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# THE DELUGE

## By David Graham Phillips

**Author of The Cost, The Plum Tree, The Social Secretary, etc.**

**Illustrations (not available here) By George Gibbs**

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# I. MR. BLACKLOCK

When Napoleon was about to crown himself—so I have somewhere read—they submitted to him the royal genealogy they had faked up for him. He crumpled the parchment and flung it in the face of the chief herald, or whoever it was. "My line," said he, "dates from Montenotte." And so I say, my line dates from the campaign that completed and established my fame—from "Wild Week."

I shall not pause to recite the details of the obscurity from which I emerged. It would be an interesting, a romantic story; but it is a familiar story, also, in this land which Lincoln so finely and so fully described when he said: "The republic is opportunity."

One fact only: *I did not take the name Blacklock*.

I was born Blacklock, and christened Matthew; and my hair's being very black and growing so that a lock of it often falls down the middle of my forehead is a coincidence. The malicious and insinuating story that I used to go under another name arose, no doubt, from my having been a bootblack in my early days, and having let my customers shorten my name into Matt Black. But, as soon as I graduated from manual labor, I resumed my rightful name and have borne it—I think I may say without vanity—in honor to honor.

Some one has written: “It was a great day for fools when modesty was made a virtue.” I heartily subscribe to that. Life means action; action means self-assertion; self-assertion rouses all the small, colorless people to the only sort of action of which they are capable—to sneering at the doer as egotistical, vain, conceited, bumptious and the like. So be it! I have an individuality, aggressive, restless and, like all such individualities, necessarily in the lime-light; I have from the beginning lost no opportunity to impress that individuality upon my time. Let those who have nothing to advertise, and those less courageous and less successful than I at advertisement, jeer and spit. I ignore them. I make no apologies for egotism. I think, when my readers have finished, they will demand none. They will see that I had work to do, and that I did it in the only way an intelligent man ever tries to do his work—his own way, the way natural to him!

Wild Week! Its cyclones, rising fury on fury to that historic climax of chaos, sing their mad song in my ears again as I write. But I shall by no means confine my narrative to business and finance. Take a cross-section of life anywhere, and you have a tangled interweaving of the action and reaction of men upon men, of women upon women, of men and women upon one another. And this shall be a cross-section out of the very heart of our life to-day, with its big and bold energies and passions—the swiftest and intensest life ever lived by the human race.

To begin:

## II. IN THOSE DAYS AROSE KINGS

Imagine yourself back two years and a half before Wild Week, back at the time when the kings of finance had just completed their apparently final conquest of the industries of the country, when they were seating themselves upon thrones encircled by vast armies of capital and brains, when all the governments of the nation—national, state and city—were prostrate under their iron heels.

You may remember that I was a not inconspicuous figure then. Of all their financial agents, I was the best-known, the most trusted by them, the most believed in by the people. I had a magnificent suite of offices in the building that dominates Wall and Broad Streets. Boston claimed me also, and Chicago; and in Philadelphia, New Orleans, St. Louis, San Francisco, in the towns and rural districts tributary to the cities, thousands spoke of Blacklock as their trusted adviser in matters of finance. My enemies—and I had them, numerous and venomous enough to prove me a man worth while—my enemies spoke of me as the “biggest bucket-shop gambler in the world.”

Gambler I was—like all the other manipulators of the markets. But “bucket-shop” I never kept. As the kings of finance were the representatives of the great merchants, manufacturers and investors, so was I the representative of the masses, of those who wished their small savings properly invested. The power of the big fellows was founded upon wealth and the brains wealth buys or bullies or seduces into its service; my power was founded upon the hearts and homes of the people, upon faith in my frank honesty.

How had I built up my power? By recognizing the possibilities of publicity, the chance which the broadcast sowing of newspapers and magazines put within the reach of the individual man to impress himself upon the whole country, upon the whole civilized world. The kings of finance relied upon the assiduity and dexterity of sundry paid agents, operating through the stealthy, clumsy, old-fashioned channels for the exercise of power. I relied only upon myself; I had to trust to no fallible, perhaps traitorous, understrappers; through the megaphone of the press I spoke directly to the people.

My enemies charge that I always have been unscrupulous and dishonest. So? Then how have I lived and thrived all these years in the glare and blare of publicity?

It is true, I have used the “methods of the charlatan” in bringing myself into wide public notice. The just way to put it would be that I have used for honest purposes the methods of publicity that charlatans have shrewdly appropriated, because by those means the public can be most widely and most quickly reached. Does good become evil because hypocrites use it as a cloak? It is also true that I have been “undignified.” Let the stupid cover their stupidity with “dignity.” Let the swindler hide his schemings under “dignity.” I am a man of the people, not afraid to be seen as the human being that I am. I laugh when I feel like it. I have no sense of jar when people call me “Matt.” I have a good time, and I shall stay young as long as I stay alive. Wealth hasn't made me a solemn ass, fenced in and unapproachable. The custom of receiving obedience and flattery and admiration has not made me a turkey-cock. Life is a joke; and when the joke's on me, I laugh as heartily as when it's on the other fellow.

It is half-past three o'clock on a May afternoon; a dismal, dreary rain is being whirled through the streets by as nasty a wind as ever blew out of the east. You are in the private office of that “king of kings,” Henry J. Roebuck, philanthropist, eminent churchman, leading citizen and—in business—as corrupt a creature as ever used the domino of respectability. That office is on the twelfth floor of the Power Trust Building—and the Power Trust is Roebuck, and Roebuck is the Power Trust. He is seated at his desk and, thinking I do not see him, is looking at me with an expression of benevolent and melancholy pity—the look with which he always regarded any one whom the Roebuck God Almighty had commanded Roebuck to destroy. He and his God were in constant communication; his God never did anything except for his benefit, he never did anything except on the direct counsel or command of his God. Just now his God is commanding him to destroy me, his confidential agent in shaping many a vast industrial enterprise and in inducing the public to buy by the million its bonds and stocks.

I invited the angry frown of the Roebuck God by saying: “And I bought in the Manasquale mines on my own account.”

“On your own account!” said Roebuck. Then he hastily effaced his involuntary air of the engineer startled by sight of an unexpected red light.

“Yes,” replied I, as calm as if I were not realizing the tremendous significance of what I had announced. “I look to you to let me participate on equal terms.”

That is, I had decided that the time had come for me to take my place among the kings of finance. I had decided to promote myself from agent to principal, from prime minister to king—I must, myself, promote myself, for in this world all promotion that is solid comes from within. And in furtherance of my object I had bought this group of mines, control of which was vital to the Roebuck-Langdon-Melville combine for a monopoly of the coal of the country.

“Did not Mr. Langdon commission you to buy them for him and his friends?” inquired Roebuck, in that slow, placid tone which yet, for the attentive ear, had a note in it like the scream of a jaguar that comes home and finds its cub gone.

“But I couldn't get them for him,” I explained. “The owners wouldn't sell until I engaged that the National Coal and Railway Company was not to have them.”

“Oh, I see,” said Roebuck, sinking back relieved. “We must get Browne to draw up some sort of perpetual, irrevocable power of attorney to us for you to sign.”

“But I won't sign it,” said I.

Roebuck took up a sheet of paper and began to fold it upon itself with great care to get the edges straight. He had grasped my meaning; he was deliberating.

“For four years now,” I went on, “you people have been promising to take me in as a principal in some one of your deals—to give me recognition by making me president, or chairman of an executive or finance committee. I am an impatient man, Mr. Roebuck. Life is short, and I have much to do. So I have bought the Manasquale mines—and I shall hold them.”

Roebuck continued to fold the paper upon itself until he had reduced it to a short, thick strip. This he slowly twisted between his cruel fingers until it was in two pieces. He dropped them, one at a time, into the waste-basket, then smiled benevolently at me. “You are right,” he said. “You shall have what you want. You have seemed such a mere boy to me that, in spite of your giving again and again proof of what you are, I have been putting you off. Then, too—” He halted, and his look was that of one surveying delicate ground.

“The bucket-shop?” suggested I.

“Exactly,” said he gratefully. “Your brokerage business has been invaluable to us. But—well, I needn't tell you how people—the men of standing—look on that sort of thing.”

“I never have paid any attention to pompous pretenses,” said I, “and I never shall. My brokerage business must go on, and my daily letters to investors. By advertising I rose; by advertising I am a power that even you recognize; by advertising alone can I keep that power.”

“You forget that in the new circumstances, you won't need that sort of power. Adapt yourself to your new surroundings. Overalls for the trench; a business suit for the office.”

“I shall keep to my overalls for the present,” said I. “They're more comfortable, and”—here I smiled significantly at him—“if I shed them, I might have to go naked. The first principle of business is never to give up what you have until your grip is tight on something better.”

“No doubt you're right,” agreed the white-haired old scoundrel, giving no sign that I had fathomed his motive for trying to “hint” me out of my stronghold. “I will talk the matter over with Langdon and Melville. Rest assured, my boy, that you will be satisfied.” He got up, put his arm affectionately round my shoulders. “We all like you. I have a feeling toward you as if you were my own son. I am getting old, and I like to see young men about me, growing up to assume the responsibilities of the Lord's work whenever He shall call me to my reward.”

It will seem incredible that a man of my shrewdness and experience could be taken in by such slimy stuff as that—I who knew Roebuck as only a few insiders knew him, I who had seen him at work, as devoid of heart as an empty spider in an empty web. Yet I was taken in to the extent that I thought he really purposed to recognize my services, to yield to the only persuasion that could affect him—force. I fancied he was actually about to put me where I could be of the highest usefulness to him and his associates, as well as to myself. As if an old man ever yielded power or permitted another to gain power, even though it were to his own great advantage. The avarice of age is not open to reason.

It was with tears in my eyes that I shook hands with him, thanking him emotionally. It was with a high chin and a proud heart that I went back to my offices. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that I was about to get my deserts, was about to enter the charmed circle of “high finance.”

That small and exclusive circle, into which I was seeing myself admitted without the usual arduous and unequal battle, was what may be called the industrial ring—a loose, yet tight, combine of about a dozen men who controlled in one way or another practically all the industries of the country. They had no formal agreements; they held no official meetings. They did not look upon themselves as an association. They often quarreled among themselves, waged bitter wars upon each other over divisions of power or plunder. But, in the broad sense, in the true sense, they were an association—a band united by a common interest, to control finance, commerce and therefore politics; a band united by a common purpose, to keep that control in as few hands as possible. Whenever there was sign of peril from without they flung away differences, pooled resources, marched in full force to put down the insurrection. For they looked on any attempt to interfere with them as a mutiny, as an outbreak of anarchy. This band persisted, but membership in it changed, changed rapidly. Now, one would be beaten to death and despoiled by a clique of fellows; again, weak or rash ones would be cut off in strenuous battle. Often, most often, some too-powerful or too-arrogant member would be secretly and stealthily assassinated by a jealous associate or by a committee of internal safety. Of course, I do not mean literally assassinated, but assassinated, cut off, destroyed, in the sense that a man whose whole life is wealth and power is dead when wealth and power are taken from him.

Actual assassination, the crime of murder—these “gentlemen” rarely did anything which their lawyers did not advise them was legal or could be made legal by bribery of one kind or another. Rarely, I say—not never. You will see presently why I make that qualification.

I had my heart set upon membership in this band—and, as I confess now with shame, my prejudices of self-interest had blinded me into regarding it and its members as great and useful and honorable “captains of industry.” Honorable in the main; for, not even my prejudice could blind me to the almost hair-raising atrocity of some of their doings. Still, morality is largely a question of environment. I had been bred in that environment. Even the atrocities I excused on the ground that he who goes forth to war must be prepared to do and to tolerate many acts the church would have to strain a point to bless. What was Columbus but a marauder, a buccaneer? Was not Drake, in law and in fact, a pirate; Washington a traitor to his soldier's oath of allegiance to King George? I had much to learn, and to unlearn. I was to find out that whenever a Roebuck puts his arm round you, it is invariably to get within your guard and nearer your fifth rib. I was to trace the ugliest deformities of that conscience of his, hidden away down inside him like a dwarfed, starved prisoner in an underground dungeon. I was to be astounded by revelations of Langdon, who was not a believer, like Roebuck, and so was not under the restraint of the feeling that he must keep some sort of conscience ledgers against the inspection of the angelic auditing committee in the day of wrath.

Much to learn—and to unlearn. It makes me laugh as I recall how, on that May day, I looked into the first mirror I was alone with, smiled delighted, as an idiot with myself and said: “Matt, you are of the kings now. Your crown suits you and, as you've earned it, you know how to keep it. Now for some fun with your subjects and your fellow sovereigns.”

A little premature, that preening!

## III. CAME A WOMAN

In my suite in the Textile Building, just off the big main room with its blackboards and tickers, I had a small office in which I spent a good deal of time during Stock Exchange hours. It was there that Sam Ellersly found me the next day but one after my talk with Roebuck.

“I want you to sell that Steel Common, Matt,” said he.

“It'll go several points higher,” said I. “Better let me hold it and use my judgment on selling.”

“I need money—right away,” was his answer.

“That's all right,” said I. “Let me give you an order for what you need.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said he, so promptly that I knew I had done what he had been hoping for, probably counting on.

I give this incident to show what our relations were. He was a young fellow of good family, to whom I had taken a liking. He was a lazy dog, and as out of place in business as a cat in a choir. I had been keeping him going for four years at that time, by giving him tips on stocks and protecting him against loss. This purely out of good nature and liking; for I hadn't the remotest idea he could ever be of use to me beyond helping to liven things up at a dinner or late supper, or down in the country, or on the yacht. In fact, his principal use to me was that he knew how to “beat the box” well enough to shake fairly good music out of it—and I am so fond of music that I can fill in with my imagination when the performer isn't too bad.

They have charged that I deliberately ruined him. Ruined! The first time I gave him a tip—and that was the second or third time I ever saw him—he burst into tears and said: “You've saved my life, Blacklock. I'll never tell you how much this windfall means to me now.” Nor did I with deep and dark design keep him along on the ragged edge. He kept himself there. How could I build up such a man with his hundred ways of wasting money, including throwing it away on his own opinions of stocks—for he would gamble on his own account in the bucket-shops, though I had shown him that the Wall Street game is played always with marked cards, and that the only hope of winning is to get the confidence of the card-markers, unless you are big enough to become a card-marker yourself.

As soon as he got the money from my teller that day, he was rushing away. I followed him to the door—that part of my suite opened out on the sidewalk, for the convenience of my crowds of customers. “I'm just going to lunch,” said I. “Come with me.”

He looked uneasily toward a smart little one-horse brougham at the curb. “Sorry—but I can't,” said he. “I've my sister with me. She brought me down in her trap.”

“That's all right,” said I; “bring her along. We'll go to the Savarin.” And I locked his arm in mine and started toward the brougham.

He was turning all kinds of colors, and was acting in a way that puzzled me—then. Despite all my years in New York I was ignorant of the elaborate social distinctions that had grown up in its Fifth Avenue quarter. I knew, of course, that there was a fashionable society and that some of the most conspicuous of those in it seemed unable to get used to the idea of being rich and were in a state of great agitation over their own importance. Important they might be, but not to me. I knew nothing of their careful gradations of snobbism—the people to know socially, the people to know in a business way, the people to know in ways religious and philanthropic, the people to know for the fun to be got out of them, the people to pride oneself on not knowing at all; the nervousness, the hysteria about preserving these disgusting gradations. All this, I say, was an undreamed-of mystery to me who gave and took liking in the sensible, self-respecting American fashion. So I didn't understand why Sam, as I almost dragged him along, was stammering: “Thank you—but—I—she—the fact is, we really must get up-town.”

By this time I was where I could look into the brougham. A glance—I can see much at a glance, as can any man who spends every day of every year in an all-day fight for his purse and his life, with the blows coming from all sides. I can see much at a glance; I often have seen much; I never saw more than just then. Instantly, I made up my mind that the Ellerslys would lunch with me. “You've got to eat somewhere,” said I, in a tone

that put an end to his attempts to manufacture excuses. “I'll be delighted to have you. Don't make up any more yarns.”

He slowly opened the door. “Anita,” said he, “Mr. Blacklock. He's invited us to lunch.”

I lifted my hat, and bowed. I kept my eyes straight upon hers. And it gave me more pleasure to look into them than I had ever before got out of looking into anybody's. I am passionately fond of flowers, and of children; and her face reminded me of both. Or, rather, it seemed to me that what I had seen, with delight and longing, incomplete in their freshness and beauty and charm, was now before me in the fullness. I felt like saying to her, “I have heard of you often. The children and the flowers have told me you were coming.” Perhaps my eyes did say it. At any rate, she looked as straight at me as I at her, and I noticed that she paled a little and shrank—yet continued to look, as if I were compelling her. But her voice, beautifully clear, and lingering in the ears like the resonance of the violin after the bow has swept its strings and lifted, was perfectly self-possessed, as she said to her brother: “That will be delightful—if you think we have time.”

I saw that she, uncertain whether he wished to accept, was giving him a chance to take either course. “He has time—nothing but time,” said I. “His engagements are always with people who want to get something out of him. And they can wait.” I pretended to think he was expecting me to enter the trap; I got in, seated myself beside her, said to Sam: “I've saved the little seat for you. Tell your man to take us to the Equitable Building—Nassau Street entrance.”

I talked a good deal during the first half of the nearly two hours we were together—partly because both Sam and his sister seemed under some sort of strain, chiefly because I was determined to make a good impression. I told her about myself, my horses, my house in the country, my yacht. I tried to show her I wasn't an ignoramus as to books and art, even if I hadn't been to college. She listened, while Sam sat embarrassed. “You must bring your sister down to visit me,” I said finally. “I'll see that you both have the time of your lives. Make up a party of your friends, Sam, and come down—when shall we say? Next Sunday? You know you were coming anyhow. I can change the rest of the party.”

Sam grew as red as if he were going into apoplexy. I thought then he was afraid I'd blurt out something about who were in the party I was proposing to change. I was soon to know better.

“Thank you, Mr.—Blacklock,” said his sister. “But I have an engagement next Sunday. I have a great many engagements just now. Without looking at my book I couldn't say when I can go.” This easily and naturally. In her set they certainly do learn thoroughly that branch of tact which plain people call lying.

Sam gave her a grateful look, which he thought I didn't see, and which I didn't rightly interpret—then.

“We'll fix it up later, Blacklock,” said he.

“All right,” said I. And from that minute I was almost silent. It was something in her tone and manner that silenced me. I suddenly realized that I wasn't making as good an impression as I had been flattering myself.

When a man has money and is willing to spend it, he can readily fool himself into imagining he gets on grandly with women. But I had better grounds than that for thinking myself not unattractive to them, as a rule. Women had liked me when I had nothing; women had liked me when they didn't know who I was. I felt that this woman did not like me. And yet, by the way she looked at me in spite of her efforts not to do so, I could tell that I had some sort of unusual interest for her. Why didn't she like me? She made me feel the reason. I didn't belong to her world. My ways and my looks offended her. She disliked me a good deal; she feared me a little. She would have felt safer if she had been gratifying her curiosity, gazing in at me through the bars of a cage.

Where I had been feeling and showing my usual assurance, I now became ill at ease. I longed for them to be gone; at the same time I hated to let her go—for, when and how would I see her again, would I get the chance to remove her bad impression? It irritated me thus to be concerned about the sister of a man into my liking for whom there was mixed much pity and some contempt. But I am of the disposition that, whenever I see an obstacle of whatever kind, I can not restrain myself from trying to jump it. Here was an obstacle—a dislike. To clear it was of the smallest importance in the world, was a silly waste of time. Yet I felt I could not maintain with myself my boast that there were no obstacles I couldn't get over, if I turned aside from this.

Sam—not without hesitation, as I recalled afterward—left me with her, when I sent him to bring her brougham up to the Broadway entrance. As she and I were standing there alone, waiting in silence, I turned on her suddenly, and blurted out, “You don't like me.”

She reddened a little, smiled slightly. “What a quaint remark!” said she.

I looked straight at her. “But you shall.”

Our eyes met. Her chin came out a little, her eyebrows lifted. Then, in scorn of herself as well as of me, she locked herself in behind a frozen haughtiness that ignored me. “Ah, here is the carriage,” she said. I followed her to the curb; she just touched my hand, just nodded her fascinating little head.

“See you Saturday, old man,” called her brother friendlily. My lowering face had alarmed him.

“That party is off,” said I curtly. And I lifted my hat and strode away.

As I had formed the habit of dismissing the disagreeable, I soon put her out of my mind. But she took with her my joy in the taste of things. I couldn't get back my former keen satisfaction in all I had done and was doing. The luxury, the tangible evidences of my achievement, no longer gave me pleasure; they seemed to add to my irritation.

That's the way it is in life. We load ourselves down with toys like so many greedy children; then we see another toy and drop everything to be free to seize it; and if we can not, we're wretched.

I worked myself up, or rather, down, to such a mood that when my office boy told me Mr. Langdon would like me to come to his office as soon as it was convenient, I snapped out: “The hell he does! Tell Mr. Langdon I'll be glad to see him here whenever he calls.” That was stupidity, a premature assertion of my right to be treated as an equal. I had always gone to Langdon, and to any other of the rulers of finance, whenever I had got a summons. For, while I was rich and powerful, I held both wealth and power, in a sense, on sufferance; I knew that, so long as I had no absolute control of any great department of industry, these rulers could

destroy me should they decide that they needed my holdings or were not satisfied with my use of my power. There were a good many people who did not realize that property rights had ceased to exist, that property had become a revocable grant from the “plutocrats.” I was not of those misguided ones who had failed to discover the new fact concealed in the old form. So I used to go when I was summoned.

