nobler figure of a man than I had thought existed."

Hampstead shuddered, in part at his own pain, in part at the ease with which she uttered the sentiment, because this woman could really never know how much his fall had cost him.

"Each of us in life I fear must be held to answer for his own obtuseness," he suggested.

"But that is not all we are held to answer for," Miss Dounay replied with sudden perception. "We must pay the penalty of the obtuseness of others."

"Ah!" exclaimed the minister quickly. "There you stumbled upon one of the greatest truths in religion, the law of vicarious suffering. We are each compelled, whether we will or not, to suffer for the sins of others. If we, you or I, mere humanity that we are, can so manage such suffering that it becomes a redemptive influence over the life of the one who caused it, we have done in a small and distant way the thing which the Son of Man did so perfectly for all the world."

"I see," she exclaimed eagerly, pressing her hands together in a sort of rapture. "It is that which you have done for me. You have suffered for my sin, and you have so managed the suffering that you have taken away some of my selfishness and will send me out of here, as I said before, not with an ambition, but with a mission."

She had risen, and though her manner was still subdued, it was again the manner of self-possession. Yet the new mood into which she had passed, and the new light of spiritual enthusiasm which had come upon her face, in no wise wiped out the impression that in the hour past she had tasted the bitterest disappointment that a woman can know, had plunged to the very depths of despair, and was still under its somber cloud. Indeed it was the fierceness of the conflagration within her which had burned out so swiftly at least a part of that dross of selfishness of which she had spoken, and clarified her vision, so that their two minds had leaped quickly from one peak of thought to another, to come suddenly on embarrassed silence just because all words, all deeds even, seemed suddenly futile to express what each had felt and was now feeling.

As the conversation lapsed momentarily, both appeared to find relief in trivial interests. The minister straightened the books in the rack upon his desk, then looked at his watch and noted that it was fifteen minutes to seven and reflected that seven was his dinner hour.

The actress gave her hair a few touches with her hands, and stood adjusting her hat before the mirror above the mantel. But the veil was still raised. Hampstead watched these operations silently, moved by evidences of the change in the woman.

"You have forgiven me," she began again, noticing in the mirror that his eye was upon her; "but I do not forgive myself. My first mission is to repair the damage which I have done to you. I will go immediately to Searle and tell him the truth."

Hampstead's mouth fell open, and a single step carried him half way across the room.

"But you must not tell Searle nor any one else the truth!" he affirmed vehemently.

It was Marian's turn to be surprised.

"You mean that I am not to undo the wrong that I have done you?" she asked in amazement.

"Not that way," he answered, with deliberate shakings of the head.

"You mean that you are to stand under the stigma which now rests upon you?" she insisted, with a gleam of the old imperious manner. "Certainly not! I have done wrong enough! It cannot be undone too quickly. I shall tell the truth to Searle. I shall gather the reporters about me and spare myself nothing. I will reveal the whole horrible plot; I will confess that Searle was duped, and that you were grossly conspired against by me!"

Again Hampstead, meeting that level glance, knew that the woman spoke in absolute sincerity. She was entirely capable of doing it. Once a course commended itself to her judgment, she had already shown that she would spare nothing to follow it.

"But you forget young Burbeck," he exclaimed. "Your exposure would mean his exposure."

"Well?"

Marian's eyes and tone both expressed her meaning, though she added incisively: "He is no reason why you should linger under this cloud."

Hampstead gazed at the woman doubtfully, speculating as to what argument would make the strongest appeal to her.

"His mother," he began gravely, "is my dearest friend. She is the most saintly woman I have ever known. One year of her life to this community is worth more than a score of years of mine—than all of mine. Let her know in private that her son is the thief, and she would grieve to death in a week. Let her know suddenly, with the force of public exposure, and it would kill her instantly, like an electric shock."

But this note proved the wrong one. Marian instantly took higher ground.

"I know that woman," she replied. "I have sensed her spirit. You do her injustice. If she knew the facts, she would speak, though it killed her and ruined her son, rather than see you endure for a single day what you are suffering now."

Hampstead knew better than the speaker how true this was.

"But there is another reason, a higher reason," he began slowly, with a grave significance that caught Marian's attention instantly, "the soul of Rollie Burbeck!"

The minister had breathed rather than spoken these last words. They had in them a sense of the awe he felt at what hung upon his actions now.

For an instant, the keen eyes of the woman searched the depths of Hampstead's own, as if she was making sure that what she heard and understood with this new and spiritual intuition which had come so swiftly out of her experience, was confirmed by what she saw.

"You mean," she asked, only half credulous, "that you will suffer for his sake as you have suffered for mine, until new character begins to grow in him just as a new objective begins to stir in me? You mean that?"

Hampstead nodded. "That is my hope," he said solemnly.

"Oh!" Marien sighed, with a prolonged aspirate note which expressed reverence, awe, and astonishment. "But the charges? They will be pressed. You will be held—convicted—imprisoned!"

"I cannot think it," argued John soberly. "A way will appear to avoid that. Yet we must contemplate the worst. One thing is sure," and his voice appeared to increase in volume without an increase of tone, "one thing is sure: In the position in which you have placed me I must remain until the thing for which I am standing has been accomplished—however long that takes—and if the wrong you have done to me confers any obligation upon you, it is to keep your lips sealed till I give you leave to open them."

Miss Dounay, more humbled by this steadfast magnanimity of soul which could refuse vindication when it was offered than awed by the sudden force of self-assertion which Hampstead manifested, looked her submission.

"Man!" she exclaimed impulsively, seizing both his hands for an instant. "I revere you. You are not the flesh I thought. You have altered greatly. Yours was not a pose. It is genuine. I am reconciled a little to my loss. You are not mine because I was not worthy to be yours!"

Hampstead made a deprecating, repressive gesture.

"Let me finish," she protested. "I am even less humiliated. The thing required to charm you was a thing I did not possess!"

"Beauty is a great possession," Hampstead smiled. "I have been and am sensible to it. I was sensible to your beauty to the last. The woman I love is beautiful."

"The woman you love!" Marien's whole manner changed. Her face took on the tigerish look. "There is some one else then? At least," she added reproachfully, "you might have spared me this."

"It was necessary," the minister replied quietly, "if we were really to understand each other."

The gravity of the man's tone, as well as some subtle recovery within herself, checked the tigerish impulse. Swiftly it gave way to pain and humility again.

"You—you are to marry?" she faltered weakly.

"No," he replied, with ineffable sadness. "This—" and again that comprehensive gesture which he had used so frequently to indicate the catastrophe which had come upon him, "this has dashed that hope entirely!"

The actress stood completely confounded. Within herself she wondered why she did not fly into a jealous passion. Surely she was changing; she felt half bewildered, half distrustful of her own moods in which she had believed so surely before. She was also completely staggered by this crowning revelation of the capacity of the man for sacrifice. Instead of the jealous passion, she felt a sisterly kind of sympathy; but it was only after a very considerable interval that Marien trusted herself to ask with trembling voice:

"She is very—very beautiful—this—this woman whom you love?"

The question was put very softly, meditatively almost.

"To me, yes," replied the minister with emphasis. "I think you would say so too."

"You were engaged?"

"Not when I met you first; but there had been a bond of very close sympathy between us. After you were gone, I felt that I had never really loved you; and my heart fastened itself on her. I loved her and told her so. But I felt it my duty to tell her the truth about you. Manlike, I thought she would comprehend. Woman-like, she comprehended more than I thought. She believed me weak and uncertain. She loved me still, but with a pain of disappointment in her heart. She put my love upon a kind of probation. The probation has lasted five years. It was almost finished. After what the papers have published in the past few days, you can imagine that now all is over."

"But you will write to her? You will see her? You will explain?" Marien questioned in self-forgetful eagerness.

"Explain," he smiled sadly. "What a futility! What explanation could there be after what I had told her? You know a woman's heart. More firmly than any other, she would be forced to an implicit belief in what the newspapers have falsely intimated concerning our relations in the past few weeks."

"But I will go to her myself!" Marien exclaimed impetuously. "I will tell her the truth."

"Do you think she would believe you?" he asked frankly. "Could you expect any woman to believe in your sincerity under such circumstances, upon such a mission? You would not be able to believe it yourself."

"You are right!" Marien admitted after a moment of thought. "Once away from the restraining influence of your character, my true nature would reveal itself. I should hate her! I do hate her! No, I could not go!"

"And so, you see,"—John did not finish the sentence but had recourse to a helpless smile and a pathetic shrug of the shoulders.

Marien lowered her veil. The interview was running on and on. It must come to an end.

"It all becomes uncanny," she exclaimed. "There is too much converging upon your heart. There must come a rift in the clouds. I have submitted to your compelling altruism but only for the present. If something does not happen within a reasonable limit of time, I shall positively and dangerously explode!"

John smiled at the vehemence with which she spoke.

"But in the meantime—silence!" he adjured impressively.

"Yes," she assented reluctantly. "But at the same time I shall not know one gleam of happiness, one moment's freedom from mental anguish until your vindication is flung widely to the world."

"But in the meantime, silence!" reiterated John obstinately.

"And in the meantime," she consented more resignedly, "silence!"

"Good night, Marien," said the minister, putting out his hand.

"Good night, Doctor Hampstead," she replied, seizing that hand impulsively, then flinging it from her again as she turned, without another glance, to the door. It closed behind her softly, considerately almost, but with that same decisive snap of the lock which had shut her in three quarters of an hour before.

Hampstead stood a moment in reflection. She had come and she had gone, leaving behind a great sense of relief, of complexities unraveled, of good accomplished and of further danger averted. Of one thing he felt sure now; he would never go to prison. A way would be found to avoid that. Her vindictive malice had spent itself and been turned to an attempt at co-operation.

But he was still under clouds: one the verdict of Judge Brennan, "Held to Answer"; the other less black, but larger and murkier, the cloud of public condemnation; and for the present he must remain under both. Besides which, there was his church and Elder Burbeck to consider.

And to-morrow was Sunday!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SUNDAY IN ALL PEOPLE'S

Elder Burbeck did not make good his threat. Hampstead stood again in the pulpit of All People's on Sunday, as his heart had so passionately desired.

But the reality disappointed. The contrast between this day and last Lord's day was pitiful. To be sure, the church was packed; but not to worship. The people—curious and wooden-hearted—had come to be witnesses to a spectacle, to see a man go through the business of a rôle which his character no longer fitted him to enact. The service and the sermon were one long agony. John spoke upon the duty of being true. His words came back upon him like an echo.

As for Elder Burbeck, he had only halted. The minister, from considerations of delicacy which were promptly misconstrued, having remained away from the called meeting of the Official Board on Saturday night, all things in that session had gone to Burbeck's satisfaction. He held in his pocket the resolution of the Board, recommending that the congregation request the resignation of the pastor of All People's. He might have introduced this at the close of the sermon, thus turning the ordinary congregational meeting into a business session; but the Elder was an expert tactician. He decided to devote the entire day to a final estimate of just what inroads the week had made upon the ascendancy of the minister with his people.

However, the manner in which the sermon was received encouraged him to go forward immediately with his plans. As the congregation was upon the last verse of the last hymn, the Elder ascended to the pulpit beside the minister. He did not look at the minister. He did not whisper that he had an announcement to make, and Hampstead did not say at the end of the hymn: "Elder Burbeck has an announcement to make." This was the usual form. But it was not followed. Instead, Burbeck, unannounced, with coarse self-assertion, made the announcement:

"There will be a business meeting of the church on Monday night to consider matters of grave import to the congregation. Every member is urged to be present."

