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Jennette Lee**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIMEON TETLOW'S SHADOW ***

SIMEON TETLOW'S SHADOW

By Jennette Lee

New York: The Century Co.

1909



His glance fell upon John mopping his brow



SIMEON TETLOW'S SHADOW

BY

JENNETTE LEE

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE WILLIAM," ETC.



NEW YORK
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TO

GERALD STANLEY LEE

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SIMEON TETLOW'S SHADOW

I

IT was turning dusk in the office, though it was scarcely three o'clock and outside the sun was still shining, beyond the busy streets. The two men sitting on opposite sides of the small room bent closer to their desks. The younger glanced up and got up to turn on the electric light. The little scowl that had begun to form itself on the face of the older man changed to a look of relief. His pen moved faster over the paper.

The older man was Simeon Tetlow, President of the "R. and Q." Railroad. It might almost be said that he *was* the road. Its minute ramifications and its great divisions were hardly more than the nerves and arteries that threaded Simeon Tetlow's thin frame. And the orders that went out from the tiny office, high up in the big block, were the play of his flitting finger-tips upon the keyboard of the whole clanking system. The tiny, shriveled figure gave no hint of the power that ticked carloads of live stock and human beings to their destination and laid its hand upon roads half dead, or dying, or alive and kicking, sweeping them gently into the system, with hardly a gulp.

Simeon Tetlow was an iron man, wiry and keen—an intellect without heart or soul or conscience, his co-workers would have told you. Each new road absorbed, each influx of power, seemed only to tighten a spring somewhere inside that shot the bolt. He could work day and night without tiring; and that was the reason, in part, why at forty-two he was president of the "R. and Q." road; and the reason why at forty-two his hand, when it reached out for its abstemious glass of water, trembled so that it was quickly withdrawn. No one knew the man. No one guessed the nervous horror that often racked the small frame driven relentlessly by its big brain.

He reached out for a slip of paper that lay at hand and ran his eye over it, jotting down a few figures. Then he pushed it to one side and went on writing. The younger man came across the office and laid another slip of paper on the desk. He took the one that had been pushed aside, made a memorandum on it, and filed it in a pigeon-hole at the right. He was a short, young man, with broad shoulders and a round face. The face as it bent above the slip of paper had a dull look. There was a kind of patience in it not usual in so young a man, and when he turned his eyes to his employer they glowed with a clear light, as if something were shining behind them.

"What is it, John?" The man reached out a nervous, groping hand. His gaze had not left the page before him.

"This one next, sir." The young man touched the outstretched hand with the slip of paper.

"Yes, yes." It was almost testy.

The other returned to his desk and the scratching pens raced with the minutes.

A call-boy entered with a handful of letters. The young man took them and ran them through his fingers. He arranged them in piles, reserving a part for himself. These he read, making notes and filing them rapidly. One letter, the one at the bottom of the pack, was not addressed to the great corporation, but—in a fine, small hand—to "John Bennett." He read this one last, looking thoughtfully at the lines and folding it with slow fingers. The patient look was still in his face, but the light of the eyes was gone. It seemed to have sunk back, leaving the flesh dull and heavy.

His employer glanced up suddenly. His quick eye sought the electric bulb, with a flash of impatience, and returned to its work.

The young man rose and turned on more lights. He moved about the room, putting things away for the night.

Simeon Tetlow finished his letters and pushed them from him. The young man came across and began to gather them up. His dull face came in range of his employer's eye.

"Give those I 've marked to Hanscom. Have the rest ready in the morning. I shall dictate."

"Yes, sir." The young man finished gathering them up.

The man glanced again, half-impatiently, at the heavy face. The room seemed suddenly gloomy, in spite of the red-hot wires looping the light about them.

The young man brought a hat and coat and laid them beside his employer. "May I speak to you a minute, sir?" he asked as he put them down.

The other glanced again, sharply, at his face. "Go ahead." His hand was reaching for the hat.

"I shall have to hand in my resignation, sir." The young man said it slowly, as if repeating something he had learned by heart.

The hand on the hat drew back. "What 's that?" He laughed curtly and shot a look of suspicion at the impassive face. "More money?"

The face flushed. "No, sir." He hesitated a little. "My mother is sick."

"Umph!" The man's face cleared. "You don't need to resign for *that*." He did not ask what was the matter with the mother. He had not known that John had a mother. She seemed to be springing into existence very inconveniently. "Get a nurse," he said.

"She has had a nurse. But she needs me, I think." He did not offer more details.

The older man shrugged his shoulders a little—a quick shrug. He pushed forward a chair with his foot. "Sit down. Your father dead?" quickly.

"No, sir. But—father is—father." He said it with a little smile. "She's never had anybody but me," he went on quickly. "She's been sick ever since I was a little thing, and I've taken care of her. It frets her to have a woman around. She does n't wash the dishes clean, and her cooking is n't really very good." He was smiling a little as he said it.

The man shot a quick look at him. "You 're going home to wash dishes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um-m." The fingers played a little tune on the desk. "I 'll raise you twenty-five a month. Get a better nurse."

The boy shook his head. "I 'm afraid it would n't do." He was hesitating. "I think she misses me."

"Umph! Very likely!" The man glanced at him over quick spectacles. "What 's the matter with her? Sit down." He touched the chair again with his foot.

The young man sat down. "We don't know what it is. She cannot walk—cannot stand—a good deal of the time—and sometimes she suffers. But it is a kind of nervousness that is hardest to bear. She cannot lie quiet. Something seems to drive her."

The man nodded. His fingers opened and closed. "What else?" he said brusquely.

"That 's all—except that it quiets her to have me around. I can get work in Bridgewater and do the housework nights and mornings."

The man was scowling at him intently.

"It 's what I 've always done, till I came here," he said quickly.

"Washed dishes and cooked and made beds?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's no work for a *man*."

"I know." The dull face smiled a little. "The boys always called me 'Sissie Johnny.'"

"Umph! I 'm glad they did!... 'Sissie Johnny!'" He smiled grimly and took a card from the desk before him, holding it a minute in his fingers, snapping it back and forth. "Has she ever seen a specialist?"

The young man shook his head. "No, sir." The man wrote a few words on the card and blotted it quickly. "Take her to see Dr. Blake. He is the best nerve specialist in five hundred miles. If she is n't well enough to go to him, have him come to her. I 'll pay the bill." He thrust himself into his hat and coat and got himself out of the room, shrugging nervously.

The young man stood with the card in his hand, looking at it, a little smile on his lips. Then he went about, turning out all the bulbs but one and putting away papers and arranging the room for the night.

It was a small, rough room—hardly more than a corner cut off from the top floor by board partitions. The rest of the floor, outside, was used only for storage. Simeon Tetlow had achieved here what he wanted—complete solitude. There was, on the first floor, a magnificent apartment with lordly mahogany chairs, a baize-covered table and oil paintings, where twice a year he met his directors; and on the floor above it was a

spacious room bearing on its panel the bronze token, "President's Office." It was occupied at present by three young lady typewriters who clacked their machines and arranged their hair and adjusted the shades on the plate-glass windows to suit their convenience, while in the little room at the top of the building the president of the corporation hunched himself over a four-dollar desk and scowled at the dim light that came through the half-sized windows. For three days after it was finished, Simeon Tetlow occupied the spacious room below designed for the president of the corporation. Then he gathered together his few belongings and fled to the top. His gigantic brain could only work when free from distraction. The mere sense that some one might rap, even on the outer door of the stately office, paralyzed him, and his nervous frame, once set a-jangle, trembled, and palpitated for hours. The mere forbidding of intrusion was not sufficient. Some well-meaning idiot, laden with news of importance, would break over the command, and hours of careful thought would be whirled aloft in the smoke of Simeon's wrath. He fled to the loft, dropping, as it were, a trapdoor behind him. No one was to follow—unless summoned. No literary man was ever more jealous of solitude. But no mere literary man could think a railroad into existence or quench a wheat crop with a nod. If Simeon Tetlow's body had matched his brain, there would have been no limit to his power. As it was, he remained a mighty general without an army, a head without hands and feet. The details of life frustrated him at every point. He could meet his directors, serene in the knowledge that the road was prospering beyond all bounds. He could carry to them the facts and figures and proofs of prosperity—in his head. But the papers that recorded these facts, the proofs in black and white, were never forthcoming at the right moment. They took to themselves wings—of paper; they flitted and skulked and hid; they lay on the top of the pile before him and grinned at him, their very faces changed to a diabolic scorn that he should not know them.

This was the Simeon Tetlow of three years ago. Then there entered, one morning, in response to his summons for a call-boy, a short, square youth with a dull face. Simeon did not note him as he came in. He forgot that he had called for a boy. His mind was busy with projects of import. When it came back, with a start, he recognized that some one had been with him, for ten minutes or more, who had not worried and irritated him by merely being alive. He shot a keen glance at the dull face. The light of the eyes was turned to him, waiting to serve him.

After that Simeon summoned the boy again and again, on one pretext or another. He made excuses to see him. He advanced him from post to post.

At last, about a year ago, he nodded at a desk that had been installed, overnight, across the room: "You are to work there and your pay will be raised a hundred."

The boy took possession of the desk with as little stir as if he had received some casual order. He did not ask what his work was to be, and Simeon Tetlow did not tell him. The big brain had found hands and feet—almost, it might seem, lungs and a few other useful, vital organs—and it used them, as it had used the nervous, shaking body before—relentlessly. For the first time in his life Simeon found his papers ready to his hand. He attended his first directors' meeting, sitting at the head of the green baize table, like a man in a dream. The right paper slipped to his finger-tips and lingered there; the figures formed themselves in seemly ranks and marched up and down the green baize parade in orderly file. The effect upon the directors was, at first, a little startling. They had become wonted to Simeon hurried, gasping, and impatient—and to dividends. They were almost afraid of these cold facts and figures. They looked at them cautiously, through gold-rimmed glasses, received their dividends—and took heart.

Each day some new comfort found its way to Simeon's desk. The morning that the box of elastic bands appeared there was a holocaust of joy among the papers. He used nearly the whole box the first day. He had never owned an elastic band before. He was president of the great corporation, but it had not occurred to him that he had a right to elastic bands. He slid them up and down his nervous fingers in sheer energy of delight. But he did not mention them to John, nor John to him. It was John who provided the new letter-file that cut the work in half, and had the grimy windows washed till they shone like plate, and arranged the desk 'phone so that Simeon could dictate to the stenographer three floors below, without knowing, or caring, who sat at the other end taking his crisp words with harried, compliant fingers. Hitherto, dictating had burdened Simeon's life. He had written dozens of letters himself rather than endure the presence of a stenographer for even half an hour; and the sound of a girl clacking drove him wild.

The letters that were not dictated into the telephone were written in John's round, conscientious-looking hand. If there were anything that one human being could do for another that was not done in the office, Simeon did not know what it was—nor did John. A clothes-brush that brushed them twice a day hung by Simeon's hat and coat; and if Simeon's neckties were still shabby and his collars a little frayed, it was because John had not yet discovered the remedy. Some days a luncheon appeared on Simeon's desk, and some days he went out to luncheon; and he could not have told which, except that it was always the thing that he would have done had he devoted hours of thought to it all.

He did not give thanks to John, and John did not expect them. The lamps in his eyes had not been lighted for that—nor for money....

He went about the room now in his slow, considerate way, attending to each detail of locking up, as carefully as if he were not to be first on the ground in the morning.... He would return to start the day. Later—perhaps at noon—he would slip away. That would make least trouble.... To come in the morning and find him gone!—John felt, through all his short, square figure, the shock to the nervous, quivering one. He did not need to reason it out. He did not even know that he thought it. It was an instinct—born the first day he came into Simeon Tetlow's office and saw the thin figure seated before its chaotic desk wrestling its way through mighty things.... He had thought of his mother as he stood there waiting for orders. She had fairly driven him away. "Go and be a *man!*" she had said; "I shall ruin you." And she had smiled at him courageously.... And he had come away, and had taken the first thing at hand—a call-boy, kicking his heels against a bench with a dozen others. And this was his employer.... So he had stood waiting when Simeon Tetlow had looked up and seen the lamps aglow.

That was three years ago. And tonight Simeon, plodding home through the foggy gloom, was swearing a little under his breath.

"It 's the weak spot in the boy," he said testily; "I believe he's soft at the core."

He inserted his latchkey, grumbling still. "Wash dishes—will he? Damn him!—Umph!—Damn him!" And yet it was as if he had said: "Bless him!" The great door swung noiselessly open, and he went in.

II

The woman was looking into the dusk. Her hair, short like a boy's, curled a little about the ears. She pushed it back as she looked, her eyes deepening and widening. It was a gentle face, with a sharp line between the eyes, that broke its quiet. She sank back with a little sigh. Foolish to look.... He could not come. She must think of something.... The twilights were long and heavy.... What was it he had written?... Hollyhocks? yes; that was it!—in the garden. He had said she should have them—next summer. She leaned back with closed eyes and folded hands, watching them—pink and rose and crimson, white with flushing red, standing stiff and straight against the wall. They were so cool and sturdy, and they brought the sunshine.... The dark floated wide and lost itself in a sky of light. The smile crept back to her lips. She stirred a little. The door opened and closed.... His hands scarcely touched her as he bent and kissed her.

"It's you—!" a little cry of doubt and delight.

"It's me, mother." The words laughed to her quietly.

She put out a hand. "How long can you stay?" She was stroking his coat.

"Always."

"What—?" The hand pushed him from her. The eyes scanned his face.

"Always," he repeated cheerfully, "if you want me."

She shook her head. "I don't want you. I wrote you I was—happy."

"Yes. You wrote it too often—and too hard." He was smiling at her. But the lamps were misty. "Did you think I would n't see?"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear—dear, dear!" It was a little wail of reproach at his foolishness—and hers. "And you were doing so well!"

"I can do better here. What's burning!" He sniffed a little.

She glanced anxiously toward the kitchen. "Your father put some crusts in the oven to brown. It can't be—"

"It can't be anything else," said John.

When he came back he told her of the great Dr. Blake.

They sat in silence while the room drew dark about them.

Now and then she reached out and touched his coat softly.

"Tomorrow then—!" half-doubtfully, when he bade her good night.

"Tomorrow we shall see the great doctor," he assented cheerfully. "Good night, mother."

"Good night, my son."

The great doctor looked her over keenly, with eyes that saw everything and saw nothing.

"A little trouble in walking!"

"Yes."

"And nervous sometimes—a little!"

He might have been a neighbor, inquiring after her health. The little woman forgot herself and her fear of him. She told him, very simply, of the long nights—when the walls seemed closing in and there was no air except under the sky, and her feet refused to carry her. The line between her eyes grew deeper as she talked, but the hands in her lap were very quiet. She did not shrink while the doctor's sensitive fingers traveled up and down her spine with almost roseleaf touch. Only once she gave a quick cry of pain.

"I see. I see. A little tender."

"Yes." It was almost a gasp, with a quick drawing in of the lip.

"I see." He nodded. "Yes. That will do—very nicely."

He led her away to another room—to rest a little before the journey. When he returned his glance met the boy's absently.

He arranged trifles on his desk—paperweight and pens and blotter—as affairs of importance, before he spoke, casually:

"She will always be ill—Yes. It is a hopeless case—Yes." He paused a little between the words, giving the boy time. "She will suffer—more than she has yet. But we can help a little." He had drawn a paper toward him and was writing his hieroglyphics with slow care, not looking up. "We will ease it, all we can. Keep her mind at rest. Make her happy." He turned his spectacles on the young man. "You can make her happy. That will do more for her than I can.... Will she live? Yes, yes. Longer than the rest, perhaps.... Shall you tell her?—not today, I think—some other time. She is a little tired. She is a brave woman."

III

SIMEON Tetlow glanced up sharply. The door had opened without a sound. "You 've come. Umph!" He shoved the pile of letters from him.

"Sit down."

The air was full of sunshine. Even in the dingy office it glinted and shone.

Across its radiance Simeon studied the dull face. "Well!"

The eyes of the boy met his, half-wistfully, it seemed. "She needs me, sir," he said. Simeon stirred uneasily. "Seen Dr. Blake?"

"Yes, sir. He says he cannot help her."

"Umph!" Simeon shifted again in his chair. His eye dropped to the pile of papers beside him.

The boy's hands had reached out to them. Almost instinctively the fingers were threading their way among them, sorting and arranging in neat piles.

Simeon watched the fingers jealously. It was as if he might spring upon them and fasten them there forever. The young man's eyes traveled about the room, noting signs of disorder. "I can stay today," he said slowly. He hesitated. "I can stay a week, sir, if you want me."

"I don't want you a week." The man was looking at him savagely. "You must bring them here!" he said.

"Here!" in doubt.

The man nodded. "They can live here as well as anywhere!"

The boy pondered it a minute. He shook his head slowly.

"They would n't be happy," he said. "She has friends there, in Bridgewater—people she's known ever since she was a little girl—and father has his work. He 's an old man. It would n't be easy for him to get work here. He has an easy job—"

"Work enough here," growled Simeon. He was studying the boy's face keenly. Was it possible the fellow was making capital of all this? He threw off the thought. "Work enough here," he repeated.

John considered it again. He looked up. The lamps threw their clear light into the future. "I 'd thought of that, sir," he said slowly, "and I 've talked about it—a little. But I saw it hurt them. So I dropped it."

"You 're missing the chance of a lifetime," said Simeon. "There are men working below that'd give ten years off their life to get what you've got without trying."

The boy's quiet eye met his.

"Oh, you 've tried—you've tried. I don't mean that," he said testily. "But it's a case of fitness—the chance of a lifetime," he repeated significantly.

The boy looked at him. "I know it, sir. I've thought about it a long time. It 's hard to do. But, you see, we never have but one father and mother."

The other met it, blinking. "Umph!"

"I shall try to get something at the Bridgewater office. I thought perhaps you would recommend me if there was a vacancy."

"There is n't any," said Simeon shortly—almost with relief.

"The second shipping-clerk left week before last."

"You don't want that?"

"I think I do."

Simeon turned vaguely toward the pigeonholes. The boy's quick eye was before him. "This is the one, sir."

Simeon smiled grimly. He drew out a blank from its place and filled it in. "You won't like it," he said, holding the pen in his teeth while he reached for the blotter. "It 's heavy lifting, and Simpson 's no angel to work under. No chance to rise, either." He was glaring at the boy, a kind of desperate affection growing in his eyes..

The boy returned the look mistily. "You make it a little hard, sir. I wish I could stay." He half held out his hand and drew it back.

Simeon ignored it. He had taken down a ledger and picked a letter from the pile before him. The interview was over. The President of the "R. and Q." Railroad was not hanging on anybody's neck.

"It 's the other ledger, sir," said John quickly, "the farther one." He reached over and laid it deftly before his employer.

Simeon pushed it from him savagely. "Go to the devil!" he said.

The boy went, shutting the door quietly behind him.

IV

IT was six o'clock—the close of a perfect June day. Not even the freight engines, pulling and hauling up and down the yard, with their puffs of black smoke, could darken the sky. Over in the meadow, beyond the network of tracks, the bobolinks had been tumbling and bubbling all day. It was time to close shop now, and they had subsided into the long grass. In the office the assistant shipping-clerk was finishing the last bill of lading. He put it to one side and looked at his watch. A look of relief crossed his face as he replaced it and climbed down from the high stool. It had been a hard day in the Bridge-water freight-office. News had come, in the early morning, of a wreck, three miles down the track—a sleeper and a freight had collided where the road curves by the stonework of the long bridge, and John had been sent down to help in looking after the freight.

It was one of the worst wrecks the road had known. No one placed the blame. Those on the ground were too busy to have theories; and those at a distance had to change their theories a dozen times during the day. At noon word came that the president of the road was on his way to the scene of the accident. The news reached John as he was getting into the wrecking-car to return to the office. He paused for a flying minute, one foot on the step of the car. Then he swung off, and the car moved on without him. He spent the next half hour going over the ground. He made careful notes of every detail, recalling points from memory, taking measurements, jotting down facts and figures with his swift, short fingers. When he had finished he took the next wrecking-car back, making up for lost time by lunching at his desk while he worked.

All the afternoon he had been doing the work of three men.... Six o'clock. He got down from the high stool, stretching himself and rubbing his arms. In ten minutes the special would pass. He glanced out through the office window at the back of the building. High at the top of the sandy bank a bunch of clover bloomed against the sky, huge heads, with pink-and-white hearts—a kind of alfalfa—perhaps a seed from some passing freight. He had seen them, flaunting there, between hurried snatches of work, all the afternoon. He would pick them and carry them to her. But not now.... He looked again at his watch. He wanted to see the special when it passed. It would not stop, probably, but he might catch a glimpse of Simeon Tetlow. He had often wished he might see him, and he had often thought of his face the morning he said good-by. Beneath the anger in it had been something the boy could not fathom—a kind of entreaty.... He must find some way to give him the notes he had made of the wreck. He stepped out on the platform, looking up and down the shine on the tracks. The sun, coming low across the meadow beyond the tracks, made everything beautiful. A whistle sounded. The special—at the upper bridge. In five minutes it would pass. A smile curved his lips. The sound of quick bells and puffs and wheels came pleasantly to him from the engines at work in the yard down beyond the freight-house. A long train at the left was backing in slowly. John watched it and jingled some pennies in his pockets. He was thinking of Simeon Tetlow, the smile still on his lips.... Suddenly the smile stopped. The fingers gripped the pennies and held them fast.. .. His eye flashed along the top of the slow-moving train.—No one in sight—level tracks—the special two minutes off—the freight taking her track.... The switch, if he could make it—It was not a thought, but a swift turn of the short legs. Never had they seemed to him so fat and heavy beneath him. Yet they were flying over the ties as the wind sweeps a field. The short, strong body dropped itself upon the switch and hung there, gripping—a whirl of cinders and blast and roar. ... Had he come fast enough?... Ages passed. He lifted his head and looked back up the long tracks. The freight was still backing in slowly. The special—like an old lady who has taken the wrong crossing—was emitting a sound of dismay, a quick, high note. The wheels reversed and she came back, puffing and complaining, in little jerks.

When the train halted Simeon Tetlow stepped down from the platform. His hand, as it left the iron rail, trembled a little. He thrust it into the pocket of his light coat, looking up and down the tracks with stern glance. The glance fell upon John mopping his brow.



His glance fell upon John mopping his brow



The president of the road moved toward him slowly. "What 's up?" It was short and sharp.

John waited a minute while he mopped his brow again and replaced the handkerchief. He was thinking fast—for two. "I—I wanted to see you, sir." One glance at the man had told him everything—the shaking hand clinched in the pocket, the quivering nerves, the dusty journey, the anxiety and fierce need of help. One more shock and the tension would give way. "I wanted to see you, sir," he repeated quietly.

Simeon was looking at him keenly, up and down. "So you stopped my special?"

John nodded. "Yes, I stopped it—I guess I stopped it." His voice almost laughed at the words. He was tugging at something in his pocket. "I wanted to give you these, sir." He had fished out the handful of papers—old envelopes, scraps, bits of newspaper margins—covered with writing and figures. "I was down there this morning—to the wreck," he said quickly. "Things were pretty well mixed up—I thought you might like to see how they lay. I made some notes."

"Ah-h!" It was a long-drawn breath—something between a snarl and a laugh. "Come inside."

They went into the special, with her hideous decorations of plush and imitation leather. The president nodded to the seat beside a table covered with telegrams and newspapers and memoranda: "Sit down."

He seated himself opposite the boy, his elbow on the table and his head resting on the hand. Beneath its shelter his swift eyes looked out, scanning the boy's face. "Well!" It was sharp and quick.

The boy smiled at the familiar note. He ran over the papers in his fingers, selecting one near the bottom. "This is the way things lay when we got there. We were first on the ground. I had a good chance to see," he said simply.

"I 'll warrant." Simeon growled a little, leaning toward it.

The boy moved nearer to him. "These are the sleepers—the freight lay this way, over to the left. They must have struck just as the last car left the bridge."

"I see." Simeon reached out a hand for the paper. It trembled mistily as he bent above it. "I see." The tone held a note of satisfaction. "What else?" He looked up quickly.

John was sorting the papers, a half-smile on his slow lips. A sense of happiness held his stubby fingers.

The president's eyes rested on the dull face for a long minute. His hand, holding the paper, had ceased to tremble. He was resting in the strength of this body, short and sturdy and full of willing life. No one knew what that stubby-fingered boy had meant to him—what plans for the future had been cut off. The boy was to have been closer than a partner for him, closer than his own body, through the years. He was to have lived with him—shared his fortune, good and bad.... No one had guessed. He himself had not quite known—until,

one day, the door closed behind the boy and he found himself sitting before a desk, trying with trembling fingers to make an entry in the ledger.... He had worried along since then as best he could.... And now he was sitting in the quiet car with the boy opposite him. The freight outside was pulling away with slow, disturbed puffs. The low sun shone through the car, and a glow of red plush lifted itself about them and filled the car with clear, rosy light.