But not that day. However, no sooner was my boy gone than I repented the imprudence, “But what of it?” said I to myself. “No matter how the thing turns out, I shall be able to get some advantage.” For it was part of my philosophy that a proper boat with proper sails and a proper steersman can gain in any wind. I was surprised when Langdon appeared in my office a few minutes later.

He was a tallish, slim man, carefully dressed, with a bored, weary look and a slow, bored way of talking. I had always said that if I had not been myself I should have wished to be Langdon. Men liked and admired him; women loved and ran after him. Yet he exerted not the slightest effort to please any one; on the contrary, he made it distinct and clear that he didn't care a rap what any one thought of him or, for that matter, of anybody or anything. He knew how to get, without sweat or snatching, all the good there was in whatever fate threw in his way—and he was one of those men into whose way fate seems to strive to put everything worth having. His business judgment was shrewd, but he cared nothing for the big game he was playing except as a game. Like myself, he was simply a sportsman—and, I think, that is why we liked each other. He could have trusted almost any one that came into contact with him; but he trusted nobody, and frankly warned every one not to trust him—a safe frankness, for his charm caused it to be forgotten or ignored. He would do anything to gain an object, however trivial, which chanced to attract him; once it was his, he would throw it aside as carelessly as an ill-fitting collar.

His expression, as he came into my office, was one of cynical amusement, as if he were saying to himself: “Our friend Blacklock has caught the swollen head at last.” Not a suggestion of ill humor, of resentment at my impertinence—for, in the circumstances, I had been guilty of an impertinence. Just languid, amused patience with the frailty of a friend. “I see,” said he, “that you have got Textile up to eighty-five.”

He was the head of the Textile Trust which had been built by his brother-in-law and had fallen to him in the confusion following his brother-in-law's death. As he was just then needing some money for his share in the National Coal undertaking, he had directed me to push Textile up toward par and unload him of two or three hundred thousand shares—he, of course, to repurchase the shares after he had taken profits and Textile had dropped back to its normal fifty.

“I'll have it up to ninety-eight by the middle of next month,” said I. “And there I think we'd better stop.”

“Stop at about ninety,” said he. “That will give me all I find I'll need for this Coal business. I don't want to be bothered with hunting up an investment.”

I shook my head. “I must put it up to within a point or two of par,” I declared. “In my public letter I've been saying it would go above ninety-five, and I never deceive my public.”

He smiled—my notion of honesty always amused him. “As you please,” he said with a shrug. Then I saw a serious look—just a fleeting flash of warning—behind his smiling mask; and he added carelessly: “Be careful about your own personal play. I doubt if Textile can be put any higher.”

It must have been my mood that prevented those words from making the impression on me they should have made. Instead of appreciating at once and at its full value this characteristic and amazingly friendly signal of caution, I showed how stupidly inattentive I was by saying: “Something doing? Something new?”

But he had already gone further than his notion of friendship warranted. So he replied: “Oh, no. Simply that everything's uncertain nowadays.”

My mind had been all this time on those Manasquale mining properties. I now said: “Has Roebuck told you that I had to buy those mines on my own account?”

“Yes,” he said. He hesitated, and again he gave me a look whose meaning came to me only when it was too late. “I think, Blacklock, you'd better turn them over to me.”

“I can't,” I answered. “I gave my word.”

“As you please,” said he.

Apparently the matter didn't interest him. He began to talk of the performances of my little two-year-old, Beachcomber; and after twenty minutes or so, he drifted away. “I envy you your enthusiasm,” he said, pausing in my doorway. “Wherever I am, I wish I were somewhere else. Whatever I'm doing, I wish I were doing something else. Where do you get all this joy of the fight? What the devil are you fighting for?”

He didn't wait for a reply.

I thought over my situation steadily for several days. I went down to my country place. I looked everywhere among all my belongings, searching, searching, restless, impatient. At last I knew what ailed me—what the lack was that yawned so gloomily from everything I had once thought beautiful, had once found sufficient. I was in the midst of the splendid, terraced pansy beds my gardeners had just set out; I stopped short and slapped my thigh. “A woman!” I exclaimed. “That's what I need. A woman—the right sort of woman—a wife!”

## IV. A CANDIDATE FOR “RESPECTABILITY”

To handle this new business properly I must put myself in position to look the whole field over. I must get in line and in touch with “respectability.” When Sam Ellersly came in for his “rations,” I said: “Sam, I want you to put me up at the Travelers Club.”

“The Travelers!” echoed he, with a blank look.

“The Travelers,” said I. “It's about the best of the big clubs, isn't it? And it has as members most of the men

I do business with and most of those I want to get into touch with."

He laughed. "It can't be done."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Oh—I don't know. You see—the fact is—well, they're a lot of old fogies up there. You don't want to bother with that push, Matt. Take my advice. Do business with them, but avoid them socially."

"I want to go in there," I insisted. "I have my own reasons. You put me up."

"I tell you, it'd be no use," he replied, in a tone that implied he wished to hear no more of the matter.

"You put me up," I repeated. "And if you do your best, I'll get in all right. I've got lots of friends there. And you've got three relatives in the committee on membership."

At this he gave me a queer, sharp glance—a little fright in it.

I laughed. "You see, I've been looking into it, Sam. I never take a jump till I've measured it."

"You'd better wait a few years, until—" he began, then stopped and turned red.

"Until what?" said I. "I want you to speak frankly."

"Well, you've got a lot of enemies—a lot of fellows who've lost money in deals you've engineered. And they'd say all sorts of things."

"I'll take care of that," said I, quite easy in mind. "Mowbray Langdon's president, isn't he? Well, he's my closest friend." I spoke quite honestly. It shows how simple-minded I was in certain ways that I had never once noted the important circumstance that this "closest friend" had never invited me to his house, or anywhere where I'd meet his up-town associates at introducing distance.

Sam looked surprised. "Oh, in that case," he said, "I'll see what can be done." But his tone was not quite cordial enough to satisfy me.

To stimulate him and to give him an earnest of what I intended to do for him, when our little social deal had been put through, I showed him how he could win ten thousand dollars in the next three days. "And you needn't bother about putting up margins," said I, as I often had before. "I'll take care of that."

He stammered a refusal and went out; but he came back within an hour, and, in a strained sort of way, accepted my tip and my offer.

"That's sensible," said I. "When will you attend to the matter at the Travelers? I want to be warned so I can pull my own set of wires in concert."

"I'll let you know," he answered, hanging his head.

I didn't understand his queer actions then. Though I was an expert in finance, I hadn't yet made a study of that other game—the game of "gentleman." And I didn't know how seriously the frauds and fakirs who play it take it and themselves. I attributed his confusion to a ridiculous mock modesty he had about accepting favors; it struck me as being particularly silly on this occasion, because for once he was to give as well as to take.

He didn't call for his profits, but wrote asking me to mail him the check for them. I did so, putting in the envelop with it a little jog to his memory on the club matter. I didn't see him again for nearly a month; and though I searched and sent, I couldn't get his trail. On opening day at Morris Park, I was going along the passage behind the boxes in the grand stand, on my way to the paddock. I wanted to see my horse that was about to run for the Salmagundi Sweepstakes, and to tell my jockey that I'd give him fifteen thousand, instead of ten thousand, if he won—for I had put quite a bunch down. I was a figure at the tracks in those days. I went into racing on my customary generous scale. I liked horses, just as I liked everything that belonged out under the big sky; also I liked the advertising my string of thoroughbreds gave me. I was rich enough to be beyond the stage at which a man excites suspicion by frequenting race-tracks and gambling-houses; I was at the height where prodigalities begin to be taken as evidences of abounding superfluity, not of a dangerous profligacy. Jim Harkaway, who failed at playing the same game I played and won, said to me with a sneer one day: "You certainly do know how to get a dollar's worth of notoriety out of a dollar's worth of advertising."

"If I only knew that, Jim," said I, "I'd have been long ago where you're bound for. The trick is to get it back ten for one. The more *you* advertise yourself, the more suspicious of you people become. The more money I 'throw away' in advertising, the more convinced people are that I can afford to do it."

But, as I was about to say, in one of the boxes I spied my shy friend, Sammy. He was looking better than I had ever seen him. Less heavy-eyed, less pallid and pasty, less like a man who had been shirking bed and keeping up on cocktails and cold baths. He was at the rear of the box, talking with a lady and a gentleman. As soon as I saw that lady, I knew what it was that had been hiding at the bottom of my mind and rankling there.

Luckily I was alone; ever since that lunch I had been cutting loose from the old crowd—from all its women, and from all its men except two or three real friends who were good fellows straight through, in spite of their having made the mistake of crossing the dead line between amateur "sport" and professional. I leaned over and tapped Sammy on the shoulder.

He glanced round, and when he saw me, looked as if I were a policeman who had caught him in the act.

"Howdy, Sam?" said I. "It's been so long since I've seen you that I couldn't resist the temptation to interrupt. Hope your friends'll excuse me. Howdy do, Miss Ellersly?" And I put out my hand.

She took it reluctantly. She was giving me a very unpleasant look—as if she were seeing, not somebody, but some *thing* she didn't care to see, or were seeing nothing at all. I liked that look; I liked the woman who had it in her to give it. She made me feel that she was difficult and therefore worth while, and that's what all we human beings are in business for—to make each other feel that we're worth while.

"Just a moment," said Sam, red as a cranberry and stuttering. And he made a motion to come out of the box and join me. At the same time Miss Anita and the other fellow began to turn away.

But I was not the man to be cheated in that fashion. I wanted to see *her*, and I compelled her to see it and to feel it. "Don't let me take you from your friends," said I to Sammy. "Perhaps they'd like to come with you and me down to look at my horse. I can give you a good tip—he's bound to win. I've had my boys out on the rails every morning at the trials of all the other possibilities. None of 'em's in it with Mowghli."

“Mowghli!” said the young lady—she had begun to turn toward me as soon as I spoke the magic word, “tip.” There may be men who can resist that word “tip” at the race-track, but there never was a woman.

“My sister has to stay here,” said Sammy hurriedly. “I'll go with you, Blacklock.”

All this time he was looking as if he were doing something he ought to be ashamed of. I thought then he was ashamed because he, professing to be a gentleman, had been neglecting his debt of honor. I now know he was ashamed because he was responsible for his sister's being contaminated by contact with such a man as I! I who hadn't a dollar that wasn't honestly earned; I who had made a fortune by my own efforts, and was spending my millions like a prince; I who had taste in art and music and in architecture and furnishing and all the fine things of life. Above all, I who had been his friend and benefactor. *He* knew I was more of a gentleman than he could ever hope to be, he with no ability at anything but spending money; he a sponge and a cadger, yes, and a welcher—for wasn't he doing his best to welch me? But just because a lot of his friends, jealous of my success and angry that I refused to truckle to them and be like them instead of like myself, sneered at me—behind my back—this poor-spirited creature was daring to pretend to himself that I wasn't fit for the society of his sister!

“Mowghli!” said Miss Ellersly. “What a quaint name!”

“My trainer gave it,” said I. “I've got a second son of one of those broken-down English noblemen at the head of my stables. He's trying to get money enough together to be able to show up at Newport and take a shy at an heiress.”

At this the fellow who was fourth in our party, and who had been giving me a nasty, glassy stare, got as red as was Sammy. Then I noticed that he was an Englishman, and I all but chuckled with delight. However, I said, “No offense intended,” and clapped him on the shoulder with a friendly smile. “He's a good fellow, my man Monson, and knows a lot about horses.”

Miss Ellersly bit her lip and colored, but I noticed also that her eyes were dancing.

Sam introduced the Englishman to me—Lord Somebody-or-other, I forget what, as I never saw him again. I turned like a bulldog from a toy terrier and was at Miss Ellersly again. “Let me put a little something on Mowghli for you,” said I. “You're bound to win—and I'll see that you don't lose. I know how you ladies hate to lose.”

That was a bit stiff, as I know well enough now. Indeed, my instinct would have told me better then, if I hadn't been so used to the sort of women that jump at such an offer, and if I hadn't been casting about so desperately and in such confusion for some way to please her. At any rate, I hardly deserved her sudden frozen look. “I beg pardon,” I stammered, and I think my look at her must have been very humble—for me.

The others in the box were staring round at us. “Come on,” cried Sam, dragging at my arm, “let's go.”

“Won't you come?” I said to his sister. I shouldn't have been able to keep my state of mind out of my voice, if I had tried. And I didn't try.

Trust the right sort of woman to see the right sort of thing in a man through any and all kinds of barriers of caste and manners and breeding. Her voice was much softer as she said: “I think I must stay here. Thank you, just the same.”

As soon as Sam and I were alone, I apologized. “I hope you'll tell your sister I'm sorry for that break,” said I.

“Oh, that's all right,” he answered, easy again, now that we were away from the others. “You meant well—and motive's the thing.”

“Motive—hell!” cried I in my anger at myself. “Nobody but a man's God knows his motives; he doesn't even know them himself. I judge others by what they do, and I expect to be judged in the same way. I see I've got a lot to learn.” Then I suddenly remembered the Travelers Club, and asked him what he'd done about it.

“I—I've been—thinking it over,” said he. “Are you *sure* you want to run the risk of an ugly cropper, Matt?”

I turned him round so that we were facing each other. “Do you want to do me that favor, or don't you?” I demanded.

“I'll do whatever you say,” he replied. “I'm thinking only of your interests.”

“Let *me* take care of *them*,” said I. “You put me up at that club to-morrow. I'll send you the name of a seconder not later than noon.”

“Up goes your name,” he said. “But don't blame me for the consequences.”

And my name went up, with Mowbray Langdon's brother, Tom, as seconder. Every newspaper in town published the fact, most of them under big black headlines. “The fun's about to begin,” thought I, as I read. And I was right, though I hadn't the remotest idea how big a ball I had opened.

## V. DANGER SIGNALS

At that time I did not myself go over the bills before the legislatures of those states in which I had interests. I trusted that work to my lawyers—and, like every man who ever absolutely trusted an important division of his affairs to another, I was severely punished. One morning my eye happened to light upon a minor paragraph in a newspaper—a list of the “small bills yesterday approved by the governor.” In the list was one “defining the power of sundry commissions.” Those words seemed to me somehow to spell “joker.” But why did I call up my lawyers to ask them about it? It's a mystery to me. All I know is that, busy as I was, something inside me compelled me to drop everything else and hunt that “joker” down.

I got Saxe—then senior partner in Browne, Saxe and Einstein—on the 'phone, and said: “Just see and tell me, will you, what is the 'bill defining the power of sundry commissions'—the bill the governor signed yesterday?”

“Certainly, Mr. Blacklock,” came the answer. My nerves are, and always have been, on the watchout for the looks and the tones and the gestures that are just a shade off the natural; and I feel that I do Saxe no injustice when I say his tone was, not a shade, but a full color, off the natural. So I was prepared for what he said when he returned to the telephone. “I'm sorry, Mr. Blacklock, but we seem unable to lay our hands on that bill at this moment.”

“Why not?” said I, in the tone that makes an employee jump as if a whip-lash had cut him on the calves.

He had jumped all right, as his voice showed. “It's not in our file,” said he. “It's House Bill No. 427, and it's apparently not here.”

“The hell you say!” I exclaimed. “Why?”

“I really can't explain,” he pleaded, and the frightened whine confirmed my suspicion.

“I guess not,” said I, making the words significant and suggestive. “And you're in my pay to look after such matters! But you'll have to explain, if this turns out to be serious.”

“Apparently our file of bills is complete except that one,” he went on. “I suppose it was lost in the mail, and I very stupidly didn't notice the gap in the numbers.”

“Stupid isn't the word I'd use,” said I, with a laugh that wasn't of the kind that cheers. And I rang off and asked for the state capitol on the “long distance.”

Before I got my connection Saxe, whose office was only two blocks away, came flustering in. “The boy has been discharged, Mr. Blacklock,” he began.

“What boy?” said I.

“The boy in charge of the bill file—the boy whose business it was to keep the file complete.”

“Send him to me, you damned scoundrel,” said I. “I'll give him a job. What do you take me for, anyway? And what kind of a cowardly hound are you to disgrace an innocent boy as a cover for your own crooked work?”

“Really, Mr. Blacklock, this is most extraordinary,” he expostulated.

“Extraordinary? I call it criminal,” I retorted. “Listen to me. You look after the legislation calendars for me, and for Langdon, and for Roebuck, and for Melville, and for half a dozen others of the biggest financiers in the country. It's the most important work you do for us. Yet you, as shrewd and careful a lawyer as there is at the bar, want me to believe you trusted that work to a boy! If you did, you're a damn fool. If you didn't, you're a damn scoundrel. There's no more doubt in my mind than in yours which of those horns has you sticking on it.”

“You are letting your quick temper get away with you, Mr. Blacklock,” he deprecated.

“Stop lying!” I shouted, “I knew you had been doing some skulduggery when I first heard your voice on the telephone. And if I needed any proof, the meek way you've taken my abuse would furnish it, and to spare.”

Just then the telephone bell rang and I got the right department and asked the clerk to read House Bill 427. It contained five short paragraphs. The “joker” was in the third, which gave the State Canal Commission the right “to institute condemnation proceedings, and to condemn, and to abolish, any canal not exceeding thirty miles in length and not a part of the connected canal system of the state.”

When I hung up the receiver I was so absorbed that I had forgotten Saxe was waiting. He made some slight sound. I wheeled on him. I needed a vent. If he hadn't been there I should have smashed a chair. But there was he—and I kicked him out of my private office and would have kicked him out through the anteroom into the outer hall, had he not gathered himself together and run like a jack-rabbit.

Since that day I have done my own calendar watching.

By this incident I do not mean to suggest that there are not honorable men in the legal profession. Most of them are men of the highest honor, as are most business men, most persons of consequence in every department of life. But you don't look for character in the proprietors, servants, customers and hangers-on of dives. No more ought you to look for honor among any of the people that have to do with the big gilded dive of the dollarocracy. They are there to gamble, and to prostitute themselves. The fact that they look like gentlemen and have the manners and the language of gentlemen ought to deceive nobody but the callow chaps of the sort that believes the swell gambler is “an honest fellow” and a “perfect gentleman otherwise,” because he wears a dress suit in the evening and is a judge of books and pictures. Lawyers are the doorkeepers and the messengers of the big dive; and these lawyers, though they stand the highest and get the biggest fees, are just what you would expect human beings to be who expose themselves to such temptations, and yield whenever they get an opportunity, as eager and as compliant as a *cocotte*.

My lawyers had sold me out; I, fool that I was, had not guarded the only weak plate in my armor against my companions—the plate over my back, to shed assassin thrusts. Roebuck and Langdon between them owned the governor; he owned the Canal Commission; my canal, which gave me access to tide-water for the product of my Manasquale mines, was as good as closed. I no longer had the whip-hand in National Coal. The others could sell me out and take two-thirds of my fortune, whenever they liked—for of what use were my mines with no outlet now to any market, except the outlets the coal crowd owned?

As soon as I had thought the situation out in all its bearings, I realized that there was no escape for me now, that whatever chance to escape I might have had was closed by my uncovering to Saxe and kicking him. But I did not regret; it was worth the money it would cost me. Besides, I thought I saw how I could later on turn it to good account. A sensible man never makes fatal errors. Whatever he does is at least experience, and can also be used to advantage. If Napoleon hadn't been half dead at Waterloo, I don't doubt he would have used its disaster as a means to a greater victory.

Was I downcast by the discovery that those bandits had me apparently at their mercy? Not a bit. Never in my life have I been downcast over money matters more than a few minutes. Why should I be? Why should any man be who has made himself all that he is? As long as his brain is sound, his capital is unimpaired. When I walked into Mowbray Langdon's office, I was like a thoroughbred exercising on a clear frosty morning; and my smile was as fresh as the flower in my buttonhole. I thrust out my hand at him. “I congratulate you,” said I.

He took the proffered hand with a questioning look.

“On what?” said he. It is hard to tell from his face what is going on in his head, but I think I guessed right when I decided that Saxe hadn't yet warned him.

“I have just found out from Saxe,” I pursued, “about the Canal Bill.”

“What Canal Bill?” he asked.

“That puzzled look was a mistake, Langdon,” said I, laughing at him. “When you don't know anything about a matter, you look merely blank. You overdid it; you've given yourself away.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “As you please,” said he. As you please was his favorite expression; a stereotyped irony, for in dealing with him, things were never as *you* pleased, but always as *he* pleased.

“Next time you want to dig a mine under anybody,” I went on, “don't hire Saxe. Really I feel sorry for you—to have such a clever scheme messed by such an ass.”

“If you don't mind, I'd like to know what you're talking about,” said he, with his patient, bored look.

“As you and Roebuck own the governor, I know your little law ends my little canal.”

“Still I don't know what you're talking about,” drawled he. “You are always suspecting everybody of double-dealing. I gather that this is another instance of your infirmity. Really, Blacklock, the world isn't wholly made up of scoundrels.”

“I know that,” said I. “And I will even admit that its scoundrels are seldom made up wholly of scoundrelism. Even Roebuck would rather do the decent thing, if he can do it without endangering his personal interests. As for you—I regard you as one of the decentest men I ever knew—outside of business. And even there, I believe you'd keep your word, as long as the other fellow kept his.”

“Thank you,” said he, bowing ironically. “This flattery makes me suspect you've come to get something.”

“On the contrary,” said I. “I want to give something. I want to give you my coal mines.”

“I thought you'd see that our offer was fair,” said he. “And I'm glad you have changed your mind about quarreling with your best friends. We can be useful to you, you to us. A break would be silly.”

“That's the way it looks to me,” I assented. And I decided that my sharp talk to Roebuck had set them to estimating my value to them.

“Sam Ellersly,” Langdon presently remarked, “tells me he's campaigning hard for you at the Travelers. I hope you'll make it. We're rather a slow crowd; a few men like you might stir things up.”