There was a grave doubt if the Elder had a right of himself to call a meeting of the church. Yet the only man with force enough to voice that doubt was the minister, and he did not voice it. Instead, he stood quietly until the announcement was concluded and then invoked the benediction of God upon all the service, which, of course, included the announcement.

When at the close of the service Doctor Hampstead undertook to mingle among his people, according to custom, he found a minority hysterically hearty in their assurances of confidence, sympathy, and support; but the majority avoided him. Instead of enduring this and withering under it, the minister was roused into something like aggression. By confronting and accosting them, he forced aloof individuals to address him. He made his way into groups that did not open readily to receive him. In all conversations he frankly recognized his position, made it the uppermost topic, and solicited opinion and advice. He even eavesdropped a little. Once people opened their mouths upon the subject, he was astonished at their frankness. When the sum total of the impressions thus gathered was organized and deductions made, he was stunned almost to cynicism by their results. Of course, no one indicated that they believed him guilty of theft, and in the main all accepted his defense as the true defense. But they found him guilty of folly—a folly with a woman. Whether it was merely a folly and not a sin, it appeared was not to greatly alter penalties.

Yet justice must be done these people. They felt sorry for their minister and showed it; and they only shrank from him to avoid showing something else that would hurt him. They still acknowledged their debts of personal gratitude to him, but now they experienced a feeling of superiority. Their weaknesses had overtaken them in private; his had caught up with him under the spotlight's glare. They looked upon him with commiseration, pityingly, but from a lofty height. Besides which, they accused him of an overt offense. He had brought shame on All People's. He had preached to them this morning upon the duty of being true; but he had himself not been true—to the proud self-interest of All People's.

This indignant concern for the reputation of All People's was rather a surprising revelation to Hampstead. He had fallen into the way of thinking that he had made All People's; that he and All People's were one. That the congregation could have any purpose that did not include his purpose was not thinkable. He had never conceived of it as a social organism, with self-consciousness, with pride, with a head to be held up and a reputation to be sustained. To him All People's was not a society of persons with a pose. It was an association of individuals, each more or less weak, more or less dependent in their spiritual nature upon each other and upon him; the whole banded together to help each other and to help others like themselves. He had thought of himself as the instrument of All People's in its work of human salvage. But he now discovered that in these four years All People's had suffered from an over extension of the ego. It had been spoiled by prosperity and public approbation, just as other congregations, or individuals, might be or have been. The admiration of the members for him as their pastor, their humble obedience to his will, was in part due, not to his spiritual ascendancy, not to his conspicuously successful labors as a helper of humankind in so many different ways, but to the fact that these activities of the minister won him that public admiration and approval which shed a glamour also upon the congregation and upon the individual members of the congregation. Because of this, they worshipped him, honored him, and palavered over him to a point where Hampstead, no doubt as unconsciously as the congregation and as dangerously, had suffered an over-extension of his own ego.

But deflation of spirit had come to him swiftly. Now his own pride and his own self-sufficiency had all been shot away. If any remained, the effect of this Sunday morning service was quite sufficient to perform the final operation of removal.

He was to preach that night from the text: "If God is for us, who is against us." He gave up the idea. It sounded egotistical. He preached instead his farewell sermon, though without a word of farewell in it, from the text:

"Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual restore such a one

in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted."

That was what the pastor of All People's was trying to do,—to restore a man. In preaching this sermon, he forgot that this was his valedictory, forgot himself, forgot everything but the great mission of spiritual reconstruction upon which he had labored and proposed to labor as long as life was in him, no matter what yokes and scars were put upon him. In it he reached the oratorical height of his career, which was not necessarily lofty.

But people listened—and with understanding. Some of them cried a little. It made them reminiscent. The man himself, now slipping, had once restored them with great gentleness. All said, "What a pity!"

But Hampstead, while he spoke, was steeling himself against the probable desertion of his congregation. He had a feeling that he could win them back if he tried hard enough, but he began to doubt that they were worth winning back. He had really never sought to win them to himself personally; he would not begin now.

Instead, he saw himself cast out. The verdict of the church on Monday night would also be "Held to Answer."

He saw it coming almost gloatingly, and with a fierce up-flaming of that fanatic ardor which was always in him. The desire came to him to seize upon the position in which he stood as a pulpit from which to deliver a message to the world that greatly needed to be delivered, to say something that his fate and his life thereafter might illustrate, and thus make his public shame a greater witness to the truth than ever his popularity had been. In one of the loftiest of his moods of exaltation, he strode homeward from the church.

At ten o'clock, he telephoned the morning papers that at midnight he would have a statement to give out. It contained some rather extravagant expressions, was couched throughout in an exalted strain, and ran as follows:

AN ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE

"They tell me that I have stood for the last time in the pulpit of *All People's*; that on Monday night I shall be unfrocked by the hands that ordained me; for my ministerial standing was created by this church which now proposes to take it away. This act, more than a court conviction, will seem my ruin. I write to say I cannot call that ruin to which a man goes willingly.

"It is not my soul that hangs in the balance, but another's. While this man struggles, I declare again that I will not break in upon him. I can reach out and touch him; but I will not. He will read this. I say to him: 'Brother, wait! Do not hurry. I can hold your load a while until you get the grapple on your spirit.'

"But for saying this, I am cast out.

"Men observe to me: 'What a pity!' I say to you: 'No pity at all!'

"Is a minister who would not thus suffer worthy to be a minister? The conception can be broadened. Is any man? Is an editor worthy to be an editor, a merchant, a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor, standing as each must at sometime where the issue is sharply drawn between loyalty and disloyalty to truth or trust,—is any of them truly worthy or truly true, who would not willingly suffer all that is demanded of me?

"It does not require a great man to be true to the clasp of his hand: nor a minister. I know policemen and motormen who are that. To be that, upon the human side, has been almost the sum of my religious practice—not my profession, but my *practice*. By that habit I have gained what I have gained—and *lost what I have lost*. Humbled to the dust, I dare yet to make one boast: I have not failed in these small human loyalties, except as my capacities have failed.

"This last act of mine, which will be regarded as the consummation of failure, is the greatest opportunity to be true that I have ever had.

"To go forth on foot before this community, held to answer for my convictions, fills me with a sense of abandon to immolation upon high altars that is almost intoxicating.

"I can almost wish it might never be known whether I spoke the truth or not about the Dounay diamonds; that in my death, unvindicated, I might lie yonder on the hills of Piedmont; that on a simple slab just large enough to bear it, might be written no name but only this:

"*He believed something hard enough to live for it.*'

"I wish even that you might crucify me, take me out on Broadway here and nail me to a trolley pole. But you will not do this. I am not so worthy. You are not so brave. Those men had the courage of their convictions who nailed up the Galilean and hurled down with stones the first martyr. You have not. Courage to-day survives; but it is reserved for ignoble struggles. Men are

more ready to die for their appetites than to live for their convictions. Men fear to be uncomfortable, to be sneered at, to be defeated. Paugh! Defeat is not a thing to fear. To be untrue is the blackest terror! To become involved for the sake of one's convictions should not be regarded as calamity. Yet it is,—in these soft days.

"The hope that the fall, even of one so humble and unimportant as I, may be some slight protest against this spirit of weakness, takes out the sting and gives me a delirious kind of joy.

"I would like to have been a great preacher. I am not. I would I had a tongue of eloquence to fire men to this passion of mine. I have not. That is the pity! I was proud and jealous of my position. I have lost it.

"Yet I do not doubt that I shall find a field of usefulness. Deep as you hurl me down, I do not doubt but that there are some to whom even if condemned, spurned, unfrocked—oh, the eternal silliness of that! as if any decrees of men could affect the standing or potentiality of a soul—I can come as a welcome messenger of helpfulness. To them I shall go! They may be found here. If so, I shall remain here—go in and out—pointed at as the man who failed.

"Perhaps I can even make failure popular. It ought to be. There is a great need of failures just now, for men who will fail for their true success's sake.

"The world needs a new standard of appraisal. It honors the man whose success bulks to the eye. It needs to be a little more discriminating; to find out why some men failed, and to honor them because they are failures. Some of the greatest men in America and in history were failures. Socrates with his cup was a failure. Jesus was a failure. It was written on his back in lines of blistering welts. It was nailed into his palms, stabbed into his brow, hissed into his ear as he died.

"Re-reading at this midnight hour what I have written, I perceive that it sounds slightly frenzied. But my soul just now is slightly frenzied. If I wrote calmly, unegoistically, it would be a lie. What is written is what I feel.

"Here and there some will approve this document. More will sneer at it. But it is mine. It is I. I sign it. It is my last will and testament in this community where once—daring to boast again—I have been a power.

"Friends—and enemies alike!—this final word.

"I have not grasped much, but this: To be true. When somebody trusts you worthily, make good. Be true, children, to the plans and to the hopes of parents. Be true, lad, to the impetuous girl who has trusted you with more than she should have trusted you. Be true, women, to your lovers and your husbands; men to your wives, your partners, your fellow men, your patrons; to your talents, your opportunities, your country, your age, your world! Be true to God! If you have no God, be true to your highest conception of what God ought to be.

"It sounds like a homily. It is a principle. You can multiply it indefinitely. It runs like a scarlet thread through religion, and it will go all around the borders of life.

"Eternal Loyalty is the Price of true Success.

"To this conviction I subscribe my name, myself and everything that still remains to me.

"JOHN HAMPSTEAD,

"Pastor of All People's Church."

John felt that he wrote this and that he signed it in the presence of the Presence. The address and not the sermon was his valedictory.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE CUP TOO FULL

While the Monday morning papers played up the "Address to the People", in the evening John noticed that his name had slipped off the front page. This was at once a relief and a bitterness. It told him that he was done for; that, as a matter of news, he was only a corpse waiting for the funeral pyre. That pyre was a matter to which Elder Burbeck was attending, assisted by a committee of fellow zealots—male and female—who were industriously conducting a house-to-house canvass of the entire membership of All People's during the hours between Sunday at one and Monday night at eight. Despite the lofty mood of self-sacrifice into which the man had

worked himself, the knowledge of all this busy bell-ringing and its sinister purpose operated irritatingly on the skin of Hampstead. It made his flesh creep with annoyance that grew toward anger.

But in the midst of these creepings, a significant thing happened. The Reverend William Dudley Rohan, pastor of the largest, the richest, and by material standards the most influential protestant congregation in the city, came in person to call on Hampstead, to shake him by the hand and say: "Your address had an apostolic ring to it. I believe in you sincerely."

In John's mail that afternoon there came from Father Ansley, an influential priest of the Roman Catholic communion, a letter to similar effect.

Moreover, as the activity of Elder Burbeck developed, John began to hear more and more from members of his own congregation who either refused to believe the charges against him, or, if not so ready to acquit, none the less refused to desert him now.

All of these things seemed definitely to testify that a wave of reaction was upon its way. They almost gave the man hope. Yet by the end of an hour of calculation, John saw that after all it was a small wave. All People's church had more than eleven hundred members. He had not heard from one fifth of them. Those who had communicated or come to press his hand were very frequently the weak, obscure, and least influential. They were the "riff-raff", as Burbeck would have called them, of the congregation. The pastor did not disesteem their support on this account. Instead he valued it a little more; yet gave himself no illusions as to its value in a battle-line.

At the same time his friends urged him to organize against the assaults of Elder Burbeck; to send out bell-ringing committees upon his own account. Yet he would not do this. He would not make himself an issue. But the minister's negatives were not so stout as they had been. It was one thing to write in a frenzy at midnight how bravely he would endure his fate. It was another to wait the creeping hours in passive fortitude until the blow should fall.