The boy looked up. His eyes met the watching ones, and a quick light flashed into them, touching the lamps of service to flame. "This is the next one, sir." He looked down again at the papers and held one out.

The president pushed it aside with a touch. His eyes searched the boy's face. "Tell me what happened—just now!"

"Just now—!" The boy looked up, waiting, his lips half apart.

The president nodded. "You know—When we stopped—What was wrong!"

The boy waited a minute. "No. 39 had your track," he said at last, quietly. "She's gone now. That's her whistle—up the yard." He turned his head a little.

The president's eyes still scanned the dull face. "And you changed the switch!"

"Yes, sir."

The president pushed the papers farther from him, making a place for both arms on the table. He leaned forward a little. "So that's what you left me for?"

The boy looked up, startled. "What, sir!"

The president nodded slowly. "To turn a switch, I suppose—" The thin hand lifted to his lips was trembling now as a leaf quivers at a sudden wind.

"Some one else would have seen," said the boy quickly.

"Nobody sees—but you." He crunched out the words. "When are you coming back?"

"Back!"

"To the office—I need you." He gulped a little over the words. He had never said as much to any one.

The lamps, with their still glow, were turned toward him. "I want to come, sir."

"Well?"

"We talked it over last night—She wants me to do it—She will come with me—But—"

The president of the road was looking down now—waiting.

The boy's eyes studied the worn face with its wrinkles, the thin, hard lips and stern lines. Something in it made his heart suddenly go from him. "I think I'm coming, sir," he said simply.

The face did not look up. It worked strangely for a moment.

Then it dropped in the folded arms on the table and rested there.

The boy fell to sorting the telegrams.

When the man looked up the face was quiet. But something had gone from it—a kind of hard selfishness. The gentleness that touched the lines had left them free. He smiled a little wistfully as he held out his hand for the papers. "I'm ready now. Go ahead."

In ten minutes the papers were all in his hands, and the special was on her way to the wreck. The boy watched it out of sight. Then he turned away and crossed the tracks to the sandy bank, whistling softly—little breaths of sound that broke into lightest bubbles of joy as he climbed the bank. He was going to gather the clover blossoms, with the pink-and-white hearts, to carry home to her.

V

The man at work in the garden looked up with sudden interest. A light whistle had caught his ear—"That you, Johnny?" He looked out through the vista of currant-bushes and peas to the path that skirted the house. "You there?" he called.

The youth, who had come around the corner, nodded casually. "How is mother?"

The old man got slowly to his feet, rubbing his knees a little. "All right, I guess. She was out here with me a while ago, but I took her in.—You got some flowers for her?" He glanced at the pink-and-white blossoms in the boy's hand.

"I got them on the bank by the track—Has she had a good day?"

"Putty good, I reckon. Putty good." He was coming down between the peas, limping a little. "They found out who's to blame—?"

The boy was moving toward the house, but he turned back with a little gesture of silence. "She does n't know?"

The older man looked a little guilty. "Well—yes—fact is—I told her. She kind o' got it out o' me," he added in defence.

The boy smiled. "She always gets it out of you.—Never mind if it has n't hurt her." He turned again toward the house.

She was very quiet as he entered the room. The blinds were closed and the little light that came through the shutters made a kind of cool dusk. He crossed to the lounge and laid the flowers by her hand. The delicate

fingers reached out and closed over them. "Clover blossoms," she said softly. "I was wishing today—We used to have them in the yard-before the lawn-mower—" The fingers strayed here and there, touching them gently. "Are they crimson?"

"Guess again." His voice was full of gentle love.

"Not crimson, no.... But they 're not white, either—"

"But you 're warm," he said.

The eyes flashed open and looked at him. "What happened today?"

"Father told you—about the accident?"

"The accident—Yes. But there was something else—"

He laughed quietly. "You always know, don't you! Was it good or bad!"

She hesitated a second. "Good—for you."

"And for all of us, mother." He bent toward her. "We were talking about it last night—about my going back—if he wanted me."

"Yes—Have you heard from him!"

"I 've seen him."

"Today!"

He nodded. "He came down to look after the accident, and his train stopped a minute at the office. He wants me—I think he needs me—But it 's for you to say, mother—you and father."

The breath of a sigh came to her lips and changed to a smile. "Ah, if you can get your father to go—"

He smiled back, his eyes searching her face for the slightest shadow that should cross it. "He 'll go," he said decisively. "And he 'll like it—after we get there. But will *you* like it, mother! That 's what I 'm afraid of—You 'll miss your friends—and little things—"

"I shall have you," she returned quickly, "and your father—and President Tetlow."

He smiled a little at the picture. But his face had suddenly cleared. "I believe you *would* like him," he said. "I never thought before how much alike you are—you two—in some ways!"

She laughed out. "He's a terrible hard man to get on with!"

He bent and kissed her cheek lightly. "For other people, perhaps—not for you—or me." She had lifted the clovers and was looking at them. "How beautiful they are!" she said softly. They dropped again to her side. "I want to go." She was looking at him with clear eyes. "And I want *you* to go—I didn't see how it was when we talked it over last winter—how much it would mean to you. I dreaded the change and your father is so hard to move—and I thought, too, that it would be too much for you—having me to look after and all the responsibility besides. I did n't see then—but I've been thinking about it months now, lying here. You really liked the work there and that made it easy—" She was looking at him inquiringly.

He nodded slowly. "I liked it—I don't think I ever did any work I liked so well. It was almost as if I thought things out myself. I can't explain how it felt—but somehow I used to forget, almost, that I was n't planning things—It seemed so natural to do them—the things he wanted done."

"I know." She sighed softly. "How he must miss you!"

He seemed not to have heard her. He was following his thought, clearing it to his slow mind. "You 're right in the midst of things down there. It's like being fireman on one of these big engines, I guess—every shovelful you put in, you can see her fly just as if you were doing it yourself. Here it 's different, somehow. I do first one thing and then another, but nothing seems to count much."

"It 's like being a brakeman," she suggested.

"That's it! I never thought of that! But I've always said I'd rather be fireman on any old engine than a high-class brakeman—Pullman or anything."

Again the little breath of a sigh that changed quickly to a smile. "We won't be brakemen any more," she said. "We 'll go live on the engine—right by the throttle—that's what you call it, is n't it?" A little laugh covered the words.

He bent and kissed her again. "Dear mother! You shall never go if you do not want it."

"Ah, but I want it—more than anything in the world. But there is your father—?"

"There is father," he said decisively. "But first we 'll have supper."

He went out into the kitchen and she lay in the half-dusk with the flowers clasped in her fingers. Presently she lifted them and drew them across her cheek. "It was good in You to make flowers," she said softly, "thank You for them. ... Thank You...." The words trailed away to a breath as she held the flowers to the light, turning them a little and shaking them softly apart to look into their cool fragrance.

Then she touched them again to her cheek and lay with closed eyes.

When the boy came in a few minutes later, he stood for a moment watching her before he set the slender glass of water on the table and turned to the window, opening the blinds and letting in the late light. Her eyelids lifted and she looked out at him dreamily. "I must have been asleep," she said. "I was picking flowers in the meadow at home and the wind blew in my face. I ran a little way—" She held out the flowers to him. "Put them in water for me, John."

He took them and shook them apart, dropping them lightly into the glass of water on the table.

"They are drooping," she said regretfully.

"Yes, but they will come up.—Supper is ready." He had placed an arm under her shoulders and lifted her from her place as easily as if she were a child. They waited a moment while she slipped to her feet, steadying herself a little. Then they moved slowly toward the door, her weight half resting on the arm that guided her. Any one watching them would have seen where the boy had gained his gentle bearing. He leaned a little as they went, his soul absorbed in serving her; and something of the dignity and courage of the slender

shoulders seemed to have passed into the heavier ones, as if they, too, bore the burden and the pain with heroic spirit.

To the old man, waiting by the stove, tea-pot in hand, there was nothing heroic in the sight of the two in the doorway. They were simply John and Marcia and they had always walked together like that, almost from the time John could toddle across the floor. Then her hand had rested on the boy's shoulder and he had looked up, now and then, under the weight, saying, "Does it hurt this way, mother?" Now he did not need to ask. He guided the slight figure, half carrying it, lightly, as if it had been a part of himself.

The old man set the tea-pot on the table and drew out her chair clumsily. "We've got lettuce for supper," he said proudly, "and redishes, and tomorrow night they 'll be a mess of peas, if nothin' happens."

She sank into the chair with a little sigh and a smile of pleasure at the dainty table. The lettuce lifted itself crisply and the radishes glowed pink and white in their dish. A silence fell for a moment on the little group. They had never formed the habit of saying grace; but when the mother was well enough to be in her place, there was a quiet moment before they broke bread.

John looked at her now, a little shade of anxiety in his face. Then he began to talk of the day's happenings, the old man chiming in with the odd effect of a heavy freight, shacking back and forth through the whirl of traffic. To the boy and his mother talking was a kind of thinking aloud—elliptical flashes, sentences half-finished, nods intercepted and smiles running to quick laughs. To the old man it was a slower process, broken by spaces of silence, chewing and meditating. Now and then he caught at some flying fragment of talk, holding it close—as to near-sighted eyes.

"You wa'n't thinkin' of moving to Bay-port?" He asked the question humbly, but with a kind of mild obstinacy that checked the flow of talk.

"That's what we wanted to ask you, father."

The boy had raised his voice a little, as if speaking to a person who was a little deaf.

The old man sat down his tea-cup and rubbed his finger thoughtfully along his chin. "I don't b'lieve I 'd better go," he said slowly. He shook his head. "I don't see how I can go nohow."

The boy glanced swiftly at his mother. A little line had fallen between her eyes. The slower processes of the man's mind were a nervous horror to her quick-moving one.

She leaned forward a little. "We want to go, Caleb, because it will be better for John," she said slowly.

He nodded imperturbably. "Yes, it 'll be better for the boy." He glanced at him kindly. "I know all about it's being better for the boy. We talked about it last winter, and if you 'd made up your minds to go then, I would n't 'a' said a word—not a word."

"But it will be better now—easier to go. There is n't any other difference from what there was last winter."

"Yes, they's a difference," said the old man slowly. "I did n't hev my squashes then."

"But you have n't got them now," said John. "They won't be ripe for months—"

"Six weeks," interrupted the old man solemnly. "They are just a-settin'."

"But we can buy squashes in Bayport, Caleb."

He looked at her mildly. "Yes, we can buy 'em, but will they be them squashes!—You know they won't be, and Johnny knows they won't." His look changed a little to severity. "When a man's done what I have for them squashes—Why, I dug that ground and I fertilized it, and I've weeded and watered and fussed and tended them all spring, and when a man 's done that much, a man wants to *eat 'em!*" It was a long speech for the old man, and he chewed in gloomy silence.

The man looked up again and saw them shining at him. "I want to go, Johnny," he said, and his thick lips trembled a little, "I want to do what's best for you. You know it and your mother knows it." He was looking at her humbly.

"Yes, Caleb, I know." The line had vanished from her eyes. Dear old Caleb!—How slow he was and how right, always, in the end!

"How would it do, father, if we had the things sent down to us?" said the boy.

The man's mouth was open, regarding him mildly. "If we had, what sent, Johnny?"

"The garden stuff—peas and beets and squashes and so on?"

The dull look lightened. "Maybe we could—and it would seem good to eat the same ones we raised, would n't it?" He looked at him appealingly.

"We'd all like it, and it would be good for mother—to have the things fresh from home."

"So 't would, Johnny. So 't would. Who'll we get to tend 'em?" The thought puckered his forehead in anxious lines.

"There 's Stillwell," said John absently. He was not looking at the old man, but at his mother's face.

It was turned to him with a little smile. "I am glad," she said, as if he had spoken.

"You are tired?"

"Yes—it has been a long day—so much has happened."

"I will help you to bed," he said, thoughtfully, "and then I must go back to the office for a little while."

She looked at him inquiringly. "Tonight?"

"Only for a little while. The special goes back at eight—I want to tell him."

She made a swift gesture. "Don't wait. Your father will help me."

"I 'll help her, Sonny. You run right along," said the old man kindly.

"I am a little late," said the boy, looking at his watch. "I 'll have to hurry. But I 'll be back before you 're asleep." With a little nod he was gone.

They looked at each other across the vacant place. "I do know how you 're goin' to stand it," said the old man slowly.

"I shall not mind." She spoke with quick decision, "but it will be hard for you—leaving the garden and the place."

"We 've lived here thirty year," he said thoughtfully.

"Thirty-one," she responded.

"So 't was—thirty-one last May."

He came around and laid a clumsy hand on her shoulder. "You want I should help you, Marcia?"

"No, Caleb, I 'll sit here a little—perhaps till the boy comes back. I like to look at the garden from here."

The old man's glance followed hers. "It is putty," he said. "You see how them squashes hev come on since morning?"

"Yes." She smiled at him in the dim light. "Seems's if you could most see 'em grow," said the old man with a little sigh. He took up his battered hat. "Well, I 'll go see Stillwell. Like enough he 'll be glad to do it."

But when he was outside of the door, he did not turn toward Stillwell's. He went down the garden path instead, stooping now and then to a plant or vine, patting the mold with slow fingers. At the end of the garden he dropped to his knees, feeling cautiously along the bed that skirted the high board fence.... "Coming on fine," he said, "and hollyhocks is what she wanted most of all." His fingers strayed among them, picking off dead leaves, straightening stems and propping them with bits of stick. While he worked he talked to himself, a kind of mumbling chant, and sometimes he lifted himself a little and looked about the garden, much as a muskrat sits upon its haunches and watches the outer world for a moment before it dives again to its home. Once he looked up to the sky and his fingers ceased their work, his face wore a passive look. Kneeling there in the half-light, his big face lifted and the fragrance of the garden rising about him, he seemed to wait for something. Then his face dropped and his fingers groped again among the plants. By-and-by he got to his feet, stamping a little to shake out the stiffness. "It 's better for the boy," he said humbly. "I 'll go see Stillwell right off."

VI

The special was halting, with little puffs, and the president swung down from the steps. He looked about him with a nervous, running glance up and down the platform. If the boy were not here, he could not wait....

"Hello!" He laid his hands on a pair of broad shoulders that pushed toward him out of the dusk. "I want you—right off!"

"All right, sir, I'm coming." There was a note of joy in the voice that warmed the older man's heart.

"You 're ready, are you?" He had turned toward the steps, with quick motion.

The boy laughed a little, hurrying beside him. "Not tonight. I must wait. There are things—"

The president paused, one foot on the step, glaring at him. "What things—Telegraph—" He waved a hand toward the office.

"It is n't that." The boy spoke quickly, the puffs from the engine driving his words aside. Nothing could seem important except that great engine, panting to be off, and the nervous man gripping the rail at his side. "It is n't that, sir. It is my mother and the moving. I must see to that first."

"Oh, they 're coming, are they?" The hand on the rail relaxed.

"Yes, sir."

The president stepped back to the platform. He made an impatient gesture to the engineer and turned to the boy. "How long do you want?" It was the old, sharp tone.

But the boy smiled, looking at him with shining eyes. "We might walk up and down," he suggested.

"Oh, walk—if you want to!" growled Simeon. He fell into a quick trot, matching the boy's stride.

"Things are bad down there!" He jerked out the words. "Damn fool work!"

"Yes, sir."

"And the fault's here." He nodded toward the maze of tracks that stretched away in the dark.

"Tomlinson is an old man," said the boy.

"Old fool!" retorted the other. "Must have been asleep—drunk!"

"I don't think he drinks," said the boy quietly. "The hours are long—he 's old—he may have dropped off."

"He 'll drop off now," said the other grimly, "—way off—How long will it take—this moving business?"

The boy waited a minute. "I want to come now, sir, right off—tomorrow. But my mother is not well—You see we must wait for the right day, and there is the house to look out for and my father—"

"Don't you know I need you?" said Simeon gruffly.

The boy looked at him again. It was plain, even in the obscure light, that the man was driven.... He had never seen him like this; and he thought rapidly. The engine had ceased its puffs, but he felt the great throbbing power waiting there behind it. His blood thrilled to it, drifting in his veins. To be off with this man—shaping the course of a world! They had come to the end of the platform and he stopped, wiping away the great drops that had gathered on his forehead.

"It 's a hot night," said Simeon testily. "Come into the car—get something cool." The tone was almost crafty

and the boy smiled, shaking his head. "Not tonight!"

Already the slow, patient underhold had regained its power. He spoke in his old, slow fashion, choosing his words with care. "I can't go tonight, sir. But I'll come the first thing in the morning, if that will do. A few days won't matter. The moving can wait till this thing is straightened out." He motioned toward the east, where the wreck lay.

They had turned and were pacing back toward the engine. Insensibly Simeon's gait had slowed to the boy's even tread and his breathing had slackened its quick beat. He looked at the great eye blazing toward them through the dusk. "You won't come," he said, "not till you're good and ready. But I tell you—I shall dock your pay!"

The boy laughed out. "I will come tomorrow, sir, if she keeps well."

"Oh, tomorrow!" said Simeon. It might have been years from the tone.

He stepped on to the platform of the car. "I can get along without you," he said. The train had started and the words rumbled back, out of the roar of smoke. But to the boy, standing with his hat in his hand, they were an appeal for help, a call from the whirl and rush of the world for something that he had to give.

He turned away and went down the street, wondering a little at the strangeness of the day.

It was a radiant night.

He looked up to the sky—the same sky that the man in the garden had lifted his face to, a little while ago, kneeling among the plants. But the stars were out now, lighting its gloom. The boy thought suddenly of his mother's eyes and quickened his pace. She would be waiting for him, looking into the dark. He felt a little thrill of pride in her courage. ... She would make the sacrifice for him without a murmur. Yet it was not for him—nor for the man who needed him. But behind him—behind them all—a great hand seemed reaching out to the boy, beckoning him, drawing him to his place in the world.

VII

SPEEDING that night toward Bayport, through the dark and the stars, Simeon Tetlow's thoughts were often on the hoy. He was haunted by the wreck. It was shattered glass, and charred wood, and blood everywhere, and trampled grass and leaves.... But across the face of the wreck moved the hoy's eyes as they had turned to him, following his train into the night.

With the boy again, he could do all that he had ever planned—and more. In spite of his harsh words, flung back as the train started, his heart was aglow. John was coming back to him and together they could work out the plan that held him.... He could not have told the plan to any one; it was hardly articulate, even to himself. He paced up and down the tawdry car, his hands, tense at his sides, opening and closing with the swift thought that crowded upon him. It had been coming to him through the months, while he had groped and wrestled alone. Slowly it had been forming deep below—shaping itself out of life—a vision of service. And today he had seen it stretching before him, unrolling its web of thought as the train tracked the fertile country. All day he had looked out upon wide fields, scarred and broken by late frosts, on orchards and meadows and stretches of plain, half-tilled; and always, in the distance, the mountains, filled to the brim with ore. It was a rich country, but starved, straitened—and no one knew better than the President of the "R. and Q." road the cause of its poverty. Across its length and breadth stretched the road—like a great monster that sprawled, sucking its lifeblood. He had known it, always,—and he had not cared. Let the country take care of itself. There was always enough for the road—and for dividends. He had put them off, when they had come to him begging better rates—leniency in bad seasons. There was not a farmer, up and down the region, that did not know Simeon Tetlow. He had a name among them. "The road was not there for its health." They knew his face as he said it, and they hated it. As he sped through the night, he seemed to feel it closing in upon him—a cloud of malevolence settling upon him from the hills, rising from the valleys, shutting in on every side—and he, alone in its midst, tracking the great country—his hand reaching out to grasp its wealth.... But not now. He had seen it in the slow days that lay behind—a new vision. Sitting alone in his high office, he had watched the great system stretching out—not to drain the wealth of the country, not the huge monster that battered on its strength, but a vital necessity—a thing of veins and arteries, the highway of its life current—without which life itself must cease altogether or run feeble and clogged. The great imagination that could think a railroad into existence had brooded on the picture, sitting alone in its high office, watching the system stretching away, branching in every direction, lighting up the surrounding hills. And today, when the Boy had said he would come back, the man had known that the picture would come true.

The porter had brought in his supper, placing it noiselessly before him on the table, but the president of the road had pushed it from him, leaning a little forward, gazing at the picture that glowed and filled the horizon. He drew his hand hastily across his eyes and the porter moved forward.

"Supper, sah."

"Yes—yes." But he did not stir. His eyes were fixed on the dark window, staring into the night.

The porter reached out a hand to draw down the blind, but the president stayed him with a smile.

"Let it be, Sam. I am ready now."

He ate with quick, nervous motion, his eyes still on the window. Glimmers of light from the hills struck across it—towns glinted and sparkled and slipped into the night. The eyes followed them eagerly—each gleam of light, each flash of power. It was a new country—*his* country. It should be what he chose to make it—a

fertile land.

The supper had been removed and the porter had set down the box of cigars on the table and withdrawn to his own place. The train rumbled through the night with swift shrieks and long, sliding rushes of sound. The president of the road reached out for a cigar. But the hand that held the lighted match trembled and whirred. He threw it aside, with an impatient sound, and struck another, taking the light with quick, tense puffs. It caught the spark and glowed. He dropped the match upon its tray. There was a look in his eyes that was half fear. He had been a man of iron—but the iron was shaken, shattered.... They threw the worn-out engine on the scrap-heap.... But not yet—Give him a year, two years, to make the dream come true. He saw the country bud and blossom and fling its promise on the air. In the ground he heard the grass grow, creeping. The grain beneath the mold could not move its silken filaments so lightly that his ear did not catch the sound; and from the mountains the ore called, loud and free, knocking against its walls. The mountains opened their great sides, and it poured down into the valleys—wealth for all the world—It should come true.... Time and strength—and John!

The cigar had gone out and he tossed it aside, throwing himself on the red cushions and staring at the ceiling that swayed to the swift run of the engine. Then he closed his eyes and the boy's face was before him, smiling. He slept fitfully. The train rumbled and jarred through his sleep, but always with its song of iron courage.

VIII

HERE were no dreams in the eyes of the President of the "R. and Q." road the next morning. The office was a chaos of papers; they lay on the desk and on chairs, and covered the floor. "When John opened the door and stepped in, the president was running distracted fingers through his hair and diving into the chaos. He came up with a grunt.

"I wish you'd find that statement the C. B. and L. sent last month—and be quick about it!"

With a smile the boy hung up his hat and went down on his knees into the chaos, filing, selecting, discarding, with the old care.

Simeon returned to his desk, growling. He took up the telephone receiver and put it to his ear, his scowl alert for blunders.... "What?—No!—You 've copied that wrong—The *last* one—yes.... Tomlinson, I said—not Thompson—Oh, Lord! *Tomlin—L-i-n...*"

John slipped quietly from the room. At the door marked with the bronze token, "President's Office," he paused. The typewriters clattered merrily within and through the ground glass he caught a haze of pompadours rising against the light. He opened the door and looked in. The young women at the typewriters did not look up—except with their shoulders. The one by the large window scowled fixedly at her machine, her fingers fidgeting and thumping the keys. Her mouth wore a look of fine scorn and her blue eyes glinted.

John returned to the outer office. The head bookkeeper looked up with a nod. "Morning, John. Moving along up above!"

The boy nodded a slow reply. "Where is Edith?" he said.

"Oh—Edith?" The man thought a moment with pen suspended. The light from the hanging bulb fell on his lined face. "Edith? Oh, yes. Congdon took her. Billing-room, I guess. Back to stay?"

"Not for long." The boy had disappeared through the swinging door at the end of the room.

The young man seated at another desk in the room followed him with curious glance. "Who is that?" he asked, turning a little on his stool and staring at his companion.

The head bookkeeper nodded absently. "That is John Bennett." His finger was on the column, tracing a blunder to its source.

"And who in hell is John Bennett?" demanded the other slowly.

"You 'll find out—if you stay long enough," replied the head bookkeeper pleasantly. He placed his finger on the column and jotted figures on the little pad at his side. He laid aside the pad. "He 's Simeon Tetlow's shadow," he said. "The two Bridgewater boys over there by the window." He nodded his head. "They call him 'Sissie Johnny.'"

"Looks like a fool and acts like Lord of Creation," muttered the other.

"That 's what he is," said the head bookkeeper. He had no time for conversation just then. He was close on the track of his mistake. Moreover, the assistant bookkeeper was a thorn in his side. The appointment had been none of his—one of old man Tetlow's blunders, he called it savagely when he had time to talk.

The assistant bookkeeper took up his pen, looking at it musingly. He knew, perhaps better than the head bookkeeper, to what he owed his appointment. Six months ago he had been in the employ of the rival road. Just why he had left them was his own affair, as were also the wires that had been pulled in his behalf along the "R. and Q." Well, he was here. He had gathered much interesting information in his six months—information that might be valuable—very valuable—some day. He dipped his pen in the ink.... As for this John Bennett.... The pens were both at work now, flying fast.

"You want Edith?" Congdon, the head billing-clerk, looked up from his file of bills with a little scowl; it changed slowly to pleasure. "Why, how are you, John? Did n't know you were back... Edith—Well, yes, I took her—wanted another hand here. Marshall said they could spare one from the office. So I took the littlest." He smiled genially.