I am always more than willing to give others credit for good sense and good motives. It was not vanity, but this disposition to credit others with sincerity and sense, that led me to believe him, both as to the Coal matter and as to the Travelers Club. “Thanks, Langdon,” I said; and that he might look no further for my motive, I added: “I want to get into that club much as the winner of a race wants the medal that belongs to him. I've built myself up into a rich man, into one of the powers in finance, and I feel I'm entitled to recognition.”

“I don't quite follow you,” he said. “I can't see that you'll be either better or worse for getting into the Travelers.”

“No more I shall,” replied I. “No more is the winner of the race the better or the worse for having the medal. But he wants it.”

He had a queer expression. I suppose he regarded it as a joke, my attaching apparently so much importance to a thing he cared nothing about. “You've always had that sort of thing,” said I, “and so you don't appreciate it. You're like a respectable woman. She can't imagine what all the fuss over women keeping a good reputation is about. Well, just let her lose it!”

“Perhaps,” said he.

“And,” I went on, “you can have the rule about the waiting list suspended, and can move me up and get me in at once.”

“We don't do things in quite such a hurry at the Travelers,” said he, laughing. “However, we'll try to comply with your commands.”

His generous, cordial offer made me half ashamed of the plot I had underneath my submission about the coal mines—a plot to get into the coal combine in order to gather the means to destroy it, and perhaps reconstruct it with myself in control. I made up my mind that, if he continued to act squarely, I would alter those plans.

“If you don't mind,” Langdon was going on, “I'll make a suggestion—merely a suggestion. It might not be a bad idea for you to arrange to—to eliminate some of the—the popular features from your—brokerage business. There are several influential members of the Travelers who have a—a prejudice—”

“I understand,” I interposed, to spare him the necessity of saying things he thought I might regard as impertinent. “They look on me as a keeper of a high-class bucket-shop.” “That's about the way they'd put it.”

“But the things they object to are, unfortunately, my 'strong hold,'” I explained. “You other big fellows gather in the big investors by simply announcing your projects in a dignified way. I haven't got the ear of that class of people. I have to send out my letters, have to advertise in all the cities and towns, have to catch the little fellows. You can afford to send out engraved invitations; I have to gather in my people with brass bands and megaphones. Don't forget that my people count in the totals bigger than yours. And what's my chief value to you? Why, when you want to unload, I furnish the crowd to unload on, the crowd that gives you and your big customers cash for your water and wind. I don't see my way to letting go of what I've got until I get hold of what I'm reaching for.” All this with not a suspicion in my mind that he was at the same game that had caused Roebuck to “hint” that same proposal. What a “con man” high finance got when Mowbray Langdon became active down town!

“That's true,” he admitted, with a great air of frankness. “But the cry that you're not a financier, but a bucket-shop man, might be fatal at the Travelers. Of course, the sacrifice would be large for such a small object. Still, you might have to make it—if you really want to get in.”

“I'll think it over,” said I. He thought I meant that I'd think over dropping my power—thought I was as big a snob as he and his friends of the Travelers, willing to make any sacrifice to be “in the push.” But, while Matthew Blacklock has the streak of snob in him that's natural to all human beings and to most animals, he is not quite insane. No, the thing I intended to think over was how to stay in the “bucket-shop” business, but wash myself of its odium. Bucket-shop! What snobbery! Yet it's human nature, too. The wholesale merchant looks down on the retailer, the big retailer on the little; the burglar despises the pickpocket; the financier, the small promoter; the man who works with his brain, the man who works with his hands. A silly lot we are—silly to look down, sillier to feel badly when we're looked down upon.

## VI. OF “GENTLEMEN”

When I got back to my office and was settling in to the proofs of the “Letter to Investors,” which I published in sixty newspapers throughout the country and which daily reached upward of five million people, Sam Ellersly came in. His manner was certainly different from what it had ever been before; a difference so subtle that I couldn't describe it more nearly than to say it made me feel as if he had not until then been treating me as of the same class with himself. I smiled to myself and made an entry in my mental ledger to the credit of Mowbray Langdon.

“That club business is going nicely,” said Sam. “Langdon is enthusiastic, and I find you've got good friends on the committee.”

I knew that well enough. Hadn't I been carrying them on my books at a good round loss for two years?

“If it wasn't for—for some features of this business of yours,” he went on, “I'd say there wouldn't be the slightest trouble.”

“Bucket-shop?” said I with an easy laugh, though this nagging was beginning to get on my nerves.

“Exactly,” said he. “And, you know, you advertise yourself like—like—”

“Like everybody else, only more successfully than most,” said I. “Everybody advertises, each one adapting his advertising to the needs of his enterprises, as far as he knows how.”

“That's true enough,” he confessed. “But there are enterprises and enterprises, you know.”

“You can tell 'em, Sam,” said I, “that I never put out a statement I don't believe to be true, and that when any of my followers lose on one of my tips, I've lost on it, too. For I play my own tips—and that's more than can be said of any 'financier' in this town.”

“It'd be no use to tell 'em that,” said he. “Character's something of a consideration in social matters, of course. But it isn't the chief consideration by a long shot, and the absence of it isn't necessarily fatal.”

“I'm the biggest single operator in the country,” I went on. “And it's my methods that give me success—because I know how to advertise—how to keep my name before the country, and how to make men say, whenever they hear it: 'There's a shrewd, honest fellow.' That and the people it brings me, in flocks, are my stock in trade. Honesty's a bluff with most of the big respectables; under cover of their respectability, of their 'old and honored names,' of their social connections, of their church-going and that, they do all sorts of queer work.”

“To hear you talk,” put in Sam, with a grin, “one would think you didn't shove off millions of dollars of suspicious stuff on the public through those damn clever letters of yours.”

“There's where you didn't stop to think, Sam,” said I. “When I say a stock's going to rise, it rises. When I stop talking about it, it may go on rising or it may fall. But I never advise anybody to buy except when I have every reason to believe it's a good thing. If they hold on too long, that's their own lookout.”

“But they invest—”

“You use words too carelessly,” I said. “When I say buy, I don't mean *invest*. When I mean invest, I say invest.” There I laughed. “It's a word I don't often use.”

“And that's what you call honesty!” jeered he.

“That's what I call honesty,” I retorted, “and that *is* honesty.” And I thought so then.

“Well—every man has a right to his own notion of what's honest,” he said. “But no man's got a right to complain if a fellow with a different notion criticizes him.”

“None in the world,” I assented. “Do *you* criticize me?”

“No, no, no, indeed!” he answered, nervous, and taking seriously what I had intended as a joke.

After a while I dragged in *the* subject. “One thing I can and will do to get myself in line for that club,” I said, like a seal on promenade. “I'm sick of the crowd I travel with—the men and the women. I feel it's about time I settled down. I've got a fortune and establishment that needs a woman to set it off. I can make some woman happy. You don't happen to know any nice girls—the right sort, I mean?”

“Not many.” said Sam. “You'd better go back to the country where you came from, and get her there. She'd be eternally grateful, and her head wouldn't be full of mercenary nonsense.”

“Excuse me!” exclaimed I. “It'd turn her head. She'd go clean crazy. She'd plunge in up to her neck—and not being used to these waters, she'd make a show of herself, and probably drown, dragging me down with her, if possible.”

Sam laughed. “Keep out of marriage, Matt,” he advised, not so obtuse to my real point as he wanted me to believe. “I know the kind of girl you've got in mind. She'd marry you for your money, and she'd never appreciate you. She'd see in you only the lack of the things she's been taught to lay stress on.”

“For instance?”

“I couldn't tell you any more than I could enable you to recognize a person you'd never seen by describing him.”

“Ain't I a gentleman?” I inquired.

He laughed, as if the idea tickled him. “Of course,” he said. “Of course.”

“Ain't I got as proper a country place as there is a-going? Ain't my apartment in the Willoughby a peach? Don't I give as elegant dinners as you ever sat down to? Don't I dress right up to the Piccadilly latest? Don't I act all right—know enough to keep my feet off the table and my knife out of my mouth?” All true enough; and I so crude then that I hadn't a suspicion what a flat contradiction of my pretensions and beliefs about myself the very words and phrases were.

“You're right in it, Matt,” said Sam. “But—well—you haven't traveled with our crowd, and they're shy of strangers, especially as—as energetic a sort of stranger as you are. You're too sudden, Matt—too dazzling—too—”

“Too shiny and new?” said I, beginning to catch his drift. “That'll be looked after. What I want is you to take me round a bit.”

“I can't ask you to people's houses,” protested he, knowing I'd not realize what a flimsy pretense that was.

While we were talking I had been thinking—working out the proposition along lines he had indicated to me without knowing it. “Look here, Sam,” I said. “You imagine I'm trying to butt in with a lot of people that don't know me and don't want to know me. But that ain't my point of view. Those people can be useful to me. I need 'em. What do I care whether they want to be useful to me or not? The machine'd have run down and rusted out long ago if you and your friends' idea of a gentleman had been taken seriously by anybody who had anything to do and knew how to do it. In this world you've got to *make* people do what's for your good and their own. Your idea of a gentleman was put forward by lazy fakirs who were living off of what their ungentlemanly ancestors had annexed, and who didn't want to be disturbed. So they 'fixed' the game by passing these rules you and your kind are fools enough to abide by—that is, you are fools, unless you haven't got brains enough to get on in a free-and-fair-for-all.”

Sam laughed.. “There's a lot of truth in what you say,” he admitted.

“However,” I ended, “my plans don't call for hurry just there. When I get ready to go round, I'll let you know.”

## VII. BLACKLOCK GOES INTO TRAINING

This brings me to the ugliest story my enemies have concocted against me. No one appreciates more thoroughly than I that, to rise high, a man must have his own efforts seconded by the flood of vituperation that his enemies send to overwhelm him, and which washes him far higher than he could hope to lift himself. So I do not here refer to any attack on me in the public prints; I think of them only with amusement and gratitude. The story that rankles is the one these foes of mine set creeping, like a snake under the fallen leaves, everywhere, anywhere, unseen, without a trail. It has been whispered into every ear—and it is, no doubt, widely believed—that I deliberately put old Bromwell Ellersly “in a hole,” and there tortured him until he consented to try to compel his daughter to marry me.

It is possible that, if I had thought of such a devilish device, I might have tried it—is not all fair in love? But there was no need for my cudgeling my brains to carry that particular fortification on my way to what I had fixed my will upon. *Bromwell Ellersly came to me of his own accord*.

I suppose the Ellerslys must have talked me over in the family circle. However this may be, my acquaintance with her father began with Sam's asking me to lunch with him. “The governor has heard me talk of you so much,” said he, “that he is anxious to meet you.”

I found him a dried-up, conventional old gentleman, very proud of his ancestors, none of whom I had ever heard of, and very positive that a great deal of deference was due him—though on what grounds I could not then, and can not now, make out. I soon discovered that it was the scent of my stock-tip generosity, wafted to him by Sammy, that had put him hot upon my trail. I hadn't gone far into his affairs before I learned that he had been speculating, mortgaging, kiting notes, doing what he called, and thought, “business” on a large scale. He regarded business as beneath the dignity and the intellect of a “gentleman”—how my gorge does rise at that word! So he put his great mind on it only for a few hours now and then; he reserved the rest of his time for what he regarded as the proper concerns of a gentleman—attending to social “duties,” reading pretentious books, looking at the pictures and listening to the music decreed fashionable.

They charge that I put him “in a hole.” In fact, I found him at the bottom of a deep pit he had dug for himself; and when he first met me he was, without having the sense to realize it, just about to go smash, with not a penny for his old age. As soon as I had got this fact clear of the tangle, I showed it to him.

“My God, what is to become of *me*?” he said, That was his only thought—not, what is to become of my wife and daughter; but, what is to become of “*me*!” I do not blame him for this. Naturally enough, people who have always been used to everything become, unconsciously, monsters of egotism and selfishness; it is natural, too, that they should imagine themselves liberal and generous if they give away occasionally something that costs them, at most, nothing more serious than the foregoing of some extravagant luxury or other. I recite his remark simply to show what manner of man he was, what sort of creature I had to deal with.

I offered to help him, and I did help him. Is there any one, knowing anything of the facts of life, who will censure me when I admit that I—with deliberation—simply tided him over, did not make for him and present to him a fortune? What chance should I have had, if I had been so absurdly generous to a man who deserved nothing but punishment for his selfish and bigoted mode of life? I took away his worst burdens; but I left him

more than he could carry without my help. And it was not until he had appealed, in vain to all his social friends to relieve him of the necessity of my aid, not until he realized that I was his only hope of escaping a sharp comedown from luxury to very modest comfort in a flat somewhere—not until then did his wife send me an invitation to dinner. And I had not so much as hinted that I wanted it.

I shall never forget the smallest detail of that dinner—it was a purely “family” affair, only the Ellerslys and I. I can feel now the oppressive atmosphere, the look as of impending sacrilege upon the faces of the old servants; I can see Mrs. Ellersly trying to condescend to be “gracious,” and treating me as if I were some sort of museum freak or menagerie exhibit. I can see Anita. She was like a statue of snow; she spoke not a word; if she lifted her eyes, I failed to note it. And when I was leaving—I with my collar wilted from the fierce, nervous strain I had been enduring—Mrs. Ellersly, in that voice of hers into which I don't believe any shade of a real human emotion ever penetrated, said: “You must come to see us, Mr. Blacklock. We are always at home after five.”

I looked at Miss Ellersly. She was white to the lips now, and the spangles on her white dress seemed bits of ice glittering there. She said nothing; but I knew she felt my look, and that it froze the ice the more closely in around her heart. “Thank you,” I muttered.

I stumbled in the hall; I almost fell down the broad steps. I stopped at the first bar and took three drinks in quick succession. I went on down the avenue, breathing like an exhausted swimmer. “I'll give her up!” I cried aloud, so upset was I.

I am a man of impulse; but I have trained myself not to be a *creature* of impulse, at least not in matters of importance. Without that patient and painful schooling, I shouldn't have got where I now am; probably I'd still be blacking boots, or sheet-writing for some bookmaker, or clerking it for some broker. Before I got to my rooms, the night air and my habit of the “sober second thought” had cooled me back to rationality.

“I want her, I need her,” I was saying to myself. “I am worthier of her than are those mincing manikins she has been bred to regard as men. She is for me—she belongs to me. I'll abandon her to no smirking puppet who'd wear her as a donkey would a diamond. Why should I do myself and her an injury simply because she has been too badly brought up to know her own interest?”

And now I see all the smooth frauds, all the weak people who never have purposes or passions worthy of the name, all the finicky, finger-dusting gentry with the “fine souls,” who flatter themselves that their timidity is the squeamishness of superior sensibilities—I see all these feeble folk fluttering their feeble fingers in horror of me. “The brute!” they cry; “the bounder!” Well, I accept the names quite cheerfully. Those are the epithets the wishy-washy always hurl at the strong; they put me in the small and truly aristocratic class of men who *do*. I proudly avow myself no subscriber to the code that was made by the shearers to encourage the sheep to keep on being nice docile animals, trotting meekly up to be shorn or slaughtered as their masters may decide. I harm no man, and no woman; but neither do I pause to weep over any man or any woman who flings himself or herself upon my steady spear. I try to be courteous and considerate to all; but I do not stop when some fellow who has something that belongs to me shouts “Rude!” at me to sheer me off.

At the same time, her delicate beauty, her quiet, distinctive, high-bred manner, had thrust it home to me that in certain respects I was ignorant and crude—as who would not have been, brought up as was I? I knew there was, somewhere between my roughness of the uncut individuality and the smoothness of the planed and sand-papered nonentity of her “set,” a mean, better than either, better because more efficient.

When this was clear to me I sent for my trainer. He was one of those spare, wiry Englishmen, with skin like tanned and painted hide—brown except where the bones seem about to push their sharp angles through, and there a frosty, winter-apple red. He dressed like a Deadwood gambler, he talked like a stable boy; but for all that, you couldn't fail to see he was a gentleman born and bred. Yes, he was a gentleman, though he mixed profanity into his ordinary flow of conversation more liberally than did I when in a rage.

I stood up before him, threw my coat back, thrust my thumbs into my trousers pockets and slowly turned about like a ready-made tailor's dummy. “Monson,” said I, “what do you think of me?”

He looked me over as if I were a horse he was about to buy. “Sound, I'd say,” was his verdict. “Good wind—uncommon good wind. A goer, and a stayer. Not a lump. Not a hair out of place.” He laughed. “Action a bit high perhaps—for the track. But a grand reach.”

“I know all that,” said I. “You miss my point. Suppose you wanted to enter me for—say, the Society Sweepstakes—what then?”

“Um—um,” he muttered reflectively. “That's different.”

“Don't I look—sort of—new—as if the varnish was still sticky and might come off on the ladies' dresses and on the fine furniture?”

“Oh—that!” said he dubiously. “But all those kinds of things are matters of taste.”

“Out with it!” I commanded. “Don't be afraid. I'm not one of those damn fools that ask for criticism when they want only flattery, as you ought to know by this time. I'm aware of my good points, know how good they are better than anybody else in the world. And I suspect my weak points—always did. I've got on chiefly because I made people tell me to my face what they'd rather have grinned over behind my back.”

“What's your game?” asked Monson. “I'm in the dark.”

“I'll tell you, Monson. I hired you to train horses. Now I want to hire you to train me, too. As it's double work, it's double pay.”

“Say on,” said he, “and say it slow.”

“I want to marry,” I explained. “I want to inspect all the offerings before I decide. You are to train me so that I can go among the herds that'd shy off from me if I wasn't on to their little ways.”

He looked suspiciously at me, doubtless thinking this some new development of “American humor.”

“I mean it,” I assured him. “I'm going to train, and train hard. I've got no time to lose. I must be on my way down the aisle inside of three months. I give you a free hand. I'll do just what you say.”

“The job's out of my line,” he protested.

“I know better,” said I. “I've always seen the parlor under the stable in you. We'll begin right away. What do you think of these clothes?”

“Well—they're not exactly noisy,” he said. “But—they're far from silent. That waistcoat—” He stopped and gave me another nervous, timid look. He found it hard to believe a man of my sort, so self-assured, would stand the truth from a man of his second-fiddle sort.

“Go on!” I commanded. “Speak out! Mowbray Langdon had on one twice as loud the other day at the track.”

“But, perhaps you'll remember, it was only his waistcoat that was loud—not he himself. Now, a man of your manner and voice and—you've got a look out of the eyes that'd wake the dead all by itself. People can feel you coming before they hear you. When they feel and hear and see all together—it's like a brass band in scarlet uniform, with a seven-foot, sky-blue drum major. If your hair wasn't so black and your eyes so steel-blue and sharp, and your teeth so big and strong and white, and your jaw such a—such a—*jaw*—”

“I see the point,” said I. And I did. “You'll find you won't need to tell me many things twice. I've got a busy day before me here; so we'll have to suspend this until you come to dine with me at eight—at my rooms. I want you to put in the time well. Go to my house in the country and then up to my apartment; take my valet with you; look through all my belongings—shirts, ties, socks, trousers, waistcoats, clothes of every kind. Throw out every rag you think doesn't fit in with what I want to be. How's my grammar?”

I was proud of it; I had been taking more or less pains with my mode of speech for a dozen years. “Rather too good,” said he. “But that's better than making the breaks that aren't regarded as good form.”

“Good form!” I exclaimed. “That's it! That's what I want! What does 'good form' mean?”

He laughed. “You can search me,” said he. “I could easier tell you—anything else. It's what everybody recognizes on sight, and nobody knows how to describe. It's like the difference between a cultivated 'jimson' weed and a wild one.”

“Like the difference between Mowbray Langdon and me,” I suggested good-naturedly. “How about my manners?”

“Not so bad,” said he. “Not so rotten bad. But—when you're polite, you're a little too polite; when you're not polite, you—”

“Show where I came from too plainly?” said I. “Speak right out—hit good and hard. Am I too frank for 'good form'?”

“You needn't bother about that,” he assured me. “Say whatever comes into your head—only, be sure the right sort of thing comes into your head. Don't talk too much about yourself, for instance. It's good form to think about yourself all the time; it's bad form to let people see it—in your talk. Say as little as possible about your business and about what you've got. Don't be lavish with the I's and the my's.”

“That's harder,” said I. “I'm a man who has always minded his own business, and cared for nothing else. What could I talk about, except myself?”

“Blest if I know,” replied he. “Where you want to go, the last thing people mind is their own business—in talk, at least. But you'll get on all right if you don't worry too much about it. You've got natural independence, and an original way of putting things, and common sense. Don't be afraid.”

“Afraid!” said I. “I never knew what it was to be afraid.”

“Your nerve'll carry you through,” he assured me. “Nerve'll take a man anywhere.”

“You never said a truer thing in your life,” said I. “It'll take him wherever he wants, and, after he's there, it'll get him whatever he wants.”

And with that, I, thinking of my plans and of how sure I was of success, began to march up and down the office with my chest thrown out—until I caught myself at it. That stopped me, set me off in a laugh at my own expense, he joining in with a kind of heartiness I did not like, though I did not venture to check him.

So ended the first lesson—the first of a long series. I soon saw that Monson was being most useful to me—far more useful than if he were a “perfect gentleman” with nothing of the track and stable and back stairs about him. Being a sort of betwixt and between, he could appreciate my needs as they could not have been appreciated by a fellow who had never lived in the rough-and-tumble I had fought my way up through. And being at bottom a real gentleman, and not one of those nervous, snobbish make-believes, he wasn't so busy trying to hide his own deficiencies from me that he couldn't teach me anything. He wasn't afraid of being found out, as Sam—or perhaps, even Langdon—would have been in the same circumstances. I wonder if there is another country where so many gentlemen and ladies are born, or another where so many of them have their natural gentility educated out of them.