By noon he confessed to himself that he was feeling rather broken. For a week he had eaten little, and that little nervously, absently, and without enjoyment. His sleep had been restless and unrefreshing. Strong, vigorous as he was, reckless as were the draughts that could be made upon his work-hardened constitution, a fear that it would fail him now began to agitate the man. He must be strong—physically. He must bear himself unyielding as Atlas. His shoulders, instead of sinking, must stiffen as the still heavier load rolled upon them. But his mind also must be strong.

He was almost mad with thinking on his course, with trying to reason out some Northwest Passage for his conscience. Every eventuality had been considered, every resulting good or injury taken into account. When he did sleep, dreams had come to him—horrible, portending dreams that lingered into wakefulness and filled the hours with vague, tissue-weakening dread. He knew the meaning of this. His brain was so wearied with thinking of the perplexities which bristled round him that the very processes of thought had begun to operate less surely. Conclusions that should have stood out sharp and clear became blurred. Doubts and indecisions clamored round him. Things settled and settled right came trooping back to demand realignment. This alarmed him more than anything else,—the fear that the course he had chosen and which he knew to be right, might seem, in some moment when his mind passed into a fog, the wrong course; and he would falter not for lack of will but because of the maiming of his judgment.

He longed for counsel, to talk intimately with some one, but was afraid, afraid he might get the wrong advice and follow it. The loyalty of Rose, the judgment of the Angel of the Chair, he trusted; but himself he began to mistrust. Mistrusting himself, he dared not talk at all, lest he either exhibit signs of weakness that would frighten Rose, or lest, in that weakness, he confess too much to Mrs. Burbeck.

One fear like this and one alarm acted to produce another until something like panic grew up in his soul. A small onyx clock was on the mantel. The hands pointed to one—and then to two—and to three. At eight he must go to the church and see himself accused by those whom he loved, and for whom he had labored.

But at half-past three he saw clearly that his intended course was wrong, that he should defend himself and speak the truth: that his silence was working greater ill than good.

The clock tinkled four with this decision still clear in his mind. But the tinkling sound appeared to ring another bell deep inside him—a bell that boomed from far, far away and made him think of some one's definition of religion, "as a power within us not ourselves that makes for godliness." That power had spoken out. It revived the decision of half-past three. His former course was right. He must not swerve. With a gesture of pain and terror he flung up his hands to his brow. The calamity had fallen. His mind was passing under a fog. Defiantly he tried auto-

suggestion to school his will against a possible reversal in the hour of trial, saying to himself over and over again: "I will stand! I will stand! I will stand!" He quoted frequently the words of Paul: "And having done all, to stand!"

At length he fell back limply in his chair. A vast irksomeness had taken possession of him. He was tired—tired of thinking of It—tired of waiting for It to come. Why didn't the clock hurry? The coming of Tayna to the study alone brought a welcome to his eye. Tayna! So full of buoyant, blooming youth; so quickly moved to tears of sympathy; so lightly kindled to smiling, happy laughter! Tayna, her melting eyes, her red cheeks, her one intermittent dimple, who flung her long arms about her uncle and held him close and silently as if he had been a lover!

But it was only a moment until Tayna too irked the tortured man. The touch of her cheek upon his cheek and the aggressive mingling of her thick braids with his own disheveled locks, once brushed so neat and high, now so apt to loop disconsolate upon his temples, reminded him of something quite unbearable but quite unbanishable,—a vision, and a vision which must be entertained alone.

"Stay here and keep shop," her uncle said with sudden brusqueness, forcing her down into his own chair at the desk. "I can see no one; talk to no one; hear from no one. I am going up-stairs!"

"Up-stairs" meant the long, half-attic room in which Hampstead slept. It ran the length of the cottage. There were windows in the gables, and dormers were chopped in upon the side toward the Bay. At one end, pushed back toward the eaves, was a bed, fenced from the eye by a folding screen. Far at the other end was a table, a student-lamp and a few books. Between lay a long, rug-strewn space which Hampstead called his "tramping ground."

Here, when he wished to retire most completely from the public reach, he made his lair. Upon that rug-strewn space he had tramped out many of the problems of his ministry. In the past week he had walked miles between one gable window and the other, and stopped as many times to gaze out through the dormer windows over the crested tops of palms to the dancing waters on the Bay.

But now he had retreated there, not to be alone, but because he felt a sudden longing for companionship; and for a certain and particular companionship. That touch of Tayna's soft cheek upon his own had brought with stinging poignancy the recollection of what the presence of Bessie would be now,—Bessie as she once had been, dear, loyal, sympathetic, wise; as she had begun to be again before that last trip east; as she would have been when she returned and found him still strong and faithful.

Yet now she would never come. She was in Chicago to-day—no, upon the Atlantic. Last week was her final week. She had been getting her degree there while his unfrocking was beginning here. She was attaining her high hope as he was losing his. He had meant to telegraph her his congratulations, but he had forgotten it. That was just as well now. All this hissing of the poisoned tongues must have poured into her ears. The old doubts would be revived. She would feel herself shamed, humiliated, all but compromised by these disclosures, and she would never see—never communicate with him again. No letter had come in that last week, no telegram from the ship's side. That proved it clearly. She was lost to him.

Yet now his church—his liberty—his reputation—nothing else that he had lost or might lose seemed worth while. He wanted only her, cared only about her. His duty had melted into mist. He could not see its outlines. But there was a face in the mist, her face; and a form, her form. And he would never see her in any other way but this way—a vision to haunt and mock and torture him.

Thinking these thoughts over and over again, the man walked steadily from gable's end to gable's end and back again, until his legs lost all sense of feeling; but still he walked, and occasionally his fists were clenched and beat upon his chest, while an expression of agony looked out of his eyes.

The Reverend John Hampstead, pastor of All People's, a man of some victories and of some defeats, a man of some strength and of some weaknesses, was fighting his most important and his hardest battle, and he knew it. And he was no longer fit. The preliminary days of battling in the lower spurs and ranges had exhausted him. The summit was still above. The higher he toiled, the weaker he grew; the greater need for strength, the less he had to offer. He felt his purpose sag, his courage breaking. He had faced too much, and faced it too long and too solitarily. Others had sympathetically tried to get into his heart, and he had shut them out. It was a place which only one could enter, and she was not there. Now he knew that she would never be there.

That was the final mockery of his fate. At the time when he loved her most, when he needed her most, when before God, he deserved her most, she was most irretrievably lost. The pang of

this, the awful inevitableness of it, broke him like a reed. From time to time he had sighed heavily, but now a dry sob shivered in his broad breast. His shoulders shook, and then his legs crumpled under him; he was on his knees and sinking lower and lower, like a man beaten down, blow upon blow, until at length he lies prostrate before his foes.

"Not that, O God," he sobbed; "not that! I cannot—I cannot lose her. Leave me, oh, leave me this one thing! I ask nothing more! Nothing more."

There was silence for an interval and then the pleadings began more earnestly, more piteously. "O God, give me her! Give me love! Give me completeness! Give me that without which no man is strong, the undoubting love of an unwavering woman! Give me that and I can face anything—endure anything!"

For a moment his hands, virile and outstretched, grasped convulsively the far edges of the Indian rug on which he had fallen, and thrust themselves through the stoutly woven fabric as if it had been wet paper. Scalding drops had begun to flow from his eyes like rivers. He seized the fabric of the rug in his teeth and bit it. He forced the thick folds against his eyes as if to dam the flooding tears.

"It is too much! It is too much!" he moaned. "O God," he reproached, "you have left me; you have left me alone and far. I have stood, but I am tottering." He dropped into a sort of vernacular in his blind pleadings. "I can go, I can go the route, but I cannot go it alone. Give me her, O God, give me her!"

His voice, half-delirious, died out in a final withering sob, as if the last atom of his strength had gone with this passionate, hoarse, uttermost plea of his soul. His great fingers stretching out again to the limit of his arm, knotted and unknotted themselves and then grew still. The shoulders, too, were motionless. The face was turned on one side; the profile of the ridged forehead and the thrust of nose and chin, so strongly carved, appeared against the grotesque pattern of the rug as features delicately chiseled. The eyes were open, tearless now and staring. They had expression, but it was the expression of the beaten man. The mouth was parted, and the firm lines were gone from it. It was the old, loose, flabby mouth that had once marked the weak spot in the character of the man. Again the man was weak. He lay so still that life itself seemed to have gone. The wandering afternoon breeze that stole in through one gable window and went romping out at the other played with the mass of hair upon his brow as indifferently as if it had been a tuft of grass.

Even the man's enemies must have pitied him had they seen him now. Searle, standing over him, would have felt a twinge of conscience. Elder Burbeck, before that spectacle, would at least have paused long enough to murmur, sincerely, with upturned eyes and a grave shake of the head, "God be merciful to him, a sinner." But neither Searle nor Burbeck, nor any other eye was there to see how he lay nor how long. Perhaps not even Tayna, crouching on the stairs outside, hearing his sobbings and venting tear for tear, could have computed the time.

Surely the man knew nothing himself except that he fell asleep and dreamed, this time not horribly, but felicitously,—a dream of Bessie; that she was coming to him; that she was there. It was such a beautiful dream. It took all the strain out of the muscles of his face. It tickled the flabby mouth into smiles of happiness. It triumphed over everything else. It made every experience through which he had gone seem a high and beautiful experience because it brought him Bessie.

A knock at the door awoke him. It was such a cruel awakening. Bessie was not there. His cheeks were hard and stiff where tears had dried upon them. His shoulders and neck ached from the position in which he had slept. The rug was rumpled. The room was bleak and desolate. The breeze was chill and gloomy. The situation in which he stood came to him again with appealing acuteness and stung his memory like scourging whips. He rose with pain in his mind, pain in his heart, pain in every tissue of his body.

But there are worse things than pain. John was appalled to realize that he had risen a quaking coward.

The knock had sounded again. It was a soft knock, but it echoed loud, like the crack of doom. It stood for the outside world; it stood for the accusing finger; it stood for the felon's brand; it stood for the great monster, Ruin, which threatened him, which terrorized him, which he had faced courageously, but which at last through the workings of his own morbid imagination and the tentacles of a great love, torn blood-dripping from his heart, had over-awed him. Before this monster he now shrank, cowering as only six days before he had seen Rollie Burbeck cower. He said to himself that he, John Hampstead, was the greater coward. Rollie had faltered in the face of his crime. He, the priest of God, was faltering in the face of his duty. He retreated from his

own presence aghast at the thought. He looked about him wildly, and saw his features in the glass. It was a coward's face. He felt something stagger in his breast. It was his coward's heart!

Again the knock sounded. Not because he had grown brave again, but because he had grown too weak to resist even a knock upon a door, he gave the rug a kick that half straightened it, and in the tone of one who, despairing help, bids his torturers advance, he called: "Come in."

But instead of waiting to see who entered, he turned his back and walked off down the room with slow, disconsolate stride, head hanging, shoulders drooping, knees trembling, feet dragging, utterly unmindful to preserve longer the pose of strength even before the dear ones whom he wished above all to see him brave and strong.

It was the silence of the one who entered that made him turn slowly, staring, his form lifting itself to its full height, and a hand rising to sweep the hanging hair from his eyes as he gazed for a moment in unbelieving bewilderment and then hoarsely shouted:

"Bessie! Bessie! Is it you?"

Before the broken, paralyzed man could leap to meet her, the young woman had flung herself into his arms, with a cry almost of pain: "John! Oh, John!"

He clasped her hysterically, half laughing and half sobbing: "Thank God! Thank God!" and then, murmuring incoherently, "It is the answer of the Father! It is the answer of the Father!"

Bessie, the first surge of her emotions over, stood looking up into John's storm-stressed face, with glistening, happy eyes.