"Littlest and best," said John.

The other laughed out. "I began to suspect it—The old man wants her back?"

"Right off."

Congdon turned a little in his place. "Oh, Edith!" He raised his voice and the girl across the room looked up.

He beckoned to her and she came slowly, leaving her machine with a little touch that was almost a pat, as if

it said, "Coming back very soon."

"Yes, sir." She stood before them waiting, a slight, dark girl, with clear glance.

"Ah," the man's eyes dwelt on her kindly. "They want you back in the office, Edith. You need n't stop to finish.—I 'll put some one else on those."

She turned away with a look that was almost a smile of pleasure. Half way to her table she paused and came back. "I can take my machine, can't I?"

He laughed tolerantly. "Oh, take it along, if you want to—Nobody else wants it."

John followed her to the table. "I 'll carry it for you, Edith."

She slipped out the paper she had been at work on and began gathering up the trifles from her table.

When he set down the machine in the president's office, a ripple of eyebrows passed it by—glances too busy for comment. The clatter of the typewriters rose and hummed. The hive could not pause for a worker more or less. She slipped into her place with a little smile and nod, waiting while John shifted the telephone connection and swung a bulb, with its green shade, conveniently in place.

The little bell rang sharply and she leaned to the receiver. "Hello!"

John crossed to the young woman by the window. She had finished a sheet and was drawing it out with a quick swirl.

"All done?" he asked pleasantly.

She ignored him, rubbing out an offending word and blowing away the black fuzz before she looked up. "What is it?" she said sharply. Her hair, which was red and crisp, glinted as she turned her head.

John's eyes followed it with a little look of pleasure. There was something about that color that always made him happy. He did not know this and it had never occurred to him to be diplomatic. But a hint of a smile crossed the girl's mouth.

"Well?" She was looking at him tolerantly.

He drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "These are to be copied—leaving blanks here, and here—Send a boy when they are done. He wants two carbons—very clear."

"All right." She took them from him with a look of relief. It might be an honor to take down 'the old man's dictation, but it was an honor she could dispense with. She fluffed her fingers toward the glinting hair and descended on the keys.

John stood for a moment, looking thoughtfully at the crisping hair in the wide window-light. The girl had turned her head a little and it twinkled, but did not look up.

As he crossed the room, he glanced casually at the new occupant. Her head was bent to the receiver and a little smile played about her lips. "Yes—yes—yes?—yes." Her fingers moved quickly and she nodded once or twice as if listening to something pleasant. "She *likes* to work for him," thought John, "same as I do."

With a look of satisfaction on his round face he closed the office door behind him. He had accomplished, without a jar, what perhaps no other man in the service could have done. But he was not thinking of this—he hardly knew it. He was planning what Simeon should have for luncheon—something hot and staying....

He reached out a hand to a boy who was hurrying toward the elevator. "Hold up, Sandy. What's that?"

"A note for the president." It was the tone of pride.

John smiled a little as he held out his hand. "I 'll take it to him—and here—" The boy's face had fallen, "Take this—" He wrote hastily on a pad—"Carry that, one o'clock sharp, to the Holman House. They 'll give you a luncheon for the president. Sprint, won't you?"

"You bet." The smile was stealing back to the boyish face.

John nodded. "Bring it up yourself—set it on the box by the door—not later than one, mind."

The boy nodded and was gone, tucking the note in his pocket. It did not occur to him to question the authority of this slow-moving young man—hardly more than a boy himself.

It did not occur to any one to question it, as he made his way in a sort of slow-looking, fast fashion about the building, doing the things, little and big, that came to his hand. One did not think of the boy apart from his eyes. It was as if a spirit dwelt there, guiding the slowness and sureness, and men yielded to it, as they yield to the light when it shines on them.

If the boy had known his power or guessed it, it would have vanished, slipped from him, even while he put out his hand to it. But he had always been slow and stupid—not clever like other boys—and needing time and patience for his work. He knew that it rested his mother to have him do things for her, and that Simeon Tetlow needed him. Beyond that his mind did not travel. He could not have told how he knew men's thoughts—read their minds, almost, when their eyes looked into his—any more than he could have told why certain colors made him happy, or why he had chosen Edith Burton out of the office force for Simeon's private work. Things came to him slowly. He stood motionless, sometimes, waiting—almost stupidly, it seemed—before a piece of work, a decision to be made—but when he put out his hand to it, he held it with firm grasp.

Simeon did not look up when he came back. He was speaking into the telephone, a look of comparative peace on his face.

John swept aside the heap of bills and memoranda that covered the desk across the room. Then he looked about for the dust-cloth. He found it in the pocket of one of Simeon's old coats on the wall. A piece of cheese fell to the floor as he shook it out. And Simeon, looking around as he hung up the receiver, smiled for the first time in weeks.

"So that 's where I put that cheese, is it? I got it one day for luncheon—forgot where I put it—did n't have any luncheon that day at all." He was looking at it regretfully.

John tossed it into the waste basket, a look of disapproval in his face. He wiped the dust from his desk, arranging the files of papers he had collected from the floor and placing them in pigeon-holes.

Simeon watched, a look of something like contentment creeping to his face. "You found that statement

yet?" The question was almost mild.

"Yes, sir." John picked up the paper and handed it to him. "They 've made double charge on those forty boilers, have n't they?" Simeon took it and glared at it. "That 's what I can't find out," he said. "I can't find out." He sighed impatiently and laid it on the desk while he reached for another set of papers.

John, watching the face, was struck anew by the weariness in it. It was the face of an old man.

He held out his hand. "Suppose I take it, sir. I 'll be down in the yard this afternoon and I 'll look it up."

There was a sound of jingling glass outside the partition.

John stepped quickly to the door.

"Here, Sandy. Take this to McElwain in the yard. Tell him I 'll be down in half an hour.—Here 's your luncheon, sir." He brought in the tray and placed it on the table, setting a chair before it and drawing the cork from the bottle. He removed the napkin that covered the tray. "Your luncheon 's ready, sir."

With a sigh of satisfaction, the President of the "R. and Q." Road rose from his desk.

"There's a fresh towel, sir, and I brought up some soap."

With another sigh, the president of the road obeyed.

IX

Simeon was looking over his mail, grumbling and fussing. He pushed a pile of letters toward John when he returned from luncheon. "They're coming in—thick and fast," he said.

"What are they?"

"Damages." He was scowling absently at the sheet in his hand. "Mail was full of it this morning. Here's another." He tossed it to the boy.

John gathered them up, looking at them thoughtfully.

"Take 'em to McKinnon," said Simeon. "He 'll tend to 'em for us."

"Shall I read them first?"

Simeon snorted a little. "Read 'em?—Yes, read 'em, if you want to. You won't find them very entertaining. *I* did n't."

The boy was turning them over slowly.

"I 'll pay 'em—every just claim," said the old man. His shoulders were hunched a little forward, as if he were talking to himself. "I 'll pay the just ones—every last cent. But the fakes can look out—that's all!" His jaw set itself firmly.

The boy had taken them to his desk and was going through them, making notes from them slowly. The heavy look in his face held a kind of pain. He was seeing it again—the wreck—the flare of fire; there were groans about him and shrill calls—hysterical women—and there had been a child.... He glanced across at Simeon.

The old man's face, bent to his work, was gray and haggard. He looked up, meeting the boy's eye.

"It 's a terrible thing!" he said as if answering the look. "I can't get it out of my mind." His hand shook a little reaching for the paper. "I'd give the year's profits—" he said slowly.

"Have to," said the boy quietly.

The shrewd business look flashed back to the man's face. "You can't tell," he said brusquely. "We shall settle 'em out of court—all we can."

"Won't it cost more?"

"A little, maybe. Some we 'll pay a little more, perhaps, than the court would allow. But it 's cheaper—in the end. The public won't get scared. It's bad having things gone over and raked up for folks to read. Let 'em sleep. We 're ready and willing to pay costs—Keep the thing quiet. It's only the fakes that bother—" He gave a little sigh.

The boy was staring at the letter in his hand. He put it down and crossed to Simeon's desk, taking out the handful of notes he had made the night of the wreck. He ran them through his fingers and replaced them, smiling a little. "What's tha?" asked Simeon.

"I wanted to see if I made a note. I don't think I did, but I can remember." He went over and picked up the letter again. "It 's this man Spaulding."

A light shot to Simeon's face.

"I think I saw him there."

"You did!" The light had gone out suddenly. "Fight it—You testify in court."

The boy was looking down at the letter thoughtfully. "It 's a good thing I asked," he said.

"Asked what?"

"His name," said the hoy. "I don't know why I did it. One of the brakemen told me. He limps a little, does n't he?"

"He 's the man," said Simeon promptly. "Rascal! Known him thirty years. He could n't tell the straight truth if he tried—no more 'n he can walk straight." His mouth shut grimly. "He won't get a cent out of *this* road—

not while I run it!"

"I don't think he will," said the boy quietly. "He was there—at the wreck. I saw him. But he came in a buggy."

"Buggy?" Simeon sat up.

The boy nodded. "And he went away in it.—It was while I was looking after the freight—along toward the end. I had sealed the cars that were n't broken up and I was trying to tally odds and ends—Things were scattered, you know?"

The man's eyes assented gloomily.

"I was down in that gully to the left, looking after things, and I came on the horse and buggy tied there—a little way in from the road."

Simeon was smiling now, a look of exultation in his eyes. "You saw him?"

"He came down and got in while I was there—"

"See you?"

"It was a little off in the trees where I was; but I saw him quite plainly. It was getting light then—four o'clock, at least."

Simeon chuckled. He reached out a hand. "Let's have his claim—Twenty thousand, is it?" He looked at it. "Ten cents would buy him—body and soul!" he said scornfully. "Just like him—to hear of it and drive across country—five miles—to get evidence!" He looked at John shrewdly. "Perjury's a good thing—put him where he belongs—where he 'll stay put, too. He won't go driving across country, making up claims for damages for quite a spell, likely, if he pushes this one." He tapped the paper in his hand. "Twenty thousand he wants, does he? Let him get it—work for it—making shoes!" He replaced the letter in his desk.

"We 'll keep that," he said. "We won't trouble McKinnon with it—not just yet."

He returned to his work, a look of satisfaction in his face, and went through the remaining letters, laying them one side, making a note for reference. "That's all!" He placed the last one on its pile and gathered up the bunch. "There 's one thing I 've noticed," he said drily, "folks that get to handing in their claims inside of twenty-four hours ain't very badly damaged."

The boy looked up absently. "Did you mean this, sir?" He had picked up a letter from the pile and he brought it across, laying it on Simeon's desk. Across one corner of it a note was scrawled in Simeon's small, crabbed hand.

He looked at it with a snort. "Why should n't I?" he demanded.

John surveyed it thoughtfully. "I did n't know but you would like to read it again." Simeon took it in his hand. "I've read it a number of times already," he said. "You see what it means, don't you?" He was looking over the top of his glasses at the boy's face.

The boy nodded. "They mean that you will promise to hold to the rates of the last two years."

"They don't say so—"

"It *means* that," said the boy.

Simeon nodded. "That's what I make out. Well—I don't do it—I don't promise the C., B. and L. anything. You understand?—not *anything!*" He was glaring at the boy.

"Yes, sir." He held out a hand. "I only wanted to make sure."

Simeon handed him the letter. "The C., B. and L. is a big road," he said. "They 've got smart men, but they can't run the 'R. and Q.'—not yet." He pointed to the words scrawled in the corner. "You write what I've marked there. Don't let it go downstairs."

The boy went back to his desk.

Simeon wrote with level brows, scowling at the paper before him. By-and-by he looked up. The boy, bending over his desk, had a troubled look. The president of the road watched him a few minutes in silence. He pushed back his papers. "Oh, John—?"

The boy looked up. "Yes, sir."

"Don't you worry about that. It gives them a chance to cut. But they've been doing it all along on the side. I have pretty clear proof they carried Thornton & Birdwell last year for six—five and three-quarters, part of the time, and a rebate besides."

"But this means open fight," said the boy. He was looking down at the note.

"And it 's what I want," said Simeon quickly. "They've had their spies on me long enough. Let 'em come out and fight for what they get."

The boy was still looking at the paper, a question in his eyes. "You don't think they will connect with the Bridgewater terminus?" he said.

Simeon's eyes were on him shrewdly. "I think they 'll *try* to."

"And if they—do—?"

"If they do, they 'll find they can't—not this year, nor next."

The boy looked up quickly.

Simeon nodded. "You remember telling me last year that the Bardwell farm would block their road and that you thought it could be got?"

"I knew they needed money," said John. "They took a fair price," said the old man drily.

The boy's face lighted slowly—"They can't put through their road!"

"Not without a lot of trouble. They can compel us to sell—maybe. But it will take time—and it will take a lot of money," he said grimly.

The boy's face answered the look in his. "You going to fight 'em?"

The man nodded slowly. "I 'm going to fight 'em." He touched the letter with his hand. "Do you know what

that rate would mean for the road?"

"It has paid pretty well for two years," said the boy thoughtfully.

"And it would pay again," said the man. He looked at the boy. "It would pay three years—perhaps four—for the road. But it would n't pay the country."

The boy looked at him, a little puzzled light in his face.

Simeon surveyed him a minute. Then he turned away, as if half ashamed. "What did you find out from McElwain about those boilers?"

The boy glanced at the clock. "He 's to have the statement at five. I 'll get it now." When he had gone from the room, the man sat looking thoughtfully at his desk. He could not understand the feeling that had suddenly gripped him—a kind of shame—holding him back from revealing to the boy his purpose. He had faced the world with selfishness, but when virtue tried to look out from his eyes, they had faltered and turned away.

X

John went slowly down the stairs, pondering the quick words that had been spoken. What did it mean? He had never known the President of the "R. and Q." to give a thought for any one or anything—except the road. He must be going to pieces—talking about the good of the country. ... The boy had always felt, in a vague way, the region hating Simeon—his hand against every man and every man's hand against him—and John had been his henchman, serving him faithfully; his quarrels had been John's quarrels and his battles John's battles. Again and again the boy's heavier hand had steadied his; they had fought to win and they had given no quarter. But now.... The boy's brow puckered in a little puzzled frown.... Now, Simeon was turning his back on profit.... He was bringing on himself difficulties and annoyance—What was up? He shook his head and plunged into the yard.

When he came out, he had forgotten his questioning. He held McElwain's statement.—The C., B. and L. account was a clear overcharge—a mistake, perhaps; but it seemed to the boy there had been too many mistakes of that kind in his absence; and things were coming to the president of the road that should never have troubled him. No wonder he looked harassed and driven. But that should be changed now. He should have the quiet he needed for his work. The boy's heart glowed and he whistled lightly as he sprang up the stairs.

He laid the statement before the president.

The president grunted a little—puffs of smouldering wrath. He searched out the C., B. and L. statement, pinning them together with quick stab.

The boy was gathering up the letters for the mail, licking each stamp and affixing it with slow precision in its corner, right side up. It would have troubled John's orderly soul had an ex-president gone out of the office, standing on his head. In the midst of the work he stopped, his eye held by an address on the envelope before him. He opened his mouth and glanced at Simeon, hesitating. He drew a stamp across the convenient tongue and placed it on the envelope, crowding it down with firm palm, his eye still on the address. He looked again at the president and laid the letter one side, going on with his stamps. When he had finished, he bundled them together, the letter that he had laid aside on top.

Simeon was making ready to go, fussing a little at his desk.

"I 'll take care of those," said John. He came across. "Did you want this to go?" He was holding out the letter.

Simeon dropped an eye to it curtly. "What's the matter with it? It's plain, is n't it—'Hugh Tomlinson, Bridgewater'?" He turned again fretfully to the desk.

The boy hesitated. "I thought it might be his dismissal?" he said.

"It is."

"They 're very poor, sir."

The man shot a look at him under keen brows. "That letter is not about their being poor," he said.

John laid it again on the desk. He brought Simeon's hat, brushing it a little and holding it out.

The man took it brusquely, crowding it on to his head, and moved toward the door. He passed the letter without a glance.

"Good night, sir," said John.

"Good night." It was a half growl, muffled by the closing door.

The boy finished his work in the room. He glanced about; it was all right now, except the grime on the windows—and there must be some sort of shade for them these hot days.... Awnings—? He went to the window and leaned out, looking for fastenings.... Yes, that would do. He would order them in the morning. His eye dropped to the street. It fell on the figure of the president on the opposite side walking slowly and bent like an old man. It almost seemed to the boy watching, that the figure shook a little, as with a kind of palsy. The boy's eyes grew deep, following him out of sight.

Before he had turned away, he became conscious that another figure had emerged from a doorway somewhere and was standing looking after the feeble, retreating one. Then it turned and re-entered the building.

He closed the window, puzzling a little in his mind, half-wondering where he had seen the man before.... He

gathered up the letters from the table, glancing at them absently.... Then it came to him—The new bookkeeper, Harrington. The president had told him—The one that had taken Carpenter's place.

He went out, locking the door behind him. The letter on the top he still held a little apart from the others, dropping it into the box by itself, holding it back to the last, as if hoping somehow to defeat its end. When it fell with a little swish upon the others, he turned away hurriedly. He was thinking of Ellen's face—Tomlinson's wife—the morning of the wreck.

"He done it, Johnny," she had said piteously, wiping the wetness from her gray cheek. "And they 'll turn him off, but it's hard on an old man—and there's not a cent laid by—not since the bairns came. We'd a bit before that, but it went for the boy's burying—" The boy was Eddie, killed on the road the year before, a brakeman—Tomlinson's only son. John had known him well. They had been schoolmates. "It's hard on the bairns," she had said.... They had come to live with Tomlinson—a boy and a girl.

He was walking slowly now, not thinking, hardly conscious of himself, hut feeling the misery in the old woman's voice. At the corner he paused a little, staring at the opposite wall. What had he forgotten to do.... The desks were locked and the door.... His fingers felt the key in his pocket.... And the copy was ready for Whitcomb in the morning.... And the windows? Yes, they were closed.... But he must go hack. He would remember when he got there what it was.... With a little sigh he had turned back. He walked more quickly now.... He would measure the windows for the awnings. Perhaps that was what he was trying to remember. He sprang up the stairs quickly and was on the upper floor almost before there was time for thought. His coming had been swift, and perhaps too silent for a man in the upper loft who looked up with startled glance at the sound of a foot on the stair. He moved quickly from the place he had been standing in and met the boy half way in the big room, his glance full of nonchalance.

John stared at him a little. Then his brow raised itself.

The man returned the look, smiling. "Jolly old place!" he said, moving his hand toward the loft, "lots of room."

The boy looked at him slowly. "No one comes up here," he said.

"Except the old man. I know," said the other pleasantly, "but I wanted some files for the morning—early. Thought I 'd save time getting them now—Save bothering the old man, too."

"You did n't find them, did you?" He was looking into the man's eyes.

They flickered a little. "Well, I have n't had time." He laughed, easily. "I only want a couple of dozen." He moved away a few steps.

"You won't find them here," said John.

"They 're over here," said the man, looking back.

"I guess not."

The man moved quickly to a box and raised the cover.

The boy looked in with a startled glance. "Those belong on the third floor," he said sharply.

"Very likely," said the man. "I don't know about that. I 'm new here." He had taken out a handful of the files and closed the box. "I don't run the business, you know. But I know where to find things when I want 'em." He spoke almost as if the last words had escaped without volition. It was a challenge to the clear eyes looking into his.

"They will be moved down tomorrow," said the boy. "They will be more convenient down there," he added.

"That's all right," said the other smoothly. He had recovered his temper. "Glad to have seen you." He went softly down the stairs, with little tripping steps that tapped.

The boy's eyes followed him slowly. He went into the office and closed the door behind him. For a long minute he stood looking at Simeon's desk. Then he went across to it. He sat down before it and tried the lid. It was locked securely, as he had left it. He did not open it, but sat motionless, gazing before him. Dusk settled in the room—shadows crept in from the comers. But the boy had not stirred.... At last he raised himself with a little sigh. He had come back none too soon. His slow, sensitive nature felt things that he could not have said. The president needed him—more than either of them had known! He opened the desk deliberately and took out a handful of papers, sorting out certain ones with mechanical fingers. Even in the dark he knew them; but he turned on the light for a minute to make sure; he selected certain ones and placed them together, slipping them into his pocket. Then he turned out the little looping bulbs and went out, and left the room to the darkness.

XI

THE next morning a new lock was on the office door and the key lay on the president's desk when he came in. He glanced at it sharply. "What's that?"

"I 've had a new lock put on; the old one was never very good," said the boy.

The man took up the key and slipped it on to his key-ring without comment. A hundred times a day the boy did things without consulting him. If he saw any special significance in this new caution, his face gave no sign and his hand, as it slipped the ring into his pocket, trembled no more than usual. But his glance, as it fell on the boy through the day, held a quiet content.

Just how wrong things had been going for the last few weeks only the president of the road knew. It seemed

almost as if there were a concerted plan to harrow him—some hidden power, that chose maliciously his weakest spot, at the moment when he was most off his guard. Yet he could never lay his finger on a thing or a person that proved it. He only felt, helplessly enmeshed by circumstance—he, who had always driven others, chuckling at their discomfiture! But with the boy to help—Ah, what could he not do—with the boy! His face lost its driven look. The new awnings shaded the glare from the windows. It was almost comfortable in the little office.

As for the boy, he was watching over Simeon with new care. Not only did what he had seen the night before make him cautious, but Simeon's whole attitude troubled him. There was something about the man—broken, hesitant—that had never been there before. He had always been nervous, crabbed, but not like this. It was as if the spring had snapped—or weakened helplessly under the long strain. One could not tell, at any moment, whether it would respond to the demands made on it. Now and then he recovered himself and spoke and acted like his old self. But again he would relapse into uncertainty, a kind of vague fretfulness and indecision, more trying than open collapse. It was when he spoke of the road and its future that he grew most like himself. ... Quietly the boy took it in—his change of purpose—and his heart moved to it in gentle understanding. Little by little, Simeon revealed himself—a word here, a word there—never by full explanation—watching all the time the thought reflected in the boy's eyes, and strengthening his courage in the clear look as it grew and deepened.

The boy threw himself into the work, body and soul. It was good to be in the stir of things once more. He liked to feel the steady pound of the engine under him, as it drove to its work—to see the clear track and the shining country.... He drew his breath full and deep, and worked night and day, righting the things that had gone wrong, gathering details into his hands.

Simeon Tetlow could plan an edifice that in a night should overtop the world. But even while he planned, he let slip a myriad details—things that fluttered and fell and went wrong and threatened the structure at its proudest foment. The boy gathered them up one by one, little things of no account, things too minute for Simeon's notice—and held them fast.

The office felt the change. The road felt it—vaguely. There was the same driving power in the little office, high up in the roof, but steadied and controlled—less smoke and wrath and ringing of bells in the orders that came down from the office and a freer, heavier swing to the big engine as it took the track.

It was absorbing work, and two weeks went by before the boy saw a chance to break away. There had been letters from his mother every day, full of detail—pictures of Caleb packing the dishes with clumsy fingers, or clearing out the cellar, happy and important, in spite of the parting from the squashes. John had smiled as he read the letters, but he had caught the note of courage beneath and sent it back to her full of cheer.... The moving would not be hard—with all that father had been doing. Three days would be enough for everything and he had their new home ready for them, a little house—seven rooms with a garden stretching to the side and back, for Caleb to dig in.

"I can raise a few things this year," Caleb had said when he heard it—"Lettuce and parsley and reddishes, maybe. And next year we 'll have a *real* garden. I'm going to take up some roots of daffydils and some jonquils and a stalk of that flowering shrub by the walk."

He was occupied with this new hope when John arrived—pottering about with hoe and trowel—and they left him to his garden, while inside the house John tied up furniture and packed boxes, with watchful eye upon his mother that she should not overtax her strength before the journey. She had been a little restless the first day of his homecoming, going from room to room with long pauses for rest—a kind of slow pilgrimage—touching the familiar things softly, her thin hands lingering on them as if she might not see them again in the new home.

The boy watched a little anxiously. But her face was still and her eyes smiling when they met his, and after the first day she sat with him while he packed, talking of their new home and his work, and when the carriage left the house, she did not look back—her eyes were on the boy's face.

It had been arranged that they should travel in the baggage-car. Simeon had spoken gruffly of the special and John had refused it, and she herself had chosen the baggage-car. "It will interest me, I think," she said. There was a free space about her steamer-chair and through the partly-open door that framed a great picture a fresh breeze blew in, stirring her hair and bringing a clear color to her cheeks. Her eyes were like stars, looking out on the fields, and she grew like a child with the miles. John's heart lightened as he watched her. What a thing of courage she was! Sheer courage. Just a frail body to give it foothold on the earth. The boy could not have said it, but he felt it—through every dull fiber—the courage that he could never match, but that had been before every day of life.... He need not have feared the journey for her—She made holiday of it!