## VIII. ON THE TRAIL OF LANGDON

I had Monson with me twice each week-day—early in the morning and again after business hours until bed-time. Also he spent the whole of every Saturday and Sunday with me. He developed astonishing dexterity as a teacher, and as soon as he realized that I had no false pride and was thoroughly in earnest, he handled me without gloves—like a boxing teacher who finds that his pupil has the grit of a professional. It was easy enough for me to grasp the theory of my new business—it was nothing more than “Be natural.” But the rub came in making myself naturally of the right sort. I had—as I suppose every man of intelligence and decent instincts has—a disposition to be friendly and simple. But my manner was by nature what you might call abrupt. My not very easy task was to learn the subtle difference between the abrupt that injects a tonic into social intercourse, and the abrupt that makes the other person shut up with a feeling of having been insulted.

Then, there was the matter of good taste in conversation. Monson found, as I soon saw, that my everlasting self-assertiveness was beyond cure. As I said to him: “I'm afraid you might easier succeed in reducing my chest measure.” But we worked away at it, and perhaps my readers may discover even in this narrative, though it is necessarily egotistic, evidence of at least an honest effort not to be baldly boastful. Monson would have liked to make of me a self-deprecating sort of person—such as he was himself, with the result that the other fellow always got the prize and he got left. But I would have none of it.

“How are people to know about you, if you don't tell 'em?” I argued. “Don't you yourself admit that men take a man at his own valuation less a slight discount, and that women take him at his own valuation plus an allowance for his supposed modesty?”

“Cracking yourself up is vulgar, nevertheless,” declared the Englishman. “It's the chief reason why we on the other side look on you Americans as a lot of vulgarians—”

“And are in awe of our superior cleverness,” I put in.

He laughed.

“Well, do the best you can,” said he. “Only, you really must not brag and swagger, and you must get out of the habit of talking louder than any one else.”

In the matter of dress, our task was easy. I had a fancy for bright colors and for strong contrasts; but I know I never indulged in clashes and discords. It was simply that in clothes I had the same taste as in pictures—the taste that made me prefer Rubens to Rembrandt. We cast out of my wardrobe everything in the least doubtful; and I gave away my jeweled canes, my pins and links and buttons for shirts and waistcoats except plain gold and pearls. I even left off the magnificent diamond I had worn for years on my little finger—but I didn't give away that stone; I put it by for resetting into an engagement ring. However, when I was as quietly dressed as it was possible for a gentleman to be, he still studied me dubiously, when he thought I wasn't seeing him. And I recall that he said once: “It's your face, Blacklock. If you could only manage to look less like a Spanish bull dashing into the ring, gazing joyfully about for somebody to gore and toss!”

“But I can't,” said I. “And I wouldn't if I could—because that's *me*!”

One Saturday he brought a dancing master down to my country place—Dawn Hill, which I bought of the Dumont estate and completely remodeled. I saw what the man's business was the instant I looked at him. I left him in the hall and took Monson into my den.

“Not for me!” I protested. “There's where I draw the line.”

“You don't understand,” he urged. “This fellow, this Alphonse Lynch, out in the hall there, isn't going to teach you dancing so that you may dance, but so that you shall be less awkward in strange company.”

“My walk suits me,” said I. “And I don't fall over furniture or trip people up.”

“True enough,” he answered. “But you haven't the complete control of your body that'll make you unconscious of it when you're suddenly shot by a butler into a room full of people you suspect of being unfriendly and critical.”

Not until he used his authority as trainer-in-full-charge, did I yield. It may seem absurd to some for a serious man like me solemnly to caper about in imitation of a scraping, grimacing French-Irishman; but Monson was right, and I haven't in the least minded the ridicule he has brought on me by tattling this and the other things everywhere, since he turned against me. It's nothing new under the sun for the crowds of chuckleheads to laugh where they ought to applaud; their habit is to laugh and to applaud in the wrong places. There's no part of my career that I'm prouder of than the whole of this thorough course of education in the trifles that are yet not trifles. To have been ignorant is no disgrace; the disgrace comes when one persists in ignorance and glories in it.

Yet those who make the most pretensions in this topsy-turvy of a world regard it as a disgrace to have been obscure and ignorant, and pride themselves upon their persistence in their own kind of obscurity and ignorance! No wonder the few strong men do about as they please with such a race of nincompoopery. If they didn't grow old and tired, what would they not do?

All this time I was giving myself—or thought I was giving myself—chiefly to my business, as usual. I know now that the new interests had in fact crowded the things down town far into the background, had impaired my judgment, had suspended my common sense; but I had no inkling of this then, The most important matter that was occupying me down town was pushing Textile up toward par. Langdon's doubts, little though they influenced me, still made enough of an impression to cause me to test the market. I sold for him at ninety, as he had directed; I sold in quantity every day. But no matter how much I unloaded, the price showed no tendency to break.

“This,” said I to myself, “is a testimonial to the skill with which I prepared for my bull campaign.” And that seemed to me—all unsuspicious as I then was—a sufficient explanation of the steadiness of the stock which I had worked to establish in the public confidence.

I felt that, if my matrimonial plans should turn out as I confidently expected, I should need a much larger fortune than I had—for I was determined that my wife should have an establishment second to none. Accordingly, I enlarged my original plan. I had intended to keep close to Langdon in that plunge; I believed I controlled the market, but I hadn't been in Wall Street twenty years without learning that the worst thunderbolts fall from cloudless skies. Without being in the least suspicious of Langdon, and simply acting on the general principle that surprise and treachery are part of the code of high finance, I had prepared to guard, first, against being taken in the rear by a secret change of plan on Langdon's part, and second, against being involved and overwhelmed by a sudden secret attack on him from some associate of his who might think he had laid himself open to successful raiding.

The market is especially dangerous toward Christmas and in the spring—toward Christmas the big fellows often juggle the stocks to get the money for their big Christmas gifts and alms; toward spring the motive is, of course, the extra summer expenses of their families and the commencement gifts to colleges. It was now late in the spring.

I say, I had intended to be cautious. I abandoned caution and rushed in boldly, feeling that the market was,

in general, safe and that Textile was under my control—and that I was one of the kings of high finance, with my lucky star in the zenith. I decided to continue my bull campaign on my own account for two weeks after I had unloaded for Langdon, to continue it until the stock was at par. I had no difficulty in pushing it to ninety-seven, and I was not alarmed when I found myself loaded up with it, quoted at ninety-eight for the preferred and thirty for the common. I assumed that I was practically its only supporter and that it would slowly settle back as I slowly withdrew my support.

To my surprise, the stock did not yield immediately under my efforts to depress it. I sold more heavily; Textile continued to show a tendency to rise. I sold still more heavily; it broke a point or two, then steadied and rose again. Instead of sending out along my secret lines for inside information, as I should have done, and would have done had I not been in a state of hypnotized judgment—I went to Langdon! I who had been studying those scoundrels for twenty-odd years, and dealing directly with and for them for ten years!

He wasn't at his office; they told me there that they didn't know whether he was at his town house or at his place in the country—“probably in the country,” said his down-town secretary, with elaborate carelessness. “He wouldn't be likely to stay away from the office or not to send for me, if he were in town, would he?”

It takes an uncommon good liar to lie to me when I'm on the alert. As I was determined to see Langdon, I was in so far on the alert. And I felt the fellow was lying. “That's reasonable,” said I. “Call me up, if you hear from him. I want to see him—important, but not immediate.” And I went away, having left the impression that I would make no further effort.

Incredible though it may seem, especially to those who know how careful I am to guard every point and to see in every friend a possible foe, I still did not suspect that smooth, that profound scoundrel. I do not use these epithets with heat. I flatter myself I am a connoisseur of finesse and can look even at my own affairs with judicial impartiality. And Langdon was, and is now, such a past master of finesse that he compels the admiration even of his victims. He's like one of those fabled Damascus blades. When he takes a leg off, the victim forgets to suffer in his amazement at the cleanness of the wound, in his incredulity that the leg is no longer part of him. “Langdon,” said I to myself, “is a sly dog. No doubt he's busy about some woman, and has covered his tracks.” Yet I ought, in the circumstances, instantly to have suspected that I was the person he was dodging.

I went up to his house. You, no doubt, have often seen and often admired its beautiful façade, so simple that it hides its own magnificence from all but experienced eyes, so perfect in its proportions that it hides the vastness of the palace of which it is the face. I have heard men say: “I'd like to have a house—a moderate-sized house—one about the size of Mowbray Langdon's—though perhaps a little more elegant, not so plain.”

That's typical of the man. You have to look closely at him, to study him, before you appreciate how he has combined a thousand details of manner and dress into an appearance which, while it can not but impress the ordinary man with its distinction, suggests to all but the very observant the most modest plainness and simplicity. How few realize that simplicity must be profound, complex, studied, not to be and to appear crude and coarse. In those days that truth had just begun to dawn on me.

“Mr. Langdon isn't at home,” said the servant.

I had been at his house once before; I knew he occupied the left side—the whole of the second floor, so shut off that it not only had a separate entrance, but also could not be reached by those in the right side of the house without descending to the entrance hall and ascending the left stairway.

“Just take my card to his private secretary, to Mr. Rathburn,” said I. “Mr. Langdon has doubtless left a message for me.”

The butler hesitated, yielded, showed me into the reception-room off the entrance hall. I waited a few seconds, then adventured the stairway to the left, up which he had disappeared. I entered the small salon in which Langdon had received me on my other visit. From the direction of an open door, I heard his voice—he was saying: “I am not at home. There's no message.”

And still I did not realize that it was I he was avoiding!

“It's no use now, Langdon,” I called cheerfully. “Beg pardon for seeming to intrude. I misunderstood—or didn't hear where the servant said I was to wait. However, no harm done. So long! I'm off.” But I made no move toward the door by which I had entered; instead, I advanced a few feet nearer the door from which his voice had come.

After a brief—a very brief—pause, there came in Langdon's voice—laughing, not a trace of annoyance: “I might have known! Come in, Matt!”

## IX. LANGDON AT HOME

I entered, with an amused glance at the butler, who was giving over his heavy countenance to a delightful exhibition of disgust and discomfiture. It was Langdon's sitting-room. He had had the carved antique oak interior of a room in an old French palace torn out and transported to New York and set up for him. I had made a study of that sort of thing, and at Dawn Hill had done something toward realizing my own ideas of the splendid. But a glance showed me that I was far surpassed. What I had done seemed in comparison like the composition of a school-boy beside an essay by Goldsmith or Hazlitt.

And in the midst of this quiet splendor sat, or rather lounged, Langdon, reading the newspapers. He was dressed in a dark blue velvet house-suit with facings and cords of blue silk a shade or so lighter than the suit. I had always thought him handsome; he looked now like a god. He was smoking a cigarette in an oriental holder nearly a foot long; but the air of the room, so perfect was the ventilation, instead of being scented with tobacco, had the odor of some fresh, clean, slightly saline perfume.

I think what was in my mind must have shown in my face, must have subtly flattered him, for, when I looked at him, he was giving me a look of genuine friendly kindliness. “This is—perfect, Langdon,” said I. “And I think I'm a judge.”

“Glad you like it,” said he, trying to dissemble his satisfaction in so strongly impressing me.

“You must take me through your house sometime,” I went on. “I'm going to build soon. No—don't be afraid I'll imitate. I'm too vain for that. But I want suggestions. I'm not ashamed to go to school to a master—to anybody, for that matter.”

“Why do you build?” said he. “A town house is a nuisance. If I could induce my wife to take the children to the country to live, I'd dispose of this.”

“That's it—the wife,” said I.

“But you have no wife. At least—”

“No,” I replied with a laugh. “Not yet. But I'm going to have.”

I interpreted his expression then as amused cynicism. But I see a different meaning in it now. And I can recall his tone, can find a strained note which then escaped me in his usual mocking drawl.

“To marry?” said he. “I haven't heard of that.”

“Nor no one else,” said I.

“Except her,” said he.

“Not even except her,” said I. “But I've got my eye on her—and you know what that means with me.”

“Yes, I know,” drawled he. Then he added, with a curious twinkle which I do not now misunderstand: “We have somewhat the same weakness.”

“I shouldn't call it a weakness,” said I. “It's the quality that makes the chief difference between us and the common run—the fellows that have no purposes beyond getting comfortably through each day—”

“And getting real happiness,” he interrupted, with just a tinge of bitterness.

“We wouldn't think it happiness,” was my answer.

“The worse for us,” he replied. “We're under the tyranny of to-morrow—and happiness is impossible.”

“May I look at your bedroom?” I asked.

“Certainly,” he assented.

I pushed open the door he indicated. At first glimpse I was disappointed. The big room looked like a section of a hospital ward. It wasn't until I had taken a second and very careful look at the tiled floor, walls, ceiling, that I noted that those plain smooth tiles were of the very finest, were probably of his own designing, certainly had been imported from some great Dutch or German kiln. Not an inch of drapery, not a picture, nothing that could hold dust or germs anywhere; a square of sanitary matting by the bed; another square opposite an elaborate exercising machine. The bed was of the simplest metallic construction—but I noted that the metal was the finest bronze. On it was a thin, hard mattress. You could wash the big room down and out with the hose, without doing any damage.

“Quite a contrast,” said I, glancing from the one room to the other.

“My architect is a crank on sanitation,” he explained, from his lounge.

I noted that the windows were huge—to admit floods of light—and that they were hermetically sealed so that the air should be only the pure air supplied from the ventilating apparatus. To many people that room would have seemed a cheaply got together cell; to me, once I had examined it, it was evidently built at enormous cost and represented an extravagance of common-sense luxury which was more than princely or royal.

Suddenly my mind reverted to my business. “How do you account for the steadiness of Textile, Langdon?” I asked, returning to the carved sitting-room and trying to put those surroundings out of my mind.

“I don't account for it,” was his languid, uninterested reply.

“Any of your people under the market?”

“It isn't to my interest to have it supported, is it?” he replied.

“I know that,” I admitted. “But why doesn't it drop?”

“Those letters of yours may have overeducated the public in confidence,” suggested he. “Your followers have the habit of believing implicitly whatever you say.”

“Yes, but I haven't written a line about Textile for nearly a month now,” I pretended to object, my vanity fairly purring with pleasure.

“That's the only reason I can give,” said he.

“You are sure none of your people is supporting the stock?” I asked, as a form and not for information; for I thought I knew they weren't—I trusted him to have seen to that.

“I'd like to get my holdings back,” said he. “I can't buy until it's down. And I know none of my people would dare support it.”

You will notice he did not say directly that he was not himself supporting the market; he simply so answered me that I, not suspecting him, would think he reassured me. There is another of those mysteries of conscience. Had it been necessary, Langdon would have told me the lie flat and direct, would have told it without a tremor of the voice or a blink of the eye, would have lied to me as I have heard him, and almost all the big fellows, lie under oath before courts and legislative committees; yet, so long as it was possible, he would thus lie to me with lies that were not lies. As if negative lies are not falser and more cowardly than positive lies, because securer and more deceptive.

“Well, then, the price must break,” said I, “It won't be many days before the public begins to realize that there isn't anybody under Textile.”

“No sharp break!” he said carelessly. “No panic!”

“I'll see to that,” replied I, with not a shadow of a notion of the subtlety behind his warning.

“I hope it will break soon,” he then said, adding in his friendliest voice with what I now know was malignant treachery: “You owe it to me to bring it down.” That meant that he wished me to increase my already far too heavy and dangerous line of shorts.

Just then a voice—a woman's voice—came from the salon. “May I come in? Do I interrupt?” it said, and its tone struck me as having in it something of plaintive appeal.

“Excuse me a moment, Blacklock,” said he, rising with what was for him haste.

But he was too late. The woman entered, searching the room with a piercing, suspicious gaze. At once I saw, behind that look, a jealousy that pounced on every object that came into its view, and studied it with a hope that feared and a fear that hoped. When her eyes had toured the room, they paused upon him, seemed to be saying: “You've baffled me again, but I'm not discouraged. I shall catch you yet.”

“Well, my dear?” said Langdon, whom she seemed faintly to amuse. “It's only Mr. Blacklock. Mr. Blacklock, my wife.”

I bowed; she looked coldly at me, and her slight nod was more than a hint that she wished to be left alone with her husband.

I said to him: “Well, I'll be off. Thank you for—”

“One moment,” he interrupted. Then to his wife: “Anything special?”

She flushed. “No—nothing special. I just came to see you. But if I am disturbing you—as usual—”

“Not at all,” said he. “When Blacklock and I have finished, I'll come to you. It won't be longer than an hour—or so.”

“Is that all?” she said almost savagely. Evidently she was one of those women who dare not make “scenes” with their husbands in private and so are compelled to take advantage of the presence of strangers to ease their minds. She was an extremely pretty woman, would have been beautiful but for the worn, strained, nervous look that probably came from her jealousy. She was small in stature; her figure was approaching that stage at which a woman is called “well rounded” by the charitable, fat by the frank and accurate. A few years more and she would be hunting down and destroying early photographs. There was in the arrangement of her hair and in the details of her toilet—as well as in her giving way to her tendency to fat—that carelessness that so many women allow themselves, once they are safely married to a man they care for.

“Curious,” thought I, “that being married to him should make her feel secure enough of him to let herself go, although her instinct is warning her all the time that she isn't in the least sure of him. Her laziness must be stronger than her love—her laziness or her vanity.”

While I was thus sizing her up, she was reluctantly leaving. She didn't even give me the courtesy of a bow—whether from self-absorption or from haughtiness I don't know; probably from both. She was a Western woman, and when those Western women do become perverts to New York's gospel of snobbishness, they are the worst snobs in the push. Langdon, regardless of my presence, looked after her with a faintly amused, faintly contemptuous expression that—well, it didn't fit in with *my* notion of what constitutes a gentleman. In fact, I didn't know which of them had come off the worse in that brief encounter in my presence. It was my first glimpse of a fashionable behind-the-scenes, and it made a profound impression upon me—an impression that has grown deeper as I have learned how much of the typical there was in it. Dirt looks worse in the midst of finery than where one naturally expects to find it—looks worse, and is worse.

When we were seated again, Langdon, after a few reflective puffs at his cigarette, said: “So you're about to marry?”

“I hope so,” said I. “But as I haven't asked her yet, I can't be quite sure.” For obvious reasons I wasn't so enamored of the idea of matrimony as I had been a few minutes before.

“I trust you're making a sensible marriage,” said he. “If the part that may be glamour should by chance rub clean away, there ought to be something to make one feel he wasn't wholly an ass.”

“Very sensible,” I replied with emphasis. “I want the woman. I need her.”

He inspected the coal of his cigarette, lifting his eyebrows at it. Presently he said: “And she?”

“I don't know how she feels about it—as I told you,” I replied curtly. In spite of myself, my eyes shifted and my skin began to burn. “By the way, Langdon, what's the name of your architect?”

“Wilder and Marcy,” said he. “They're fairly satisfactory, if you tell 'em exactly what you want and watch 'em all the time. They're perfectly conventional and so can't distinguish between originality that's artistic and originality that's only bizarre. They're like most people—they keep to the beaten track and fight tooth and nail against being drawn out of it and against those who do go out of it.”

“I'll have a talk with Marcy this very day,” said I.

“Oh, you're in a hurry!” He laughed. “And you haven't asked her. You remind me of that Greek philosopher who was in love with Lais. They asked him: 'But does she love you?' And he said: 'One does not inquire of the fish one likes whether it likes one.'”

I flushed. “You'll pardon me, Langdon,” said I, “but I don't like that. It isn't my attitude at all toward—the right sort of women.”

He looked half-quizzical, half-apologetic. “Ah, to be sure,” said he. “I forgot you weren't a married man.”

“I don't think I'll ever lose the belief that there's a quality in a good woman for a man to—to respect and look up to.”

“I envy you,” said he, but his eyes were mocking still. I saw he was a little disdainful of my rebuking *him*—and angry at me, too.

“Woman's a subject of conversation that men ought to avoid,” said I easily—for, having set myself right, I felt I could afford to smooth him down.

“Well, good-by—good luck—or, if I may be permitted to say it to one so touchy, the kind of luck you're bent on having, whether it's good or bad.”

“If my luck ain't good, I'll make it good,” said I with a laugh.

And so I left him, with a look in his eyes that came back to me long afterward when I realized the full meaning of that apparently almost commonplace interview.

That same day I began to plunge on Textile, watching the market closely, that I might go more slowly should there be signs of a dangerous break—for no more than Langdon did I want a sudden panicky slump. The price held steady, however; but I, fool that I was, certain the fall must come, plunged on, digging the pit for my own destruction deeper and deeper.

## X. TWO “PILLARS OF SOCIETY”

I was neither seeing nor hearing from the Ellerslys, father or son; but, as I knew why, I was not disquieted. I had made them temporarily easy in their finances just before that dinner, and they, being fatuous, incurable optimists, were probably imagining they would never need me again. I did not disturb them until Monson and I had got my education so well under way that even I, always severe in self-criticism and now merciless, was compelled to admit to myself a distinct change for the better. You know how it is with a boy at the “growing age”—how he bursts out of clothes and ideas of life almost as fast as they are supplied him, so swiftly is he transforming into a man. Well, I think it is much that way with us Americans all our lives; we continue on and on at the growing age. And if one of us puts his or her mind hard upon growth in some particular direction, you see almost overnight a development fledged to the last tail-feathers and tip of top-knot where there was nothing at all. What miracles can be wrought by an open mind and a keen sense of the cumulative power of the unwasted minute! All this apropos of a very trivial matter, you may be thinking. But, be careful how you judge what is trivial and what important in a universe built up of atoms.

However—When my education seemed far enough advanced, I sent for Sam. He, after his footless fashion, didn't bother to acknowledge my note. His margin account with me was at the moment straight; I turned to his father. I had my cashier send him a formal, type-written letter signed Blacklock & Co., informing him that his account was overdrawn and that we “would be obliged if he would give the matter his immediate attention.” The note must have reached him the following morning; but he did not come until, after waiting three days, “we” sent him a sharp demand for a check for the balance due us.