It was evident that all the vapor of her doubt and misunderstanding had been burned away. She was again the old Bessie. She had started to him by an instinct of loyalty, spurred by a love that had refused to die, yet, womanlike, was still doubting. But the moving picture which the papers of succeeding days had reeled before her eyes as her train sped westward; the solemn face of Rose, the teary eyes of Tayna, whom she had found sitting at the foot of the stairs outside; and now this glimpse of that stooping, passionately despairing, hopelessly broken figure were enough to banish doubt forever. They testified that John Hampstead, in the soul of him, was true—to love as to duty—that he had burned out the scar of his first disloyalty to her in the fires of intense suffering.

Her radiant beauty, the soft, trusting blue of her eyes, the wonderful witchery of smiling lips and dimpling cheeks, the proud, happy, worshipful look upon her face, all proclaimed the bounding joy with which she hurled herself again into his life.

John perceived this in ecstasy. Bessie was not lost to him, but won to him by what had happened. The mere perception threw him into a frenzy of joy, and yet it was a reversal of probabilities so sudden and so overwhelming that he dared not accept it unattested.

"But, Bessie," he protested. "But, Bessie?"

"But nothing!" she answered stoutly, flinging her arms once more about his neck and drawing his lips down to hers, while she passionately stamped them again and again with the seal of her love and faith.

With the submission of a child, and under the stimulus of such convincing, such deliciously thrilling demonstration as this, the strong-weak man surrendered unconditionally to an acceptance of facts at once so undeniable and so excitingly happy.

But the articles of surrender could not be signed in words. He drew her close to him and held her there long and silently, feeling his heart beat violently against her own, and at the same time his tissues filling with new and glowing strength. A sigh from Bessie, softly audible and blissfully long-drawn, broke the silence and the pose.

John held her at arm's length—his eyes a-dance with the emotional riot of an experience so foreign to the ascetic life which his character had forced upon him that he felt the wish for anchorage at which to moor himself and his joys. Such a mooring was offered by the long, wide window seat before the dormer which looked over palms and acacias to the Bay.

Taking Bessie by the hand, he led her to this tiny haven.

"Oh, John," she murmured, with a flutter in her voice and a sudden gust of happy tears, as she cuddled down against his shoulder, "it has been such a long, cruel wait, hasn't it? Such a hilly, roundabout way that we have traveled to know and get to each other at last."

"But now it's over," he breathed contentedly, swaying her body gently with his own.

As if a tide had taken them, they drifted out; two argonauts upon the sea of love with the window seat for a bark, and soon were cruising far out of sight of land. There was little talk. Words were so unnecessary. To feel the presence of each other was quite enough. For the time being, degrees and careers and private cars, courts and newspapers, actresses and diamonds, elders and church trials, were sunk entirely below the horizon.

Bessie was first to come back from this nebulous state of bliss to the more tangible realities of the situation. With her lover so close and so secure, she experienced a stirring of possessive instincts accompanied by an impulse to caretaking. John was hers now, and he required attention. With a soft hand she smoothed the yellow locks backward from his brow. With pliant fingers she sought to iron out the lines of care from his face, and with lingering, affectionate lips to kiss the tear-stiffness from his eyelids.

To the man of loneliness, these attentions were exquisitely delightful. They soothed and fortified him. They calmed his nerves and ministered to clarity of thought. This was well, for there were things that needed to be said as well as those which needed to be done.

Dusk was falling. John arose, lighted a pendant bulb in the center of the long attic, and sat down again, taking Bessie's hand in his while he told her the story of the diamonds as he had told it in court—told her so much and no more; then stopped. The cessation was abrupt, decisive, but also interrogatory. John could not tell Bessie more than he could tell any one else and be true to his vow. Would she appreciate this and acquiesce? Or would she resent it?

Bessie understood the question in the silence. Her answer was to snuggle closer and after allowing time for this action to interpret itself, to say:

"That must be the bravest, hardest thing you have done, John dear; to stop just there, when telling me."

"It was," he answered softly.

"It makes me trust you further than ever," she assured him, passing her hand under his chin and pulling his cheek to hers, again with that instinct of possession. "You must not be less true but more, because of me," she breathed softly.

"But there is one thing I can tell you," he continued, "which no one else knows nor can know now."

And then he told her of Marien's visit. The girl listened at first with cheeks flaming hot and her blue eyes fixed and sternly hard. Yet as the narrative proceeded, she grew thoughtful and then considerate, breaking in finally with:

"But she did it so wantonly, so irresponsibly; what reparation does she propose?"

"To immediately make a public confession that her charge against me was utterly false," replied John, strangely moved to speak defensively for Marien.

"She will do that?" exclaimed Bessie, her face alive with excitement and intense relief.

"She would have done it," answered John, "but I forbade her."

"Forbade her? Oh, John!" The soft eyes looked amazement and reproach.

"Yes," acknowledged John in a steady voice. "You see, her word would become instantly worthless. To be believed, her confession would have to be supported by the naming of the real thief."

"And is the saving of a thief worth more to you than your church—your good name—your—your everything?"

"In my conception, yes," John answered seriously. "That is what I have a church, a name, everything, for; to use it all in saving people—or in helping them, if the other is too strong a word."

As her lover spoke in this lofty, detached, meditative tone, Bessie held him off and studied him. This was the new John Hampstead speaking; the man she did not know; the man who, up to the hour when cruel scandal smirched it, had stirred this community with the example of his life. Before this new man she felt her very soul bowing. She had loved the old John. She adored the new.

"Oh, John! How brave! How strong! How right you are!" she exclaimed, with a note of adoration in her voice.

A pang of self-reproach shot through the big man.

"Not so brave—not so strong as I must—as I ought to be," he hastened to explain. "In fact, I have been doubting even if I were right, after all."

Bessie's startled look brought out of him like a confession the story of the last hours before her coming; the full meaning of the state in which she found him; how the burden of it all had overtopped him; how she had come to find him not brave and certain, but doubting.

"But now," she affirmed buoyantly, "you are strong, you are certain again."

The very radiance, the fresh youthful happiness on the face of Bessie, checked the assent to this which was on his lips. He suddenly thought of what this action would mean to her, this beautiful, loving, aspiring young woman. She was his wife now in spirit. By some miracle of God their lives had in a moment been fused unalterably. He might bear a stigma for himself, but had

he a right to assume a stigma for her?

"Why, John," she murmured, wonder mingling with mild reproach, as she saw him hesitate.

"Listen, my girl," began her lover, with infinite sympathy and tenderness in his manner, and gravely he re-sketched the elements in the situation as they would apply to her.

Bessie did listen, and as gravely as John spoke to her,—listened until her eyes were first perplexed and then downcast. Sitting thus, seeing nothing, she saw everything; all that it might mean to her to become the partner of this public shame. She thought of her college friends, of her mother with her social aspirations, of her strong and high-standing father and the circle of his business and personal associates; of the part she hoped herself to play in the new political life that was coming to her sex. She saw it and for a moment was afraid, cowering before it as her lover had cowered. John, in an agony of suspense, watched this conflict staging itself graphically upon the features he loved so deeply, gleaning as he waited another two-edged truth, and that truth this: *The love of a woman may make a man surpassingly stronger; it may also make him immeasurably weaker.* It depends on the woman. He was weaker now. He had accepted her, demanded her of God, and God had given her. She was part of him now. It must no longer be his judgment but their judgment which ruled. She was forming their judgment now. He leaned forward apprehensively, like a criminal awaiting his fate. He had surrendered his independence of action. Had he gained or lost thereby?

Bessie stood up suddenly. Her face was still white, but her square little chin with its softly rounded corners was firmly set.

"Your decision," she affirmed stoutly, "was the right decision. Your course has been the right course. You must not waver now. I command—I compel you to go straight forward. And I will stand with you—go out with you. From this moment on, your duty is my duty; your lot shall be my lot."

A smile of heavenly happiness broke like a sunset on the face of Hampstead.

"Thank God!" he murmured reverently; "thank God!"

And then as a surging Niagara of new strength rushed over him, he clasped her tightly, exclaiming enthusiastically: "I feel strong enough now, strong enough for everything!"

Standing thus, smiling blissfully into each other's faces, the lovers became again the two argonauts upon a shoreless, timeless sea. As they came back, Bessie, a look half mischievous and half bashful upon her face, pleaded softly:

"John! Ask me something, please?"

"Ask you something," her lover murmured, with a look of dutiful affection, "why, there is nothing more that I can ask." He sighed contentedly.

"But put it into words. Something to which I can answer Yes," she said, a happy blush stealing across her cheeks.

The big man gazed at her with a puzzled expression.

"So—so that our engagement can be announced in the papers to-morrow morning."

John asked her, grimacing delight in his sudden comprehension, and took her answer in a kiss. But immediately after he became serious.

"To-morrow morning?" he queried apprehensively; and then answered the interrogation himself. "No, not to-morrow, Bessie. Not soon. Later. When the issues are decided. When we know the worst that is to fall. Not now. You must protect yourself as well as your father and your mother from such notoriety!"

But Bessie's own uncompromising spirit flashed.

"No," she exclaimed with a stamp of her foot that was characteristic. "Now! This is when you need me! Now you are my affianced husband; I want the world to know that he is not as friendless as he seems. That we who know him best believe him most. Do you know, big man, that my parents cancelled their European trip and have been rushing across the continent with me in a special train faster than anybody ever crossed before, just to come and stand by you. Mother had a headache and is resting at the St. Albans, but father and I—why, father is down-stairs in the study waiting. He must have been there hours and hours. Father!"

Bessie had rushed across the room and flung open the door leading downward.

"Father," she cried. "Father! We are coming."

"What's the hurry?" boomed back a big, ironic voice that proceeded from the round moon of an amiable face in the open door of the study near the foot of the stairs. The face, of course, belonged to Mr. Mitchell, and he enlarged upon his first gentle sarcasm by adding: "I bought a thousand freight cars the other day in less time than it has taken you people to come to terms."

Nevertheless, he greeted his former employee with cordial and sincere affection, while

Bessie, radiantly happy but a little confused, asked:

"What must have you been thinking all this time?"

"Mostly I was thinking what a superfluous person a father comes to be all at once," laughed Mr. Mitchell. "Isn't there anything I can do at all?" he asked, with mock seriousness.

"Yes," rejoined Bessie in the same spirit. "Telephone the papers to announce the engagement of your daughter to the Reverend John Hampstead, pastor of All People's Church."

"Oh, I did that after the first hour and a half," exclaimed the railroad man, laughing heartily.

But the situation was too grave, the feelings of all were too tense, to sustain this spirit of badinage for long. Bessie and Tayna fell upon each other with instant liking. Even Dick and Rose seemed able to forget the crisis which overhung them in the sudden advent of this beautiful young woman who had come into their ken again so suddenly and so mysteriously, and seemed to represent in herself and her father such a sudden and vast access of prestige and power to the cause of their uncle and brother.

John and his old employer sat down in the study for a quiet talk in which the minister related what he had told Bessie, the circumstances in which he stood, and finally and especially, his new compunction and Bessie's firm decision.

"She was right!" The heavy jaws of Mitchell snapped decisively. "The whole thing is a community brain storm. It will pass."

"The criminal charge," began John, feeling relieved and yet looking serious.

"Nothing to that at all," answered the practical Mitchell, with quick decision. "Ridiculous! You're morbid from brooding over all this. From the minute this woman comes to you with her admission, you must have just ordinary horse sense enough to see that between us all we can find a way to stop that prosecution without making it necessary to expose anybody at all."

Mitchell, observing Hampstead closely, saw that he was rather careless of this; that in fact he only thought of it when he thought of Bessie; that the one thing gnawing into him now was the action of the church. That was something outside of Mitchell's experience. Whether a church more or less unfrocked his future son-in-law was small concern. He was a man who thought in thousands of miles and millions of people.