After a little he left her and went forward. He had seen a man sitting at the farther end of the car, bent forward, his elbows resting on his knees, his gaze on the floor of the car.

He did not look up as John paused beside him, and the boy seated himself on a box.

After a time he looked up. "You 're taking her to the Port?" He nodded toward the steamer-chair.

"We 're all going down."

"I heerd it," said the man. He relapsed into silence. The train thundered on with hoarse stops and fierce quickening of power as it left the stations behind.

The man lifted his head. "He 's a hard man!" he said. He fixed his reddened eyes on the boy's face. "I've served the road—man and boy—forty year." He said the words slowly, as if they were important. They became a kind of chant in the roar of the train—"And now I'm turned off."

John waited a minute. His slow mind did not find words to speak to the haggard face. "I'm going down to see him," said the man. "The president!"

He nodded slowly and solemnly. "They say he 's a hard man. But he shall hear it to his face—what I 've got to say!"

"You 're going to ask him for work?"

"I 've asked it—three times. I 'll ask it four times," said the man. "And after that I 'll curse him."

The boy made a quick motion.

The old face lifted itself, with a tragic look, toward the car. "Is there aught a man can do?" he demanded. "They 've shook the strength out of me for forty year on the road.... They 'll not take it from me! ... They 've drove me up and down—cold and rain—wind that cut my in'ards—till I 'm fit for naught but the switch.... They 'll not take it from me!" It was a solemn cry.

The boy listened to it, for a moment, as it died away. The train roared its echo mockingly. He reached out a hand and laid it on the rough knee. "Don't go down today, Tomlinson," he said slowly. "I want to see him first."

The old man stared at him with grim eyes. "Ye think ye can help me with him?" he asked sharply.

"I *know* I can. But you must wait. I have my mother to look after. I can't be at the office—yet. Wait till I 'm there. You take the next train back and I 'll write you."

"I 'll not go back," said the old man slowly, "I 'll not face Ellen without news—good or bad. But I 'll stop off to my daughter's—in Hudson. Ye can write me there and I 'll come."

"I 'll write you before the week 's up," said John. "You may not need to come down."

"I thank ye, Johnny," said the old man. The train had halted at Hudson and he got stiffly to his feet.

"It 's what Eddie al'ays said about you, you 'd help a man out—gi'e you time!" He chuckled feebly, with returning hope, and climbed down from the car.

His mother's glance met him as he returned to her side.

He nodded. "He was going down to see the president. But I 've got him to wait.... They ought to do something for him," he said.

"Is he strong enough to work?"

"He's not strong—except in an emergency, maybe—but he 's faithful. That ought to count."

"Yes, that ought to count." She said the words softly under her breath.

XII

JOHNN was not back at the office "within the week." He forgot the office and Simeon Tetlow and Tomlinson. He had eyes only for a white face looking up to him from the pillow and his ear listened only for low moans that broke the darkness. The spirit of courage had driven the thin body a step beyond the line where the soul has its way, and the body had turned and struck back.

Tomlinson, waiting in his daughter's home, wondered a little at the silence, but waited, on the whole, content. Since his talk with John a hope had sprung up in him that, somehow, the boy would do for him what he could never do for himself. He had started out for Bayport more because he wanted to look Simeon Tetlow in the face than because he hoped for justice at his hands. But since he had talked with the hoy, his purpose had changed imperceptibly and his shrewd Scotch sense of justice asserted itself. He would speak the president of the road fair. The man should have his chance. He should not be condemned unheard. So Tomlinson waited, his sullen mood passing gently into tolerance.

But his daughter, a buxom woman, many years Eddie's senior, grew impatient at the delay. She prodded Tomlinson a little for his inaction.

"What is it like, that Johnny Bennett—a slip of a boy—can do for ye with Simeon Tetlow?" she had demanded scornfully when the week had gone by and no word had come.

"He has a way ye can trust, Jennie—the boy has," the old man had replied.

"Best trust yourself," said the woman.

"Go and stan' up before Sim Tetlow. Tell him to his face what ye want. And if he won't give it to ye—then *curse him!*"

So the old man wavered forth, half driven to a task to which he felt himself unequal. But his reliance was on the boy. He would find him and ask what to do.

"John Bennett?" The assistant bookkeeper, hurrying back from luncheon a little late, paused in the doorway, looking at the tall, red-eyed Scotchman who put the anxious question.

"John Bennett?" He wrinkled his brow a little, as if trying to place so unimportant a person—"I think he works up above—top floor. Take the elevator." He passed on, chuckling a little at the invasion of the sacred territory. "'Nobody comes up here,'" he said mincingly, as he drew the ledger toward him and plunged into work, harrying to make ap lost time.

Tomlinson looked a little fearfully at the iron cage, plying up and down. He cast an eye about for the more friendly stairway. He was not afraid of any engine, however mighty and plunging, that held to solid earth, keeping its track with open sky; but these prisoned forces and office slaves, clacking back and forth in their narrow walls, and elevators knocking at a man's stomach, were less to his mind. He climbed laboriously up the long stairs, flight after flight, his spent breath gasping at each turn. At the top floor he gazed around him, his mouth a little open.

"A queer place for the lad," he said to himself, his faith in John oozing a little as he walked across and knocked at the door of the room.

There was a moment's silence; then the scraping legs of a chair, and silence.

Tomlinson had raised his hand ready to rap again. The door receded before his knuckles....

It was the president of the road, himself, Simeon Tetlow—whom all men hated and feared—standing there grim and terrible.

Tomlinson's nerveless hand rose to his hat.

"I'm wanting to ask you something, sir."

The man surveyed him with a scowl. "Who told you to come up here?" he demanded.

"It were Johnny Bennett, sir."

The scowling face changed subtly. It seemed to grow more human beneath its mask.

Tomlinson took heart. "It's only a word I want with you, sir."

"Come in."

Tomlinson shut the door circumspectly and stood turning his hat in his fingers.

"Well?"

"It 's the place, sir—I 'm Tomlinson," he said. "*Oh—you—are—Tomlinson—*"

The old man shrank a little, as if each word had struck him lightly in the face. Then he raised his head. "I 've served the road forty year," he said, repeating his lesson, "and I've never done harm. I've worked early and I've worked late for ye, and never a word of complaint."

The president of the road stirred sharply. "The Bridgewater wreck—"

The old man raised his hand. "It's that I wanted to speak about, Mr. Tetlow." There was a simple dignity in the words. "I'd been on duty seventeen hour—and ten hour before that—with not a wink of sleep. They run us hard on the hours, sir."

"The other men stand it—the young men." The words had a kind of cutting emphasis.

The old man raised his red eyes. "They've not gi'ed their strength to the road, sir, as I have—" He threw out a hand. "The road's had all o' me."

Simeon eyed him keenly, the bent look and worn shoulders. His glance traveled up and down the thin frame slowly.... Not an ounce of work left in him.

"We 've no place for incompetents," he said, turning away.

Tomlinson made a step forward, as if he would touch him with his hands. Then he stood quiet. "There might be a boy's place, sir—"

The man wheeled sharply, driven without and within—"I tell you we've nothing for you. You 've done your work. You 've had your pay. You 're used up." It was the biting truth and the old man shrank before it.

"I can't spend any more time on you," said the president of the road. He turned decisively to his desk.

For a moment Tomlinson stood with bent head. Then he raised his red-rimmed eyes, fixing them on the man before him. His right hand lifted itself significantly. "May the God in heaven curse ye, Simeon Tetlow, as ye have cursed me this day. May He shrivel ye, body and soul, in hell—" The words were shrill. "Curse ye—curse ye!"

He drew a step nearer, his eyes still on the other's face.... Gradually a change seemed to come over him. The bent figure straightened itself. It towered above the president of the road, filling the little room. The chieftain of some mighty Highland clan might have stood thus, defying his enemy. His lifted right hand grew tense and flung itself, and a torrent of broad Scotch poured forth. Words of fire, heard in Tomlinson's boyhood and forgotten long since, were on his tongue. The elemental passions were afire within him. Like the slow-burning peat of his native bogs, his soul, nourishing its spark through the years, had blazed forth—a scorching torrent. The words rolled on, a mighty flood, enveloping the man before him. Scathing tongues of flame darted at him and drew back, and leaped high—to fall in fiery, stinging showers on his head.

At the first words of the imprecation the president of the road had lifted his head with a little smile—almost of scorn—on his lips, as one might watch some domestic animal reverting to its ancestral rage. But as the broad Scotch rolled on—stem, implacable and sinister—the smile faded a little and the man seemed to shrivel where he stood, as if some fiery blast touched him. When he raised his head again, the look in his eyes was of cold steel.

He waited a minute after the voice had ceased, then he lifted his hand quietly. "You 've had your say, Tomlinson. Now I 'll say mine—You leave this office and you leave the road. You 'll never touch brake or throttle or switch on it again. You 're not fit—do you understand!"

He moved his hand toward the door and Tomlinson went out, a tottering old man once more.

For a long minute the president of the road stood staring at the closed door. The hand that had pointed to it had not trembled; but now it began subtly, as if of its own will, to move. Slowly the vibration communicated itself to the whole frame till the man threw himself into a chair, broken from head to foot. He leaned toward his desk, gasping a little. "My God!" he said under his breath, "My God!" He lifted his hand and wiped the moisture from his forehead with the dazed look of one who has come through some mighty upheaval unharmed.

Another week went by before John was free to go back. The day before his return he received a letter, addressed in a huge, sprawling hand:

I seen him. I cursed him.

Hugh Tomlinson.

Simeon made no reference to the visit or the curse, and John waited, wondering a little whether it might be possible, even now, to undo the consequences of the old man's folly.

That there was any connection between Simeon's growing weakness and the old Scotchman's visit did not occur to him. There were difficulties enough in the office to account for it without going outside. As the days went by and he watched the worn face, he grew more anxious. A look haunted the eyes—something almost crafty—they gazed at the simplest thing as if unseen terror lurked in it; and he started at any sudden noise as one pursued.... When John, leaning across the desk, pushed a book to the floor, he leaped to his feet, his hand upraised to strike, his lip drawn back from his teeth in quick rage.

That night John made a midnight journey, traveling all night and coming back at dawn. He had been to consult Dr. Blake, the great specialist, laying the case before him—withholding only the name of the man whose health was in question.

The physician had listened, his head a little bent, his eyes looking out as if seeing the man whom John described. "It's the same story—I hear it every day," he said. "I call it Ameri-canitis—It does n't make much difference what you call it.... He must stop work—at once."

"He won't do it," said John as promptly.

The physician looked at him keenly. "I suppose not—one of the symptoms. You have influence with him—?"

John shook his head slowly. "Not enough for that. I might get him to do other things, perhaps."

The physician nodded.

"He would take medicine?"

John smiled at the picture.

"Perhaps." He waited a little. "I 'm afraid he 's losing his mind," he said. "That's really what I want to know—I don't dare let him go on."

The physician assented. "If I could see him ten minutes, I could tell, perhaps—more. But not in the dark, like this. You ask too much," he said with a smile.

John gave a quick sigh. "He will never come to you," he said.

The physician had drawn a paper toward him and was writing on it. "I can give certain general directions. If they don't help, he *must* come."

John waited while the pen scratched on. "These baths," said the physician, "are good. They may help."

John's eyes grew dubious—a little wide with anxiety.

"These other things," went on the physician, "are for your discretion. He 's probably under-nourished. Raw eggs will give him what he needs—tax him least."

"How many?" asked John.

"All you can get into him."

The young man's eyes grew larger—at the way before him....

"He does n't half breathe, I suppose?"

"I—I don't know," said John.

"Watch him. Take him in hand. He must breathe deep—all the time, night and day. Here, I will show you." He put his hand on the young man's chest. "Go on—I 'll tell you when to stop—" He held the hand in place a few minutes, then he withdrew it with a smile. "Tell him to breathe like that," he said quietly. "He 'll get well then."

"Don't everybody breathe that way?" asked the youth helplessly.

The physician laughed out. "If they did, they would n't be nervous wrecks." He handed him the list of instructions. "He must be spared any nervous worry, of course. That is the most important of all. Good-by. If he gets unmanageable, send him to me."

"I wish I could," said John with a little smile that was half a frown. He was not appalled at the details of nursing thrust upon him. He had cared for his mother too long and skilfully to be worried by these. But Simeon—yielding gracefully to being dieted—told what to eat and how to breathe and little things like that—!

During the home journey he devoted himself to planning ambushes for Simeon's obstinacy; and when, after a vigorous bath, he arrived at the office, he was equipped with a dozen "strictly fresh" eggs in a paper bag; a small egg-beater in one pocket and a flask of brandy in the other. This last was a little addition of John's own—prompted by wisdom, and a knowledge of Simeon. He put the eggs carefully on a high shelf. It would not do to rouse untimely prejudice against them by untoward accidents. The egg-beater and brandy he concealed skilfully behind a row of ledgers. When Simeon entered a little later, irritable and suspicious, there was no sign that the office was to be turned into a kind of fresh air hospital.

The windows were open and a little breeze came in. John, refreshed by his bath, was hard at work, the broad, phlegmatic back a kind of huge mountain of strength. The little man threw himself into his chair with a grunt. He would rest more looking at that back than he could in a bed all night, tossing and turning through the hours.

Schemes had haunted him—visions for the road—New tracks to be run—new regulations. Investments along the route, a little here and a little there, not for the corporation, but to build up the country—capital to help out feeble enterprises. And athwart the visions ran black shadows—disturbing dreams of the C., B. and L., always waiting, weapon in hand, to spring upon him.... If only they would fight fair! He had tossed restlessly, seeking a cool place for his tired head. There was no time to spend in fighting.—So much to be

done—his whole life-work to build anew.... Then he had fallen again to staring at the vision as it flared across the night, the vision of light and wonder.... When morning came, he had slept perhaps an hour..

But here, in the cool office, he could rest. The boy came and went with quiet step, his hand everywhere, yet without hurry, and his thought running always ahead of Simeon's, smoothing the way.

The president of the road had intended to rest, but before he knew it, he was hurrying feverishly to finish a letter for the ten o'clock mail. His head throbbed and his hand, as it dipped the pen in the ink, shook quick spatters across the paper. He swore under his breath, dabbing the blotter here and there.... There was a gentle shiver of egg shell, a little whirring sound that buzzed, and then, upon the air of the room, a subtle, pervasive odor. Simeon raised his head and sniffed. Then he looked around. The boy was at his elbow.

"You'd better take this, sir," he said casually. He set it down beside him, picked up a pile of papers and returned to his own desk.

Simeon dropped an eye to the glass of yellow foam. He looked hastily away. He particularly and fervently hated an egg—and an egg that foamed—"Bah!" He wrote savagely, the gentle odor stealing up woingly, appealingly to his nostrils. He moved restlessly in his chair, throwing back his head, as if to shake it off. Then his hand reached out slowly—shook a little—and closed upon it.

John, with his back to him, went on slowly sorting papers. When he looked around, the glass, with its little flecks of foam, stood empty and Simeon was writing fiercely. The boy took the glass to the faucet and washed it, humming a little, gentle tune to himself as the water ran. The first step in a long and difficult way had been taken.

But no one knew better than John that it was only a first step and that the road ahead was strewn with difficulties.... It was at the seventh egg that Simeon rebelled openly, and John was forced to retire upon six-thankful to have achieved as much as this, and thankful to have discovered the limit. "As many as you can get into him," the physician had said. John had not known what this number might be, until the day of the explosion—when the seventh egg was proffered and rejected.

He had swept up the fragments of glass and repaired damages with grateful heart.... Six a day was the limit. But there ought to be a great deal of nourishment in six eggs.

That there was, Simeon's conduct proved. He rose to a kind of new, fierce strength that exhausted itself each day.

"He 's just eggs!" thought the youth, watching him gloomily. "He has n't gained an inch. It all goes into work." And he set himself anew to spare the nervous, driven frame.

There were times when he hoped, for a little, that a permanent gain had been made. But an emergency would arise and three days would be used up in one blaze of wrath.

The C., B. and L. was tireless in its attacks, goading him on, nagging him—now here, now there—till he shook his nervous fists, palpitating, in air.

"They've held back those machines on purpose," he said, one morning, late in September.

"Those machines" were a consignment of harvesters, sidetracked somewhere along the C., B. and L. and not to be located. The "B. and Q." had been telegraphing frantically for weeks—only to receive cool and regretful apologies. Farmers were besieging the road. A whole crop depended on the issue.

Simeon tossed the last telegram to John with a grunt. "We 'll have to give it up," he said grimly, "it's too late. But they shall pay for it—if there is a law in the land, they shall make it good—every cent. Think of that crop—wasted for deviltry!" He groaned suddenly and the hand resting on the desk trembled heavily.

"You could n't have helped it, sir," said John. "They would have done it, anyway, and you've made them trouble enough."

"I don't know—I don't know." He turned his head restlessly, as if pursued. "I think any other man would have made 'em."

The young man laughed out. "They 're afraid of you, sir—for their life! You 've *made* the 'R. and Q.'"

The man gulped a little. He glanced suspiciously at the door. "I've ruined it, I think," he said slowly. "*There 's a curse on everything I touch!*"

"Nonsense! Look at *me!*" The young man threw back his head, choosing the first words at hand to banish the look in Simeon's face. It was this look—the shadow haunting the eyes, that troubled him. Sometimes when he turned and caught it, his own heart seemed suddenly to stop its beat, at what it saw there. "Look at me!" he said laughing. "You have n't ruined *me!*"

The man looked at him—a long, slow, hopeless look. Then he shook his head. "It's no use, John. I'm broken—! The road has used all of me—" He stopped suddenly, his gaze fixed on the floor.... A memory rang in his ear. The high Scotch voice thrilled through it. "They've not gi'e their strength to the road, as I have. The road's had all o' me."

That night John visited Dr. Blake again.

XIV

The assistant bookkeeper had returned from his two weeks' vacation—most of which had been spent in the vicinity of the main offices of the C., B. and L.—feeling a little sore. He had not been treated with the respect due to a person entrusted with important interests. Certain reports which represented

hours of faithful work had been looked upon as of little worth, and others—facts most difficult, even dangerous, to obtain—had been demanded crassly. Moreover, his statement that the president of the “R. and Q.” was practically a broken-down man had been openly flouted.

“You don’t know him,” the manager of the C., B. and L. had declared, sitting back in his big chair. “He’s been a broken-down man for years. I’d like to be broken-down, myself, the way he is, a little while!” Eds chair creaked comfortably. “He ’s a steel trap! That ’s what he is!” he said sharply. “Look out for your fingers.”

The assistant bookkeeper had smiled ruefully, rubbing the fingers together. “Of course, I’ve never seen him before,” he said respectfully, “but if I know a man that ’s pretty near frazzled out—he ’s the man. There’s nothing to him but a blaze.”

“You don’t know him,” said the manager brusquely. He took a sealed envelope from the desk and held it out.... “When you report again, we want the names of all parties shipping, with rates—and rebates,” he added significantly. “This won’t do, you know.” He tapped the report that had cost the assistant bookkeeper many anxious hours—lightly with his finger.

The bookkeeper, whose hand almost of itself had reached out for the envelope, hesitated a little. “I don’t know that I shall stay with the ‘R. and Q.,’” he said softly.

“Don’t you!” The manager’s keen eyes read his little soul through—and smiled. “You have n’t any particular position in mind where you can draw a better salary for keeping one set of books, have you!”

“I don’t know that I have—just now.” The tone was defiant—but wobbly.

“All right, stay where you are. You won’t do better. Take my advice. You ’re getting along all right.”

The assistant bookkeeper glanced again at the envelope—and took it. “You better see Tetlow, yourself,” he said as he went out.

The manager nodded. “You ’re all right,” he repeated.

“Harrington will bear watching,” he said to the division superintendent. “I don’t trust him.”

“Don’t trust anybody,” said the superintendent. “You won’t get fooled.”

“I wish I knew the truth about Sim Tetlow,” went on the other. “It would be just like him to pretend he was a wreck, and then spring on us and paw us all over while we ’re getting ready to squeeze him.... You can’t trust Harrington. He works for his pay.” He touched the report a little scornfully. “But who knows that Tetlow is n’t paying him—to say that he ’s a wreck—That makes three salaries—?”

“Go and see for yourself,” said the other curtly.

The manager’s face grew thoughtful. The shrewd light spread to his fat cheeks. “It ’s a good idea. I ’ll do it—right off.”

XV

JOHNS’S second visit to Dr. Blake was much briefer than the first. The doctor had refused to advise further without direct consultation. “I must see the man,” he said decisively.

And when John had demurred, he had asked the patient’s name.

“Simeon Tetlow!” he said thoughtfully, but smiling a little. “Why did n’t you tell me at first it was Sim Tetlow?”

“Do you know him?” asked John.

“I knew him years ago, in college. He was n’t what he is now—more human blood. I knew him pretty well up to the time he was married.”

John looked up. “I did n’t know he was married!”

“A beautiful woman,” said the doctor, “too good for him—She died the next year—and the baby—That was twenty years ago and more..... So it’s Sim! I might have guessed. There is n’t a man in a thousand miles that fits the case as he does—Driving himself to death!”

The young man waited directions.

“Send him to me,” said the doctor. “He ’ll come—Yes. He won’t mind seeing *me!*” He laughed a little.

John started for home with lighter heart. Simeon would obey the great doctor—and all would be well. He even slept a little on the way. But when the train reached Bay-port, it was not yet three o’clock. He hesitated as he left the station. He had not expected to reach home before morning and his mother was not expecting him. She would be sure to waken—perhaps lie awake the rest of the night. He turned his steps toward the “R. and Q.” office building. There was a cushioned settle in the little upper office; he had had it brought in lately—in the hope that Simeon would use it. He would spend the rest of the night there, and be on hand in the morning.

He turned the key noiselessly in the lock and went in. The great building lay silent and shadowy as he made his way from room to room, up flight after flight of long stairs, guided only by the sense of touch and familiarity. The darkness about him seemed filled with whispers—plots, counterplots. He felt them vaguely, as he climbed—yet with a certain serenity of heart. Simeon would see Dr. Blake. All would be right. Let the master of the road once be master of himself and the shadows would melt. He crossed the upper loft and went into the little room. The air was stifling, after the freshness outside, and he threw open the windows,

leaning out to breathe deep. He heard the roar of the engine coming into the yard on the still air and saw the lights gleam through the smoke.

It was a wonderful night. The deep September sky twinkled with stars and far below him, the city, dark and mysterious and sad, lifted its glimmering lamps. They broke the darkness, luminous, faint—like some inner meaning. The youth looking down had a sudden, quickened sense of power, vast issues, mighty interests. The city slept at his feet, beautiful, relaxed. Fold upon fold of darkness wrapped it round and his heart went out to it—helpless there in the darkness—and in its midst, Simeon—asleep or awake—waiting the new day. A fresh loyalty to the man swelled within him. The sleeping city touched him in a way he could not name—its mighty power cradled in the night in sleep.

He threw himself on the couch and slept.

It was the lightest click... but he sat up, his eyes fixed on darkness. The lock clicked again and the door swung open. He felt it move softly through the black, and close again. A footstep crossed the floor. John waited. He was leaning forward, staring before him, his slow mind wrestling with the sounds that came and went, lightly. He was unarmed. He had only his hands; he clinched them a little and felt the muscles swell behind them. He was not altogether defenceless!

The sounds puzzled him. They were methodical, deliberate—not as if finding out the way, but as if accustomed to the place and to darkness. ... Simeon Tetlow, himself?—The thought flashed at him and drew back. ... A light stole through the gloom—the focused glow of the electric pocket candle on a desk across the room—Simeon's desk.

John leaned forward, holding his breath.

... Behind the candle, a vague form—a massive head and shoulders, bending above the lock of the desk.... The key was fitted in and the top lifted. Then, for the first time, the man seemed to hesitate, his head turning itself a little in the shadow and waiting, as if disturbed. The glow of the candle suddenly went out and the steps moved stealthily. John straightened himself—the clinched hand ready.... The steps receded slowly and a hand fumbled at the open window, lowering it without sound and drawing down the thick shade. The man moved to the other window and closed it. The youth on the lounge caught the muttered sound of his own name, as if in imprecation.... Then the steps again. ... And suddenly the soft candle—shining in the dark.

The man reached into the half-gloom of the desk for a ledger. He seemed to know without hesitation which he wanted. He opened it and fell to work, apparently in the middle of a page, the sinister eye of the candle traveling up and down the columns, the scratching pen transcribing figures to a kind of muttered accompaniment.

John recognized the book, in the shadowy light.... He ought not to have left it there. He had more than half guessed this thing before.... So this was the reason why Hemenway & Hill countermanded their order for fifty cars, a week ago, and Gardner & Hutchinson changed their mind about shipping their wheat the thirtieth... and this thing had been going on for weeks?—months?... No, it was only within six weeks that the book had been tampered with.... His mind ran back over the time, fitting each coincidence in place.... So this was it! It was state prison for the man.... But suppose he were not arrested?... Suppose he were let to go free—in fear of his life.... John, watching, gauged the man, sitting there in the night, his busy pen writing his own doom.... He should go on sending the reports. The enemy should have their bulletin from day to day, but it should be compiled by John Bennett. The scribe should have only the work of copying.... It might save time if the arrangement were completed now. He moved his hand a trifle toward the wall behind him, groping a little. The next minute the room was a blaze of light and the man at the desk was on his feet, stifling a quick cry—blinking at the looping bulbs of light. He made a swift step toward the door; but some one, broad-shouldered and smiling, stood against it.