A pleasing, aristocratic-looking figure he made as he entered my office, with his air of the man whose hands have never known the stains of toil, with his manner of having always received deferential treatment. There was no pretense in my curt greeting, my tone of “despatch your business, sir, and be gone”; for I was both busy and much irritated against him. “I guess you want to see our cashier,” said I, after giving him a hasty, absent-minded hand-shake. “My boy out there will take you to him.”

The old do-nothing's face lost its confident, condescending expression. His lip quivered, and I think there were tears in his bad, dim, gray-green eyes. I suppose he thought his a profoundly pathetic case; no doubt he hadn't the remotest conception what he really was—and no doubt, also, there are many who would honestly take his view. As if the fact that he was born with all possible advantages did not make him and his plight inexcusable. It passes my comprehension why people of his sort, when suffering from the calamities they have deliberately brought upon themselves by laziness and self-indulgence and extravagance, should get a sympathy that is withheld from those of the honest human rank and file falling into far more real misfortunes not of their own making.

“No, my dear Blacklock,” said he, cringing now as easily as he had condescended—how to cringe and how to condescend are taught at the same school, the one he had gone to all his life. “It is you I want to talk with. And, first, I owe you my apologies. I know you'll make allowances for one who was never trained to business methods. I've always been like a child in those matters.”

“You frighten me,” said I. “The last 'gentleman' who came throwing me off my guard with that plea was shrewd enough to get away with a very large sum of my hard-earned money. Besides”—and I was laughing, though not too good-naturedly—“I've noticed that you 'gentlemen' become vague about business only when the balance is against you. When it's in your favor, you manage to get your minds on business long enough to collect to the last fraction of a cent.”

He heartily echoed my laugh. “I only wish I *were* clever,” said he. “However, I've come to ask your indulgence. I'd have been here before, but those who owe me have been putting me off. And they're of the sort of people whom it's impossible to press.”

“I'd like to accommodate you further,” said I, shedding that last little hint as a cliff sheds rain, “but your account has been in an unsatisfactory state for nearly a month now.”

“I'm sure you'll give me a few days longer,” was his easy reply, as if we were discussing a trifle. “By the way, you haven't been to see us yet. Only this morning my wife was wondering when you'd come. You quite captivated her, Blacklock. Can't you dine with us to-morrow night—no, Sunday—at eight? We're having in a few people I think you'd like to meet.”

If any one imagines that this bald, businesslike way of putting it set my teeth on edge, let him dismiss the idea; my nerves had been too long accustomed to the feel of the harsh facts of life. It is evidence of the shrewdness of the old fellow at character-reading that he wasted none of his silk and velvet pretenses upon me, and so saved his time and mine. Probably he wished me to see that I need have no timidity or false shame in dealing with him, that when the time came to talk business I was free to talk it in my own straight fashion.

“Glad to come,” said I, wishing to be rid of him, now that my point was gained. “We'll let the account stand open for the present—I rather think your stocks are going up. Give my regards to—the ladies, please, especially to Miss Anita.”

He winced, but thanked me graciously; gave me his soft, fine hand to shake and departed, as eager to be off

as I to be rid of him. “Sunday next—at eight,” were his last words. “Don't fail us”—that in the tone of a king addressing some obscure person whom he had commanded to court. It may be that old Ellersly was wholly unconscious of his superciliousness, fancied he was treating me as if I were almost an equal; but I suspect he rather accentuated his natural manner, with the idea of impressing upon me that in our deal he was giving at least as much as I.

I recall that I thought about him for several minutes after he was gone—philosophized on the folly of a man's deliberately weaving a net to entangle himself. As if any man was ever caught in any net not of his own weaving and setting; as if I myself were not just then working at the last row of meshes of a net in which I was to ensnare myself.

My petty and inevitable success with that helpless creature added amazingly, ludicrously, to that dangerous elation which, as I can now see, had been growing in me ever since the day Roebuck yielded so readily to my demands as to National Coal. The whole trouble with me was that up to that time I had won all my victories by the plainest kind of straightaway hard work. I was imagining myself victor in contests of wit against wit, when, in fact, no one with any especial equipment of brains had ever opposed me; all the really strong men had been helping me because they found me useful. Too easy success—there is the clue to the wild folly of my performances in those days, a folly that seems utterly inconsistent with the reputation for shrewdness I had, and seemed to have earned.

I can find a certain small amount of legitimate excuse for my falling under Langdon's spell. He had, and has, fascinations, through personal magnetism, which it is hardly in human nature to resist. But for my self-hypnotism in the case of Roebuck, I find no excuse whatever for myself.

He sent for me and told me what share in National Coal they had decided to give me for my Manasquale mines. “Langdon and Melville,” said he, “think me too liberal; far too liberal, my boy. But I insisted—in your case I felt we could afford to be generous as well as just.” All this with an air that was a combination of the pastor and the parent.

I can't even offer the excuse of not having seen that he was a hypocrite. I felt his hypocrisy at once, and my first impulse was to jump for my breastworks. But instantly my vanity got behind me, held me in the open, pushed me on toward him. If you will notice, almost all “confidence” games rely for success chiefly upon enlisting a man's vanity to play the traitor to his judgment. So, instead of reading his liberality as plain proof of intended treachery, I read it as plain proof of my own greatness, and of the fear it had inspired in old Roebuck. Laugh *with* me if you like; but, before you laugh *at* me, think carefully—those of you who have ever put yourselves to the test on the field of action—think carefully whether you have never found that your head decoration which you thought a crown was in reality the peaked and belled cap of the fool.

But my vanity was not done with me. Led on by it, I proceeded to have one of those ridiculous “generous impulses”—I persuaded myself that there must be some decency in this liberality, in addition to the prudence which I flattered myself was the chief cause. “I have been unjust to Roebuck,” I thought. “I have been misjudging his character.” And incredible though it seems, I said to him with a good deal of genuine emotion: “I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Roebuck. And, instead of trying, I want to apologize to you. I have thought many hard things against you; have spoken some of them. I had better have been attending to my own conscience, instead of criticizing yours.”

I had often thought his face about the most repulsive, hypocrisy-glozed concourse of evil passions that ever fronted a fiend in the flesh. It had seemed to me the fitting result of a long career which, according to common report, was stained with murder, with rapacity and heartless cruelty, with the most brutal secret sensuality, and which had left in its wake the ruins of lives and hearts and fortunes innumerable. I had looked on the vast wealth he had heaped mountain high as a monument to devil-daring—other men had, no doubt, dreamed of doing the ferocious things he had done, but their weak, human hearts failed when it came to executing such horrible acts, and they had to be content with smaller fortunes, with the comparatively small fruits of their comparatively small infamies. He had dared all, had won; the most powerful bowed with quaking knees before him, and trembled lest they might, by a blundering look or word, excite his anger and cause him to snatch their possessions from them.

Thus I had regarded him, accepting the universal judgment, believing the thousand and one stories. But as his eyes, softened by his hugely generous act, beamed upon me now, I was amazed that I had so misjudged him. In that face which I had thought frightful there was, to my hypnotized gaze, the look of strong, sincere—yes, holy—beauty and power—the look of an archangel.

“Thank you, Blacklock,” said he, in a voice that made me feel as if I were a little boy in the crossroads church, believing I could almost see the angels floating above the heads of the singers in the choir behind the preacher. “Thank you. I am not surprised that you have misjudged me. God has given me a great work to do, and those who do His will in this wicked world must expect martyrdom. I should never have had the courage to do what I have done, what He has done through me, had He not guided my every step. You are not a religious man?”

“I try to do what's square,” said I. “But I'd prefer not to talk about it.”

“That's right! That's right!” he approved earnestly. “A man's religion is a matter between himself and his God. But I hope, Matthew, you will never forget that, unless you have daily, hourly communion with Almighty God, you will never be able to bear the great burdens, to do the great work fearlessly, disregarding the lies of the wicked, and, hardest of all to endure, the honestly-mistaken judgments of honest men.”

“I'll look into it,” said I. And I don't know to what lengths of foolish speech I should have gone had I not been saved by an office boy interrupting with a card for him.

“Ah, here's Walters now,” said he. Then to the boy: “Bring him in when I ring.”

I rose to go.

“No, sit down, Blacklock,” he insisted. “You are in with us now, and you may learn something by seeing how I deal with the larger problems that face men in these large undertakings, the problems that have faced me in each new enterprise I have inaugurated to the glory of God.”

Naturally, I accepted with enthusiasm.

You would not believe what a mood I had by this time been worked into by my rampant and raging vanity and emotionalism and by his snake-like charming. “Thank you,” I said, with an energetic warmth that must have secretly amused him mightily.

“When my reorganization of the iron industry proved such a great success, and God rewarded my labors with large returns,” he went on, “I looked about me to see what new work He wished me to undertake, how He wished me to invest His profits. And I saw the coal industry and the coal-carrying railroads in confusion, with waste on every side, and godless competition. Thousands of widows and orphans who had invested in coal railways and mines were getting no returns. Labor was fitfully employed, owing to alternations of over-production and no production at all. I saw my work ready for my hand. And now we are bringing order out of chaos. This man Walters, useful up to a certain point, has become insolent, corrupt, a stumbling-block in our way.” Here he pressed the button of his electric bell.

## XI. WHEN A MAN IS NOT A MAN

Walters entered. He was one of the great railway presidents, was universally regarded as a power, though I, of course, knew that he, like so many other presidents of railways, of individual corporations, of banks, of insurance companies, and high political officials in cities, states and the nation, was little more than a figurehead put up and used by the inside financial ring. As he shifted from leg to leg, holding his hat and trying to steady his twitching upper lip, he looked as one of his smallest section-bosses would have looked, if called up for a wigging.

Roebuck shook hands cordially with him, responded to his nervous glance at me with:

“Blacklock is practically in our directory.” We all sat, then Roebuck began in his kindliest tone:

“We have decided, Walters, that we must give your place to a stronger man. Your gross receipts, outside of coal, have fallen rapidly and steadily for the past three quarters. You were put into the presidency to bring them up. They have shown no change beyond what might have been expected in the natural fluctuations of freight. We calculated on resuming dividends a year ago. We have barely been able to meet the interest on our bonds.”

“But, Mr. Roebuck,” pleaded Walters, “you doubled the bonded indebtedness of the road just before I took charge.”

“The money went into improvements, into increasing your facilities, did it not?” inquired Roebuck, his paw as soft as a playful tiger's.

“Part of it,” said Walters. “But you remember the reorganizing syndicate got five millions, and then the contracts for the new work had to be given to construction companies in which directors of the road were silent partners. Then they are interested in the supply companies from which I must buy. You know what all that means, Mr. Roebuck.”

“No doubt,” said Roebuck, still smooth and soft. “But if there was waste, you should have reported—”

“To whom?” demanded Walters. “Every one of our directors, including yourself, Mr. Roebuck, is a stock-holder—a large stock-holder—in one or more of those companies.”

“Have you proof of this, Walters?” asked Roebuck, looking profoundly shocked. “It's a very grave charge—a criminal charge.”

“Proof?” said Walters, “You know how that is. The real books of all big companies are kept in the memories of the directors—and mighty treacherous memories they are.” This with a nervous laugh. “As for the holdings of directors in construction and supply companies—most of those holdings are in other names—all of them are disguised where the connection is direct.”

Roebuck shook his head sadly. “You admit, then, that you have allowed millions of the road's money to be wasted, that you made no complaint, no effort to stop the waste; and your only defense is that you *suspect* the directors of fraud. And you accuse them to excuse yourself—accuse them with no proof. Were you in any of those companies, Walters?”

“No,” he said, his eyes shifting.

Roebuck's face grew stern. “You bought two hundred thousand dollars of the last issue of government bonds, they tell me, with your two years' profits from the Western Railway Construction Company.”

“I bought no bonds,” blustered Walters. “What money I have I made out of speculating in the stock of my road—on legitimate inside information.”

“Your uncle in Wilkesbarre, I meant,” pursued Roebuck.

Walters reddened, looked straight at Roebuck without speaking.

“Do you still deny?” demanded Roebuck.

“I saw everybody—*everybody*—grafting,” said Walters boldly, “and I thought I might as well take my share. It's part of the business.” Then he added cynically: “That's the way it is nowadays. The lower ones see the higher ones raking off, and they rake off, too—down to conductors and brakemen. We caught some trackwalkers in a conspiracy to dispose of the discarded ties and rails the other day.” He laughed. “We jailed *them*.”

“If you can show that any director has taken anything that did not belong to him, if you can show that a single contract you let to a construction or a supply company—except, of course, the contracts you let to yourself—of them I know nothing, suspect much—if you can show one instance of these criminal doings, Mr. Walters, I shall back you up with all my power in prosecution.”

“Of course I can't show it,” cried Walters. “If I tried, wouldn't they ruin and disgrace me, perhaps send me to the penitentiary? Wasn't I the one that passed on and signed their contracts? And wouldn't they—wouldn't you, Mr. Roebuck—have fired me if I had refused to sign?”

“Excuses, excuses, Walters,” was Roebuck's answer, with a sad, disappointed look, as if he had hoped Walters would make a brighter showing for himself. “How many times have you yourself talked to me of this eternal excuse habit of men who fail? And if I expended my limited brain-power in looking into all the excuses and explanations, what energy or time would I have for constructive work? All I can do is to select a man for a position and to judge him by results. You were put in charge to produce dividends. You haven't produced them. I'm sorry, and I venture to hope that things are not so bad as you make out in your eagerness to excuse yourself. For the sake of old times, Tom, I ignore your angry insinuations against me. I try to be just, and to be just one must always be impersonal.”

“Well,” said Walters with an air of desperation, “give me another year, Mr. Roebuck, and I'll produce results all right. I'll break the agreements and cut rates. I'll freeze out the branch roads and our minority stock-holders, I'll keep the books so that all the expert accountants in New York couldn't untangle them. I'll wink at and commit and order committed all the necessary crimes. I don't know why I've been so squeamish, when there were so many penitentiary offenses that I did consent to, and, for that matter, commit, without a quiver. I thought I ought to draw the line somewhere—and I drew it at keeping my personal word and at keeping the books reasonably straight. But I'll go the limit.”

I'll never forget Roebuck's expression; it was perfect, simply perfect—a great and good man outraged beyond endurance, but a Christian still. “You have made it impossible for me to temper justice with mercy, Walters,” said he. “If it were not for the long years of association, for the affection for you which has grown up in me, I should hand you over to the fate you have earned. You tell me you have been committing crimes in my service. You tell me you will commit more and greater crimes. I can scarcely believe my own ears.”

Walters laughed scornfully—the reckless laugh of a man who suddenly sees that he is cornered and must fight for his life. “Rot!” he jeered. “Rot! You always have been a wonder at juggling with your conscience. But do you expect me to believe you think yourself innocent because you do not yourself execute the orders you issue—orders that can be carried out only by committing crimes?” Walters was now beside himself with rage. He gave the reins to that high horse he had been riding ever since he was promoted to the presidency of the great coal road. He began to lay on whip and spur. “Do you think,” he cried to Roebuck, “the blood of those five hundred men drowned in the Pequot mine is not on *your* hands—*your* head? You, who ordered John Wilkinson to suppress the competition the Pequot was giving you, ordered him in such a way that he knew the alternative was his own ruin? He shot himself—yet he had as good an excuse as you, for he, too, passed on the order until it got to the poor fireman—that wretched fellow they sent to the penitentiary for life? And as sure as there is a God in Heaven, you will some day do a long, long sentence in whatever hell there is, for letting that wretch rot in prison—yes, and for John Wilkinson's suicide, and for the lives of those five hundred drowned. Your pensions to the widows and orphans can't save you.”

I listened to this tirade astounded. Used as I was to men losing their heads through vanity, I could not credit my own ears and eyes when they reported to me this insane exhibition. I looked at Roebuck. He was wearing an expression of beatific patience; he would have made a fine study for a picture of the martyr at the stake.

“I forgive you, Tom,” he said, when Walters stopped for breath. “Your own sinful heart makes you see the black of sin upon everything. I had heard that you were going about making loud boasts of your power over your employers, but I tried not to believe it. I see now that you have, indeed, lost your senses. Your prosperity has been too much for your good sense.” He sighed mournfully. “I shall not interfere to prevent your getting a position elsewhere,” he continued. “But after what you have confessed, after your slanders, how can I put you back in your old place out West, as I intended? How can I continue the interest in you and care for your career that I have had, in spite of all your shortcomings? I who raised you up from a clerk.”

“Raised me up as you fellows always raise men up—because you find them clever at doing your dirty work. I was a decent, honest fellow when you first took notice of me and tempted me. But, by God, Mr. Roebuck, if I've sold out beyond hope of living decent again, I'll have my price—to the last cent. You've got to leave me where I am or give me a place and salary equally as good.” This Walters said blusteringly, but beneath I could detect the beginnings of a whine.

“You are angry, Tom,” said Roebuck soothingly. “I have hurt your vanity—it is one of the heaviest crosses I have to bear, that I must be continually hurting the vanity of men. Go away and—and calm down. Think the situation over coolly; then come and apologize to me, and I will do what I can to help you. As for your threats—when you are calm, you will see how idle they are.”

Walters gave a sort of groan; and though I, blinded by my prejudices in favor of Roebuck and of the crowd with whom my interests lay, had been feeling that he was an impudent and crazy ingrate, I pitied him.

“What proofs have I got?” he said desperately. “If I show up the things I know about, I show up myself, and everybody will say I'm lying about you and the others in the effort to save myself. The newspapers would denounce me as a treacherous liar—you fellows own or control or foozle them in one way and another. And if I was believed, who'd prosecute you and what court'd condemn you? Don't you own both political parties and make all the tickets, and can't you ruin any office-holders who lifted a finger against you? What a hell of a state of affairs!”

A swifter or a weaker descent I never witnessed. My pity changed to contempt. “This fellow, with his great reputation,” thought I, “is a fool and a knave, and a weak one at that.”

“Go away now, Tom,” said Roebuck.

“When you're master of yourself again, come to see me.”

“Master of myself!” cried Walters bitterly. “Who that's got anything to lose is master of himself in this country?” With shoulders sagging and a sort of stumble in his gait, he went toward the door. He paused there to say: “I've served too long, Mr. Roebuck. There's no fight in me. I thought there was, but there ain't. Do the best you can for me.” And he took himself out of our sight.

You will wonder how I was ever able to blind myself to the reality of this frightful scene. But please remember that in this world every thought and every act is a mixture of the good and the bad; and the one or the other shows the more prominently according to one's point of view. There probably isn't a criminal in any cell, anywhere, no matter what he may say in sniveling pretense in the hope of lighter sentence, who doesn't at the bottom of his heart believe his crime or crimes somehow justifiable—and who couldn't make out a plausible case for himself.

At that time I was stuffed with the arrogance of my fancied membership in the caste of directing financial geniuses; I was looking at everything from the viewpoint of the brotherhood of which Roebuck was the strongest brother, and of which I imagined myself a full and equal member. I did not, I could not, blind myself to the vivid reminders of his relentlessness; but I knew too well how necessary the iron hand and the fixed purpose are to great affairs to judge him as infuriated Walters, with his vanity savagely wounded, was judging him. I'd as soon have thought of describing General Grant as a murderer, because he ordered the battles in which men were killed or because he planned and led the campaigns in which subordinates committed rapine and pillage and assassination. I did not then see the radical difference—did not realize that while Grant's work was at the command of patriotism and necessity, there was no necessity whatever for Roebuck's getting rich but the command of his own greedy and cruel appetites.

Don't misunderstand me. My morals are practical, not theoretical. Men must die, old customs embodied in law must be broken, the venal must be bribed and the weak cowed and compelled, in order that civilization may advance. You can't establish a railway or a great industrial system by rose-water morality. But I shall show, before I finish, that Roebuck and his gang of so-called “organizers of industry” bear about the same relation to industry that the boll weevil bears to the cotton crop.

I'll withdraw this, if any one can show me that, as the result of the activities of those parasites, anybody anywhere is using or is able to use a single pound or bushel or yard more of any commodity whatsoever. I'll withdraw it, if I can not show that but for those parasites, bearing precisely the same relation to our society that the kings and nobles and priests bore to France before the Revolution, everybody except them would have more goods and more money than they have under the system that enables these parasites to overshadow the highways of commerce with their strongholds and to clog them with their toll-gates. They know little about producing, about manufacturing, about distributing, about any process of industry. Their skill is in temptation, in trickery and in terror.

On that day, however, I sided—honestly, as I thought—with Roebuck. What I saw and heard increased my admiration of the man, my already profound respect for his master mind. And when, just after Walters went out, he leaned back in his chair and sat silent with closed eyes and moving lips, I—yes, I, Matt Blacklock, “Black Matt,” as they call me—was awed in the presence of this great and good man at prayer!

How he and that God of his must have laughed at me! So infatuated was I that, clear as it is that he'd never have let me be present at such a scene without a strong ulterior motive, not until he himself long afterward made it impossible for me to deceive myself did I penetrate to his real purpose—that he wished to fill me with a prudent dread and fear of him, with a sense of the absoluteness of his power and of the hopelessness of trying to combat it. But at the time I thought—imbecile that my vanity had made me—at the time I thought he had let me be present because he genuinely liked, admired and trusted me!

Is it not amazing that one who could fall into such colossal blunders should survive to tell of them? I would not have survived had not Roebuck and his crowd been at the same time making an even more colossal misestimate of me than I was making of them. My attack of vanity was violent, but temporary; theirs was equally violent, and chronic and incurable to boot.

## XII. ANITA

On my first day in long trousers I may have been more ill at ease than I was that Sunday evening at the Ellerslys'; but I doubt it.