"Come, Bessie," he called, "we must be getting back to the hotel."

"You will stay for dinner, Mr. Mitchell?" suggested John.

"No, I'll be getting back to mother. I just came to tell you that I am with you. My attorneys will be your attorneys. My friends and my influence will be your influence. Some of these newspapers may bark out of the other corner of their mouths after they've heard from me. Come on, Bessie!"

"But," demurred Bessie, "I'm not coming. I am going to the church to-night to sit beside John."

CHAPTER XL

THE ELDER IN THE CHAIR

The auditorium of All People's was cunningly contrived to bring a very large number of people close to each other and to the minister. Roughly semicircular, with bowled main floor and rimmed around by a gallery that edged nearer and nearer at the sides, it was possible to seat fifteen hundred persons where a man in the pulpit could look each individual in the eye, and except where the screen of the gallery broke in, each auditor could see every other auditor.

The special meeting for an object unannounced but clearly understood was, of course, an assemblage of the church itself; yet so great was the general interest in what was to transpire, and so willing were the moving spirits to play out their act in public, that no one was turned away. By an instruction from Elder Burbeck, the ushers merely sifted people, sending the members to the main floor, and the non-members up-stairs into the gallery.

Hampstead entered the church at precisely eight o'clock.

The auditorium was filled with the buzz of many voices, but as the pastor of All People's advanced down the aisle, this hum gradually ceased, and every eye was turned upon the man, who tall and grave, with features slightly wasted, nevertheless wore a look serenely confident and even happy.

This expression in itself was instant occasion for wonder and surprise. Was this man really unbreakable? Knowing nothing of what had happened in the day to encourage its pastor and

make him strong, his congregation was much better prepared to see him as Bessie had found him three hours before than as he now appeared.

There were glances also for the faithful Rose, pale and worn, but bearing herself with true Hampstead dignity; for aggressive, wizened Dick, and for Tayna, emotional and ready, as usual, for tears or laughter. But there were more than glances for the lady who walked at the pastor's side proudly, with a possessive air as if she owned him and were glad to own him. There was searching scrutiny and attempt at appraisal.

All People's had never seen this woman before. She looked young; yet bore herself like a person of consequence. She was beautiful, but the dignity of her beauty was detracted from by dimples. Yet with the dimples went a masterful self-possession and a chin that was a trifle square and to-night just a trifle thrust out, while her head was a little tilted back and her blue eyes were a little aglint with shafts of a light something like defiance, as if to say: "Hurt him at your peril. Take him from me if you can!"

Who was she? No one knew. Everybody asked; but no one answered.

After standing in the aisle before his family pew, while Rose, Dick, Tayna, and Bessie filed in before him, the minister stood for a moment surveying the scene. As he looked, the serenity upon his features gave way to pain. The situation saddened him inexpressibly. He was like a refugee who returns to find his home ruined by the ravages of war. How peaceful and how helpful had been the atmosphere of All People's! How happily he had seen its walls rise and its pews fill! How many good impulses had been started there! What a pity that the note of inquisition and of persecution should now be sounded. How sad that strife should come! And over him of all beings! He had often looked upon a congregation torn by dissensions concerning its pastor, and he had said that no church should ever undo itself over him. When his time came to go, he would go quietly.

Yet now he was not going quietly, but that was because he felt it was not himself that was involved; instead it was a principle. Either this congregation existed to mediate love, helpfulness, and a charitable spirit to the world, or it had no reason for existence at all. It had better be disrupted, this gallery fall, this altar crumble, these walls collapse, these people be scattered to the winds, than All People's become a society for the advancement of pharisaism.

He noted that the gallery was packed, but on the main floor empty spaces stared at him from the central tier of pews. Half of All People's members must have remained away. John realized with new emotion what this meant: that there were men and women in his congregation who could not see their pastor arraigned like this, who could not bear to witness the rising waves of bitterness, the charges and the counter-charges, the incriminations, the malicious spirit of partisanship which invariably breaks out in times like these. But it meant too that these same soft-hearted folk were also soft in the spine; unwilling to take a stand with him; unwilling to be recorded pro or con upon a great issue like this; people for whom he had done a service so great that they could not now turn down their thumbs against him, yet lacking in the strength of character either to sit as his judges or to cast a vote in his favor.

From this thought of jelly-fish the minister turned, almost with relief to where, stretching widely behind the Burbeck pew, was a mass of close-packed faces, with super-heated resolution depicted upon their features. The bearing of these partisans in itself reflected how they had been solicited, inflamed, and organized. They were there like an army to follow their leader.

Good people, too, some of them! Doctor Hampstead's very best people. Yet to recognize them and their mood gave him a sense of personal power. He believed that he could walk over there and talk to these people ten minutes, and they would break like sheep from the leadership of Brother Burbeck. They would come pressing around him with tears and expressions of confidence. But it was not in John's purpose to do that. He was on trial. If on the record of his life among them, these people could condemn and oust him, his work had been a failure. It was as well to know it.

One thing more the minister took into account. The number of persons who, half in an attitude of aggressive loyalty and half in tearful sympathy had gathered in the tiers behind his own pew was less by half than that massed behind the Burbeck leadership. The issue was not in doubt. It had been decided already,—in the newspapers, in the court room, and in all this busy bell-ringing of the last two days.

And now, having seen as much and reflected as much as has been recorded, Hampstead sat down and slipped a furtive lover's hand along the seat until it found the hand of Bessie, and took it into his with a gentle pressure that was affectionately reciprocated.

But if to the congregation the entry of the minister and the woman of mystery by his side was

sensation number one in this evening of sensations, the entry of the Angel of the Chair was sensation number two. Mrs. Burbeck, propelled as usual by Mori, the Japanese, was just appearing at the side door; and this time there was no trundling to the center between two factions. Instead, with Japanese intentness of purpose, and as if he had his instructions beforehand, Mori drove the chair straight across the neutral ground to the end of the Hampstead pew.

The church, seeing this act, grasped instantly its solemn meaning. The house of Burbeck was divided against itself. Mrs. Burbeck had often disapproved of her husband's course in church leadership, but she had never taken sides against him. To-night she did so. The issue was too great, too fundamental, to do otherwise. That it hurt her painfully was evident. Her face had lost its smile. The pallor of her cheeks was more wax-like than ever, and there was a droop in the corners of her mouth that no physical suffering had effected. But the lips were tightly compressed, and the valiant spirit of the woman looked resolutely out of her eyes. Those near and watching the face of her husband saw that this look affected him; saw him start as if he had hardly expected such action, hardly realized what it would be to find her thus opposing him. They even noted that a fleeting expression of doubt, of sudden loss of faith in his own course, came into the eyes of the man.

Nevertheless, although with a sigh at the burdens his faithfulness to the Lord so often compelled him to bear, Elder Burbeck set his spirit sternly upon its task. He was the Nemesis of God. He would not shrink though the flame scorched him, the innocent, while it consumed the guilty.

Yet from the moment that this glance had passed between the husband and the wife, it appeared that a gloom of tragedy settled upon the gathering. Again the congregation sank of itself to awed silence, so intense that a cough, the clearing of a throat, the dropping of a hymn-book into a rack, echoed hollowly. Slight movements took on augmented significance. Thoughts boomed out like words, and looks had all the force of blows.

The polity of All People's was ultra-congregational. The proceedings had the form of order, but were primitive and practical; yet every step, voice, motion, detail, took on an exaggerated sense of the ominous, as if a man's body were on trial instead of merely his soul.

Nor was Elder Burbeck at all approving of Hampstead's manner to-night. The minister had shown again his utter incapacity to appreciate a situation. He was too cool, too unmoved. He had taken a full minute to stand there posing in pretended serenity while he looked the congregation over. From Burbeck's point of view, this manoeuvre was dangerous tactics. There was always some indefinable power in that deep-searching look of Hampstead's. If the man should stand up there and look at these people for ten minutes longer, he might have them all over there palavering about him. He was looking in the gallery now. Well, let him look there as long as he liked. The gallery couldn't vote. Burbeck's own eye wandered into the gallery. On the other side from him, just where the horseshoe curve began to draw in toward the choir loft, sat his son, Rollie.

"Rollie should not be up there," the Elder instructed, turning to an usher. "Go and tell him to come down."

"He says he is with a lady who is not a member," reported the usher on returning.

"Huh?" ejaculated Burbeck, turning a surprised gaze upon the figure of a woman heavily veiled who sat beside his son.

That woman! What sacrilege had impelled his son to bring her here? Had she not wrought ruin enough already? Must she gloat over the shame she had brought upon this congregation and upon the church of the living God? And must his son be the means of her coming? What was that boy thinking of, anyway?

And yet, since Rollie had grown into so fine a figure of a man, his father had come to regard his son and what he chose to do with an indulgence he granted to no one else. He wished the boy would come to church more; he wished he would give more attention to those things to which his father had devoted his life; and yet he could make allowance for him. The young man's environment, his social gifts, his business prospects, all inclined him to another set of associations. Besides, the boy's own character seemed so fine and strong, the sentiments of his heart so truly noble, that the father's iron judgment softened even in the matter of an indiscretion so flagrant as this. He reflected too that for business reasons it was doubtless just as well if Rollie were brought into no prominence in this unpleasant affair. In fact, Elder Burbeck would have been as well satisfied if his son had stayed away altogether.

"It is time to call the meeting to order," suggested Elder Brooks, a pale, nervous man whose

eyes were continually consulting the typewritten sheet which he held in his hand.

"Yes, Brother Brooks," agreed Elder Burbeck, advancing to the table below and in front of the pulpit. He was almost directly in front of where Doctor Hampstead sat in his pew.

John noticed that the Elder looked worried and over-anxious. His pouchy cheeks sagged; there were huge wattles of red skin beneath his chin, and his whole countenance had a more than usually apoplectic look.

"Brother Anderson will lead in prayer," announced the Elder in unctuous tones. "Let us stand, please!"

The congregation stood. But Brother Anderson's leadership in prayer could not be deemed very successful. He led as if he himself were lost. His prayer appeared to partake of the nature of an apology to God for what the petitioner hoped was about to be done.

During the length of these whining orisons, the congregation grew impatient. The gallery in spots sat down. The effect of the prayer was in total no more than a dismal thickening of the gloom of tragedy that hung lower and lower over the meeting. Yet once the prayer was ended, Elder Burbeck baldly declared the object of the meeting.

His manner was strained, his voice was harsh and halting, but he began stubbornly and plodded forward doggedly, gradually laboring himself into the hectic fervor of his assumed position as the instrument of God to purge All People's of its pastor.

Yet it was in keeping with the tenseness of the situation that as the emotions of the vehement apostle of the *status quo* reached their height, his words became rather less florid, and he concluded in sentences of sycophantic calm and tones of solicitous consideration for the feelings of the piece of riff-raff he was about to brush aside with a sweep of his fiery fan.

"There is before us," he assured his audience finally, "no question of the pastor's guilt or innocence of the charges made. The question is one of expediency; as to what is best to do for the good name and the future usefulness of All People's. The Board of Elders, after serious and prayerful consideration," Brother Burbeck's voice whined a little as he said this, "has felt that it was best for the pastor and best for the interest of the church to ask him to resign quietly and immediately. That request has been emphatically declined. It has become our duty, painful as it is," the Elder sighed and twitched his red neck regretfully in his white collar, "to present to the congregation a resolution covering the situation. That resolution the clerk of the church will now read."

But instead of looking at the clerk, the chairman looked at Elder Brooks.