"Sit down, Harrington," said John quietly.

The man's hands swung out blindly. Then they fell to his sides. He was panting a little, as if he had come a long distance. But his eyes were fixed on John's face with a little sneer. "Think you 're clever, don't you!" he said doggedly.

"I wish I were," said John, "though it does n't seem to have done you much good," he added after a moment.

The man's fingers were fumbling at the desk, striving to gather up and destroy the papers jotted with figures.

"Let those alone!" said John.

The fingers ceased their work, but they still moved restlessly, playing on the air. The sudden fright had done its work.... Quietly, bit by bit, John laid the plan before him.

"But I tell you I don't *dare* do it," said the man. His voice was a kind of shrill moan.

"Do you dare *not* to?" asked the young man.

There was silence in the room.

"All right." It was crafty, with a sullen note just below the surface. "You give me the figures and I 'll copy 'em and send 'em."

"I will send them," said John slowly, "and so long as you play fair, no one else knows it. But if you betray us by one breath—I give the matter over to President Tetlow—"

The man had started. "No,—You won't do that—No!" He was almost cowering before him.

John smiled a little, looking down at him. So it was still a name to conjure with! His mind wandered inconsequently to the bag of eggs on the high shelf and the egg-beater hanging on its nail behind the cupboard door. The man little knew that they were President Tetlow. He was still a terror to evil doers. "One breath—and I tell him!" said John sternly.

The man shrank a little. "I 'll do it," he said. He, himself, could not have accounted for the fear that held him. He knew that the president of the "R. and Q." road was a broken man; he had sworn it to the manager of the C. B. and L.; but none the less he was afraid. A phrase that he had heard long since, stirred in his mind

—“You don’t cross Sim Tetlow and live!” He wanted to live—the assistant bookkeeper—he desired earnestly to live—and to prosper. He had done his best for years—Yet it seemed always to evade him.

“I ’ll do it all right for you—I ’ll act on the square,” he said magnanimously.

“Oh, no—You ’ll do what you have to,” said John.

A sudden hatred of this young man flared in the assistant bookkeeper’s heart. Then he remembered the look in Nixon’s face—manager of the C. B. and L.—the day he had seen him last. It struck him that the two looks were curiously alike. “I hate Nixon!” he said viciously, “I ’ll be glad to get one on him.”

“Does n’t he pay you well?” asked John.

The man writhed a little. “That’s my affair,” he said.

“All right. Keep it your affair,” said John. “He ’ll pay you—same as ever—and you ’re to take it.”

The man stared at him. His jaw had dropped a little. He moved toward the door. “You ’re a deep un. I don’t want anything to do with you.... I can’t face Nixon—every month, I tell you. He’d kill me!”

“You face him—or Simeon Tetlow,” John said. “You take your choice.” He moved back from the door and the man stepped toward it. He opened it quickly and went out. The sound of his footsteps, hurrying as if pursued, died away in the outer loft.

The young man stood for a moment looking thoughtfully at the disordered desk. Then he gathered up the papers and returned the ledger to its place. He locked the desk and turned off the blaze of light before he opened the windows. He stood looking down at the city in the mysterious night. Then he threw himself on the couch and slept till the morning.

XVI

SIMEON was tearing open his morning’s mail, fussing and growling. “There ’s another—” He tossed it to John.

The young man read it without comment. It was from the farmers of Elk Horn County—the second within a month—accusing the road of keeping back cars to force up rates.

“They’ve had their share,” grumbled Simeon from his mail.

“More, too,” said John. He scowled his brow a little. “No. 8 brought in thirty-five empties yesterday,” he said slowly.

Simeon wheeled a little, “Where to?”

“Somers—most of them.”

“And Somers shall have ’em,” said Simeon. He wheeled back again. “Let the Elk Horners run a road of their own. They know so much. Let their press agent get at it—Make cars out o’ wind and haul ’em with talk.” He plunged again into the mail, tearing and gritting his way through. Suddenly there was silence in the room—A long hush—

The young man looked around.

The president of the road was huddled a little forward, his eyes on a letter that his shaking hands tried in vain to steady.

John stepped quickly to his side. But the man did not look up. His eyes seemed glued to the few lines that covered the page. When the shaking hand dropped to the desk, he sat staring at nothing where the lines had been.

John went out noiselessly and mixed an egg and placed it beside him. He knew from the look in Simeon’s face that he had not slept, and he guessed that he had had no breakfast.

“You ’d better take this, sir,” he said quietly.

Simeon’s hand groped a little toward it and drew back. “I tell you I can’t see him,” he said sharply.

“Who is it, sir?”

“Nixon—” He touched the paper beside him. “He wants to talk over rates. I tell you I can’t see him—I can’t!” It was almost a cry.

The young man took up the letter. “Perhaps you won’t need to, sir.” His slow eyes were on the words. “It’s only the rates,” he said thoughtfully.

“Do you believe it?” The president of the road leaned toward him a little, hissing the words at him. “He says what he wants is an appointment for seeing *me!*” He lifted the haggard face, the bitter laugh drawing back the thin lips from his teeth. “What do you think our stock ’d be worth the next day? I tell you it ’s a trap!” He lifted his shaking hand. He looked at the light through it. “He wants to see *me!*” he repeated bitterly. “Let him come,” he said shrilly; “let him—” The hand dropped to the desk. “I ’ve lost my nerve, John!” he whispered helplessly. “I’ve lost my nerve!”

“Better take your egg, sir,” said John.

Simeon reached out blindly and gulped it down. His hand quivered as he wiped the little yellow line from his lips.

John’s eyes were on his face—“Had you thought of seeing Dr. Blake?” he asked.

The hand paused in mid air. “Yes—I’d—thought—of that.”

The young man picked up the letter. "Wednesday 's Nixon's day, is n't it? Why not see Dr. Blake Wednesday?"

The man leaned forward. "What about Nixon?"

"I 'll see Nixon, sir," said John.

Simeon stared at him a minute—"What would you say to him!"

"I don't know—yet."

Simeon stared again. Then he chuckled a little. "I believe you could," he said grimly. "He 'd go away thinking I was a prizefighter!"

John's hand rested lightly on the shaking one, holding it firm, and his eyes were on the quivering, driven face. "He 'd go away thinking the truth, sir—that you are a big man."

Simeon smiled a little shame-facedly, drawing away the hand. "I 'm a big fool," he said shortly. "There is n't a bigger anywhere—except you!"

The young man's face expressed content. "You will see Dr. Blake?"

"I 'll see Blake—yes." The shadow had returned again to his face, blotting out hope. He had drawn a sheet of paper toward him.

"I 'll see Blake if you want me to. But Blake can't help—"

"Blake can, if anybody can," said John stoutly.

"If anybody can—yes." It was a half whisper. He was writing wearily, like an old man. Presently the pen stopped and he sat staring before him.... A little look of hope stole into the set face. He took up his cheque-book and filled in a cheque in his fine, scrawling hand.

He looked around. The young man was hard at work. He waited a minute, impatient. Then he spoke, hesitating a little between the words, "Oh—John—?"

"Yes, sir." He came across.

"I thought you might like to make a present—to your friend Tomlinson?" He was holding out the slip of paper indifferently.

The youth looked down. It was a cheque for a thousand dollars. His face lighted with a quick smile. "It looks as if *you* were the friend," he said.

"Tomlinson 's no friend of mine," said Simeon gruffly. "But you can send it."

"It shall go today, sir." He was moving away.

Simeon's hand reached out to him. "It 's to come from you, you understand?"

The young man paused. He shook his head slowly. "He knows we have n't a cent in the world."

"Make it from the directors then—for services rendered." He laughed—a little bitterly.

"Yes, sir—from the directors—for services rendered." John wrote the letter and sent it. But he knew that the cheque that went with it was not recorded on the books of the "R. and Q." Road.

XVII

The manager of the C. B. and L. was being shown into the president's office—not the little room on the upper floor, but the one with the bronze token on the door. The typewriters had been driven out for the day on some pretext of cleaning.

As the manager entered the office, he saw a young man seated at the desk, his round head and broad back absorbed in work. His impatient eye swept the room—no one else!

"I—ah—I wish to see President Tetlow," he said sharply.

The young man at the desk rose and turned slowly, facing him. The manager was conscious of a pair of clear, straight eyes looking into his.

"I asked down below for Tetlow," he said a little less brusquely.

"Is it Mr. Nixon?" said John.

"Manager of the C. B. and L.," said the man.

The slow smile on John's face made him welcome. "President Tetlow asked me to see you, sir—"

"Where is he?" There was a flash of suspicion in the tone.

"He was called out of town. An old friend wrote, asking to see him today."

"Did n't know Sim Tetlow had any friends—any old ones," said the manager.

"Will you sit down, sir?" said John. He drew forward one of the capacious chairs and the man sank into it, giving a little nip to each trouser leg, just above the knee, before he settled back comfortably, a hand resting on either arm of the big chair. He glanced about the room. "Comfortable quarters," he said.

The young man was standing opposite him.

"President Tetlow asked me to give you any details you might wish, sir, and to represent him as far as I can."

The man in the big chair surveyed him for a moment. "And who might *you* be?" he asked pleasantly. There was more than a bint of irony in the light words.

"I am John Bennett," said the young man.

"Um-m. I am glad to know. And do you hold—any particular position?"

The young man was looking at him steadily. A slow smile had crept into his eyes. "I never thought *what* I am," he said.

The manager smiled too—in spite of himself. "You don't think you 've made a mistake in assuming that Tetlow expected you to see me?"

John's eyes were quiet. "No, sir. He said I was to give you all the help I can. I know about the books—orders and correspondence and things like that," he added after a minute, "I can perhaps tell you what you want to know."

The manager was searching his memory.... What was it Harrington had reported—a new private secretary—he might make trouble? Ah, yes—"You have not been here long?" he said abruptly.

"Since June," replied the young man.

"I'm afraid you won't do," said the manager, but with a little more respect in his voice. "The deals I want to talk over go back two or three years."

"I was with President Tetlow then," said John. "I came about four years ago. During the last year I 've been off for a while.—My mother was ill."

"Mother was ill?" He whistled softly between his teeth. It might, after all, be good luck that Tetlow was away. This simple youth would reveal more in half an hour than Simeon would let out in a week.

He would win his confidence.

He settled back a little in the chair. "Tetlow a hard man to work for?" he asked casually.

John's smile answered his, "I guess everybody thinks so," he said.

The man nodded. "I guess so.—They say he 's a good deal broken, though—works too hard?"

"He works harder than any man I ever saw," replied John.

"Begins to tell on him, don't it?" The man seemed to be watching a fly on the window.

"You mean—?" John's face expressed slow interest.

"I mean he 's about used up," said the manager, flashing a look at him.

John shook his head, and the slow smile grew in his face. "You *think* he 's used up and then you find—he is n't. That's the kind of man President Tetlow is."

The manager gave a dry smile. "I've noticed that 's the kind he is, myself." He turned suddenly, his eyes boring into the young man. "What 's all this bother about rates this year!" he asked. "Don't he know the roads can't stand it?"

"He thinks the country can't stand it," said John.

"The country!" The man stared at him, moistening his lips a little with his tongue. He shook his head. "Never heard of the country before," he said.

John smiled. "President Tetlow wants to make the 'R. and Q.' a benefit to the region." The man sat back in his chair. He spread his legs a little. Then he opened his mouth. He laughed. There was affectation in the laugh, perhaps, but beneath it was solid amusement and scorn. "Sim Tetlow—philanthropist!" He shook his head,—*"Look out for him!"* he said.

"You think he don't mean it, sir!" said John.

"I think he don't mean it," said the big man.

John's clear eyes looked into the small, fat ones and the man stirred a little in his chair and sat up. "Do you believe it?" he asked.

"I know it," said John. "He does n't start out on things he can't carry through."

"That 's right," muttered the man. His face was thoughtful.

"He's always run the road before for the corporation. He's running it now for everybody."

"Well, it 's beyond me.—*I* don't make money for everybody." He seemed to be digesting it.

The young man had taken up some papers from the desk. "President Tetlow wanted me to ask you about these," he said.

"What are they!" The man swung his eyeglasses to his nose and held out his hand. "They are affidavits.... about those harvesters...."

"Oh!" The manager sank back a little. He took off the glasses, tapping the table with them. "Well!"

"He wanted me to ask what you are going to do about it," said John.

"What does he expect we 'll do?" it was smooth and non-committal.

John consulted the paper. "He expects you 'll pay for them."

A little look crossed the man's face. "Oh, no. I guess not."

"He asked me to say that otherwise he will take action."

The man's face fell a little. "Take it into court—He can't win."

"They 've just won against the Lake Shore—those planting machines."

"That was Indiana," said the man quickly.

"Yes, that was Indiana. But McKinnon has three or four other similar cases, scattered about. He says they 've all won."

"I told Buxton it was a fool thing to do!" muttered the man half under his breath.

"That 's what President Tetlow said," remarked John quietly.

"Um-m—Did he? What else did he say?"

John smiled a little. "He said if you were going to try to do him, it was safer to do him inside the law."

"Hm-m—How much is he going to stick us for?"

"Twelve thousand."

"Can't do it," said the man. He sat up very straight and folded his fingers across his stomach, guarding his rights.

"He said it would be worth that—The whole district has suffered. The crop 's a dead loss."

"Why don't he let them fight for themselves?"

"I guess he thinks he 's more used to it than they are."

The manager of the C. B. and L. looked at him a moment. "Tell him we 'll settle for ten thousand—and not a cent more."

John made a note. "I 'll tell him, sir."

The man was not in good humor. The calm eyes of the young man, and a certain sense of moral inferiority that came upon him, made him restless; and the obvious respect that this young man felt for the President of the "R. and Q." was not encouraging. But it occurred to the manager suddenly that every man has his price and he drew a little breath of relief, relaxing in his chair.

Ten minutes later, when he took up his hat to go, he could not, for the life of him, have told whether the young man, holding open the door for him, was too stupid or too virtuous to take advantage of a very good offer that had been dangled before him. But he had a distinct impression that he should like to overhear some young man in his employ speak of him as this young man was speaking of Simeon Tetlow.

As he went through the outer room, the manager of the C. B. and L. passed very close to a desk where a bookkeeper was busy with columns of figures. But the manager did not glance that way and the bookkeeper did not lift his busy eyes from the page before him.

XVIII

The typewriters had been reinstalled in the president's office and John, in the little upper room, was giving the president of the road a detailed account of the preceding day—including the visit from the manager of the C. B. and L.

"That's good," said Simeon. "That's good—as far as it goes." But his thin face still wore an anxious look and he sat slouched a little forward, his eyes on the floor. The morning's mail lay on the desk behind him, untouched.

John's eyes turned to it. "You saw Dr. Blake?"

Simeon stirred uneasily. "Yes." He drew a quick sigh and turned toward the desk. "Yes—I saw him."

He glanced at the mail, but he did not touch it. His hand seemed to have lost volition and when John spoke again he gave no sign that he had heard.

The young man stepped to him quickly and touched his arm.

The man looked down at it vacantly. Then he lifted his hand and touched the spot where the hand had rested. He looked up, a thin, anxious smile quivering his face. "I can't seem to think—" he said.

"You 're tired out," said John promptly. "Did you have any breakfast?"

"Yes, I had—I think I had it—"

"What was it?"

He ran his hand across his forehead. Then he looked at John. "I can't seem to think," he said helplessly. "I think I 'm sleepy.... I'm so sleepy...."

The young man helped him to the couch and stood looking down at him. The eyelids had fallen and he seemed in a light slumber; his face still wore its seamed and exhausted look, but the anxiety had left it. He breathed lightly like a child.

After a minute John turned away and gave himself to the work of the office. No one came to break the quiet, and the figure on the couch did not stir.

Late in the afternoon he sat up and rubbed his eyes, looking confusedly about the office. "I've been asleep!" he said in a tone of surprise.

"Are you rested, sir?"

"First rate." He shook himself a little and got up from the couch. "Mail come?"

"Yes, sir." He handed him the letters.

"I 've answered these." He handed him another pile ready for signature.

Simeon read them through with untroubled face, and signed those that were ready. He seemed more like himself than John had seen him for weeks; but the young man, watching him anxiously, was afraid to question him again.

When the letters were finished, Simeon turned to him with a smile. "Blake's an old granny!" he said.

The young man made no reply. His steady eyes were on the thin face.

Simeon nodded re-assuringly. "I 'm all right.—You 'd 'a' thought, to hear him talk, the funeral was tomorrow." He gave a short laugh. "I guess he hypnotized me for a spell. I knew I'd be all right as soon as I got back to you." He smiled at the youth affectionately.

"What did he say?" asked John.

Simeon reflected. "Said I must stop—right off—Be an idiot if I did n't.—Idiot if I did!" he muttered shortly.

"You *could* stop—for a while?" It was the merest suggestion.

But the man turned fiercely—the old trembling awake in him. "You don't know! You *can't* know!" He threw the words from him. "You 've staved off Nixon. But there are other things—worse things than Nixon—"

"I don't know anything much worse," said John quietly.

Simeon stared at him a minute. Then he turned it aside with a motion of his hand. He leaned forward, speaking low and fast—"The directors—two weeks off—two weeks—I *must* stay, I tell you!"

"Yes, sir." It was the old tone of quiet deference and Simeon yielded to it. "Give me two weeks," he said more quietly. "Let me meet them with a straight record—and then—"

"And then?" The watching eyes held him.

"Then I 'll go," he said grudgingly, "—If you make me."

John weighed it for a minute. "Did you ask Dr. Blake about the two weeks?" he said.

Simeon fidgeted at his desk.

"Did you?"

"Yes." It was a growl, half-defiant.

The silence in the room was unbroken. John began to arrange things for the night. The man at the desk watched him, resentful, suspicious.

When the room was in order, the young man came across. He placed his hand on Simeon's shoulder. "All ready, sir."

Simeon started a little. He motioned to the chair. "Sit down."

The young man sat down, looking at him quietly.

Simeon was holding a paper, fingering it absently; he had retained it when John put away the others, covering it with his hand. He glanced down at it now once or twice, as if about to speak. But when he opened his lips, it was not about the paper.

"Blake does n't know," he said harshly. The young man's face clouded. "Don't you trust him, sir?"

Simeon spun the paper a little contemptuously on the desk. "I trust him—Yes—I trust Blake where he knows."

"He knows about you, sir." John, remembering the minute accounts he had given of Simeon's condition, smiled a little as he said it.

But the eyes looking into his did not smile. They held a kind of dumb fear, and the man shook his head. "He does n't know—"

"Why did n't you tell him sir?"

"I could n't!" He glanced cautiously over his shoulder and lowered his voice. "He would n't have believed—nobody 'd believe!"

"But he might help, sir."

The man shook his head dully. "He can't help. Nobody 'can help.—I 've had my chance—" He broke off and sat staring before him, as if at some nameless thing.

The young man watched him with perplexed eyes. Something mysterious, terrible, held the man in its grip—some intangible thing. Almost, it seemed to him, he could put out his hand and touch it. Then, in a breath, it was not there.... There was only Simeon—sitting with pitifully bowed head, fingering the paper.

He looked up after a minute. "The Bard-well lease expires today," he said, holding up the paper.

John nodded. He was not thinking of the Bardwell lease. He was trying to follow the elusive clue that had looked out at him and withdrawn....

"The road takes possession tomorrow," said Simeon.

"Yes, sir." John's mind came back to the farm.

"I 'd thought—" Simeon hesitated, "I 'd thought we might put some one on, for the winter."

"Rent it?" asked John.

"No—we can't rent it till spring; Nobody would want it now, but we could put some one on." He waited a minute. "There 's your friend—Tomlinson—"

John leaned forward, his face alight—"He'd like it, sir. He used to live on a farm—in Scotland."

"I judged as much," said Simeon drily. "He can have it, rent free, till spring. Then the road will talk about terms—we shan't be hard on him." He said the last words with a little gulp. He was looking down at the paper trembling in his hands.

"He will like it," said John heartily. "And it will be good for the little Tomlinsons—There are two children, you know?"

"I don't know anything about them," said Simeon wearily. "I don't care—whether there are children—or not. He can have the farm, if he wants it, rent free." He looked about for his hat. "I 'm going home," he said. "I'm tired."

The freshness of his sleep had left him. He was old and haggard once more. And John, as he handed him his hat, was struck anew by the misery in the face.

"I am going in a minute, sir. Don't you want me to walk along with you?"

"No, no. I 'm all right. Stay and write your letter. You'd better send it tonight."

XIX

HE went slowly toward the door—a bent old man. But at the door, he paused and looked back, his lip moving tremulously.

John sprang toward him. "What is it, sir?"

"I can't—go away—not before the fifth—two weeks. Blake must give me that two weeks! *You* know what it means—if I go now!" His voice was harsh and he lifted his gaunt, shaking hand to the broad shoulder that bent toward him. "It's ruin—John—for the road! I *can't* do it! It's my *life!*"

The strong hand reached up to the quivering one and drew it down, holding it fast. "You shall not go, sir. You shall stay here till the fifth—and save the road." The low, quiet tone was full of confidence.

But Simeon's voice broke across it harshly. "Blake said he would n't give me a day—not twenty-four hours!" he said hoarsely, "You should have heard him talk!" He shuddered a little.

"Never mind, sir," said John. "You *shall* stay—if you want to."

The helpless eyes devoured his face. "I can't!" He half whispered the words. "I'm afraid!"

"Listen, sir." John's face was close to his and a kind of power seemed to pass from the clear eyes into the wavering ones. "You shall stay if you want to."

"If I want to?" repeated Simeon vaguely.

"Yes. Listen." He had led him back to his chair and placed him in it. "Now I will tell you."

Simply, as if to a child, John laid the plan before him. It was not something new—thought of on the spur of the moment. For weeks the youth had seen the approach of some such crisis as this and his slow mind had been making ready for it, working out the details with careful exactness. If the road could be tided over the semi-annual meeting, everything was saved. In spite of the attacks of the C. B. and L. and in spite of Simeon's quixotic schemes for the country, there would be a comfortable dividend to declare. And with Simeon at the head of the table—not a wreck apparently, but the competent, keen-witted man whom the directors knew and trusted—all would be well. After that, let rumors get abroad—The directors would buy up any frightened stock that might be thrown on the market. There could be no attack on the road—with their confidence unshaken.

Simeon's face, as he listened, lost its strained-look and his lips seemed to move to the slow words that unfolded the plan to him.

"You could do it?" questioned John.

"I could do it," said Simeon with a deep breath. "It 's easy—after what I have been through."

"You are to do as I tell you—exactly?"

"There's Blake," said Simeon, the look of fear coming back to his face.

"I 'll see Blake," said John promptly. "Now, you are going home to rest, sir. I 'll write the letter to Tomlinson and then I 'm through."

"Yes—yes, write the letter to Tomlinson," said Simeon. "The sooner the better."

And John, as he sat down to write it, had no glimpse of the clue that was laughing at him, to his face, while his pen moved over the paper; he had no suspicion that the farm, offered rent free, was a last desperate attempt to lift a Scotch curse.... He saw only Tomlinson's face—when he should read the letter—and the children playing on the Bardwell farm.

The physician gave his consent reluctantly. "You may be able to carry it through, but it's a great risk. He ought to stop now—at once."

"He 's more quiet, sir," said John, "less nervous. He wants to sleep—falls asleep at his desk sometimes."

Dr. Blake smiled a little grimly. "The next stage he will not be so quiet," he said. "Best not tempt nature too far."

John's face grew thoughtful. "It would kill him to do it."

"To stop now—What 's the difference—two weeks, or now?"

He listened as John laid the facts of the case before him. "But he's rich—even if the road goes to pieces. Better lose the road than his reason—his life!"

John smiled. "I think the road is his reason—his life. He has lived in it so long that he does n't quite know, I think, which is Road and which is Simeon Tetlow."

The physician was looking with interest at this stupid, slow-speaking young man, who seemed to put his finger so exactly on the truth.

He nodded. "Yes, I know—organic, almost. But there are other roads. He could build up another. He 's a young man still—young in years. Let him recover and he will be as eager to fight as ever."

"It is n't quite that, sir." The slow mind groped for prosaic words in which to clothe Simeon's radiant dream. "He's not fighting just for the love of it. He thinks the country has been injured—the road has made money out of it without paying back—and he wants to make good. If the road goes to pieces—if the C. B. and L. buys it up—he could never do it. I think it would kill him."

The physician's head was bent in thought. "So Sim Tetlow loves men—like that—as much as that!" He looked up candidly. "Do you know I should have said that there was nobody in the world he would turn his hand over for. And now you tell me he's been killing himself for farmers."