When I came into their big drawing-room and took a look round at the assembled guests, I never felt more at home in my life. “Yes,” said I to myself, as Mrs. Ellersly was greeting me and as I noted the friendly interest in the glances of the women, “this is where I belong. I'm beginning to come into my own.”

As I look back on it now, I can't refrain from smiling at my own simplicity—and snobbishness. For, so determined was I to believe what I was working for was worth while, that I actually fancied there were upon these in reality ordinary people, ordinary in looks, ordinary in intelligence, some subtle marks of superiority, that made them at a glance superior to the common run. This ecstasy of snobbishness deluded me as to the women only—for, as I looked at the men, I at once felt myself their superior. They were an inconsequential, patterned lot. I even was better dressed than any of them, except possibly Mowbray Langdon; and, if he showed to more advantage than I, it was because of his manner, which, as I have probably said before, is superior to that of any human being I've ever seen—man or woman.

“You are to take Anita in,” said Mrs. Ellersly. With a laughable sense that I was doing myself proud, I crossed the room easily and took my stand in front of her. She shook hands with me politely enough. Langdon was sitting beside her; I had interrupted their conversation.

“Hello, Blacklock!” said Langdon, with a quizzical, satirical smile with the eyes only. “It seems strange to see you at such peaceful pursuits.” His glance traveled over me critically—and that was the beginning of my trouble. Presently, he rose, left me alone with her.

“You know Mr. Langdon?” she said, obviously because she felt she must say something.

“Oh, yes,” I replied. “We are old friends. What a tremendous swell he is—really a swell.” This with enthusiasm.

She made no comment. I debated with myself whether to go on talking of Langdon. I decided against it because all I knew of him had to do with matters down town—and Monson had impressed it upon me that down town was taboo in the drawing-room. I rummaged my brain in vain for another and suitable topic.

She sat, and I stood—she tranquil and beautiful and cold, I every instant more miserably self-conscious. When the start for the dining-room was made I offered her my left arm, though I had carefully planned beforehand just what I would do. She—without hesitation and, as I know now, out of sympathy for me in my suffering—was taking my wrong arm, when it flashed on me like a blinding blow in the face that I ought to be on the other side of her. I got red, tripped in the far-sprawling train of Mrs. Langdon, tore it slightly, tried to get to the other side of Miss Ellersly by walking in front of her, recovered myself somehow, stumbled round behind her, walked on her train and finally arrived at her left side, conscious in every red-hot atom of me that I was making a spectacle of myself and that the whole company was enjoying it. I must have seemed to them an ignorant boor; in fact, I had been about a great deal among people who knew how to behave, and had I never given the matter of how to conduct myself on that particular occasion an instant's thought, I should have got on without the least trouble.

It was with a sigh of profound relief that I sank upon the chair between Miss Ellersly and Mrs. Langdon, safe from danger of making “breaks,” so I hoped, for the rest of the evening. But within a very few minutes I realized that my little misadventure had unnerved me. My hands were trembling so that I could scarcely lift the soup spoon to my lips, and my throat had got so far beyond control that I had difficulty in swallowing. Miss Ellersly and Mrs. Langdon were each busy with the man on the other side of her; I was left to my own reflections, and I was not sure whether this made me more or less uncomfortable. To add to my torment, I grew angry, furiously angry, with myself. I looked up and down and across the big table noted all these self-satisfied people perfectly at their ease; and I said to myself: “What's the matter with you, Matt? They're only men and women, and by no means the best specimens of the breed. You've got more brains than all of 'em put together, probably; is there one of the lot that could get a job at good wages if thrown on the world? What do you care what they think of you? It's a damn sight more important what you think of them; as it won't be many years before you'll hold everything they value, everything that makes them of consequence, in the hollow of your hand.”

But it was of no use. When Miss Ellersly finally turned her face toward me to indicate that she would be graciously pleased to listen if I had anything to communicate, I felt as if I were slowly wilting, felt my throat contracting into a dry twist. What was the matter with me? Partly, of course, my own snobbishness, which led me to attach the same importance to those people that the snobbishness of the small and silly had got them in the way of attaching to themselves. But the chief cause of my inability was Monson and his lessons. I had thought I was estimating at its proper value what he was teaching. But so earnest and serious am I by nature, and so earnest and serious was he about those trivialities that he had been brought up to regard as the whole of life, that I had unconsciously absorbed his attitude; I was like a fellow who, after cramming hard for an examination, finds that all the questions put to him are on things he hasn't looked at. I had been making an ass of myself, and that evening I got the first instalment of my sound and just punishment. I who had prided myself on being ready for anything or anybody, I who had laughed contemptuously when I read how men and women, presented at European courts, made fools of themselves—I was made ridiculous by these people who, as I well know, had nothing to back their pretensions to superiority but a barefaced bluff.

Perhaps, had I thought this out at the table, I should have got back to myself and my normal ease; but I didn't, and that long and terrible dinner was one long and terrible agony of stage fright. When the ladies withdrew, the other men drew together, talking of people I did not know and of things I did not care about—I thought then that they were avoiding me deliberately as a flock of tame ducks avoids a wild one that some wind has accidentally blown down among them. I know now that my forbidding aspect must have been responsible for my isolations, However, I sat alone, sullenly resisting old Ellersly's constrained efforts to get me into the conversation, and angrily suspicious that Langdon was enjoying my discomfiture more than the cigarette he was apparently absorbed in.

Old Ellersly, growing more and more nervous before my dark and sullen look, finally seated himself beside me. “I hope you'll stay after the others have gone,” said he. “They'll leave early, and we can have a quiet smoke and talk.”

All unstrung though I was, I yet had the desperate courage to resolve that I'd not leave, defeated in the eyes of the one person whose opinion I really cared about. “Very well,” said I, in reply to him.

He and I did not follow the others to the drawing-room, but turned into the library adjoining. From where I seated myself I could see part of the drawing-room—saw the others leaving, saw Langdon lingering, ignoring the impatient glances of his wife, while he talked on and on with Miss Ellersly. Her face was full toward me; she was not aware that I was looking at her, I am sure, for she did not once lift her eyes. As I sat studying her, everything else was crowded out of my mind. She was indeed wonderful—too wonderful and fine and fragile, it seemed to me at that moment, for one so plain and rough as I. “Incredible,” thought I, “that she is the child of such a pair as Ellersly and his wife—but again, has she any less in common with them than she'd have with any other pair of human creatures?” Her slender white arms, her slender white shoulders, the bloom on her skin, the graceful, careless way her hair grew round her forehead and at the nape of her neck, the rather haughty expression of her small face softened into sweetness and even tenderness, now that she was talking at her ease with one whom she regarded as of her own kind—“but he isn't!” I protested to myself. “Langdon—none of these men—none of these women, is fit to associate with her. They can't appreciate her. She belongs to me who can.” And I had a mad impulse then and there to seize her and bear her away—home—to the home she could make for me out of what I would shower upon her.

At last Langdon rose. It irritated me to see her color under that indifferent fascinating smile of his. It irritated me to note that he held her hand all the time he was saying good-by, and the fact that he held it as if he'd as lief not be holding it hardly lessened my longing to rush in and knock him down. What he did was all in the way of perfect good manners, and would have jarred no one not supersensitive, like me—and like his wife. I saw that she, too, was frowning. She looked beautiful that evening, in spite of her too great breadth for her height—her stoutness was not altogether a defect when she was wearing evening dress. While she

seemed friendly and smiling to Miss Ellersly, I saw, whether others saw it or not, that she quivered with apprehension at his mildly flirtatious ways. He acted toward any and every attractive woman as if he were free and were regarding her as a possibility, and didn't mind if she flattered herself that he regarded her as a probability.

In an aimless sort of way Miss Ellersly, after the Langdons had disappeared, left the drawing-room by the same door. Still aimlessly wandering, she drifted into the library by the hall door. As I rose, she lifted her eyes, saw me, and drove away the frown of annoyance which came over her face like the faintest haze. In fact, it may have existed only in my imagination. She opened a large, square silver box on the table, took out a cigarette, lighted it and holding it, with the smoke lazily curling up from it, between the long slender first and second fingers of her white hand, stood idly turning the leaves of a magazine. I threw my cigar into the fireplace. The slight sound as it struck made her jump, and I saw that, underneath her surface of perfect calm, she was in a nervous state full as tense as my own.

“You smoke?” said I.

“Sometimes,” she replied. “It is soothing and distracting. I don't know how it is with others, but when I smoke, my mind is quite empty.”

“It's a nasty habit—smoking,” said I.

“Do you think so?” said she, with the slightest lift to her tone and her eyebrows.

“Especially for a woman,” I went on, because I could think of nothing else to say, and would not, at any cost, let this conversation, so hard to begin, die out.

“You are one of those men who have one code for themselves and another for women,” she replied.

“I'm a man,” said I. “All men have the two codes.”

“Not all,” said she after a pause.

“All men of decent ideas,” said I with emphasis.

“Really?” said she, in a tone that irritated me by suggesting that what I said was both absurd and unimportant.

“It is the first time I've ever seen a respectable woman smoke,” I went on, powerless to change the subject, though conscious I was getting tedious. “I've read of such things, but I didn't believe.”

“That is interesting,” said she, her tone suggesting the reverse.

“I've offended you by saying frankly what I think,” said I. “Of course, it's none of my business.”

“Oh, no,” replied she carelessly. “I'm not in the least offended. Prejudices always interest me.”

I saw Ellersly and his wife sitting in the drawing-room, pretending to talk to each other. I understood that they were leaving me alone with her deliberately, and I began to suspect she was in the plot. I smiled, and my courage and self-possession returned as summarily as they had fled.

“I'm glad of this chance to get better acquainted with you,” said I. “I've wanted it ever since I first saw you.”

As I put this to her directly, she dropped her eyes and murmured something she probably wished me to think vaguely pleasant.

“You are the first woman I ever knew,” I went on, “with whom it was hard for me to get on any sort of terms. I suppose it's my fault. I don't know this game yet. But I'll learn it, if you'll be a little patient; and when I do, I think I'll be able to keep up my end.”

She looked at me—just looked. I couldn't begin to guess what was going on in that gracefully-poised head of hers.

“Will you try to be friends with me?” said I with directness.

She continued to look at me in that same steady, puzzling way.

“Will you?” I repeated.

“I have no choice,” said she slowly.

I flushed. “What does that mean?” I demanded.

She threw a hurried and, it seemed to me, frightened glance toward the drawing-room. “I didn't intend to offend you,” she said in a low voice. “You have been such a good friend to papa—I've no right to feel anything but friendship for you.”

“I'm glad to hear you say that,” said I. And I was; for those words of hers were the first expression of appreciation and gratitude I had ever got from any member of that family which I was holding up from ruin. I put out my hand, and she laid hers in it.

“There isn't anything I wouldn't do to earn your friendship, Miss Anita,” I said, holding her hand tightly, feeling how lifeless it was, yet feeling, too, as if a flaming torch were being borne through me, were lighting a fire in every vein.

The scarlet poured into her face and neck, wave on wave, until I thought it would never cease to come. She snatched her hand away and from her face streamed proud resentment. God, how I loved her at that moment!

“Anita! Mr. Blacklock!” came from the other room, in her mother's voice. “Come in here and save us old people from boring each other to sleep.”

She turned swiftly and went into the other room, I following. There were a few minutes of conversation—a monologue by her mother. Then I ceased to disregard Ellersly's less and less covert yawns, and rose to take leave. I could not look directly at Anita, but I was seeing that her eyes were fixed on me, as if by some compulsion, some sinister compulsion. I left in high spirits. “No matter why or how she looks at you,” said I to myself. “All that is necessary is to get yourself noticed. After that, the rest is easy. You must keep cool enough always to remember that under this glamour that intoxicates you, she's a woman, just a woman, waiting for a man.”

# XIII. “UNTIL TO-MORROW”

On the following Tuesday afternoon, toward five o'clock, I descended from my apartment on my way to my brougham. In the entrance hall I met Monson coming in.

“Hello, you!” said he. “Slipping away to get married?”

“No, I'm only making a call,” replied I, taking alarm instantly.

“Oh, is *that* all?” said he with a sly grin. “It must be a mighty serious matter.”

“I'm in no hurry,” said I. “Come up with me for a few minutes.”

As soon as we were alone in my sitting-room, I demanded: “What's wrong with me?”

“Nothing—not a thing,” was his answer, in a tone I had a struggle with myself not to resent. “I've never seen any one quite so grand—top hat, latest style, long coat ditto, white buckskin waistcoat, twenty-thousand-dollar pearl in pale blue scarf, white spats, spotless varnish boots just from the varnishers, cream-colored gloves. You *will* make a hit! My eye, I'll bet she won't be able to resist you.”

I began to shed my plumage. “I thought this was the thing when you're calling on people you hardly know.”

“I should say you'd have to know 'em uncommon well to give 'em such a treat. Rather!”

“What shall I wear?” I asked. “You certainly told me the other day that this was proper.”

“Proper—so it is—too damn proper,” was his answer. “That'd be all right for a bridegroom or a best man or an usher—or perhaps for a wedding guest. It wouldn't do any particular harm even to call in it, if the people were used to you. But—”

“I look dressed up?”

“Like a fashion plate—like a tailor—like a society actor.”

“What shall I wear?”

“Oh, just throw yourself together any old way. Business suit's good enough.”

“But I barely know these people—socially. I never called there,” I objected.

“Then don't call,” he advised. “Send your valet in a cab to leave a card at the door. Calling has gone clean out—unless a man's got something very especial in mind. Never show that you're eager. Keep your hand hid.”

“They'd know I had something especial in mind if I called?”

“Certainly, and if you'd gone in those togs, they'd have assumed you had come to—to ask the old man for his daughter—or something like that.”

I lost no time in getting back into a business suit.

A week passed and, just as I was within sight of my limit of patience, Bromwell Ellersly appeared at my office. “I can't put my hand on the necessary cash, Mr. Blacklock—at least, not for a few days. Can I count on your further indulgence?” This in his best exhibit of old-fashioned courtliness—the “gentleman” through and through, ignorant of anything useful.

“Don't let that matter worry you, Ellersly,” said I, friendly, for I wanted to be on a somewhat less business-like basis with that family. “The market's steady, and will go up before it goes down.”

“Good!” said he. “By the way, you haven't kept your promise to call.”

“I'm a busy man,” said I. “You must make my excuses to your wife. But—in the evenings. Couldn't we get up a little theater-party—Mrs. Ellersly and your daughter and you and I—Sam, too, if he cares to come?”

“Delightful!” cried he.

“Whichever one of the next five evenings you say,” I said. “Let me know by to-morrow morning, will you?” And we talked no more of the neglected margins; we understood each other. When he left he had negotiated a three months' loan of twenty thousand dollars.

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They were so surprised that they couldn't conceal it, when they were ushered into my apartment on the Wednesday evening they had fixed upon. If my taste in dress was somewhat too pronounced, my taste in my surroundings was not. I suppose the same instinct that made me like the music and the pictures and the books that were the products of superior minds had guided me right in architecture, decoration and furniture. I know I am one of those who are born with the instinct for the best. Once Monson got in the way of free criticism, he indulged himself without stint, after the customary human fashion; in fact, so free did he become that had I not feared to frighten him and so bring about the defeat of my purposes, I should have sat on him hard very soon after we made our bargain. As it was, I stood his worst impudences without flinching, and partly consoled myself with the amusement I got out of watching his vanity lead him on into thinking his knowledge the most vital matter in the world—just as you sometimes see a waiter or a clerk with the air of sharing the care of the universe with the Almighty.

But even Monson could find nothing to criticize either in my apartment or in my country house. And, by the way, he showed his limitations by remarking, after he had inspected: “I must say, Blacklock, your architects and decorators have done well by you.” As if a man's surroundings were not the unfailing index to himself, no matter how much money he spends or how good architects and the like he hires. As if a man could ever buy good taste.

I was pleased out of all proportion to its value by what Ellersly and his wife looked and said. But, though I watched Miss Ellersly closely, though I tried to draw from her some comment on my belongings—on my pictures, on my superb tapestries, on the beautiful carving of my furniture—I got nothing from her beyond that first look of surprise and pleasure. Her face resumed its statuelike calm, her eyes did not wander; her lips, like a crimson bow painted upon her clear, white skin, remained closed. She spoke only when she was

spoken to, and then as briefly as possible. The dinner—and a mighty good dinner it was—would have been memorable for strain and silence had not Mrs. Ellersly kept up her incessant chatter. I can't recall a word she said, but I admired her for being able to talk at all. I knew she was in the same state as the rest of us, yet she acted perfectly at her ease; and not until I thought it over afterward did I realize that she had done all the talking, except answers to her occasional and cleverly-sprinkled direct questions.

Ellersly sat opposite me, and I was irritated, and thrown into confusion, too, every time I lifted my eyes, by the crushed, criminal expression of his face. He ate and drank hugely—and extremely bad manners it would have been regarded in me had I made as much noise as he, or lifted such quantities at a time into my mouth. But through his noisy gluttony he managed somehow to maintain that hang-dog air—like a thief who has gone through the house and, on his way out, has paused at the pantry, with the sack of plunder beside him, to gorge himself.

I looked at Anita several times, each time with a carefully-framed remark ready; each time I found her gaze on me—and I could say nothing, could only look away in a sort of panic. Her eyes were strangely variable. I have seen them of a gray, so pale that it was almost silver—like the steely light of the snow-line at the edge of the horizon; again, and they were so that evening, they shone with the deepest, softest blue, and made one think, as one looked at her, of a fresh violet frozen in a block of clear ice.

I sat behind her in the box at the theater. During the first and second intermissions several men dropped in to speak to her mother and her—fellows who didn't ever come down town, but I could tell they knew who I was by the way they ignored me. It exasperated me to a pitch of fury, that coldly insolent air of theirs—a jerky nod at me without so much as a glance, and no notice of me when they were leaving *my* box beyond a faint, supercilious smile as they passed with eyes straight ahead. I knew what it meant, what they were thinking—that the “Bucket-Shop King,” as the newspapers had dubbed me, was trying to use old Ellersly's necessities as a “jimmy” and “break into society.” When the curtain went down for the last intermission, two young men appeared; I did not get up as I had before, but stuck to my seat—I had reached that point at which courtesy has become cowardice.

They craned and strained at her round me and over me, presently gave up and retired, disguising their anger as contempt for the bad manners of a bounder. But that disturbed me not a ripple, the more as I was delighting in a consoling discovery. Listening and watching as she talked with these young men, whom she evidently knew well, I noted that she was distant and only politely friendly in manner habitually, that while the ice might thicken for me, it was there always. I knew enough about women to know that, if the woman who can thaw only for one man is the most difficult, she is also the most constant. “Once she thaws toward me!” I said to myself.

When the young men had gone, I leaned forward until my head was close to hers, to her hair—fine, soft, abundant, electric hair. Like the infatuated fool that I was, I tore out all the pigeon-holes of my brain in search of something to say to her, something that would start her to thinking well of me. She must have felt my breath upon her neck, for she moved away slightly, and it seemed to me a shiver visibly passed over that wonderful white skin of hers.

I drew back and involuntarily said, “Beg pardon.” I glanced at her mother and it was my turn to shudder. I can't hope to give an accurate impression of that stony, mercenary, mean face. There are looks that paint upon the human countenance the whole of a life, as a flash of lightning paints upon the blackness of the night miles on miles of landscape. That look of Mrs. Ellersly's—stern disapproval at her daughter, stern command that she be more civil, that she unbend—showed me the old woman's soul. And I say that no old harpy presiding over a dive is more full of the venom of the hideous calculations of the market for flesh and blood than is a woman whose life is wrapped up in wealth and show.

“If you wish it,” I said, on impulse, to Miss Ellersly in a low voice, “I shall never try to see you again.”

I could feel rather than see the blood suddenly beating in her skin, and there was in her voice a nervousness very like fright as she answered: “I'm sure mama and I shall be glad to see you whenever you come.”

“You?” I persisted.

“Yes,” she said, after a brief hesitation.

“Glad?” I persisted.

She smiled—the faintest change in the perfect curve of her lips. “You are very persistent, aren't you?”

“Very,” I answered. “That is why I have always got whatever I wanted.”

“I admire it,” said she.

“No, you don't,” I replied. “You think it is vulgar, and you think I am vulgar because I have that quality—that and some others.”

She did not contradict me.

“Well, I *am* vulgar—from your standpoint,” I went on. “I have purposes and passions. And I pursue them. For instance, you.”

“I?” she said tranquilly.

“You,” I repeated. “I made up my mind the first day I saw you that I'd make you like me. And—you will.”

“That is very flattering,” said she. “And a little terrifying. For”—she faltered, then went bravely on—“I suppose there isn't anything you'd stop at in order to gain your end.”

“Nothing,” said I, and I compelled her to meet my gaze.

She drew a long breath, and I thought there was a sob in it—like a frightened child.

“But I repeat,” I went on, “that if you wish it, I shall never try to see you again. Do you wish it?”

“I—don't—know,” she answered slowly. “I think—not.”

As she spoke the last word, she lifted her eyes to mine with a look of forced friendliness in them that I'd rather not have seen there. I wished to be blind to her defects, to the stains and smutches with which her

surroundings must have sullied her. And that friendly look seemed to me an unmistakable hypocrisy in obedience to her mother. However, it had the effect of bringing her nearer to my own earthy level, of putting me at ease with her; and for the few remaining minutes we talked freely, I indifferent whether my manners and conversation were correct. As I helped her into their carriage, I pressed her arm slightly, and said in a voice for her only, “Until to-morrow.”