Those typewritten lines, the mere holding of which had given Elder Brooks that sense of importance which it was necessary for him to feel in order to be able to act decisively in a matter like this which went gravely against some of the instincts of his soft nature, were, by him now, with a final and supreme sense of this importance, passed to the clerk of the church, a fat, ageless, colorless looking man who read stolidly that:

Whereas, the pastor of this congregation, John Hampstead, has been held to answer to the Superior Court of this County upon a charge of burglary and has been otherwise involved in public scandal in such manner that he appears either unable or unwilling to establish his innocence; and

Whereas, it is the judgment of this Board that such a situation is one highly detrimental to the causes for which this church exists, and one calculated to bring reproach upon the church and the sacred cause of Christ;

Therefore, be it resolved that the pastoral relation existing between All People's Church and the said John Hampstead be, and now is, immediately dissolved.

"This, brethren," announced Elder Burbeck, with an air of pain that was no doubt real, and a fresh summoning of divine resolution to his aid, "is the recommendation of your official Board. What is your pleasure concerning it?"

"I move its adoption," quavered Elder Brooks.

"I second the motion," Brother Anderson suggested faintly.

"Are you ready for the question?" hinted the ruling Elder.

But a man stood up somewhere over behind Hampstead. "I should like to ask, Brother Burbeck," he inquired, "if that was the unanimous resolution of the Board."

"It was not unanimous," replied the Elder, slightly nettled, "as you know, Brother Hinton. It is a majority resolution. The question is now upon its adoption."

Elder Burbeck swept a suggestive eye over his carefully organized majority, and this time his hint was taken. Calls of "question" arose.

But Hinton remained uncompromisingly upon his feet. He was a tall man and pale, with a high, bone-like brow, a long spiked chin, and gray moustaches that drooped placidly over a balanced mouth.

"I understand that the chair will not attempt to railroad this resolution," he ventured with mild sarcasm.

Elder Burbeck's habitual flush heightened as, after a premonitory rumble in his throat and an enormous effort at self-control, he replied emphatically: "Brother Hinton, the resolution will not be railroaded;" and then added warningly: "To avoid stirring up strife, however, I hope we may vote upon it with as little discussion as possible."

"Yes," admitted Brother Hinton dryly, but still standing his ground. "I think it is perfectly understood that debate where its outcome is pre-determined, is useless. Yet without having consulted the pastor of this church as to my course, I voice the sentiment of many around me in urging him to stand up here as its pastor, as he has a right to do, and as the congregation has a right to ask him to do, and tell us what he thinks should be our course in the premises."

Brother Hinton's was a well balanced mind, and it seemed for a moment that his own manner might inject some coolness into the situation. Indeed, the good Elder Burbeck trembled lest it might, for the fires of purification being up, he wished them to burn, undampened.

Certainly for John Hampstead to stand up there and tell that congregation what to do was the last thing the Elder wanted. Besides, he resented some of Brother Hinton's imputations as disagreeable.

The chairman answered curtly:

"If the pastor did not respect the eldership sufficiently to advise it, I think it can hardly be expected of him to advise the congregation; or that the congregation would take his advice if he gave it."

The face of Hampstead whitened, and his muscles strained in his body.

This was really a mean speech of Elder Burbeck, yet he did not wish to be mean. He meant only to be just—to All People's church. His zeal on the one hand, his prejudgment upon the other, had led him to consider no procedure as proper that did not look immediately to the hurling down of the usurper.

"The pastor is not at issue," he concluded with heat almost unholy. "It is the good name of All People's that is at issue."

The face of Hampstead whitened a little more.

"But," persisted Brother Hinton; "let our pastor make his answer to the charges, that we may determine for ourselves what is the issue."

Enough had been said. John Hampstead stood tall and statue-like in the aisle, with the manner of a man about to speak the very soul out of himself, if need be. Before this manner, Elder Burbeck recoiled a little, as he knew he must, if this man asserted himself. For one despairing moment the good man felt that the cause of righteousness was lost. But something in the manner of the minister himself reassured the Elder. The man's soul went back a little from his eyes,—receded, as it were, like a tide, while he turned toward the congregation and in kindly, patient tones began:

"I cannot speak to charges, Brother Hinton! None are presented against me. It was for this reason that I refused to appear before the eldership. This resolution is not a charge. It is an assault. There is no proposal on the part of this Board to find out if I am guilty of anything. They propose a course which assumes my guilt to be of no importance. I tell you that it is of all importance.

"Perhaps, brethren, I have been too reticent. Perhaps the peculiar circumstances out of which this congregation has grown during the five years of my ministry have made it difficult for all of us to see aright or to act aright in this trying situation. I stand before you to some extent a victim of misplaced confidence in you. I was surprised that the newspapers should inflame public opinion against me. I was surprised that a Court of Justice should hold me to answer for this improbable crime. Yet, during all these, to me, cataclysmic, happenings of the past week, I have looked to the loyalty of this church with an assurance that never wavered; an assurance that in the light of what is happening to-night seems more tragic than anything else. I never had a thought that you would not stand by me, at least until I was found to be guilty."

A note of pathos had crept into the minister's voice. The gallery listened intent and breathless. Elder Burbeck felt an irritation in his throat.

But the minister was continuing:

"Indulging this faith in you, entirely occupied with the many perplexing circumstances of this lamentable affair, I am made now to feel that I neglected you too long.

"I perceive now that your minds, too, were inflamed with suspicion; that well-meaning but mistaken zealots among you have felt called upon to take advantage of the situation to purge the church of my presence.

"Once I saw this movement under way, I felt too hurt to oppose it. It seems to me that it has been done cunningly and calculatingly. No charges have been presented against me; therefore I cannot defend myself; and I will not defend myself. I am only analyzing the situation for you, that what you do may be with open eyes. It is urged that I am not on trial; therefore as a popular tribunal, you cannot go into the details and ascertain the truth for yourselves.

"A hasty decision is demanded; therefore there is no time for the situation to clear and for calm counsel to prevail. Bear in mind that you are called upon to take action quickly, not for my sake as a minister; not for your sake as individuals; but because the good name of this church is alleged to be suffering. Is it not in reality because the vanity of some of the members of this church is suffering?

"If that is so, it is not a reason, my brethren, for hasty action against any man. Surely it is not a reason for hasty action against me. I ask those of you who can remember, to go back, to recall the circumstances under which I became your pastor. You were humble enough then. There was small thought of the good name of this congregation when I sat in the park out there and saw this man nailing a plank across the door. I did not question his good intentions then. I do not question them now. But he is proposing to do the same thing in effect that he did then; to nail God out of His house.

"Oh, not because I am nailed out. You may cast me out, and this church will go on. But if you cast out any brother, even the humblest, wrongfully or for self-righteous reasons, you depart from the spirit of Christ. You should be helping that man instead of hurting him. How much less would you cast out your pastor for the same reason."

"Brother Hampstead!" It was the voice of Elder Burbeck, grating harshly by the forced element of self-restraint in his tones. "You are misapprehending the issue. There is no proposal to cast you out of the congregation. The proposal is merely that you retire from the position of eminence which you occupy, exactly as I might be asked to retire if my own name had been smirched."

"There you are!" ejaculated Hampstead. "'Had been smirched.' Your chairman's phraseology shows that he assumes that my name has been smirched. I deny it. I indignantly reject the specious argument that the action of this church to-night does not amount to a trial. Before the eyes of the world you are finding me guilty. You place upon me a stigma as a minister that will follow wherever I go, the inference of which is unescapable. From the hour when I became the minister of this congregation until now, I have gone about as a servant of the One Master, according to my judgment and my capacity. The point of view of the authors of this resolution seems to be that I have been the servant of this congregation; that I may be hired or discharged, that I am theirs, that I have been working for them. That was a mistake! It is a mistake. I know you have paid me a salary, but I have never felt that it conferred upon me any obligation to you. I thought you gave the money to God, and that he gave it to me, and that with it I was to serve Him and not you. That service was rendered in all good conscience to this hour. Are you now presuming to oust me because I can no longer serve God? Or because you are unwilling for me longer to serve you?

"Your Board has asked me to resign. To resign would be a confession of guilt. I do not feel guilty. I am not guilty. My conscience is clear. Personally, I was never so satisfied that I was doing right as now.

"Sometimes I must have done the wrong thing. Looking back, it seems to me now that sometimes when you approved most heartily, when the public ovations were the loudest, the thing achieved was either of doubtful worth or very transitory. The present case touches fundamental issues. It has to do with one of the most sacred duties of the minister.

"The resolution to which I am entitled from this congregation is a resolution of absolute confidence. There is but one other resolution that could adequately express the situation, and that is the one which is proposed by the Board. If you cannot pass the resolution of confidence, I think that you should pass the one that has been proposed. That is the advice which I have to offer. That is the answer which I make to this unjust, this unchristian assault upon your pastor in the moment when, tried as he has never been tried before, he needs your loyalty and confidence

more than he can ever need it again."

Hampstead sat down. He had spoken with far more feeling than he had intended, but he had exhibited much less than he experienced.

Yet the total effect of his words was less happy than his friends had hoped. Instead of appealing to his auditors, he appeared to arraign them. Elder Burbeck was greatly relieved. He saw that this arraignment had antagonized and solidified his own cohorts.

But the tall man with the lofty brow was on his feet again.

"I wish to move," said Brother Hinton, "a resolution such as Doctor Hampstead has suggested; a resolution of sympathy and absolute confidence, and I now do move that this church put itself upon record as sympathizing fully with our pastor in his unpleasant position, and assuring him of our confidence in the unswerving integrity of his character and of our prayers that he may be true to his duty as he sees it. I offer that as a substitute for the resolution before the house."

The resolution was seconded. There was an interval of silence, a feeling that the crucial moment had been reached. Question was called. The substitute was put.

"All in favor of this resolution which you have heard made and with the formal reading of which we will dispense, please stand," proclaimed Elder Burbeck.

There was an uncertain movement. By ones and twos, and then in groups the persons sitting on the Hampstead side of the church rose to their feet, until with few exceptions all were standing.

"The clerk will count."

There was an awkward silence.

"One hundred and sixty-three," the colorless man announced presently.

"All opposed, same sign." Burbeck's adherents arose *en masse* at the motion of the Elder's arm, which was as involuntary as it was injudicial.

The clerk did not count. It was unnecessary. "The motion is lost," he said to the presiding officer.

"The resolution is lost," announced Elder Burbeck loudly, in tones that quickened with eagerness. "The question now recurs upon the original resolution."

Erect, poised, feeling a sense of elation that he was now to let loose the wrath of God upon a recreant shepherd of the flock, the Elder stood for a moment with his eyes sweeping over the whole congregation, and taking in every detail of the picture; the disheartened, defeated group behind Hampstead, the flushed, determined face of the minister, the defiant blaze in the eyes of the rosy-faced young person by his side,—who was this strange woman, anyway?—and then his own well-marshalled loyal forces, who to-night played the part of the avenging hosts of Jehovah!

Up even into the gallery the Elder's eyes wandered with satisfaction. These galleries should see that All People's would not suffer itself to be put to shame before the world. Something centered his eye for a moment upon Rollie. His son was gazing intently, leaning forward with a hand reached out until it rested on the balcony rail. Then the Elder's eye returned to the lower floor and to the mission now about to be accomplished.

"Are you ready for the question?" he inquired, with forced deliberation, enjoying the suspense before its inevitable outcome of satisfied justice.

"Question! Question!" came the insistent calls.

But now there was something like a movement in the gallery. The old Elder's eye, noting everything, noted that; looking up, he saw that Rollie's seat was empty; but higher up the gallery aisle the young man was visible, making his way quickly toward the stairs. That was right, he was coming down to vote; but he would be too late.