The young man's face flushed a little. "I don't think it's farmers, sir—nor—nor—anybody. It's just the

country!"

The physician looked at him a minute—"I see—it 's impersonal."

"Yes, sir. But the country is like a person to him. I think he loves it. And I know he wants to make up for the harm he's done it. It would kill him to give up—now.... Two weeks will do it."

"Well—Well. You take the risk, you understand?"

"Yes, sir." The clear eyes met his.

The physician's looked into them with quiet scrutiny. "You 're very fond of him," he said.

"I love him, sir," said the young man.

"I don't know why you should," said the physician.

The slow smile met his. "I don't know, either. I think he needs me."

"I think he does," said the physician drily, "more than he knows."

XX

THE morning of the fifth of October was keen and crisp; a hint of frost lay on the grass and the air was filled with decks of light. It was a beautiful country that the "R. and Q." passed through—hills and valleys, long stretches of wood and wide sweeps of grain, and slopes where the orchards crept to the sky, the trees gold and green, and burdened with fruit.

To the directors of the "R. and Q.," looking out from their comfortable parlor cars on the trees and fields as they sped toward Bayport, it seemed a land of fatness and dividends. Tetlow would attend to all those trees. He had never failed them since the first day he laid his nervous, wiry hand upon the road; he had wrested the last cent from it; and the road—trees, barns, elevators—jingled into their pockets. They beamed upon the fertile land as they journeyed through, noting the signs of plenty with philanthropic eye.... There had been rumors of trouble, complaints, shortage of cars. What wonder—with branches loaded to the ground, or propped with staves, and the grain bending with its weight. They smiled at each other. They knew their man—a giant—keen-sighted and far-reaching—feared through the country up and down. When he lifted his hand, the little animals scudded to their holes, and lesser men made way for him. If the directors did not put the figure into words, they felt it—through all their comfortable being, as they slid along. Simeon Tetlow—great man-prosperous "R. and Q."—fortunate directors!

They felt it as they took their way to the offices of the "R. and Q." and seated themselves in the capacious chairs about the green table. Tetlow was a little late—they looked inquiringly toward the door. He was not often late... sometimes hurried and driven, but never late.... Was Simeon Tetlow late! The door opened and he came in with a little flurry, dipping subtly to left and right, in short brusque greeting, and taking his seat. They settled back in their chairs, scarcely noting the short, square young man, a little to the left, who followed in his wake.

But when Simeon was seated, the young man remained standing and they took him in with careless glance.

Their eyes returned to Tetlow. But he motioned with a slight gesture to the young man and they looked at him again.

He stepped forward with a little smile. "President Tetlow cannot speak," he said.

They looked with startled eyes at the president of the road. He nodded reassuringly and touched his throat with his hand. He opened his lips as if to speak, but no sound came. He shook his head.

Then they understood. He had lost his voice—a cold, probably, or unusual strain upon it. They nodded their sympathy to him, as if they, too, were suddenly struck dumb. He smiled acknowledgment and touched his throat and motioned to the boy.

He had stood with eyes lowered, waiting while the pantomime went on; it was the only part that he feared. He had drilled his patient carefully. But his breath came a little fast.... So many things might happen. ... Then he looked up and met the directors' gaze fixed upon him expectantly. He consulted the paper in his hand and bent to the pile that lay on the table before him.

"President Tetlow wishes to present first the report as a whole." He took up a handful of the papers. "He has had duplicate copies made for further reference." He passed the handful of papers to the senior director at the right of the board.

It was a thrifty device—thought out in the night watches while he could not sleep... Simeon had never before allowed written reports. This was unexpected convenience.

The senior member reached out his hand with a bland smile, swinging his gold eyeglasses to his nose and surveying the figures. He nodded affably.

The young man stood watching with slow look while the papers traveled down the length of the table.... It was only a guess at human nature. ... Would it work? Would they study the figures—or Simeon Tetlow's face? There was too much written on it for them not to see if they sat there and looked at it. His eyes deepened as he watched them, waiting respectfully on their convenience. The last paper reached the hand stretched out for it and he glanced swiftly up and down the double row of faces.... every eye buried in a paper.

He drew a quick breath and began to read in clear, even tone. There was no sense of hurry in the voice, but the words passed in swift flow. He knew to a minute how long it would take and how long Simeon Tetlow would keep the cool, inscrutable smile.

He was listening, his head a little bent, to the even flow of words. John did not dare to think ahead or see more than one minute at a time. For two weeks his one thought had been to get through this meeting.... He had planned, the day carefully.... It was after the periods of heavy sleep that Simeon was most like himself and he had wakened him from a long nap this morning, brushing his clothes and placing the papers in his hand.

"It is the fifth, sir," he had said.

And Simeon had looked at him with a bit of the old, keen smile.

"You are to meet the directors," said John close in his ear, "You remember?" He looked at him anxiously.

Simeon had nodded reassuringly. "I know. *I 'm* all right—I can *look* all right." He had said it almost like himself.

And then John had taken him by the arm and led him to the door of the Room and pushed him in. Only at the door had he dared release his hold.

But he need not have feared. To the president of the "B. and Q." Road, the green table—with those mighty, iron-bounded men around it—was like a challenge. He had entered the room with positive eclat; and now he sat with quiet face listening to the report, a little cynical smile edging his lips.

It was the look the directors knew well

They trusted it as they looked up from their paper....It was the old, dividend look.

John's eye dropped to it for a moment and his voice quickened a little. He had come to a difficult part of the report. It was delicate treading here—"Equipment for the coming year: Thirty-nine new engines will be needed—twelve of the big Pacific type, the numbers running from 3,517 to 3,528, and ten combination fast freight and passenger engines of the 2,000 series. The other seventeen...."

He felt the hoard quiver subtly. They stirred in their places. He knew, without looking up, the inquiring glances gathering on the impassive face at the head of the table.... "The other seventeen will be switching engines and the heaviest kind of freight engines..." The voice went quietly on, but his hand had dropped ever so lightly on the shoulder beside him as he turned a page of the report. The shoulder straightened beneath the touch.

The president of the road looked up and nodded to the swift, darting glances—once—twice, the old, keen, reassuring look—intrepid and cool.

The directors turned the pages with easier fingers, but a new alertness was in the air. These were details that any one could grasp—with their implications.... "Six hundred box cars—forty passenger coaches, each to cost \$6,500." The look of sleepy content was banished from the board.

But the president of the road met the glances that traveled toward him, with steady front. The figures had startled the directors, but they seemed as music in his ears. "Thirty-nine engines—twelve of the big Pacific type—" sang to him! He sat a little straighter, his quick nod assenting to each detail and vouching for items that might so easily have stirred a challenge.

The directors had no eyes for the young man taking the papers from Tetlow's hand, reading them one by one. He was hardly more than a Voice. They did not note that the stubby hand as it reached out to take a paper from the trembling one closed upon it firmly for a minute and that the hand ceased to shake. When the next item was read, the hand lifted itself from the table with a little gesture of pride and assent. The proposed improvements and equipment would cost a round million,—But the road could stand a million dollars—and more.... The lifted hand had said this eloquently before it dropped.

The room breathed more easily, and into the voice that read the items there crept a quiet note of relief.

Twenty minutes more.

Ten minutes—now...

Five minutes....

The president of the road swayed a little toward the table. He might be consulting the paper in his hand—it was the last one—before he handed it to the sturdy young man beside him to read.

The young man leaning toward him to take it, blotted out for a moment the thin, bent figure. When his shoulders straightened themselves again, the president of the "R. and Q." was erect in his chair, his inscrutable face turned toward the directors.

The young man read rapidly from the paper. It was a summary of items. They had the substance of it already. This only gathered it into smaller compass for them, the quiet voice seemed to assure them, as it went swiftly to the end.

"There is one point not included in the formal report that the President intended to speak to you about." He had laid down the paper and was looking at them.

They returned the glance, finding a certain pleasure in this sturdy young man.

Simeon looked up with a little, startled glance.... The hand touched his arm carelessly and rested there while the voice went on speaking.

"It had been President Tetlow's wish to ask for a leave of absence—to take effect at your pleasure—"

The arm beneath the hand stirred and Simeon's mouth opened with an inarticulate sound.

The directors glanced at him with sympathetic, humorous smile.

The senior director was on his feet proposing a motion—Three other directors, all on their feet, were seconding it—It was carried with a little informal hurst of enthusiasm.

Simeon rose to his feet. It was as if he thought that he could respond.

The directors were looking at him with expectant faces.

He bowed toward them and opened his lips—and broke into a long, deep, helpless cough.

John put up his hand to the directors, smiling, and escorted him swiftly to the door....

There was a pleasant hurry of sound among the directors, a getting into light overcoats and shaking of

hands, a murmur of dividends, and a rush for trains.

Up in the little office Simeon Tetlow stood by the window. He held up his hand—groping, trembling toward the light—He looked at it, and tried to hold it still—and still looked at it—the light falling faintly through it.... “They trust me, John! They trust *me!* But how dare they trust me!” The shaking hand flickered its quivering, helpless dance against the light.

The young man drew it down, covering it with his own. “They trust you, sir, because you’ve never failed them,” he said quietly.

XXI

The assistant bookkeeper was finishing his accounts for the night. He made another entry and blotted it before he closed the book and looked up, with a little offhand nod.

The young man moved toward him. “President Tetlow asked me to tell you something, Harrington.” They were alone in the room, but he spoke in a low tone.

The bookkeeper’s shoulders squared themselves a little. He had expected this. He had known it would come—with the directors’ meeting. He jabbed his pen in a cup of shot and lifted his face sullenly. “Well?” His tone, too, was low.

“They raised you five hundred at the meeting,” said John.

The bookkeeper stared at him. Then his eyes dropped. He studied his nails for a minute. “What are you talking about?” he muttered.

“Five hundred dollars—to begin Monday,” said John.

The bookkeeper looked up under his lids, without lifting his head. “What do you mean?” he said slowly.

John waited a minute. When he spoke, a little smile edged the words. “I thought you’d like to know right off—So you could write the C. B. and L. that you won’t be able to do anything for them after today.”

“Did n’t it work?” sneered the man.

“It worked too well,” said John. “They’ve lost a good twenty thousand these two weeks—trying to fix it—and the twenty thousand is ours. But we don’t do business that way—not unless we have to,” he added with slow emphasis.

The man looked up. “How are you going to keep tab on me?” he demanded.

“Won’t the five hundred keep tab?” asked John.

The man’s smile was wintry. “The C. B. and L. did better,” he said.

“Yes—they knew what they were paying for—they thought they knew. The ‘R. and Q.’ does n’t.”

The man stirred a little. “All right. It’s a go.” He took up his pen and tried the nib on his thumb nail. His eyes were fixed on it. “Cheaper to fire me,” he said, dipping the pen into the ink.

“Do you think so?” said John. “Wait a minute, Harrington.”

The pen paused.

“The ‘R. and Q.’ will need straight men the next six months—men that will stand by!”

The man nodded. He was not looking up. “I have an idea, somehow—” The young man hesitated. Then he laughed out. “I’ve watched you, you know,” he said frankly, “I’ve had an eye on you.”

“Two of them,” said Harrington.

“Yes, and I’ve come to think you may be one of the best men the road’s got.”

“That’s what I’ve thought,” said the man drily.

“I don’t know how you came to be in this C. B. and L. mixup,” said John quickly, “but I think you stood by them as long as you could—”

“That’s me,” said the man.

“—and did their dirty work for them,” added John.

The man’s face clouded a little.

“The ‘R. and Q.’ wants that kind of men for clean work—” He paused, seeking the right words. “I’m not clever, you know,” said John. He raised his clear eyes to the man’s face.

The face sneered a little—then it changed subtly. “I believe you’re speaking God’s truth,” he said soberly.

“I believe I am,” said John. “I’m not clever—I know it. But the road needs men that are—Men that know enough to be rascals and won’t,” he added quietly.

The man looked at him a minute. Then he laughed—a long, full laugh. It had a hint of fellowship in it.—“You’re a rum un,” he said.

John smiled. “Thank you.” He held out his hand. “It’s a bargain?”

The man hesitated a minute. Then he took the hand. “I should think I could give five hundred dollars’ worth of honesty—and I’d like to give as much over as I can afford.” He said it lightly. But there was a little ring to the words, and the sullen look had vanished from his face.

“That’s all right,” said John. He nodded and was gone.

The assistant bookkeeper sat staring at the pen in his hand—“A rascal,” he chuckled, “but not a fool rascal!”

—He said it straight, did n't he?" He chuckled again. He drew the sheet of paper toward him. Then he looked up as if a sudden thought had struck him—"And *he* 's no fool either!" he said slowly. The pen began its letter to the manager of the C. B. and L.

When the letter reached the manager, he threw it on his desk with an exclamation of disgust.

"What's up?" said the superintendent.

"Harrington."

"What?"

"Backed out," said the manager.

"More money?"

"I don't think so." He consulted the letter. "Says he's sick of it—the whole business."

"Virtuous?—His virtue has n't been of much use the last few weeks," suggested the superintendent.

"Nobody 's any use," said the manager tartly. The two weeks' losses had worn on his nerves.... "There 's a man in that office I should like to get," added the manager after a minute. "He's young—sort of a boy. But I 've a notion we could use him—if we knew what he 'd cost."

The manager of the C. B. and L. meditated, off and on, the next few days, what John would cost. He never arrived at any conclusion that quite satisfied him. Just as he had fixed upon the bait that should tempt a young man who had his way to make in the world—a pair of clear blue eyes confronted him, shining mistily. There was a deep, still glow about that boy when he spoke of Tetlow that made him feel the boy was beyond him.

The manager of the C. B. and L. was a practical man and when, in the process of calculation, he ran up against eyes of a young man, he swore softly under his breath.

XXII

John was turning the question in his mind all day—where the president should spend his vacation. But each route that he blocked out presented at some point an insuperable obstacle, and he was forced back to the starting point to begin over.... The place must be far enough from the road so that Simeon would not be reminded of its existence, yet near enough for John to return to his mother at an hour's notice.

He had watched her with special care in the days that preceded the directors' meeting.... If she should grow worse and he could not leave her?

But His mind had come to rest hopefully in the look in her face. She would not fail him. She was even more eager than he in planning for his absence—Caleb would be with her, and in the city it was easier than in Bridgewater to get help—the cooking and baking, some of it, could be bought from the little white shop around the corner.—She entered into the plan as if the journey were to be made for her sake rather than for Simeon's. And John, watching her, knew that she was really better. The change to the new house and its surroundings had been good for her. There was even a little pink tinge in her cheeks sometimes and she declared that the very cracks in the ceiling of the new house were restful to look at as she lay in bed. She had never known how full of pain and wakefulness the old cracks were until they had been suddenly lifted from her. The new cracks should have only hope in them, she said, with a little smile; they should be filled with beautiful things—the light that came in at the east window for her—she had not had an east window at home—and Caleb's pleasure in his new work and in his garden. Her window overlooked the garden and she lay for hours looking out at it and at the sky.... There was not much in the garden yet. But Caleb potted about in it, setting out the roots and shrubs he had brought from home, preparing the asparagus bed and strawberry beds, and trimming up the few trees and shrubs that bordered it. He was very contented working in the warm October sun inside the high fence. The roots of his being stirred softly, making ready to strike down into the new mold and rest there gently as they had rested in the old garden at home. By spring he would hardly know the change—any more than the daffodils and the jonquils that he had planted in a corner by the fence with some lilies of the valley.

He had been at work in the garden the day of the directors' meeting, and he watched the Boy as he came slowly up the street, his head bent in thought. Caleb gathered up his tools with little regretful, backward looks. He had meant to set out that last row of asparagus tonight—But it was late and the boy looked tired. He set the asparagus plants in the little shed he had improvised for his tools and covered them carefully against the night air. Then he went into the house.

The mother and the Boy were talking in the next room softly and he thought he would not disturb them. He fussed about, setting the table and making tea. Even when they were seated at table, Caleb paid little heed to what was being said; his mind was still digging in the garden, out in the soft mold.

Then a word caught his ear and he looked up. "What's that you were saying, Johnny—about a farm!"

"It 's about President Tetlow. He has to go away, you know!"

Caleb's interest relaxed. "I thought it was something about a farm." He returned to his plate.

"I said I wished there were some farm he could go to—"

"Farms enough," said Caleb.

"Do you know a good one?" The boy and his mother both leaned forward. They had turned the question over and over; they had not once thought of Caleb who knew the region by heart.

He chewed slowly. "There 's a place up Chester County way," he said at last, his eyes fixed on it as he chewed. "I used to work there when I was a boy."

"That's too far away," said John.

"You want to be nearby, do ye?"

"But not too near the railroad."

Caleb's slow mind started on its new quest.

"There 's a place up from Bridgewater a ways—It 's off the road. You might hear a toot clear nights, maybe—but much as ever—"

"Who owns it?"

Caleb shook his head. "Nice folks *used* to live there—the Griswolds—but I heerd somewhere 't they'd sold —"

A quick look shot into the boy's face. "You don't mean the old Bardwell farm!"

"That 's the place," said Caleb—"I was thinking about that little house on the creek, about half a mile, cross lots, from the farmhouse. Anybody 'd be quiet enough there."

"The Tomlinsons are there," said John thoughtfully.

"There by the creek!" asked Caleb.

"No, in the farmhouse. I don't suppose there's anybody in the little house."

"It could be fitted up," said his mother quickly. "That 's better than boarding; and you must not do the work—with all that will come on you besides. Mrs. Tomlinson would cook for you."

"Ellen Tomlinson is a powerful good cook," said Caleb solemnly. "I 've et her victuals many a time."

"I 'll go down tomorrow," said John. "We can have the little house, I know—It belongs to the road—and I 'll put in a few camping things. If Ellen won't cook for us, we 'll make shift somehow."

"You must not do it," said his mother.

"It's good air," said Caleb, "—High up."

"And very still there—the top of the world," said his mother with a little flitting sigh.

"It's just the place," said John. Then he hesitated a minute. Hugh Tomlinson's face had suddenly flashed before him—the red-rimmed eyes and the high, quavering voice.... Would Simeon object to his presence? He had always refused to speak of Tomlinson and he was gruffly silent when his name was mentioned.... But he had put him on the farm—rent-free—and he had sent the cheque—a thousand dollars.... John weighed the chances... and even while he hesitated, an instinct deeper than reason told him that the old Scotchman's presence must be concealed from Simeon.... He might not mind. But there must be no risk.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I 'll go down to see the Tomlinsons and get the house ready."

The old Scotchman surveyed him with keen eyes. "He wants to come here?—Sim Tetlow wants to come *here*—to this farm!"

"Not here," said John. "He 'll be at the little house—down by the creek, you know." The switchman was silent for a little. "A man can do what he likes wi' his own," he said at last gruffly. "He owns the farm—I 'll go —"

"I hope you won't go," John said quickly. "We need some one to cook for us—good nourishing food—and I was going to ask your wife—?"

The old man's eyes still pierced him. "Ye think Sim Tetlow 'll get well on food 't my Ellen 'd cook?—Choke him!" he said.

John waited a minute. "I was n't going to tell him who cooked it—I thought he did n't need to know." He turned and looked at the man beside him. "He needs all the help we can give him, Hugh. He's desperate."

A slow, deep smile had come into the Scotch eyes—They glimmered to little points and sought the distant horizon. "He must e'en take his fate," said the old man grimly, "wi' the rest o' us."

"But we can help him," said John. "I feel it. *You* can help—"

"I 'll do naught for him," said the man sternly. "She's within door, and ye can ask *her*. If she 'll cook for Sim Tetlow, I 'll bide by what she says. I 'll not lift a hand to hinder—or help." He moved toward the bam, walking with huge strides, like some grim, implacable fate.

John watched him for a moment. Then he turned and knocked on the farmhouse door.

When he lifted the latch, the little old woman by the stove looked up, bending gentle eyes upon him. She set down the frying-pan and came forward, The smile in her face like the October sunshine outside. "It's Johnny Bennett," she said, "and I was telling Hugh, but the morning, I'd be glad to see him."

The young man took the outstretched hand with a sudden lifting of heart. He forgot the gaunt figure striding from him and saw only the gentle, wrinkled face in its prim Scotch cap, beaming with light.

In a dozen words he had laid the story before her. She listened with intent eyes, her fingers plaiting the edge of her apron in tiny folds. When he had finished, the apron dropped from her fingers and she smoothed the pleats one by one.

"He's been a hard man to us, Johnny."

"Yes."

"But I 'll do it for ye."

"I knew you would." It came from a full heart, and she smiled a little to him as she gave a final, smoothing touch to the apron. "He sent us the check, and it was bitter bread we bought wi' it. But the bread I bake for him will be sweet," she said.

"Thank you, Ellen." He held out his hand. "It 's good in you to do it, and what money can pay for—you shall have, you know."

"Money won't pay for the bread I shall bake him, Johnny," she said slowly. "But he's welcome to it and may

XXIII

SIMEON Tetlow, in the little house by the creek, was growing stronger.

There had been days of waiting-long, slow days, when he sat dully passive, staring before him, or lay on the camp bed in a deep sleep. When he woke, he took the food that John brought him and fell asleep again.

Little by little, unseen fingers had come in the silence and smoothed the lines from the sleeping face, touching the fevered cheeks to coolness.... He slept now like a child, breathing lightly, and when he woke, his eyes were clear and fresh—only somewhere in the depths lurked a little shadow that nothing could efface.

The shadow kept tally on their days. When it lightened, John’s heart sang, and when it deepened, he set himself anew to his task.

For the first days he had not left his patient night or day—except for brief journeys across the woodlot to the farmhouse to bring the food that Ellen cooked. Later, when Simeon was able to walk a little and needed less care, he had made occasional trips to the office of the road.

It was during one of these trips that a new factor had entered into the case. The young man had been gone since early morning and the house was very quiet, deepening in the long silence to a kind of presence. The October sun poured in at the windows and a late fly buzzed in the light on the pane.

Simeon glanced at it. Then he went and stood by the window looking out. His eye traveled along the little path that lost itself in the bushes and undergrowth at the left. It was a path that John had unwittingly worn in his daily journeys to the farmhouse. But Simeon did not know this, he did not even know that it was a path. He did not guess that along it a child was trudging, bringing him health in both her fat little hands.

He went back and sat down by the fire, sighing a little. It was an open fire that blazed and crackled, and as he watched it he dozed.

The hand on the latch startled him and he sat up—awake.... John was early.... He turned his expectant face to the door. It swung open silently, as if unseen hands had pushed it, and he sprang up trembling. ... No one was there.... Then his eye dropped a little and he stood still—staring at her.

She was very little, and she was very round and fat, and her cheeks laughed and her curls danced, and her stout little legs, in their heavy stockings, had a sturdy sense of achievement. She looked at him gravely. Then she turned and placing both hands on the door pushed it shut.

He had not stirred from his place. His eyes were following her, half doubting.... She was not more real than some of the visions that had haunted his tired eyes.... But much more charming!

She confronted the closed door for a moment with a little air of triumph. Then she nodded at it and turned and came toward him across the room, her face lifted.

But still he did not speak. He had moistened his lips a little with his tongue and his breath came quickly.

She seated herself on a packing box that served as a chair and crossed her fat legs at the ankle. She nodded gravely. “I am Ellen,” she said in a clear, sweet voice, “Who are you?”

He moistened his lips again, still staring. Then a humorous light crept into his eyes. “I am—Simeon,” he said gravely.

She nodded again. “I like Cinnamon. Granny makes them—round ones—cookies. I like ’em.”

“And who is Grannie?” he asked.

“She is—Grannie,” replied the child. “Do you live here?” Her direct eyes were on his face.

“Yes, I—live—here.” He said the words slowly and a little sadly.

“Who does your work?” she asked promptly.

He leaned toward her, very serious. “A fairy,” he said.

She slipped from the box and came toward him, her face aglow. “Where is it?” she demanded. She stood before him very straight—courage and health and belief in every line of the swift little body.

He half put out a hand, but she stirred a little and he withdrew it, leaning back in his chair and gazing with half-shut eyes into the flame. “You can’t see a fairy, you know,” he said quietly.

She had bent forward, a hand on either knee, peering intently into the fire. She straightened herself—“Don’t you see it?” she asked. “Not ever?” A disappointed look was in the eyes.

He shook his head. “They come at night, you know.”

The brown eyes searched his face. Then the curls wagged from side to side. “That’s a Brownie that comes at night,” she said reprovingly.

He looked his surprise. “Is it, indeed—a Brownie!”

She nodded. “Grannie told me.”

She came nearer and placed her little fat hand on his knee. “I like you,” she said.

He scarcely breathed and his face, as he leaned back in the chair, was very still.

She tipped forward and peered into it. “Are you asleep?” she asked. It was almost a whisper—solicitous, but firm.

He shook his head. The tired eyes opened and looked at her, full of a kind of sweet light. "I am—resting," he said.