## XIV. FRESH AIR IN A GREENHOUSE

At five the next day I rang the Ellerslys' bell, was taken through the drawing-room into that same library. The curtains over the double doorway between the two rooms were almost drawn. She presently entered from the hall. I admired the picture she made in the doorway—her big hat, her embroidered dress of white cloth, and that small, sweet, cold face of hers. And as I looked, I knew that nothing, nothing—no, not even her wish, her command—could stop me from trying to make her my own. That resolve must have shown in my face—it or the passion that inspired it—for she paused and paled.

“What is it?” I asked. “Are you afraid of me?”

She came forward proudly, a fine scorn in her eyes. “No,” she said. “But if you knew, you might be afraid of me.”

“I am,” I confessed. “I am afraid of you because you inspire in me a feeling that is beyond my control. I've committed many follies in my life—I have moods in which it amuses me to defy fate. But those follies have always been of my own willing. You”—I laughed—“you are a folly for me. But one that compels me.”

She smiled—not discouragingly—and seated herself on a tiny sofa in the corner, a curiously impregnable intrenchment, as I noted—for my impulse was to carry her by storm. I was astonished at my own audacity; I was wondering where my fear of her had gone, my awe of her superior fineness and breeding. “Mama will be down in a few minutes,” she said.

“I didn't come to see your mother,” replied I. “I came to see you.”

She flushed, then froze—and I thought I had once more “got upon” her nerves with my rude directness. How eagerly sensitive our nerves are to bad impressions of one we don't like, and how coarsely insensible to bad impressions of one we do like!

“I see I've offended again, as usual,” said I. “You attach so much importance to petty little dancing-master tricks and caperings. You live—always have lived—in an artificial atmosphere. Real things act on you like fresh air on a hothouse flower.”

“You are—fresh air?” she inquired, with laughing sarcasm.

“I am that,” retorted I. “And good for you—as you'll find when you get used to me.”

I heard voices in the next room—her mother's and some man's. We waited until it was evident we were not to be disturbed. As I realized that fact and surmised its meaning, I looked triumphantly at her. She drew further back into her corner, and the almost stern firmness of her contour told me she had set her teeth.

“I see you are nerving yourself,” said I with a laugh. “You are perfectly certain I am going to propose to you.”

She flamed scarlet and half-started up.

“Your mother—in the next room—expects it, too,” I went on, laughing even more disagreeably. “Your parents need money—they have decided to sell you, their only large income-producing asset. And I am willing to buy. What do you say?”

I was blocking her way out of the room. She was standing, her breath coming fast, her eyes blazing. “You are—*frightful*!” she exclaimed in a low voice.

“Because I am frank, because I am honest? Because I want to put things on a sound basis? I suppose, if I came lying and pretending, and let you lie and pretend, and let your parents and Sam lie and pretend, you would find me—almost tolerable. Well, I'm not that kind. When there's no especial reason one way or the other, I'm willing to smirk and grimace and dodder and drivel, like the rest of your friends, those ladies and gentlemen. But when there's business to be transacted, I am business-like. Let's not begin with your thinking you are deceiving me, and so hating me and despising me and trying to keep up the deception. Let's begin right.”

She was listening; she was no longer longing to fly from the room; she was curious. I knew I had scored.

“In any event,” I continued, “you would have married for money. You've been brought up to it, like all these girls of your set. You'd be miserable without luxury. If you had your choice between love without luxury and luxury without love, it'd be as easy to foretell which you'd do as to foretell how a starving poet would choose between a loaf of bread and a volume of poems. You may love love; but you love life—your kind of life—better!”

She lowered her head. “It is true,” she said. “It is low and vile, but it is true.”

“Your parents need money—” I began.

She stopped me with a gesture. “Don't blame them,” she pleaded. “I am more guilty than they.”

I was proud of her as she made that confession. “You have the making of a real woman in you,” said I. “I should have wanted you even if you hadn't. But what I now see makes what I thought a folly of mine look more like wisdom.”

“I must warn you,” she said, and now she was looking directly at me, “I shall never love you.”

“Never is a long time,” replied I. “I'm old enough to be cynical about prophecy.”

“I shall never love you,” she repeated. “For many reasons you wouldn't understand. For one you will understand.”

“I understand the 'many reasons' you say are beyond me,” said I. “For, dear young lady, under this coarse exterior I assure you there's hidden a rather sharp outlook on human nature—and—well, nerves that respond to the faintest changes in you as do mine can't be altogether without sensitiveness. What's the other reason—*the* reason? That you think you love some one else?”

“Thank you for saying it for me,” she replied.

You can't imagine how pleased I was at having earned her gratitude, even in so little a matter. “I have thought of that,” said I. “It is of no consequence.”

“But you don't understand,” she pleaded earnestly.

“On the contrary, I understand perfectly,” I assured her. “And the reason I am not disturbed is—you are here, you are not with him.”

She lowered her head so that I had no view of her face.

“You and he do not marry,” I went on, “because you are both poor?”

“No,” she replied.

“Because he does not care for you?”

“No—not that,” she said.

“Because you thought he hadn't enough for two?”

A long pause, then—very faintly: “No—not that.”

“Then it must be because he hasn't as much money as he'd like, and must find a girl who'll bring him—what he *most* wants.”

She was silent.

“That is, while he loves you dearly, he loves money more. And he's willing to see you go to another man, be the wife of another man, be—everything to another man.” I laughed. “I'll take my chances against love of that sort.”

“You don't understand,” she murmured. “You don't realize—there are many things that mean nothing to you and that mean—oh, so much to people brought up as we are.”

“Nonsense!” said I. “What do you mean by 'we'? Nature has been bringing us up for a thousand thousand years. A few years of silly false training doesn't undo her work. If you and he had cared for each other, you wouldn't be here, apologizing for his selfish vanity.”

“No matter about him,” she cried impatiently, lifting her head haughtily. “The point is, I love him—and always shall. I warn you.”

“And I take you at my own risk?”

Her look answered “Yes!”

“Well,”—and I took her hand—“then, we are engaged.”

Her whole body grew tense, and her hand chilled as it lay in mine. “Don't—please don't,” I said gently. “I'm not so bad as all that. If you will be as generous with me as I shall be with you, neither of us will ever regret this.”

There were tears on her cheeks as I slowly released her hand.

“I shall ask nothing of you that you are not ready freely to give,” I said.

Impulsively she stood and put out her hand, and the eyes she lifted to mine were shining and friendly. I caught her in my arms and kissed her—not once but many times. And it was not until the chill of her ice-like face had cooled me that I released her, drew back red and ashamed and stammering apologies. But her impulse of friendliness had been killed; she once more, as I saw only too plainly, felt for me that sense of repulsion, felt for herself that sense of self-degradation.

“I *can not* marry you!” she muttered.

“You can—and will—and must,” I cried, infuriated by her look.

There was a long silence. I could easily guess what was being fought out in her mind. At last she slowly drew herself up. “I can not refuse,” she said, and her eyes sparkled with defiance that had hate in it. “You have the power to compel me. Use it, like the brute you refuse to let me forget that you are.” She looked so young, so beautiful, so angry—and so tempting.

“So I shall!” I answered. “Children have to be taught what is good for them. Call in your mother, and we'll tell her the news.”

Instead, she went into the next room. I followed, saw Mrs. Ellersly seated at the tea-table in the corner farthest from the library where her daughter and I had been negotiating. She was reading a letter, holding her lorgnon up to her painted eyes.

“Won't you give us tea, mother?” said Anita, on her surface not a trace of the cyclone that must still have been raging hi her.

“Congratulate me, Mrs. Ellersly,” said I. “Your daughter has consented to marry me.”

Instead of speaking, Mrs. Ellersly began to cry—real tears. And for a moment I thought there was a real heart inside of her somewhere. But when she spoke, that delusion vanished.

“You must forgive me, Mr. Blacklock,” she said in her hard, smooth, politic voice. “It is the shock of realizing I'm about to lose my daughter.” And I knew that her tears were from joy and relief—Anita had “come up to the scratch;” the hideous menace of “genteel poverty” had been averted.

“Do give us tea, mama,” said Anita. Her cold, sarcastic tone cut my nerves and her mother's like a razor blade. I looked sharply at her, and wondered whether I was not making a bargain vastly different from that my passion was picturing.

# XV. SOME STRANGE LAPSES OF A LOVER

But before there was time for me to get a distinct impression, that ugly shape of cynicism had disappeared.

“It was a shadow I myself cast upon her,” I assured myself; and once more she seemed to me like a clear, calm lake of melted snow from the mountains. “I can see to the pure white sand of the very bottom,” thought I. Mystery there was, but only the mystery of wonder at the apparition of such beauty and purity in such a world as mine. True, from time to time, there showed at the surface or vaguely outlined in the depths, forms strangely out of place in those unsullied waters. But I either refused to see or refused to trust my senses. I had a fixed ideal of what a woman should be; this girl embodied that ideal.

“If you'd only give up your cigarettes,” I remember saying to her when we were a little better acquainted, “you'd be perfect.”

She made an impatient gesture. “Don't!” she commanded almost angrily. “You make me feel like a hypocrite. You tempt me to be a hypocrite. Why not be content with woman as she is—a human being? And—how could I—any woman not an idiot—be alive for twenty-five years without learning—a thing or two? Why should any man want it?”

“Because to know is to be spattered and stained,” said I. “I get enough of people who know, down-town. Up-town—I want a change of air. Of course, you think you know the world, but you haven't the remotest conception of what it's really like. Sometimes when I'm with you, I begin to feel mean and—and unclean. And the feeling grows on me until it's all I can do to restrain myself from rushing away.”

She looked at me critically.

“You've never had much to do with women, have you?” she finally said slowly in a musing tone.

“I wish that were true—almost,” replied I, on my mettle as a man, and resisting not without effort the impulse to make some vague “confessions”—boastings disguised as penitential admissions—after the customary masculine fashion.

She smiled—and one of those disquieting shapes seemed to me to be floating lazily and repellently downward, out of sight. “A man and a woman can be a great deal to each other, I believe,” said she; “can be—married, and all that—and remain as strange to each other as if they had never met—more hopelessly strangers.”

“There's always a sort of mystery,” I conceded. “I suppose that's one of the things that keep married people interested.”

She shrugged her shoulders—she was in evening dress, I recall, and there was on her white skin that intense, transparent, bluish tinge one sees on the new snow when the sun comes out.

“Mystery!” she said impatiently. “There's no mystery except what we ourselves make. It's useless—perfectly useless,” she went on absently. “You're the sort of man who, if a woman cared for him, or even showed friendship for him by being frank and human and natural with him, he'd punish her for it by—by despising her.”

I smiled, much as one smiles at the efforts of a precocious child to prove that it is a Methuselah in experience.

“If you weren't like an angel in comparison with the others I've known,” said I, “do you suppose I could care for you as I do?”

I saw my remark irritated her, and I fancied it was her vanity that was offended by my disbelief in her knowledge of life. I hadn't a suspicion that I had hurt and alienated her by slamming in her very face the door of friendship and frankness her honesty was forcing her to try to open for me.

In my stupidity of imagining her not human like the other women and the men I had known, but a creature apart and in a class apart, I stood day after day gaping at that very door, and wondering how I could open it, how penetrate even to the courtyard of that vestal citadel. So long as my old-fashioned belief that good women were more than human and bad women less than human had influenced me only to a sharper lookout in dealing with the one species of woman I then came in contact with, no harm to me resulted, but on the contrary good—whoever got into trouble through walking the world with sword and sword arm free? But when, under the spell of Anita Ellersly, I dragged the “superhuman goodness” part of my theory down out of the clouds and made it my guardian and guide—really, it's a miracle that I escaped from the pit into which that lunacy pitched me headlong. I was not content with idealizing only her; I went on to seeing good, and only good, in everybody! The millennium was at hand; all Wall Street was my friend; whatever I wanted would happen. And when Roebuck, with an air like a benediction from a bishop backed by a cathedral organ and full choir, gave me the tip to buy coal stocks, I canonized him on the spot. Never did a Jersey “jay” in Sunday clothes and tallowed boots respond to a bunco steerer's greeting with a gladder smile than mine to that pious old past-master of craft.

I will say, in justice to myself, though it is also in excuse, that if I had known him intimately a few years earlier, I should have found it all but impossible to fool myself. For he had not long been in a position where he could keep wholly detached from the crimes committed for his benefit and by his order, and where he could disclaim responsibility and even knowledge. The great lawyers of the country have been most ingenious in developing corporate law in the direction of making the corporation a complete and secure shield between the beneficiary of a crime and its consequences; but before a great financier can use this shield perfectly, he must build up a system—he must find lieutenants with the necessary coolness, courage and cunning; he must teach them to understand his hints; he must educate them, not to point out to him the disagreeable things involved in his orders, but to execute unquestioningly, to efface completely the trail between him and them,

whether or not they succeed in covering the roundabout and faint trail between themselves and the tools that nominally commit the crimes.

As nearly as I can get at it, when Roebuck was luring me into National Coal he had not for nine years been open to attack, but had so far hedged himself in that, had his closest lieutenants been trapped and frightened into "squealing," he would not have been involved; without fear of exposure and with a clear conscience he could—and would!—have joined in the denunciation of the man who had been caught, and could—and would!—have helped send him to the penitentiary or to the scaffold. With the security of an honest man and the serenity of a Christian he planned his colossal thefts and reaped their benefits; and whenever he was accused, he could have explained everything, could have got his accuser's sympathy and admiration. I say, could have explained; but he would not. Early in his career, he had learned the first principle of successful crime—silence. No matter what the provocation or the seeming advantage, he uttered only a few generous general phrases, such as "those misguided men," or "the Master teaches us to bear with meekness the calumnies of the wicked," or "let him that is without sin cast the first stone." As to the crime itself—silence, and the dividends.

A great man, Roebuck! I doff my hat to him. Of all the dealers in stolen goods under police protection, who so shrewd as he?

Wilmot was the instrument he employed to put the coal industry into condition for "reorganization." He bought control of one of the coal railroads and made Wilmot president of it. Wilmot, taught by twenty years of his service, knew what was expected of him, and proceeded to do it. He put in a "loyal" general freight agent who also needed no instructions, but busied himself at destroying his own and all the other coal roads by a system of secret rebates and rate cuttings. As the other roads, one by one, descended toward bankruptcy, Roebuck bought the comparatively small blocks of stock necessary to give him control of them. When he had power over enough of them to establish a partial monopoly of transportation in and out of the coal districts, he was ready for his lieutenant to attack the mining properties. Probably his orders to Wilmot were nothing more definite or less innocent than: "Wilmot, my boy, don't you think you and I and some others of our friends ought to buy some of those mines, if they come on the market at a fair price? Let me know when you hear of any attractive investments of that sort."

That would have been quite enough to "tip it off" to Wilmot that the time had come for reaching out from control of railway to control of mine. He lost no time; he easily forced one mining property after another into a position where its owners were glad—were eager—to sell all or part of the wreck of it "at a fair price" to him and Roebuck and "our friends." It was as the result of one of these moves that the great Manasquale mines were so hemmed in by ruinous freight rates, by strike troubles, by floods from broken machinery and mysteriously leaky dams, that I was able to buy them "at a fair price"—that is, at less than one-fifth their value. But at the time—and for a long time afterward—I did not know, on my honor did not suspect, what was the cause, the sole cause, of the change of the coal region from a place of peaceful industry, content with fair profits, to an industrial chaos with ruin impending.

Once the railways and mining companies were all on the verge of bankruptcy, Roebuck and his "friends" were ready to buy, here control for purposes of speculation, there ownership for purposes of permanent investment. This is what is known as the reorganizing stage. The processes of high finance are very simple—first, buy the comparatively small holdings necessary to create confusion and disaster; second, create confusion and disaster, buying up more and more wreckage; third, reorganize; fourth, offer the new stocks and bonds to the public with a mighty blare of trumpets which produces a boom market; fifth, unload on the public, pass dividends, issue unfavorable statements, depress prices, buy back cheap what you have sold dear. Repeat ad infinitum, for the law is for the laughter of the strong, and the public is an eager ass. To keep up the fiction of "respectability," the inside ring divides into two parties for its campaigns—one party to break down, the other to build up. One takes the profits from destruction and departs, perhaps to construct elsewhere; the other takes the profits from construction and departs, perhaps to destroy elsewhere. As their collusion is merely tacit, no conscience need twitch. I must add that, at the time of which I am writing, I did not realize the existence of this conspiracy. I knew, of course, that many lawless and savage things were done, that there were rascals among the high financiers, and that almost all financiers now and then did things that were more or less rascally; but I did not know, did not suspect, that high finance was through and through brigandage, and that the high financier, by long and unmolested practice of brigandage, had come to look on it as legitimate, lawful business, and on laws forbidding or hampering it as outrageous, socialistic, anarchistic, "attacks upon the social order!"

I was sufficiently infected with the spirit of the financier, I frankly confess, to look on the public as a sort of cow to milk and send out to grass that it might get itself ready to be driven in and milked again. Does not the cow produce milk not for her own use but for the use of him who looks after her, provides her with pasturage and shelter and saves her from the calamities in which her lack of foresight and of other intelligence would involve her, were she not looked after? And is not the fact that the public—beg pardon, the cow—meekly and even cheerfully submits to the milking proof that God intended her to be the servant of the Roebucks—beg pardon again, of man?

Plausible, isn't it?

Roebuck had given me the impression that it would be six months, at least, before what I was in those fatuous days thinking of as "*our*" plan for "putting the coal industry on a sound business basis" would be ready for the public. So, when he sent for me shortly after I became engaged to Miss Ellersly, and said: "Melville will publish the plan on the first of next month and will open the subscription books on the third—a Thursday," I was taken by surprise and was anything but pleased. His words meant that, if I wished to make a great fortune, now was the time to buy coal stocks, and buy heavily—for on the very day of the publication of the plan every coal stock would surely soar. Buy I must; not to buy was to throw away a fortune. Yet how could I buy when I was gambling in Textile up to my limit of safety, if not beyond?

I did not dare confess to Roebuck what I was doing in Textile. He was bitterly opposed to stock gambling, denouncing it as both immoral and unbusinesslike. No gambling for him! When his business sagacity and foresight(?) informed him a certain stock was going to be worth a great deal more than it was then quoted at,

he would buy outright in large quantities; when that same sagacity and foresight of the fellow who has himself marked the cards warned him that a stock was about to fall, he sold outright. But gamble—never! And I felt that, if he should learn that I had staked a large part of my entire fortune on a single gambling operation, he would straightway cut me off from his confidence, would look on me as too deeply tainted by my long career as a “bucket-shop” man to be worthy of full rank and power as a financier. Financiers do not gamble. Their only vice is grand larceny.

All this was flashing through my mind while I was thanking him.

“I am glad to have such a long forewarning,” I was saying. “Can I be of use to you? You know my machinery is perfect—I can buy anything and in any quantity without starting rumors and drawing the crowd.”

“No thank you, Matthew,” was his answer. “I have all of those stocks I wish—at present.”

Whether it is peculiar to me, I don't know—probably not—but my memory is so constituted that it takes an indelible and complete impression of whatever is sent to it by my eyes and ears; and just as by looking closely you can find in a photographic plate a hundred details that escape your glance, so on those memory plates of mine I often find long afterward many and many a detail that escaped me when my eyes and ears were taking the impression. On my memory plate of that moment in my interview with Roebuck, I find details so significant that my failing to note them at the time shows how unfit I then was to guard my interests. For instance, I find that just before he spoke those words declining my assistance and implying that he had already increased his holdings, he opened and closed his hands several times, finally closed and clinched them—a sure sign of energetic nervous action, and in that particular instance a sign of deception, because there was no energy in his remark and no reason for energy. I am not superstitious, but I believe in palmistry to a certain extent. Even more than the face are the hands a sensitive recorder of what is passing in the mind.

But I was then too intent upon my dilemma carefully to study a man who had already lulled me into absolute confidence in him. I left him as soon as he would let me go. His last words were, “No gambling, Matthew! No abuse of the opportunity God is giving us. Be content with the just profits from investment. I have seen gamblers come and go, many of them able men—very able men. But they have melted away, and where are they? And I have remained and have increased, blessed be God who has saved me from the temptations to try to reap where I had not sown! I feel that I can trust you. You began as a speculator, but success has steadied you, and you have put yourself on the firm ground where we see the solid men into whose hands God has given the development of the abounding resources of this beloved country of ours.”

Do you wonder that I went away with a heart full of shame for the gambling projects my head was planning upon the information that good man had given me?

I shut myself in my private office for several hours of hard thinking—as I can now see, the first real attention I had given my business in two months. It soon became clear enough that my Textile plunge was a folly; but it was too late to retrace. The only question was, could and should I assume additional burdens? I looked at the National Coal problem from every standpoint—so I thought. And I could see no possible risk. Did not Roebuck's statement make it certain as sunrise that, as soon as the reorganization was announced, all coal stocks would rise? Yes, I should be risking nothing; I could with absolute safety stake my credit; to make contracts to buy coal stocks at present prices for future delivery was no more of a gamble than depositing cash in the United States Treasury.

“You've gone back to gambling lately, Matt,” said I to myself. “You've been on a bender, with your head afire. You must get out of this Textile business as soon as possible. But it's good sound sense to plunge on the coal stocks. In fact, your profits there would save you if by some mischance Textile should rise instead of fall. Acting on Roebuck's tip isn't gambling, it's insurance.”

I emerged to issue orders that soon threw into the National Coal venture all I had not staked on a falling market for Textiles. I was not content—as the pious gambling-hater, Roebuck, had begged me to be—with buying only what stock I could pay for; I went plunging on, contracting for many times the amount I could have bought outright.

The next time I saw Langdon I was full of enthusiasm for Roebuck. I can see his smile as he listened.

“I had no idea you were an expert on the trumpets of praise, Blacklock,” said he finally. “A very showy accomplishment,” he added, “but rather dangerous, don't you think? The player may become enchanted by his own music.”

“I try to look on the bright side of things.” said I, “even of human nature.”

“Since when?” drawled he.