"All in favor of the resolution severing the pastoral relation between All People's Church and John Hampstead will signify by standing."

The Elder rolled the words out sonorously. In his mind they stood for the thunder of divine judgment!

The solid phalanxes upon his left arose as one man and stood while their impressive numbers were this time carefully counted by the clerk. The tally took some time.

"Opposed, the same sign!" The Elder barked out the words like a challenge. Again the straggling group behind Hampstead arose. The minister himself stood up. As a member of the congregation, he had a right to vote, and he would protest to the last this injustice to him, this slander of All People's upon itself.

Mrs. Burbeck could not stand, but raised her hand, so thin and shell-like that it trembled while she held the white palm up to view.

Elder Burbeck saw this and noted with a slight additional sense of shock that Rollie was now beside his mother and standing also to be counted with the Hampstead adherents.

"The resolution is carried," said the clerk to the Elder.

"The resolution—" echoed Burbeck, his voice beginning to gather enormous volume. But when he had got this far, his utterance was arrested by the sudden action of his son, who remained standing in the aisle, with one hand grasping his mother's, and the other outstretched in some sort of appeal to him.

"Father!" the boy whispered hoarsely; "don't announce that vote! Don't announce it!"

This startling interruption appeared to freeze the whole scene fast. The throaty, excited tones of the young man floated to the far corners of the auditorium, and again the sense of some impending terror forced itself deeper into the crowd-consciousness.

"Don't announce it? What do you mean?" ejaculated the father in an irritated and widely audible whisper.

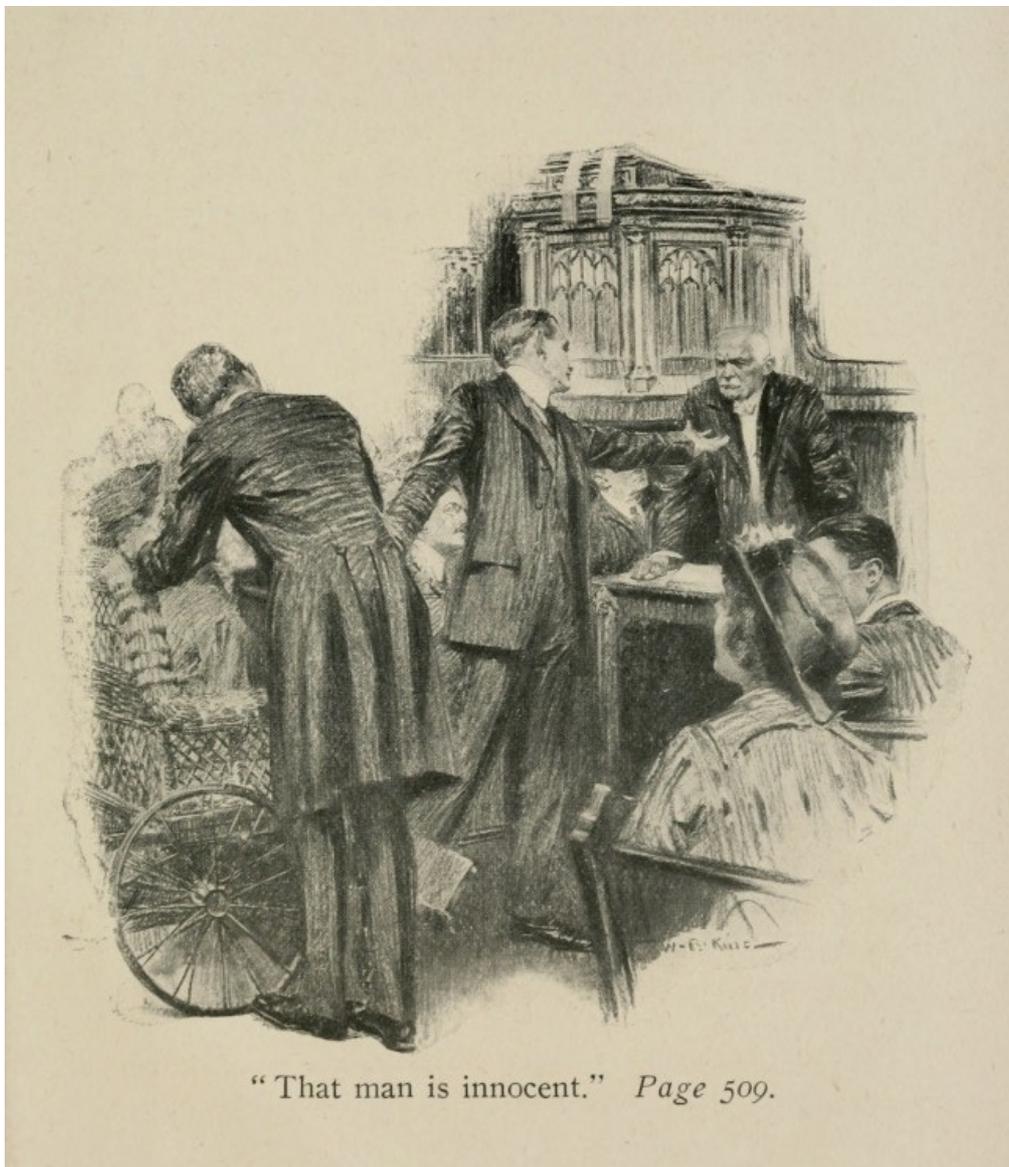
The suddenness of this outbreak and the astounding fact that it should come from his own flesh, had thrown the Elder completely off his stride.

"Because," the young man faltered, his face white, his eyes wild and staring, "because it's wrong!"

The huge dominating figure of a man stood for a moment nonplussed, wondering what hysteria could have overtaken his son; but annoyance and stubborn determination to proceed quickly manifested themselves upon his face.

"Don't, father!" pleaded the young man, advancing down the aisle, "Don't! I've got something I must say!"

By this time, Hampstead, quickly apprehensive, had stepped out from his pew and was seeking to grasp Rollie's arm; but the excited young man avoided him, and standing with one hand still appealing toward his father, and with the other pointing backward toward the minister, he announced with a sudden access of vocal force: "That man is innocent."



"That man is innocent." Page 509.

"That man is innocent."

The words had a triumphant ring in them that echoed through the auditorium.

"Innocent?"

The tone of the senior Burbeck was scornful in the extreme. Increasing anger at being thus interfered with, especially by Rollie had turned the Elder's face almost purple. "Young man," he commanded harshly, "you stand aside and let this church declare its will."

"I will not stand aside," protested the son. "I will not let you, my father, do this great wrong. He forbade me to speak; but I will speak. Yes, no matter what happens, I must speak."

The young man turned a frightened glance upon his mother. Mrs. Burbeck was gazing intently at her son, a look of shock giving way to one of comprehension and then a pitiful half-smile of encouragement, as if she urged him to go on and do his duty, whatever that involved.

"That man," Rollie began afresh, his neck thrust forward desperately, while he pointed to the minister, who had stepped back once more as though he felt the purposes of God in operation and no longer dared to interfere; "that man is innocent. I am the thief. I stole the diamonds. I did it to get the money to cover a defalcation at the bank. Fearful of the consequences, I turned to him in my distress. He got the money to restore what I had stolen. I put the diamonds in his box for an hour, and by a mistake he went off with the key. That explains all. When I returned from the cruise on the Bay and learned what had happened, I was paralyzed with fear. At first I did not even have the manhood to go and tell him how the diamonds got into his box. When I did, he made me keep the silence for fear the blow would kill my mother. It seemed to me that this was not a sufficient reason. But I was weak; I was a coward. Yet the spectacle of seeing this man stand here day after day while his reputation was torn to pieces, unwavering and unyielding whether for the sake of my mother or such a worthless wretch as I am, or for the sake of his priestly vow, made me stronger and stronger. Yet I was not strong enough to speak. Not until to-

night. Not until I saw my mother's hand tremble when she held it up to vote for him. I only came down here to stand beside her. But one touch of hers compelled me to speak. I am prepared to assume my guilt before this church and before the world. I was a defaulter, and John Hampstead saved me. I was a thief, and he saved me. I was a coward, and he made me brave enough at least for this. I tell you, the man is innocent, absolutely innocent. He is so good that you should fall down and worship him."

Rollie's confession in detail was addressed to the congregation as a whole, and he finished with his arms extended and chest thrown forward like a man who had bared his soul.

After standing for a moment motionless, his eyes turned to his mother, and with a low cry he dashed to where Hampstead was bending over her. She lay chalk-white and motionless, one hand in her lap, the other swinging pendant, the hand that had just been raised to vote. The eyes were closed; the lips half parted; the expression of her face, if expression it might be termed, one of utter exhaustion of vital forces.

For a moment the young man stood transfixed by the spectacle of what he had done. How shadow thin she looked! This was not the figure of a woman, but some exquisite pattern of the spiritual draped limply in this chair.

And yet, as if affected by his appealing gaze, the features moved, some of the looseness departed from the corners of the mouth, the eye-lashes fluttered and a delicate tint showed upon the cheek, disappeared, came again, and went away again; but with each appearance lingered longer. The lips moved too as if a breath were passing through them; almost indistinguishably and yet surely, the bosom of her dress stirred, collapsed, and stirred again. The young man had rather unconsciously seized both wilted hands, forcing the minister somewhat away in order to do so. It was his mother. He had struck her defenseless head this blow. Unmindful of the sudden awe of silence about him, followed by murmurings, ejaculations, and then a universal stir of feet, the blank looks, the questionings, the staring wonder with which neighbor looked to neighbor, the young man watched intently that stirring of the mother breast until it became regular and rhythmical.

The lips were moving now again; but this time as if in the formation of words. Rollie bent low, until his ear was close.

"Let me think, let me think," the lips murmured wearily. "My son—was a defaulter and a thief—John Hampstead knew. John Hampstead showed him the better way." She turned her head weakly and eased her body in the chair, as if to make even this slight effort at conversation less laborious, and then began to speak once more:

"But he was not strong enough to walk that better way, so John Hampstead took the burden upon his own shoulders and carried it until my boy was strong enough to bear it for himself."

Sufficient strength had returned for one of her hands to exert a pressure on the hand that held it.

"Yes, mother," Rollie breathed fervently into her ear.

"But now," and the voice gained more volume, "but now he is strong enough. He has done a brave and noble thing at last. I forget my shame in pride and gratitude to God for my son that was lost and is alive again—forever more."

The last tone flowed out upon the current of a long, wavering sigh, which seemed to take the final breath from her body.

"Yes, mother!" the young man urged anxiously, putting an instinctive pressure upon the hands he held, as if to call the spirit back into her again. There was an instant in which he felt that it was gone. She had left him. But the next instant he felt it coming back again like a tide and stronger, much stronger, so that there was real color in her cheeks, and then the eyes opened and looked at him with a clear and steady light, with the glow of love and admiration in them.

"Thank God!" murmured the voice of Hampstead hoarsely. "She is back. She will stay."

"Yes," Mrs. Burbeck affirmed, faintly but valiantly, turning from the face of her son to that of the minister with a look of inexpressible gratitude and devotion. "Yes, I am back," she smiled reassuringly, "and to stay. I never had so much reason—so much to live for as now."

The enactment of this scene at the chair, so intense and so significant, could have consumed no more than two minutes of time. The congregation, keenly alive to the effect the disclosure must have upon the life of the mother, was in a state to witness with the most perfect understanding every detail of the action about the invalid's chair. While the issue was in doubt, the audience remained in an agony of suspense and apprehension.

With the sudden look of relief upon the face of the minister, followed presently by a luminous smile of pure joy while his shoulders straightened to indicate the rolling off of the burden of his

fears, the suspense for the congregation was completely ended. Reactions began immediately to occur.