She nestled a little nearer to him, carelessly, and looked into the fire. Presently she hummed to herself...a little crooning song—half words, half happiness: Then she left him and wandered about the room, touching things with grave, respectful touches, but with liveliest curiosity in the peering brown eyes. When she had finished, she went toward the door. "I am going, now," she announced.

He dared not put out a finger to stay her and his eyes did not lift themselves from the flames. "Come again," he said carelessly.

"Yes," she replied. It was a very grave little word—full of assurance and comradeship.

Then she opened the door and went out.

The fire flared in the sudden gust and he looked around. The door—too heavy for her to close—swung wide to the October sun, and down the path the sturdy brown figure was trudging, holding intent on its way.

Simeon moved to the door and stood looking after it. The sun shone clear.... Everywhere the serene, level light and in the midst of it, moving steadily on, a quaint, sturdy figure.... He put up his hand impatiently, brushing aside something that hindered his gaze. When he withdrew the hand, he looked down at it and thrust it out of sight, perplexed and savage and stirred.... "God bless me!" he said, "I'm growing soft!"

He closed the door and went back to the seat by the fire, wondering a little that he should care.

"She will not come," he said as he looked into the deep coals. But in his heart he knew. She came again and again—sometimes every day and sometimes with long intervals between. When this occurred, Simeon would grow restless and go often to the window to look where the path emerged from the undergrowth. It never seemed to occur to him to follow the path.

He had showed, from the first, a curious indifference to his surroundings. They had not come by the way of Bridgewater, but had left the train at a small station farther up the road and driven across country eight or ten miles, by night, to the Bardwell farm and the little house on the creek. To Simeon, in the long empty days that followed his arrival, the place had no existence. He hardly knew more than that he ate and slept and that John was always at hand—to turn his pillow or speak to him or replace the light coverlet when it slipped off.

And as strength came to him and they walked every day a little distance from the house, his indifference to the outer world persisted. He asked no questions. His mind followed no roads. Sometimes on misty nights, when the long, slow whistle sounded across the low hills, John would watch him curiously. But the head was not lifted from the brooding hand by the fire. The road had slipped out of memory, perhaps—or grown dim in the visions that haunted his gaze. If he knew where John went, on the days when he was absent, he made no reference to it.

Only when the child came, his mind reached out. It reached out to a little path that lost itself in the underbrush and rustling oak leaves. He would stand for hours, looking at it wistfully when she did not come. But he never set foot in the path. It was hers and she came and went as she pleased.

With a kind of canny Scotch wisdom, the child had refrained from speaking at home of her visits. She may have been uneasily afraid that they would be forbidden if discovered, and she concealed them carefully, not only from her grandparents, but from her little brother who was her only companion. It was not always easy to evade him and, then, there were days when she did not come. But she guarded Simeon's secret jealously, as if he were some helpless thing she had come upon unawares in her trudgings up and down the farm. And from the day she first strayed into the half-defined path that John's feet had worn between the house and the farm, she did not cease to haunt it.

XXIV

WHAT are you doing?" She was standing on tiptoe, her eyes barely over the edge of the table, watching Simeon's pencil as it moved over the paper.

The pencil continued its curious tracks. Simeon's eyes were fixed on it intently. There was no reply.

She watched it a few minutes in silence. She and Simeon were good friends. They did not mind the silence, but he would answer—if he heard—"What are you doing?" It was very quiet—but firm—in the clear, high voice.

He looked down. Then he smiled into the level eyes. "I'm drawing a map," he said.

She found a chair and pushed it to the table. She climbed into it and knelt with her fat arms folded in front of her on the table, bending toward the paper.

Simeon paid no heed to her. The pencil went its absent-minded way.

It was no unusual thing for them to be silent a long while, with an occasional smile or nod between them, she intent on grave matters, Simeon following hazy, wavering thoughts.

But he had never chosen to make pictures. This was something important and different. She leaned closer, her shoulder touching his. "Is that a pig?" she asked politely. Her finger indicated a shape in one corner.

"That is a mountain," said Simeon. He sketched in a tree or two to verify it.

"It 's a funny mountain," she said. She drew in her breath a little, watching the pencil respectfully.

"It is full of beautiful things," said Simeon.

She bent closer to examine it. "Can you see them?" She lifted serious eyes to his.

"Yes, I see them—very plain. There is iron and copper and lead—" his pencil touched the paper, here and there, in little dots, "and silver."

"And gold—" said the child in a soft, monotonous voice. They were playing a game.

"Not much gold, I'm afraid," said Simeon, shaking his head, "but it is a wonderful mountain full of beautiful things—that can't get out."

"*Why* can't they get out?" she demanded as if some foolish mystery lay behind his talk.

He hesitated a moment. "A bad man keeps them there," he said. "He has the key."

"Won't he *let 'em* out?" It was a shrewd little wondering, groping question toward the truth, but it was full of sing-song happiness.

She nestled closer while the pencil went its way, drawing two long lines that stretched side by side across the paper. They readied the mountain and stopped.

"What is that?" she asked.

"That is a railroad that the bad man will build," he said, putting in some extra lines.

They watched the pencil in silence.

"I know a bad man," she said idly, as if it were not important, but worth mentioning since it concerned Ellen.

"Do you?" The surprise in the tone was partly real. "Do *you* know a bad man?"

"Yes—I know one." It was a modest little drawl—an assertion of wisdom tinged with importance. "He's a *very* bad man," she added.

"No?"

The half-teasing note did not touch her. "He kills folks—He killed my father," she said tersely. The words were light on her tongue, but she nodded to him with deep serious eyes that his could not fathom. Something in the eyes hurt him—a kind of trust and ignorance and deep appeal. He put his arm protectingly about the little form, drawing it close.

"You must not say things like that, Ellen."

"Gran'ther says it."

"But *you* must not.... You will not say it again—?" It was half a command. "Don't ever say it again, Ellen."

"No—o—" It was reassuring and polite-half drawled; and it dismissed the subject idly—They had dwelt on it too long.

"Where is the key?" She was dipping toward the paper, peering close.

"The key?" He stared a little—"Oh—yes—This is the key." His pencil touched the parallel lines.

"That 's a railroad," she said promptly.

He smiled. "It is the key, too—See—" He drew more lines rapidly, "When this touches the mountain, the iron and silver will come pouring out and it will run down this track—here, and here—" The pencil moved fast.

She followed it with grave eyes. She drew a deep breath and leaned closer to him. She lifted her face with a smile. It had caught the glow in his—but she did not speak.

He fell to sketching again and she nestled in his arm. By-and-by she put out a short finger. "Does folks live there—or Brownies!" she said, half whispering the words.

He looked up absently—"Where—Oh—on the mountain?—People live there—I suppose—"

"You ever seen them?"

"No,"—still absently.

She sighed a little. "I like folks," she said.

"What?" He paused in his thought and looked at her with a smile—tolerant and old—"You like folks, do you?" The look teased her.

She nodded gravely. "They 'll be glad—" Her finger was tapping at the mountain—"They 'll *like* to have the beautiful things come *pouring out*—" She spread her hands with a little gesture of beneficent plenty.

He stared at her a minute—then he laughed. "I suppose they will.... I had n't thought of it." His eyes dwelt on her fondly.

"Yes.—They 'll like it.—They 're nice folks."

"How do *you* know?—You seen them?" They often played like this.

"I know." She nodded wisely. "There's fahvers and muwers and little uns—bairns-like me." She was looking at something far away—Then her eyes flashed back to his. "They 'll like it," she said swiftly, "They 'll help—They 'll bring out the beautiful things—great handfuls!" She threw them out with her lavish little hands.

He caught them both in one of his. But he was not looking at her. He was seeing something far off... something the child's words made him see.... He looked at it so long that one of the hands freed itself and reached up to the intent face, stroking it.... Then he looked down and saw her. He smiled at her—with deep eyes... with the little shadow playing in them—far back.... "So you love folks?" he said slowly.

"We must e'en love everybody," she repeated as if it were a lesson.

"Everybody?" He looked at her, a little startled at the words.

The clear eyes lifted themselves—"Gran'ther says we must do justice to all men," she said gravely. "But Grannie says we must forgi'e 'em—she says we must e'en *love* 'em."

"Then you must love him—the bad man." He said the words half teasingly, half gravely.

Her face clouded. But the eyes were untroubled. "I don't fink *anybody* loves *him*," she said simply, "But Grannie says we e'en must." She gave a little sigh.

"So you will!"

"Yes—I love him."

The voice was full of her ignorance—a kind of sing-song chant, but somehow it gripped him strangely.... As if he heard in some inner world—faint, ringing little bells of joy and sadness and the mystery of life.

XXV

He sat in front of the fire brooding absently. He had been alone all day—ever since John left in the early morning. The boy was coming back tonight. He had said that he would come—but that Simeon must not wait for him; he must go to bed as usual. It was late now, but Simeon in front of the fire waited impatiently.... A strange loneliness was on him. Outside the snow had been falling fitfully all day. The ground was covered with still whiteness. Across the waste of snow he heard a distant clock strike softly and far away—eight—nine—ten—and still he waited, brooding there by the fire. He wanted to see some one—to touch a friendly hand—before he fell into the deep sleep that would cut him off. A strange yearning toward his fellowmen had come upon him in the last days. The child's words followed him wistfully—"We must e'en love 'em," he whispered to himself, wondering at the strange tugging at his heart—Tiny cords seemed to reach out from him, threading their way, spreading wide-seeking men and women.

He rose and paced the little room. He was not the man who had entered it ten weeks ago—broken, helpless in weakness. His step on the floor was firm and the hand that reached out to the tongs was steady in its grip. He readjusted a log in the fireplace and replaced the tongs. Then he stood looking down at the fire. He had grown fond of the flames—leaping there. He would miss them when he went back to his office—and the cold town house. He glanced about the little room affectionately.

... The boy had filled it with love and thoughtfulness from the first day. It was sweet now with pine and spruce and hemlock—fastened everywhere—running along the walls and heaped in corners. The boy had brought it in from the woods for Christmas Day. The scent of it was like the woods themselves—Something mysterious and deep was in the room. The woods were in the room. The man breathed deep and looked around him.... How he would miss it all.... But his work was waiting... and he was ready. He stretched out an arm straight from the shoulder and looked with quiet pride at the hand. It did not quiver, by a breath, from its place. The arm dropped at his side.... He was ready... almost. The shadow flickered across his face. It retreated to his eyes and crouched ... waiting. He sat down before the andirons and looked defiantly into the hot coals.... Some senseless, half-crazed words mumbled at him.... He shrugged his shoulder.... He would not hear them. The firm hand had clinched itself on his knee.... A face grew out of the fire, red-eyed and old and imbecile. It swung before his gaze full of hatred and leering malice, and the clinched hand lifted itself. ... The face was fading, line by line, in the flickering light. The mumbled words grew faint. They sank to a whisper... and died away. ... It was the voice of the child—clear and low, "We must e'en forgie 'em."

He sank hack, wiping the beads from his forehead. He stared before him—seeking a way out.... He had offered the man money.... He had given him the farm, free of rent—and it was a good farm, they said—the Bardwell farm—Was it not enough?... He brooded on it, sitting there. The loneliness outside crept into the room.... The snow had ceased to fall, and through the uncurtained window he caught a glimpse of light shining. He got up and went to the window and looked out. The white clouds seemed to be being drawn across the sky by unseen hands; beyond them the stars shone clear. The snowy landscape glowed faint beneath them.... Suddenly he uttered an exclamation and turned away. He crossed quickly to the door and threw it open and stood peering out.

A little figure was coming up the path, nodding and blowing—Her curls were afloat and her little face glowed in the light from the door.

"I'm coming," she panted heavily, "I've got here."

"I should think you had." His voice was stern. But he had gathered her in his arms, holding her close. She struggled a little and he set her down. "I'm wet," she announced—"I'm most wet fru, I guess."

He found some old underclothing of John's and took off the wet things, holding them up, one by one, to the light and looking at her reproachfully. She had come apparently in her nightdress, with the addition of an extra shirt, one stocking, one legging, a pair of overshoes and her little fur coat and cap.

"I could n't find my Fings," she explained, "not all of my fings—in the dark."

"What did you come for?" asked Simeon severely.

Her rosy happiness precluded sentiment—and kindness.

She glanced at the glowing fire and then at his face. She looked down at her pink toes, peeping from below John's drawers—The drawers wrinkled grotesquely on the fat legs and she tried to hold them up a little as she approached him, humbly.... Simeon was angry—She could see it from the tail of her eye, as she drew nearer with downcast head. "I wanted to see Santa Claus," she said. She had come very close now and she put out a fat hand, resting it on his knee.

He bent a little toward her. "You should have waited till tomorrow, child. Don't you know I shall have to take you back—"

She lifted a stricken face.

"—in the cold and snow," went on Simeon unheeding.

Her lip quivered. With a bound she had buried her face in his breast.—"Don't take me, Cinnamon!" she

wailed—"Please don't take me—back!"

"But your grandfather and grandmother will worry—"

She lifted a reassuring, streaming face, "They don't *know* about me," she sobbed, "I am sound asleep." She snuffed a little and fumbled in the capacious folds of John's undershirt for a handkerchief.

Simeon produced his and she accepted it meekly. She wiped her cheeks with it and stowed it away. "I peeked—" she said, "in the door and they was asleep—both of 'em—and Gran'ther was a-snorin'—"

"Suppose they wake up," said Simeon.

She looked at him piteously. "Santa Claus can't come to our house," she said. Her lip trembled.

"Why not?"

"He can't get in."

"Oh."

"They 've shut up the chimbley." She moved a fat hand toward the fireplace—"I cried about it," she explained, "and then I went to sleep—I prayed too, but that did n't do any good," she threw in. "And then I waked up in the dark and 'membered you, and that's how I come." She nestled to him.

His arms were close around her. "You shall stay till the clock strikes twelve—that's when he comes—"

She nodded sagely.

"And then I 'll carry you home."

She sank back with a little sigh of content. The pink toes cuddled themselves in the warm folds and the moist eyes rested dreamily on the coals.

Simeon, holding her in his arms, had a sense of life—its goodness and fullness. The loneliness had fled from the little room. It was filled with love, and the world outside was full of friendliness—It held them close.

The child stirred a little. "We did n't hung up my stocking," she said drowsily.

Simeon looked down at the stocking steaming with faint warmth from the fire. "It 's too wet," he said.

She roused herself and sat up—"Don't I have no stockings?" she demanded.

He hesitated. Then he got up and brought one of his own and suspended it from the corner of the shelf.

She surveyed it with dubious content. A little question flitted, and she raised an anxious, startled face. "He might fink it was yours," she said.

"We 'll tell him," said Simeon, "the minute he comes."

"I 'll tell him." The eyes had flashed wide. They shone dizzily—the little hands clasped themselves—"I 'll tell him," she whispered.

"All right."

She sat very straight, her gaze fixed on the exact spot where he should come.... Her shoulders drooped a little, but she caught them at it and shook them sternly. Then the eyes blinked—once—twice, and the brown curls nodded. The watching figure was sinking inch by inch into the great folds that enwrapped it. She lifted a heavy, dreamy face to Simeon's—"I can't keep—awake—Cinnamon," she breathed—very wistful—with little jerks between.

"Never mind, dear." He laid a hand on the bending head. "Go to sleep. I 'll wake you when he comes."

With a deep sigh, the head sank against the strong shoulder. The firelight played across the little figure in its clumsy garments; it touched the sleeping face and tipped the nodding curls.

Simeon watched it, the world in his heart speaking low.

XXVI

I 've lighted the lantern for ye, Hugh." The rays of the lantern shone on the meek, wrinkled face, bringing out faint lines and lighting up the yellow-white hair that framed it. The hair was a little rough from the pillow. She had not thought to smooth it since—wakened by some inner voice—she had risen to see that all was well with the bairns.

"She 's been long gone," she said, looking up to him as he drew on his great mittens and reached for the lantern. "The pillow was cold." The face beneath the wrinkled lines tried hard to hold itself steady.

"You 're not to worrit, Ellen. I 'll find her. I 'll bring her back." He had thrown open the door and the cold air rushed in.

She shrank a little from it, staring at the dark. "She 'll be fey," she said, "wi' the cold and wet and dark. I must have the kettle hot." She turned toward the stove.

He stooped to examine the snow in the light from the door. Then he lifted himself, a look of satisfaction in the grim face. "Shut the door, Ellen," he called, "I 'll follow 'em now in the dark."

She came quavering. "Can ye see, Hugh!" She strained her eyes toward him.

"Shut the door," he said. "I can follow—wi' this." He lifted the lantern a little and she saw the old face, stern and hopeful.

She shut the door and watched through the window as the great figure lunged away. The lantern swayed from side to side with the huge strides, as if a drunken man carried it across the wastes. But the lantern went

straight. It was making for the oak wood.

The sky overhead was sown thick with stars, flung like a royal canopy above the earth. The shepherds keeping watch over their flocks would have needed no other light to guide them, and Hugh Tomlinson, stooping to the little fat tracks that spudded through the snow, had little need of the lantern that swung from his great hand. The tracks led straight across the country without swerving to left or right. They crossed the wood and came into the open.... He followed them fiercely, like a great dog, unheeding whither they might lead. Suddenly, with a muffled cry, he stopped....

Straight before him ran the creek and out from the bank stretched a frail band of ice. Beyond—the water swirled black and sluggish. He hurried to the brink and stood staring—not a sound to break the silence. He strained his eyes across the thin edge of ice. Surely it could not have borne the weight of a tiny child. He wheeled about and looked up to the stars. They twinkled in their places—remote and glad. There was no help in them. Slowly his eyes dropped.... He started—shading them, as if from a vision, peering forward. There in the window of the little house, gleamed a light.

He strode forward blindly, his eyes fixed on it. As he drew near, he sank to his knees, creeping almost on all fours; but at the window he clutched the sill and raised himself.... Within the green-trimmed room with its glinting light and soft glow sat the man and the child—asleep before the fire. The child's head rested against the man's breast and his face drooped till his cheek touched the modeling curls.

For a moment Hugh Tomlinson eyed the sweet scene—like some gaunt wolf at the window. Then he strode to the door and throwing it open entered without knocking.

The man at the fire looked up with startled glance. He had been dreaming, and it might have been an apparition of his dream that loomed in, out of the night.

The two men regarded each other.

The gaunt one stepped forward a pace. "Gi'e her to me," he said. "She belongs to me."

"And I thought she was mine," said Simeon. A sad little smile played about his lips. He moved toward the man, holding out his hand. "Forgive me, Tomlinson," he said.

The Scotchman did not touch the outstretched hand. He looked down at it dourly. "Gi'e her to me," he repeated.

Then, as they stood confronting each other, the bells rang.... They sounded faint across the snowy waste, striking the hour. The last stroke died upon the air, and silence settled in the little room—with greenness and the scent of firs.

"Peace on earth, good-will toward men," said Simeon in a low voice. "Make it peace for me, Hugh Tomlinson."

"Gi'e her to me," said Tomlinson again.

The man made no reply, but the child reached up a sleepy hand and slipped it about his neck. "I love Cinnamon," she said drowsily.

Then the Scotchman came nearer. The bony hand did not lift itself from his side and there was no softening of the grim face—"The Lord do unto ye as ye have done unto me and mine, Simeon Tetlow," he said solemnly.

He reached out his arms for the child and the man surrendered her to them—gently, that the sleeping lids might not wake. The old Scotchman gathered her in, close—the folds of his great-coat wrapped protectingly about her. Then, his eyes bent hungrily upon her, without a backward look, he went out into the night.

Simeon Tetlow watched him go, with quiet smile. His hands had dropped to his sides.

Thoughts played across the thin face—gleams of light and humor and gentleness. He lifted his head, with a quick glance about the fragrant room. The fire had died down, but a soft light glowed everywhere. He sat down holding out his hands to the warmth, the quiet smile still resting on his face and the shadow in the eyes fading before it, flickering away to its place in the night. The eyes shone with swift, new light; it played upon the face as it bent to the coals—the intent, human eyes gazing at something there.... Slowly the vision lifted itself—shining rails gleamed upon the night. They lay upon the land, the silvery tracings branching left and right. A white light shone from them. Simeon Tetlow, looking with rapt gaze, saw a new world. The curse could not touch him here.... It could never touch him again. Something cold and hard had snapped at a word. The forgiveness he had begged of the stern Scotchman had come to him... . There had been no curse... only the hardness and bitterness in his heart—that would not say "Forgive." The word had lingered at the door of his lips through weeks of pain and the darkness—wandering rebellion, sick fancies.... "Forgive me, Hugh." He had said it—low and humble, unawares, out of the depths... and suddenly he had stood erect. "Forgive me, Hugh." He whispered it again, looking into the deep coals. ... Troops of faces filed before him and he stretched out dumb hands to them. The coals deepened and spread, and the great road lay among them. His eyes rested on it wistfully. A still, clear light was on the country-side.... Miles of wheat and corn, great tracks of prairie, mountains of ore—lighted by it. But his eye swept them as a bird sweeps river and wood and plain in its homing flight.... The light was falling on the faces of men and women and children and the faces were turned to *him*—waiting. The coals had died to a tiny spark. He rose and put on fresh wood and the flames leaped and ran up the green walls. He fell to musing again.... The dream held him.... Life opened.... Softly the bells were ringing in that other world.... Little peals that broke and rang—great swinging bells. He bent his head to the sound. It grew, and died away to lightest touch and rang again, clear and fresh.... It was nearer now... nearer—He turned his head. The sound had stopped—at the very door—The boy had come!

Before he could rise from his place, the door swung open to the freshness of the night and the boy was at his side.... "Merry Christmas, sir." He bent swiftly to the lifted, smiling face—"You are better," he cried, bending nearer in the flickering light, doubting and eager.

"I am *well*, John!" He was on his feet, both hands outstretched to the boy.

They stood thus, the fire leaping on their faces, their hands clasped. ... Then they drew apart smiling.... The man moved his hand toward the dusky, fragrant room. "I am ready to go," he said.

The young face lighted. "We need you, sir. We need you the worst way!"

"At the office?" Simeon motioned to a chair. "Sit down—Tell me."

The young man shook his head. "Not tonight." He looked at his watch. "It is after one. You must sleep."

"I shall sleep," said Simeon contentedly. "And tomorrow we will talk it over," said John.

"Tomorrow we will go," said the man.

XXVII

The old Scotchman, striding through the snow, was holding the child fiercely to him. She had not stirred since he folded the great coat about her and he felt the warmth nestling there close to his heart. But the heart beat hot and resentful. Under his breath he swore and muttered as he stumbled through the wood, straying from the path and finding it again with gaunt step. The lantern gripped in his tense hand would have lighted the faint track through the snow. But he did not look down. His eyes were on a light that glimmered and shifted among the trees, shining across the long fields of snow beyond.... Ellen was waiting, her heart sore for the bairn. He clasped the little form closer and strode on—bitterness in his heart.... "Curse him—!" He had robbed them of work and their good name and now he would take the child ... luring her from them through the dark and cold, making her love him. The great arms strained her close as he stumbled on, coming with each uncertain step nearer to the glimmering light till it fell full in his face from the uncurtained window and he flung open the door and strode in.

She looked up with quick glance. Then a little cry broke from her—"Ye did na' find her!"

He opened the great-coat where she lay like a flower, and the grandmother came close bending to the soft vision. Her hand touched the limp one that hung down, its soft, pink palm upturned.

"The little hand!" she whispered like a slow caress, "It 's warm, Hugh!" She lifted her eyes to his face.

"Aye—warm." There was no light in the stern face. "Ye best put her in bed." He held her out—a little from him—and the child stirred. Her sleepy eyes opened and smiled to them and closed slowly. The little smile faded to a dream and the lips groped with words and breathed a name softly—"Cin-na-mon—"

The grandmother gave a startled glance. "She is fey!" she said.

"'Cinnamon!—' what does she mean—'Cinnamon'?"

The old man looked resentful and said nothing.

The sleepy lips shaped themselves again—"Gran-nie." It slipped into a little sigh of content as she nestled into the arms that reached out to her.

The old woman smoothed the tumbled hair and rocked her shoulders gently to the cradling of her arms. "Where was she, Hugh?—Where did ye find her!"

"Where she 'd no right to be," he said grimly.

"She'd no right but to be in her bed," said the grandmother softly.

"Ye 'd best put her there," he responded, looking down at the sleeping flower-face with unfathomable eyes.

When she came back she found him sitting by the stove, his gaze fixed gloomily on its black surface, his body bent forward and his great hands swung loosely before him.

She stirred the fire a little and pushed back the kettle on the stove. "We 're no needing it, the night," she said with happy face.

But there was no happiness in the old face across the stove.

"What is it, Hugh?" She was looking at him with keen, gentle eyes that searched his soul.

"Sim Tetlow," he said briefly.

Her hand dropped from the kettle—"Ye 've seen him, the night!"

"He had the bairn," said Hugh. "He was holding it—in his arms—like his own." He looked up to her—bitter hatred in the red-rimmed eyes.

But she came close to him, her soft dress making no sound. "He cared for the bairn!" It was half a question—a little cry of disbelief and longing—"He cared for the bairn!"