Far up in the gallery a woman laughed, an excited, hysterical, brainless laugh, and every eye darted upon her in reproach. Then down in front somewhere near the first line of the Burbeck adherents, a man began to sob, hoarsely and with a wailing note, as if in utter despair. Again every eye swung from the woman who had laughed to the man who was crying. As they fell on him, he stood up. It was Elder Brooks, the man who had written the resolution declaring the pastoral relation severed. With streaming eyes he was hurrying toward Hampstead. But now other women were laughing hysterically, other men were sobbing. Everywhere was exclamation, movement, and a sudden impulse toward the minister. The people in the gallery came down, crowding dangerously, to the rail. On the main floor little rivulets of excited human beings trickled out from the pews and streamed down the aisles. The first to reach Hampstead was a woman. She caught his hand and kissed it. Elder Brooks came next. He flung an arm about the minister's neck, but instead of looking at him or addressing him, covered his face in shame.

But it was no longer possible to describe what any one individual was doing. The entire audience had become a sea which at first rolled toward Hampstead and then swirled and tossed its individual waves laughing, cheering or applauding frothily. In mutual congratulation men shook each other's hands and some appeared even to shake their own hands. Women kissed or flung their arms about one another. Two thirds of the main floor was devoid entirely of people. The other third was a struggling eddy in which the tall form of the ex-pastor,—for they had just voted him out of the pulpit,—stood receiving every one who reached him with a sad kind of graciousness.

Songs broke out. For a time the people in the gallery were singing: "Blessed be the tie that binds." Those below sobbed through "My faith looks up to Thee", and presently all were singing "Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee." This continued until the gathering seemed to sing itself somewhat out of its hysteria; and then, weaving to and fro, the tide began to ebb back up the aisles and into the pews again.

At first the people thought they had done this of their own accord, but later it appeared that it was Hampstead who was making them do it. He was a leader. In the temporary chaos, his will alone retained its poise, and it was the suggestion in the glance of his eye and finally in the gestures of his hands that sent them back to their seats.

When the singing stopped, and the audience sat somewhat composed and considering what should happen next, the minister remained master of the situation.

To protect himself somewhat from the surging waves of humanity, Hampstead had stepped upon the platform. He stood now with one hand resting easily upon the back of the chair beside the communion table. The chair was not empty, for it contained the huge, collapsed bulk of the Elder, the upper half of whose body had sunk sideways upon the end of the table, with his huge red face fenced off from view by one arm, as if to shroud the shame of his features. He was inert and still. The fragile human orchid in the chair had not been more motionless than he. The tip of an ear, one bald knob of his head, were all that showed to those in front; and the other arm was extended across the table, the fingers overhanging the edge of it.

The spectacle of the man lying crushed and broken upon the very table from which so often he had administered the communion, cast a deepening spell over all. But it also forced on all a thought of sympathy for this rashly misguided man, who as a spiritual leader of this church had shown himself so utterly lacking in spiritual discernment. This was quite in keeping with John Hampstead's mood.

"Our very first emotion," the minister began, "must be one of sympathy for this well-meaning brother of ours who has been the unfortunate victim of a series of mistakes in which his has been by no means the greatest. While he sits before us overcome with humiliation and remorse, Elder Burbeck will pardon me if I speak for a moment as if he were not here. I wish to urge upon you all that no one—least of all myself—should reproach him for the thing which he has done. I have never doubted that he was acting in all good conscience. The succession of events, once it had begun to march, has been so remarkable that now, looking back, we must each and all of us feel how puny are men and women to resist the winds of circumstance which blow upon them.

"To me, granting the beginning of this strange series of events for which I am at least in part to blame, it seems now that all the rest has been inevitable. I think we should reproach no one. Certainly I shall not. Instead, I am thinking that it is a time for great rejoicing. That mother who has so many times shown us the better way, has shown it to-night. Looking up to her son whose act of moral courage, witnessing to the new character that he has been building, has made

possible the happy climax of this tragic hour—looking up to him she has said: 'I never had so much to live for as now.' That should be the feeling of each one of us.

"The events of to-night must have been graven deeply into all our hearts. None of us can ever be quite the same. Each must start afresh, with our lives enriched by the lesson and by the experiences of this hour.

"It has brought to me the keenest suffering, the bitterest disappointment, that I have ever known. It has brought to me also a deepening faith in the marvelous power of God to overrule the most untoward incidents to His glory. It has brought to me also the greatest gift that any man can have upon the side of his earthly relations,—a joy so great, so supreme, so ineffable that I cannot speak farther than to say to you that it is mine to-night; and that you look into my eyes at the happiest moment I have ever known."

There was a movement in the gallery. A tall woman, heavily veiled, with an air of unmistakable distinction about her, arose and mounted the aisle step by step to the stairway leading downward.

Desiring with all the violent impetuosity of her nature to break out with the truth that would vindicate the man she loved so hopelessly and had involved so terribly, Marien had nevertheless been true to her vow of silence. But she had brought Rollie Burbeck to this meeting, and she had kept him there. At the critical moment she had sent him down to stand beside his mother, until the young man's clay-like soul at last had fluxed and fused into the moulding of a man. Having seen the mischief she had wrought undone, so far as anything done ever is undone, she was leaving now, when the minister had begun to speak of what she could not bear to hear.

Hampstead's gaze watched the receding figure, and a poignant regret for her smote in upon him in the midst of all his joy.

Desperately, with that enormous resolution of which she was capable, Marien Dounay was stepping undemonstratively out of his life. But as she went, he knew that the verdict pronounced upon him by the court was one now pronounced upon her. All through life she would be held to answer for the love she had slain for the sake of her ambition.

Of those who followed the eye of the minister as it marked the departure of the woman from the gallery, some, of course, recognized her, and for a moment they may have been puzzled over the mystery of the part she had played in that moving drama, the last act of which was now drawing to its end before them; but the minister was speaking again:

"It seems to me best for us all," he was saying, "to disperse quietly, to go each to his or her own home, to our own families, into the deeper recesses of our own hearts, to ponder that through which we have passed and plan for each the future duty.

"Upon one point I am inclined to break into homily. The great lesson which I myself have learned can be best expressed in the verdict of the court at my preliminary hearing: 'Held to Answer.' It seems to me there is a great philosophy of life in that. In the crowding events of the week past, I have been 'Held to Answer' for many mistakes of mine. Some of you must find yourselves held to answer now for the manner in which you have borne yourselves. Our young brother, Rollie Burbeck, for whom we feel so deeply and whose courage to-night we have so greatly admired, will be held to answer to-morrow before his associates and the world for his past mistakes and for his proposals for the future. But we shall be held to answer also for our blessings and our opportunities. A great joy has come to me. The woman I have loved devotedly, but perhaps undeservingly, for years, has come thundering half way across the continent to stand beside me here to-night. She brings me great happiness, an increasing opportunity to do good. For that also I shall be held to answer, since joys are not given to us for selfish use, but that we may enlarge and give them back again.

"And now, though I am no longer your pastor, you will permit me, I am sure, to lift my hand above you for this last time and invoke the benediction of God which is eternal upon the life of every man and woman here to-night."

"But," faltered Elder Brooks, starting up, his voice trembling, "that was our great mistake, our great sin. You are to be our pastor again!"

The minister shook his head slowly and decisively. The Elder stared in dumb, helpless amazement, while a murmur of dissent rose from the congregation, but quieted before the upraised hand of the minister.

"It seems to me," said Hampstead, speaking in tones of deep conviction and yet with humility, "that God has declared the pulpit of All People's vacant; that both you and I are to be held to answer for our mutual failure by a stern decree of separation. For there is another lesson which has been graven deeply in my life. It is this: No man can go back. No life ever flows up stream.

The tomb of yesterday is sealed. The decision of this congregation is irrevocable. Less than a quarter of an hour has passed; but you are not the same, and I am not the same."

In the minister's solemn utterance, the message of the inevitable consequence of what had happened was carried into every consciousness. There was no longer any protest. The congregation bowed, mutely submissive, while John Hampstead pronounced the benediction of St. Jude:

"Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power before all time, and now, and forever more. Amen."

The meeting was over. But the audience sat uncertainly in the pews, with expectant glances at Elder Burbeck. It seemed as if he should rouse and say something. John, in recognition of the naturalness of this impulse, turned and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the man.

"My brother," he began, and applied a gentle pressure. But something in the unyielding bulk of the man made him stop with a puzzled look, after which he turned and glanced toward Mrs. Burbeck. Already Rollie was pushing her chair forward, her face expressing both anxiety and love. She had been eager to go to her husband before, but consideration for his own pride, which would resent a demonstration, had withheld her. She touched first the outstretched drooping finger.

"Hiram!" she breathed softly, coaxingly, "Hiram!"

Receiving no response, Mrs. Burbeck drew the obscuring hand gently from before the face. Her own features were a study. It was curious of Hiram to act this way. He was a man of stern purpose. Having been overwhelmingly shamed by his error, it would have been like him to stand bravely and confess his wrong. But his parted lips had no purpose in their form at all. The redness of his skin had changed to a purple. She laid her fingers on his cheek and held them there, for a moment, curiously and apprehensively. Then a startled expression crossed her face, and a little exclamation broke from her lips. Instead of leaning forward, she drew back and lifted her eyes helplessly to the minister.

Hampstead met her questioning, pitiful glance with a sad shake of the head and affirmation in his own tear-filling eyes. He had sensed the solemn truth from the moment of that first touch upon the huge, unresponsive shoulder.

For an appreciable interval the face of the woman was white and set and unbelieving, and then she folded her hands and bowed her head in mute acknowledgment of the widowhood which had come upon her.

With the audience aghast and breathless in sympathetic understanding, Hampstead looked down upon the silent figures where they posed like a sculptured group, the upper bulk of the man unmoving upon the table, the woman unmoving in the chair, and behind the chair, the son, also bowed and motionless.

Hiram Burbeck was dead. He, too, had been held to answer, but before the highest court,—for his harsh legalism, for his unsympathetic heart, for his blind leadership of the blind.

How strange were the issues of life! This leaflike shadow of a woman, her mortal existence hanging by a thread, had withstood the shock for which the minister had feared and risen strong above it. She still had strength to bear and strength to give. But the proud, stern father had crumpled and died.

Again there was the sound of sobbing in the church; but the intimates of Mrs. Burbeck quickly gathered round and screened the group of mourners from the eyes of the people who filed quietly out of the building. For a time the steady tramp of feet upon the gallery stairs, with the snort and cough of motor-cars outside, resounded harshly, and then the church was emptied. Rollie had taken his mother away. Rose, Dick, and Tayna were gone. The huge chair by the end of the communion table was emptied of its burden. That, too, was gone. All the wreckage, all the past, was gone.

The old sexton stood sadly by the vestibule door, his hand upon the light switch, waiting the pleasure of his pastor for the last time.

Absently, John Hampstead climbed the pulpit stairs and stood leaning on the pulpit itself, surveying in farewell the empty pews and the empty, groined arches. They had stood for something that he had tried to do and failed; but he would try again more humbly, more in the fear of God, more in the spirit of one who had turned failure into victory.

Standing thus, looking thus, reflecting thus, John heard a soft step upon the pulpit stair. It was Bessie, who had lingered in appreciative silence, the faithful, indulgent companion of her

lover's mood. As she approached, the rapt man swung out his arm to enfold her, and they stood together, both leaning upon the pulpit.

"To-night one ministry has ended," John said presently; "to-morrow another shall begin."

"And it will be a better ministry," breathed Bessie softly, "because there are two of us."

"And they twain shall become one flesh!"

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HELD TO ANSWER ***

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HELD TO ANSWER: A NOVEL ***

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