"He were holding her," said Hugh gruffly—"Same as you—or me." He lifted his hand with a swift gesture—"Curse—"

She caught the hand, holding it to her bosom, forcing it there—"No—Hugh—no," she breathed the words with little gasps—"Ye 'll no curse—we maun—"

He turned on her savagely, struggling for a minute to free his hand. Then his eyes dropped. "Ye 're a woman," he said grimly. "Ye 've no call to know."

She stroked the hand with thin, knotted fingers, but her lips made no reply.

He looked up under fierce brows. "I 'll do to him as he 's done to me." He said the words with deep accent.

"No,—no"—

He swept aside the words—"He took away my engine," he said with slow wrath—

"But ye slept, Hugh—And ye could not help the sleeping!" It was a little cry of defence.

"I'd been waking, the night and the day—and the night again," he replied fiercely, "and I *slept*—Is sleepin' a crime!—She was safe on the sidin'," he added. "There was no harm to Her—"

She waited with bent head. So many times they had lived through the steps of his disgrace—

“An’ then he gi’e me the switch. He were kind an’ just. He gi’e me the *switch* to tend—” Impotent bitterness filled the words—“we—that’d drove the best engines on the road! Tendin’ a switch—in the freight yard—” His head sunk a little.

“Ye was old, Hugh.” It was the little cry again.

“An’ he will be old!” he broke in with tense, swift gesture—“Old before his time, bent and broke! Oh, Lord—” He lifted his gaunt face, “Gi’e him to me! Gi’e him into *my* hand!” The keen eyes, fixed on something unseen, stared before him. Hope struggled in them—a bitter, disbelieving hope. “Gi’e him into my hand!”—he whispered.... “into my hand!” He bent forward, staring at the vision. Then the face changed subtly. He drew a quick, deep breath.... His head had dropped to his breast.

She bent above him, “Hugh—” She called it to the unseeing eyes—“Hugh!”

He drew back a little dazed. The look in the face broke—“Why, Ellen—woman.” He put his arm almost tenderly about her—“What frightened ye?” he asked.

“Ye ’ll not harm him?” she cried. She leaned against him, her anxious, questioning eyes searching his face.

“I ’ll not harm him,” said the man briefly, “except the Lord deliver him into my hand—I have it for a sign.”

Her Scotch blood thrilled to the vague menace of the words. She pressed closer to him, her thin hands raised to his coat, grasping it on either side. She looked up into his face—“Hugh, ye must forgi’e—ye must e’en—”

“I must e’en do the Lord’s will,” he said sternly. He loosed the clinging hands—“Ye must sleep, Ellen,” he said more gently.

Her hands had dropped. They hung loose at her sides. But her meek eyes were still on his face. “Ye will forgi’e him,” she whispered low, under her breath.

But his face gave no sign that he heard. He put out the lantern and raked together the coals in the stove, covering them carefully with ashes to save the smouldering heat. “Come to bed, Ellen,” he said when it was done, “the bairn is safe. Ye can sleep now.”

XXVIII

Who is managing?” said Simeon.

They had finished breakfast and sat with chairs pushed back from the table. It was the first question he had asked about the road. He had devoted himself to the business of getting well as thoroughly as to any business he had ever undertaken. But he was well now. “Who is managing!” he said quietly.

The young man looked at him with a frank smile. “Nobody is managing,” he said—“That ’s the worst of it. I ’ve been *doing* things—things that *had* to be done—and trying to stave off other people’s managing.”

Simeon nodded quickly. “That ’s the best thing could have happened. I hope you ’ve done it.”

“Well, not altogether—The men in the office were all right.... But the directors fidgeted some—”

“Corbin,” said Simeon, “I know.”

The young man nodded.

“Oh, I know,” said Simeon testily. “And Dickerman, I suppose—yes, yes, I know—Go ahead now—Tell me everything.” He leaned forward with elbows on the table—the old alert look in his eyes.

When the recital was finished, he stood up, stretching his arms with a gesture of content. “It might be worse,” he said.

“You may find it worse than you think,” said the young man, “No head to anything.”

“Just legs and arms,” said Simeon. He laid his hand in passing on the boy’s shoulder. “I’d rather have legs and arms—good ones—than any heads I know of—except my own,” he added laughing. “When do we go?”

“I brought down the special last night. She’s at Bridgewater.”

“Stetson with her! That ’s good. We start tonight—Get there at ten—Sleep home—Ready for business.”

John smiled at the old, quick orders and went out to set them in motion. He looked up to the clear, keen sky with a sudden lightness of heart. A new day had come. Perhaps the tortoise had something the same feeling when Atlas stooped his shoulder to the world.

By night, the little house was stripped of its belongings. Some of them were packed in bags and boxes and the rest were to be stored in the loft overhead. The boughs of spruce and hemlock and pine had been taken down from the walls and burned in the fireplace during the day. The room was filled with the sweet, pungent odor.

At the last minute John had hurried to the woods and brought back an armful of fresh boughs—spruce and pine, hemlock and blue-berried cedar—clustered thick—and trailing green vines. He tossed them lightly into the back of the sleigh and sprang in.

The special was waiting on the siding. They saw the little, flying puffs rise from her and float on the clear air.... Stetson was ready—with steam up—They would be off at once.

The baggage master came forward to help with the bags. He spoke a word in John’s ear as he passed him.

The young man glanced quickly toward the engine that puffed and chugged at the head of the little train. He helped Simeon into the car and hurried forward. The man standing by the engine looked at him with troubled eyes.

"He's sick," he said slowly, as John came up. "He was took bad just after he came down." He nodded toward the baggage room, "He told me to fire Up—ready to go ahead. Said you'd know what to do."

The young man turned toward the baggage room. The engineer, out of a heap of blankets, spread across some trunks, regarded him somberly. "I can't do it," he said, "I don't dare. It gripes too hard when it comes. It's easier now, for a minute—But it 'll come back." He writhed a little as he spoke.

"You must n't stay here," said John quickly. He looked about him.

The man put out a hand. "I'm going," he said, "as soon as she starts. I waited for you." John nodded. "Is there anyone—on the others?" He motioned toward the yard.

The man shook his head gloomily—"Freights," he said. A kind of subtle pride underran the words—"I would n't trust 'em with Her."

The young man lifted his head—A swift thought had crossed his face. "I saw Tomlinson on the street as we drove in—Could he-?"

The man stared at him—"Old Tomlinson?" Justice weighed in the tone. "You can ask him," he said grudgingly at last.

"He 's all right for it?" questioned John.

The man writhed a little in his place. But justice held—"He's all right if he says so," he answered. His teeth bit at the under lip, holding it firm, and he breathed hard. "He's first-class—Tomlinson. He won't say he can take her unless he's able. You can trust Tomlinson—same as you would me." The pride of brotherhood breathed in the words—lifting them mightily.

"I 'll see him," said John.

The hand held him back. "Don't urge him." He gasped a little for breath between the words. "If he says he can do it—let him take Her."

"I understand," said John. "I 'll send some one for you." He was gone from the room.

As he passed the car, he hesitated a minute. Then he sprang up the step and went in. "All ready!" said Simeon looking up.

"Stetson 's sick—Shall we wait over?"

"Wait over? No! Get somebody—Get *anybody!*" He threw out the words.

The young man hesitated a minute. He had not mentioned Tomlinson's name to Simeon. Something had always pulled him back when he had thought to do it. "There's a man—" he said slowly—"lives here—He 's not running now—"

"Competent?" said Simeon.

"Stetson says so."

"Get him."

Tomlinson, one foot on the sleigh, looked at him under keen, shaggy brows. He glanced toward the station, with its wreathing, drifting lines of smoke. He shook his head. "I'm going home," he said. He threw the halter into the sleigh and knocked the snow from his boots against the side.

John watched him silently, as he climbed in and gathered up the reins in big, mittened hands.

"We need you, Hugh," he said slowly.

The old man nodded—impassive. "Can't go," he said.

"Why not!"

"*She 'll* be waiting." He pulled a little on the reins.

"Send some one home with the team—There's Russell! Get him."

The Scotchman glanced with indifferent eye at a man crossing the street. "I 've got my chores to do." He pulled again on the reins.

The old horse lifted his head.

John laid a hand on the sleigh. "See here, Hugh. We need you—There's no one else—He told me to get you."

The pull on the reins was checked. "*Who* told you!"

"President Tetlow. He 's waiting—" He motioned toward the track where the special was blowing off steam. Hugh's eye followed the motion. It dropped to the young man. "He told you—Sim Tetlow—" he demanded, "He wants *me!*"

"Yes. He wants you—But not if you 're not up to it—" He had remembered Stetson's words.

The old man leaned forward, winding the reins slowly around the whip. "I 'll take Her," he said.

"You 're not afraid!" said John. Something in the face disturbed him.

"I 'll take Her," said Hugh briefly.

"Stetson's jumpers are in the cab," said John as they came down the platform.

"Too short," said the old man. He was striding with mighty step.

John glanced at him. "That 's so—The coat's all right."

"Like enough," said Hugh absently. His face had an absorbed look—The eyes beneath the fur cap gleamed like little points of light. When they reached the engine, the light broke and ran over his face. He mounted to the cab and laid his hand on the lever—"I 'll take her down, Johnny—Don't you worry." He nodded to the young man standing below.

The face cleared. "All right, Hugh—It's the President of the Road you 're carrying, you know."

"Aye—It 's Sim Tetlow—I know," said Hugh. He opened the lever a little.

The young man hurried toward the car.

"All right!" asked Simeon as he came in. The train was in slow motion.

"All right," said John.

Supper was brought in and they ate it leisurely, watching the light change and fade upon the hills and darkness settle down outside. Simeon's eyes came back to the young man's face. "I mean to know this country," he said, "every mile of it."

The young man smiled a little. "Don't you know it now!"

"I don't know anything," said Simeon. "I was born last night.—I was born last night," he said looking at the black window in a reverie. "Who lives along here?" He nodded toward the darkness. "What kind of people!"

John peered out. "Winchendon, we just passed, was n't it? I don't know. I've never been here."

"Ever lived outside of Bridgewater!" said Simeon.

"No, sir."

"Tell me about that."

"About—!" The lifted eyebrows held it.

Simeon nodded. "About anything. Steel works—button shop—everything."

John thought a minute—"You know as much as I do—more. They do a big business."

"What kind of men?" asked Simeon brusquely.

"Men?—In the works—you mean?"

"In them—over them—on top—outside, inside," said Simeon. "You know 'em, don't you? Lived with 'em—been to school with 'em—?"

"Oh—if you mean that—!" A smile had come into the puzzled face.

"I mean that," said Simeon. He had lighted a cigar and was watching the tip intently.

The cigar went out and was relighted many times before the story of Bridgewater was finished. The slow mind of the narrator wandered in and out through the past, nudged by keen, quick questions from the nervous listener beside him. Little things loomed large—big things faded and slipped away in John's vision. It had been a mighty day for Bridgewater when the county house was built; but Simeon scoffed at the courthouse and listened with rapt face to the story of two truckmen that John knew who had quarreled over their stand and made up, and joined against a third and held up the transportation of Bridgewater for three days.

Simeon sighed a little. "I 've never lived," he said slowly. "I've made money—I've sat with my face close to a board, making money, studying moves—I've played a good game—" He said it grimly—"But I 've never lived yet. My father always said 'Go in to win,' and there was n't any mother." He said the words between the puffs.... "And then I married—" He waited a minute—"Yes—I guess I lived—a year. But I did n't know-then."

There was silence in the car. The train sped through soft, even darkness. The engine shrieked at a solitary grade crossing and was past.

The man lifted his head. There was a deep smile in his eyes.... "It 's all going to be different," he said slowly, "Just wait till we get things in hand—I 'm going over the road."... He drew a map from his pocket and spread it on the table.... "Here is a place I want to know." He pointed to a corner of the map, "They 're always making a fuss up there—saying the road's got to come their way. The division superintendent says it won't pay—They say it will. I 'm going up."

John leaned forward—"Chester County." He spelled the name across the map. "My father knows Chester County."

Simeon looked up with quick stare... "Your father?"

"He lived there when he was a boy."

"I must know him," said Simeon. "I 'll take him with me."

John smiled at the picture—but underneath the smile ran a swift sense of his father's presence—its slow, steadying power upon the nervous, hurrying man. He would rest in the stolid strength of it. "I 'll bring him to see you," he said.

"Yes—What is your mother like?—You have not told me about your mother." He gazed at the boy deeply.

"There's no one like her," said John. "I could n't tell you. Nobody could tell about Mother." His glance had traveled to the rack overhead where the fragrant boughs hung out, filling the air with light fragrance—He saw the light in her face and her hands held out to them—He smiled.

Simeon sighed and moved restlessly. He held another match to the cigar and his eye, as it followed the steady hand, filled with quick pride.

John was watching the hand, too, and the eyes of the two men met.

"I 'm all right," said Simeon, throwing away the match with a little laugh.

"You 're all right," said John with deeper meaning.

"And I 'm a young man." He rose and paced a few steps in the car—"I 'm forty-three—You don't call that old?"

The eyes watching him smiled.

"That is not old," said Simeon. He stretched himself to his full height, rapping his chest softly. He threw out his arm—toward the night. "I'm just beginning," he said.

The brakeman passed through the car-carrying something on his arm. A piece of old cloth, a bit of signal flag, was thrown carelessly across it.

John's eye followed him to the rear of the car. After a minute he got up and went to the door. He opened it and stepped onto the platform. The brakeman was bending over the end of the car, peering down at something. He tested it once or twice with his hand before he scrambled to his feet. "It 's the red," he said as he saw who stood beside him. "It don't burn right—"

"Yes—What's up?" The train was swirling through the dark and they held to the guard-rail as they faced each other.

In his cab, at the other end of the train, the old Scotchman, his body braced to the swing of the wheels, leaned out, looking back with tense eyes.

"Can ye see her, Jim?"

The fireman leaned beside him, for a moment, piercing the dark with swift, keen glance, "Nothing there," he said.

The train, on the down grade by the river, ran with swift ease through the night.... No sight—no sound.... Only the great river to the left slipping—dark and still, and the stars overhead.

But the two men leaned back, scenting the dark with swift gaze.

"Nothing there," said the fireman, peering out, "You must 'a'—"

He paused—with quick turn.

A long, low whistle broke the night, echoing against the distant hills.

The eyes of the two men met. Tomlinson's hand raised itself with startled thrust. The answering shriek tore the night.... Once—twice—in hoarse demand....

Again the low, seeking call among the hills. Then silence and the black river slipping by.

The fireman sprang to his place.

Tomlinson's hand upon the lever quickened its hold, drawing it tense. "We take no chances," he said. The engine trembled beneath and leaped to swifter stride. It swayed through the night. The furnace door flew open and heaven blazed with roar and glow and swift heat. The faces of the two men, lurid in the white glare, confronted each other. Then darkness, and the swift rush of steel on steel—crunching, heavy beats of sound—and the thrusting roar and smoke.... They were swinging the bend of the curve now, where the road leaves the river under the mountain to track across country. Tomlinson, his body half thrown from the cab, strained back, his peering eyes searching the distant curve. He drew his hand across them.

"She 's there, Jim!.... Look!" The shaking hand flung the words.

The fireman leaped to his side. A glimmer—a flash—twinkled gleams on the far curve.

"It 's Her!" muttered Tomlinson.

"86," said the fireman.

"The heaviest on the road." Tomlinson's hand reached Up....

She was running at frightful speed. His quick eye gaged her flight as he sounded the high, shrill call of warning.... She had not slowed for the curve.... She was not slowing now! Again the whistle sounded its savage cry.

And the note came back—echoing among the hills in little peals that laughed.

"Ah—she had heard.... she knew they were there... They were safe now." The hand on the lever released its grip.... Gleason was running her. He was safe—Ten miles more.... Simeon Tetlow, swaying at ease in his parlor car, need not fear.... They were picked men on the road—and he ran them hard. They would bring him through....

Once more Tomlinson leaned out, looking back with a grim smile.... His startled gaze threw itself—She was *not* slowing—"Jim!" It was hoarse like a whisper—"Jim!—Look!"

But the fireman, bending to his flaming pot, had not heard.

The red eyes blazed again to the night.... "Jim!—" The hoarse cry shook the night.

The man sprang forward.

"Look!" He flung a hand.

The man leaned out. "God!" he said—He strained his eyes.... "The brakes don't grip," he cried fiercely.... "She's running wild!" The words drove with the flying wind. He drew back, lifting a white face. "Down grade," he whispered.

"Aye—down grade," said Tomlinson, quietly. "Pile on the coal, Jim!" He flung the throttle wide. A great light broke across his face. "Pile on the coal, Jim!" The engine sprang.—"Stuff her," he cried.

Again the flare and roar to the night—Great flying sparks.... Glory and fierce heat and the mighty power that throbbed to leap its bounds.... Winged thrust—horns and hoofs, and spilling flame....

The old engineer, his hand on the lever, balanced himself to the plunging flight. His small, peering eyes held the track ahead—they laid down the road before the wheels. And somewhere—far within—his soul laughed.... In the hollow of his hand he held him—The man who had scorned him—thrust him out.... "You shall never touch throttle or brake or switch on this road." The wheels ground out the words. They beat them to powder and flung them—with hitter laugh and roar—upon the night.... He would not trust! And now he lay, like a baby, swung to the sound of wheels. Tomlinson laughed and set his teeth and leaned forward, squaring his shoulders.... His feet gripped the bounding floor. He would carry him safe.... They need not fear Tomlinson... .

Back in the car, Simeon Tetlow, absorbed in his map, looked up absently ... his glance on the swaying lamps—"They 're taking us down pretty fast," he said.

The young man nodded. He was sitting across the table, his head Testing on his hand, his eyes, with their quiet light, fixed on Simeon's face. He had not stirred since he came in from the platform ten minutes ago.

Simeon, working on his map, looked up now and then with a little smile, and the quiet eyes smiled back. But something hungry had crept into them—a look of protection and longing—as if they would shield something helpless.

The train, in its heavy swing, lurched a little and Simeon looked up with a scowl that was half a laugh. The pencil had scrawled a curious, zigzag course across the paper. "I don't seem to be running this road," he said, "I might as well give up." He pushed the map from him and looked at his watch—"9:40—Where are ye?"

"Just past Dunlop's crossing," said John.... At nine-forty, 86 was due at the crossing—the time-table in his pocket told it to him—five minutes off. Someone had blundered and she was in their block—close behind them—pressing upon them.... But the dull face gave no sign.

"Twenty minutes," said Simeon. He stretched his arms with a little yawn—"We 'll be in by ten—you think!"

"I think we shall be in before ten," said the boy. His voice was very quiet, but the man looked up and saw the light in the eyes.

He leaned forward. "What is it, John?"

"Nothing, sir—" He said the words slowly. "I was only wishing I could do something for you."

"Why, Boy—" He turned his head a little, listening—The shrill whistle had sounded—"What's that!"

"Some train at Dunlop's" said John.

The train beneath them seemed gathering itself in mighty leaps.

In the cab, the old engineer, with tense body and set teeth, laughed grimly—"I 'll bring him in—I 'll bring him in!"

The miles leaped behind them, flying. And behind them the express pounded heavily—soulless—massive—blind... five miles now—three—And the Scotchman laughed with the great lurches of his cab—

The lights of the upper station flashed past... then the lights of the yard... he threw the lever swiftly into place. The roar slackened and fell and ceased. The special was gliding easily down to her berth in the terminal shed.

The express, under control now, halted at the upper station, her blind eye glimmering through the dusk toward the little train that ran—smooth—safe, on its way. She gave a shrill cry—and puffed—impatient to be off.

Simeon put away the map in his pocket. He looked out into the busy yard as they drew in—little lights... slow-pulling freights—busy engines puffing up and down—smoke and grime. His own work. His heart leaped to it as he stepped from the car, and he lifted up his face to the great train shed—as in some great cathedral one looks up—and waits.... Whirling, drifting smoke—soaring and shimmering into the high roof.... Bells and voices and the sound of murmured calls... crimson torches flaring—skimming along the platforms—diving under engines—with hungry, peering eyes.... He took it in for a moment with deep, full breath before they swung down the platform.

Beside the engine an old man was bending with flaring torch, thrusting it into the heart of her, searching with careful eye for any harm that had come.

"Oh—Tomlinson!" said John.

The figure straightened itself and wheeled about, torch in hand.... His glance fell on the President of the Road and he stepped forward, a solemn look in the keen, blue eyes. He reached out a gaunt hand. The face, beneath its grime, held a deep, quiet power—"I forgi'e ye, Simeon Tetlow," he said slowly. "I forgi'e ye,—now."

The President of the Road took the grimy hand in his, with firm grip. "It 's all right, Tomlinson, all right."

He stood for a moment looking up at the tall figure, covered with oil and dirt—the smoke-stained face full of a kind of dignity.... "You brought us down fast, Tomlinson," said the President of the Road with a little smile.

"Aye, I brought ye fast," said Tomlinson. But there was no smile in the words.

He was gazing over their heads at something beyond them.

The express had come to rest in the next berth and the great engine loomed above them—breathing softly—full of pride and strength.

The three men looked at her for a minute, as if a magnet held them. Then the crowd, pouring out of the express, bore down upon them and swept them along. Tomlinson climbed back to his place in the cab, watching the two men until they were lost to sight in the jostling, hurrying throng. The express was a long one and the crowd streamed past... pushing, laughing... voices called... cramped limbs stretched themselves after the long ride and hurried a little; the platform resounded to light steps.

The engineer of the express leaned from his window, on folded arms, looking down. He was a quiet man with thoughtful eyes and a serious face.... The eyes raised themselves and looked across at Tomlinson—above the heads of the happy, hurrying crowd—a straight, slow glance. Then he lifted his hand to him—the sign of the brotherhood—as one who salutes an equal.

And Tomlinson lifted his hand in return.

Simeon emerged from the wicket gate, looking about with happy glance. The popcorn boy, scurrying to his place, the lights flaring and blazing, cabmen shouting—it was beautiful—all of it. He fell into the old, brisk walk and John, hurrying beside him, could hardly keep pace with it... Joy was everywhere tonight—sound and bustle and quick-moving crowd. The nervous, hurrying frame vibrated to the city as a child to its mother's touch, or the heart to music.... He was back among his own—exile was done.... They pressed upon him—past him—around him. He jostled elbows, and was glad. He could have stretched out his hands to them—every one. The grasp of the old Scotchman's fingers lingered with him still—It crept up his arm in tiny thrills and warmed his heart. He must do something better for Tomlinson. There was strength in the old man still—with a grip like that! He rubbed his hand and shook his fingers a little ruefully at the very thought of it. How the old fellow had loomed—there on the platform—tall and grim! Then—in a flash—he saw him... in the green room, his head lifted high, his face stem... the very scent of the room was in the vision, pungent and fresh.

He drew a quick breath and threw back his head with a little impatient gesture. "I shall never get out of those woods," he said. "I can smell them—yet! lean smell them here."...

The boy glanced at him with swift twinkle. "Look behind you, sir."

Simeon flashed back a quick look. Behind them was the porter, laden with bags and mgs. and bundles, and on his great shoulders the green branches swayed and nodded as he moved. They framed the big face with its

gleaming smile—like some grotesque, dark-skinned dryad in the smoky station.

Simeon's eye sought the boy's—a little anxiously, it seemed, "Going to trim the office?" he said.

He laughed back. "I 'm carrying them home to her."

He called a carriage, and the porter stowed away the boxes and bags and mgs, piling the mass of pine and spruce on the seat in front of them till the carriage was filled with its subtle fragrance.

Simeon leaned forward in the half light and plucked a little spray of the cedar, placing it in his coat. "That is for me," he said, smiling a little, as he buttoned the coat over it, "the rest is for her."

The great office building loomed at the right as they drove, and he glanced out quickly. "Same old place!" he said. His face wore a contented look and his hand reached out, in the dim light, to the stubby one resting on the boy's knee and closed upon it for a moment with firm grasp.... "Tomorrow, Boy," he said, "we begin again."

"Tomorrow, sir," replied the boy.

He entered the house lightly, but not so lightly that her sensitive ear did not catch the sound and hold itself attent to listen—"John?" Her voice searched the darkness. "John?—Is it you?"

He came in swiftly—"Bad mother!" He dropped on his knees beside her and laid his cool cheek to hers.... "Bad mother—to lie awake!" Her hand reached up to stroke his face.... "How fragrant you are—like the woods!"

The fingers strayed a little and touched the feathery sprays and lingered—questioning. "It is the woods! You have brought me the woods!" The little cry of joy trembled in her voice. "I shall sleep now."

He bent and kissed her. "Good-night, mother."

"Good-night, my son.."

In the dusky, fragrant room she fell asleep, like a child, and she dreamed that she was-a child and wandered in a wood and that an angel with shining eyes came to her and walked with her under the green branches and when he went away she cried to him and he turned and kissed her and said—

"I have brought your breakfast, mother." So she wakened to another day.

END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIMEON TETLOW'S SHADOW ***

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