I laughed—a good, hearty laugh, for this shy reference to my affair of the heart tickled me. I enjoyed to the full only in long retrospect the look he gave me.

“As soon as a man falls in love,” said he, “trustees should be appointed to take charge of his estate.”

“You're wrong there, old man,” I replied. “I've never worked harder or with a clearer head than since I learned that there are”—I hesitated, and ended lamely—“other things in life.”

Langdon's handsome face suddenly darkened, and I thought I saw in his eyes a look of savage pain. “I envy you,” said he with an effort at his wonted lightness and cynicism. But that look touched my heart; I talked no more of my own happiness. To do so, I felt would be like bringing laughter into the house of grief.

## XVI. TRAPPED AND TRIMMED

There are two kinds of dangerous temptations—those that tempt us, and those that don't. Those that don't, give us a false notion of our resisting power, and so make us easy victims to the others. I thought I knew myself pretty thoroughly, and I believed there was nothing that could tempt me to neglect my business. With

this delusion of my strength firmly in mind, when Anita became a temptation to neglect business, I said to myself: “To go up-town during business hours for long lunches, to spend the mornings selecting flowers and presents for her—these things *look* like neglect of business, and would be so in some men. But *I* couldn't neglect business. I do them because my affairs are so well ordered that a few hours of absence now and then make no difference—probably send me back fresher and clearer.”

When I left the office at half-past twelve on that fateful Wednesday in June, my business was never in better shape. Textile Common had dropped a point and a quarter in two days—evidently it was at last on its way slowly down toward where I could free myself and take profits. As for the Coal enterprise nothing could possibly happen to disturb it; I was all ready for the first of July announcement and boom. Never did I have a lighter heart than when I joined Anita and her friends at Sherry's. It seemed to me her friendliness was less perfunctory, less a matter of appearances. And the sun was bright, the air delicious, my health perfect. It took all the strength of all the straps Monson had put on my natural spirits to keep me from being exuberant.

I had fully intended to be back at my office half an hour before the Exchange closed—this in addition to the obvious precaution of leaving orders that they were to telephone me if anything should occur about which they had the least doubt. But so comfortable did my vanity make me that I forgot to look at my watch until a quarter to three. I had a momentary qualm; then, reassured, I asked Anita to take a walk with me. Before we set out I telephoned my right-hand man and partner, Ball. As I had thought, everything was quiet; the Exchange was closing with Textile sluggish and down a quarter. Anita and I took a car to the park.

As we strolled about there, it seemed to me I was making more headway with her than in all the times I had seen her since we became engaged. At each meeting I had had to begin at the beginning once more, almost as if we had never met; for I found that she had in the meanwhile taken on all, or almost all, her original reserve. It was as if she forgot me the instant I left her—not very flattering, that!

“You accuse me of refusing to get acquainted with you,” said I, “of refusing to see that you're a different person from what I imagine. But how about you? Why do you still stick to your first notion of me? Whatever I am or am not, I'm not the person you condemned on sight.”

“You *have* changed,” she conceded. “The way you dress—and sometimes the way you act. Or, is it because I'm getting used to you?”

“No—it's—” I began, but stopped there. Some day I would confess about Monson, but not yet. Also, I hoped the change wasn't altogether due to Monson and the dancing-master and my imitation of the tricks of speech and manner of the people in her set.

She did not notice my abrupt halt. Indeed, I often caught her at not listening to me. I saw that she wasn't listening now.

“You didn't hear what I said,” I accused somewhat sharply, for I was irritated—as who would not have been?

She started, gave me that hurried, apologetic look that was bitterer to me than the most savage insult would have been.

“I beg your pardon,” she said. “We were talking of—of changes, weren't we?”

“We were talking of *me*” I answered. “Of the subject that interests you not at all.”

She looked at me in a forlorn sort of way that softened my irritation with sympathy. “I've told you how it is with me,” she said. “I do my best to please you. I—”

“Damn your best!” I cried. “Don't try to please *me*. Be yourself. I'm no slave-driver. I don't have to be conciliated. Can't you ever see that I'm not your tyrant? Do I treat you as any other man would feel he had the right to treat the girl who had engaged herself to him? Do I ever thrust my feelings or wishes—or—longings on you? And do you think repression easy for a man of my temperament?”

“You have been very good,” she said humbly.

“Don't you ever say that to me again,” I half commanded, half pleaded. “I won't have you always putting me in the position of a kind and indulgent master.”

She halted and faced me.

“Why do you want me, anyhow?” she cried. Then she noticed several loungers on a bench staring at us and grinning; she flushed and walked on.

“I don't know,” said I. “Because I'm a fool, probably. My common sense tells me I can't hope to break through that shell of self-complacence you've been cased in by your family and your associates. Sometimes I think I'm mistaken in you, think there isn't any real, human blood left in your veins, that you're like the rest of them—a human body whose heart and mind have been taken out and a machine substituted—a machine that can say and do only a narrow little range of conventional things—like one of those French dolls.”

“You mustn't blame me for that,” she said gently. “I realize it, too—and I'm ashamed of it. But—if you could know how I've been educated. They've treated me as the Flathead Indian women treat their babies—keep their skulls in a press—isn't that it?—until their heads and brains grow of the Flathead pattern. Only, somehow, in my case—the process wasn't quite complete. And so, instead of being contented like the other Flathead girls, I'm—almost a rebel, at times. I'm neither the one thing nor the other—not natural and not Flathead, not enough natural to grow away from Flathead, not enough Flathead to get rid of the natural.”

“I take back what I said about not knowing why I—I want you, Anita,” I said. “I do know why—and—well, as I told you before, you'll never regret marrying me.”

“If you won't misunderstand me,” she answered, “I'll confess to you my instinct has been telling me that, too. I'm not so bad as you must think. I did bargain to sell myself, but I'd have thrown up the bargain if you had been as—as you seemed at first.” For some reason—perhaps it was her dress, or hat—she was looking particularly girlish that day, and her skin was even more transparent than usual. “You're different from the men I've been used to all my life,” she went on, and—smiling in a friendly way—“you often give me a terrifying sense of your being a—a wild man on his good behavior. But I've come to feel that you're generous and unselfish and that you'll be kind to me—won't you? And I must make a life for myself—I must—I must!

Oh, I can't explain to you, but—" She turned her little head toward me, and I was looking into those eyes that the flowers were like.

I thought she meant her home life. "You needn't tell me," I said, and I'll have to confess my voice was anything but steady. "And, I repeat, you'll never regret."

She evidently feared that she had said too much, for she lapsed into silence, and when I tried to resume the subject of ourselves, she answered me with painful constraint. I respected her nervousness and soon began to talk of things not so personal to us. Again, my mistake of treating her as if she were marked "Fragile. Handle with care." I know now that she, like all women, had the plain, tough, durable human fibre under that exterior of delicacy and fragility, and that my overconsideration caused her to exaggerate to herself her own preposterous notions of her superior fineness. We walked for an hour, talking—with less constraint and more friendliness than ever before, and when I left her I, for the first time, felt that I had left a good impression.

When I entered my offices, I, from force of habit, mechanically went direct to the ticker—and dropped all in an instant from the pinnacle of Heaven into a boiling inferno. For the ticker was just spelling out these words: "Mowbray Langdon, president of the Textile Association, sailed unexpectedly on the *Kaiser Wilhelm* at noon. A two per cent. raise of the dividend rate of Textile Common, from the present four per cent, to six, has been determined upon."

And I had staked up to, perhaps beyond, my limit of safety that Textile would fall!

Ball was watching narrowly for some sign that the news was as bad as he feared. But it cost me no effort to keep my face expressionless; I was like a man who has been killed by lightning and lies dead with the look on his face that he had just before the bolt struck him.

"Why didn't you tell me this," said I to Ball, "when I had you on the 'phone?" My tone was quiet enough, but the very question ought to have shown him that my brain was like a schooner in a cyclone.

"We heard it just after you rang off," was his reply. "We've been trying to get you ever since. I've gone everywhere after Textile stock. Very few will sell, or even lend, and they ask—the best price was ten points above to-day's closing. A strong tip's out that Textiles are to be rocketed."

Ten points up already—on the mere rumor! Already ten dollars to pay on every share I was "short"—and I short more than two hundred thousand! I felt the claws of the fiend Ruin sink into the flesh of my shoulders. "Ball doesn't know how I'm fixed," I remember I thought, "and he mustn't know."

I lit a cigar with a steady hand and waited for Joe's next words.

"I went to see Jenkins at once," he went on. Jenkins was then first vice-president of the Textile Trust. "He's all cut up because the news got out—says Langdon and he were the only ones who knew, so he supposed—says the announcement wasn't to have been made for a month—not till Langdon returned. He has had to confirm it, though. That was the only way to free his crowd from suspicion of intending to rig the market."

"All right," said I.

"Have you seen the afternoon paper?" he asked. As he held it out to me, my eye caught big Textile head-lines, then flashed to some others—something about my going to marry Miss Ellersly.

"All right," said I, and with the paper in my hand, went to my outside office. I kept on toward my inner office, saying over my shoulder—to the stenographer: "Don't let anybody interrupt me." Behind the closed and locked door my body ventured to come to life again and my face to reflect as much as it could of the chaos that was heaving in me like ten thousand warring devils.

Three months before, in the same situation, my gambler's instinct would probably have helped me out. For I had not been gambling in the great American Monte Carlo all those years without getting used to the downs as well as to the ups. I had not—and have not—anything of the business man in my composition. To me, it was wholly finance, wholly a game, with excitement the chief factor and the sure winning, whether the little ball rolled my way or not. I was the financier, the gambler and adventurer; and that had been my principal asset. For, the man who wins in the long run at any of the great games of life—and they are all alike—is the man with the cool head; and the only man whose head is cool is he who plays for the game's sake, not caring greatly whether he wins or loses on any one play, because he feels that if he wins to-day, he will lose to-morrow; if he loses to-day, he will win to-morrow. But now a new factor had come into the game. I spread out the paper and stared at the head-lines: "Black Matt To Wed Society Belle—The Bucket-Shop King Will Lead Anita Ellersly To The Altar." I tried to read the vulgar article under these vulgar lines, but I could not. I was sick, sick in body and in mind. My "nerve" was gone. I was no longer the free lance; I had responsibilities.

That thought dragged another in its train, an ugly, grinning imp that leered at me and sneered: "*But she won't have you now*!"

"She will! She must!" I cried aloud, starting up. And then the storm burst—I raged up and down the floor, shaking my clinched fists, gnashing my teeth, muttering all kinds of furious commands and threats—a truly ridiculous exhibition of impotent rage. For through it all I saw clearly enough that she wouldn't have me, that all these people I'd been trying to climb up among would kick loose my clinging hands and laugh as they watched me disappear. They who were none too gentle and slow in disengaging themselves from those of their own lifelong associates who had reverses of fortune—what consideration could "Black Matt" expect from them? And she—The necessity and the ability to deceive myself had gone, now that I could not pay the purchase price for her. The full hideousness of my bargain for her dropped its veil and stood naked before me.

At last, disgusted and exhausted, I flung myself down again, and dumbly and helplessly inspected the ruins of my projects—or, rather, the ruin of the one project upon which I had my heart set. I had known I cared for her, but it had seemed to me she was simply one more, the latest, of the objects on which I was in the habit of fixing my will from time to time to make the game more deeply interesting. I now saw that never before had I really been in earnest about anything, that on winning her I had staked myself, and that myself was a wholly different person from what I had been imagining. In a word, I sat face to face with that unfathomable mystery of sex-affinity that every man laughs at and mocks another man for believing in, until he has himself felt it drawing him against will, against reason, and sense, and interest, over the brink of destruction yawning

before his eyes—drawing him as the magnet-mountain drew Sindbad and his ship. And I say to you that those who can defy and resist that compulsion are not more, but less, than man or woman; and their fancied strength is in reality a deficiency. Looking calmly back upon my follies under her spell, I think the better of myself for them. It is the splendid follies of life that redeem it from vulgarity.

But—it is not in me to despair. There never yet was an impenetrable siege line; to escape, it is only necessary by craft or by chance to hit upon the moment and the spot for the sortie. “Ruined!” I said aloud. “Trapped and trimmed like the stupidest sucker that ever wandered into Wall Street! A dead one, no doubt; but I'll see to it that they don't enjoy my funeral.”

## XVII. A GENTEEL “HOLD-UP”

In my childhood at home, my father was often away for a week or longer, working or looking for work. My mother had a notion that a boy should be punished only by his father; so, whenever she caught me in what she regarded as a serious transgression, she used to say: “You will get a good whipping for this, when your father comes home.” At first I used to wait passively, suffering the torments of ten thrashings before the “good whipping” came to pass. But soon my mind began to employ the interval more profitably. I would scheme to escape execution of sentence; and, though my mother was a determined woman, many's the time I contrived to change her mind. I am not recommending to parents the system of delay in execution of sentence; but I must say that in my case it was responsible for an invaluable discipline. For example, the Textile tangle.

I knew I was in all human probability doomed to go down before the Stock Exchange had been open an hour the next morning. All Textile stocks must start many points higher than they had been at the close, must go steadily and swiftly up. Entangled as my reserve resources were in the Coal deal, I should have no chance to cover my shorts on any terms less than the loss of all I had. At most, I could hope only to save myself from criminal bankruptcy.

And now my early training in coolly and calmly studying how to avert execution of sentence came into play. There is a kind of cornered-rat, hit-or-miss, last-ditch fight that any creature will make in such circumstances as mine then were, and the inspirations of despair sometimes happen to be lucky. But I prefer the reasoned-out plan.

There was no signal of distress in my voice as I telephoned Corey, president of the Interstate Trust Company, to stay at his office until I came; there was no signal of distress in my manner as I sallied forth and went down to the Power Trust Building; nor did I show or suggest that I had heard the “shot-at-sunrise” sentence, as I strode into Roebuck's presence and greeted him. I was assuming, by way of precaution, that some rumor about me either had reached him or would soon reach him. I knew he had an eye in every secret of finance and industry, and, while I believed my secret was wholly my own, I had too much at stake with him to bank on that, when I could, as I thought, so easily reassure him.

“I've come to suggest, Mr. Roebuck,” said I, “that you let my house—Blacklock and Company—announce the Coal reorganization plan. It would give me a great lift, and Melville and his bank don't need prestige. My daily letters to the public on investments have, as you know, got me a big following that would help me make the flotation an even bigger success than it's bound to be, no matter who announces it and invites subscriptions.”

As I thus proposed that I be in a jiffy caught up from the extremely humble level of reputed bucket-shop dealer into the highest heaven of high finance, that I be made the official spokesman of the financial gods, his expression was so ludicrous that I almost lost my gravity. I suspect, for a moment he thought I had gone mad. His manner, when he recovered himself sufficiently to speak, was certainly not unlike what it would have been had he found himself alone before a dangerous lunatic who was armed with a bomb.

“You know how anxious I am to help you, to further your interests, Matthew,” said he wheedlingly. “I know no man who has a brighter future. But—not so fast, not so fast, young man. Of course, you will appear as one of the reorganizing committee—but we could not afford to have the announcement come through any less strong and old established house than the National Industrial Bank.”

“At least, you can make me joint announcer with them,” I urged.

“Perhaps—yes—possibly—we'll see,” said he soothingly. “There is plenty of time.”

“Plenty of time,” I assented, as if quite content. “I only wanted to put the matter before you.” And I rose to go.

“Have you heard the news of Textile Common?” he asked.

“Yes,” said I carelessly. Then, all in an instant, a plan took shape in my mind. “I own a good deal of the stock, and I must say, I don't like this raise.”

“Why?” he inquired.

“Because I'm sure it's a stock-jobbing scheme,” replied I boldly. “I know the dividend wasn't earned. I don't like that sort of thing, Mr. Roebuck. Not because it's unlawful—the laws are so clumsy that a practical man often must disregard them. But because it is tampering with the reputation and the stability of a great enterprise for the sake of a few millions of dishonest profit. I'm surprised at Langdon.”

“I hope you're wrong, Matthew,” was Roebuck's only comment. He questioned me no further, and I went away, confident that, when the crash came in the morning, if come it must, there would be no more astonished man in Wall Street than Henry J. Roebuck. How he must have laughed; or, rather, would have laughed, if his sort of human hyena expressed its emotions in the human way.

From him, straight to my lawyers, Whitehouse and Fisher, in the Mills Building.

“I want you to send for the newspaper reporters at once,” said I to Fisher, “and tell them that in my behalf you are going to apply for an injunction against the Textile Trust, forbidding them to take any further steps toward that increase of dividend. Tell them I, as a large stock-holder, and representing a group of large stock-holders, purpose to stop the paying of unearned dividends.”

Fisher knew how closely connected my house and the Textile Trust had been; but he showed, and probably felt no astonishment. He was too experienced in the ways of finance and financiers. It was a matter of indifference to him whether I was trying to assassinate my friend and ally, or was feinting at Langdon, to lure the public within reach so that we might, together, fall upon it and make a battue. Your lawyer is your true mercenary. Under his code honor consists in making the best possible fight in exchange for the biggest possible fee. He is frankly for sale to the highest bidder. At least so it is with those that lead the profession nowadays, give it what is called “character” and “tone.”

Not without some regret did I thus arrange to attack my friend in his absence. “Still,” I reasoned, “his blunder in trusting some leaky person with his secret is the cause of my peril—and I'll not have to justify myself to him for trying to save myself.” What effect my injunction would have I could not foresee. Certainly it could not save me from the loss of my fortune; but, possibly, it might check the upward course of the stock long enough to enable me to snatch myself from ruin, and to cling to firm ground until the Coal deal drew me up to safety.

My next call was at the Interstate Trust Company. I found Corey waiting for me in a most uneasy state of mind.

“Is there any truth in this story about you?” was the question he plumped at me.

“What story?” said I, and a hard fight I had to keep my confusion and alarm from the surface. For, apparently, my secret was out.

“That you're on the wrong side of the Textile.”

So it was out! “Some truth,” I admitted, since denial would have been useless here. “And I've come to you for the money to tide me over.”

He grew white, a sickly white, and into his eyes came a horrible, drowning look.

“I owe a lot to you, Matt,” he pleaded. “But I've done you a great many favors, haven't I?”

“That you have Bob,” I cordially agreed. “But this isn't a favor. It's business.”

“You mustn't ask it, Blacklock,” he cried. “I've loaned you more money now than the law allows. And I can't let you have any more.”

“Some one has been lying to you, and you've been believing him,” said I. “When I say my request isn't a favor, but business, I mean it.”

“I can't let you have any more,” he repeated. “I can't!” And down came his fist in a weak-violent gesture.

I leaned forward and laid my hand strongly on his arm.

“In addition to the stock of this concern that I hold in my own name,” said I, “I hold five shares in the name of a man whom nobody knows that I even know. If you don't let me have the money, that man goes to the district attorney with information that lands you in the penitentiary, that puts your company out of business and into bankruptcy before to-morrow noon. I saved you three years ago, and got you this job against just such an emergency as this, Bob Corey. And, by God, you'll toe the mark!”

“But we haven't done anything that every bank in town doesn't do every day—doesn't have to do. If we didn't lend money to dummy borrowers and over-certify accounts, our customers would go where they could get accommodations.”

“That's true enough,” said I. “But I'm in a position for the moment where I need my friends—and they've got to come to time. If I don't get the money from you, I'll get it elsewhere—but over the cliff with you and your bank! The laws you've been violating may be bad for the practical banking business, but they're mighty good for punishing ingratitude and treachery.”

He sat there, yellow and pinched, and shivering every now and then. He made no reply. He was one of those shells of men that are conspicuous as figureheads in every department of active life—fellows with well-shaped, white-haired or prematurely bald heads, and grave, respectable faces; they look dignified and substantial, and the soul of uprightness; they coin their looks into good salaries by selling themselves as covers for operations of the financiers. And how those operations, in the nude, as it were, would terrify the plodders that save up and deposit or invest the money the financiers gamble with on the big green tables!

Presently I shook his arm impatiently. His eyes met mine, and I fixed them.

“I'm going to pull through,” said I. “But if I weren't, I'd see to it that you were protected. Come, what's your answer? Friend or traitor?”

“Can't you give me any security—any collateral?”

“No more than I took from you when I saved you as you were going down with the rest in the Dumont smash. My word—that's all. I borrow on the same terms you've given me before, the same you're giving four of your heaviest borrowers right now.”

He winced as I thus reminded him how minute my knowledge was of the workings of his bank.

“I didn't think this of you, Matt,” he whined. “I believed you above such hold-up methods.”

“I suit my methods to the men I'm dealing with,” was my answer. “These fellows are trying to push me off the life raft. I fight with every weapon I can lay hands on. And I know as well as you do that, if you get into serious trouble through this loan, at least five men we could both name would have to step in and save the bank and cover up the scandal. You'll blackmail them, just as you've blackmailed them before, and they you. Blackmail's a legitimate part of the game. Nobody appreciates that better than you.” It was no time for the smug hypocrisies under which we people down town usually conduct our business—just as the desperadoes used to patrol the highways disguised as peaceful merchants.

“Send round in the morning and get the money,” said he, putting on a resigned, hopeless look.

I laughed. “I'll feel easier if I take it now,” I replied. “We'll fix up the notes and checks at once.”

He reddened, but after a brief hesitation busied himself. When the papers were all made up and signed, and I had the certified checks in my pocket, I said: “Wait here, Bob, until the National Industrial people call you up. I'll ask them to do it, so they can get your personal assurance that everything's all right. And I'll stop there until they tell me they've talked with you.”

“But it's too late,” he said. “You can't deposit to-day.”

“I've a special arrangement with them,” I replied.

His face betrayed him. I saw that at no stage of that proceeding had I been wiser than in shutting off his last chance to evade. What scheme he had in mind I don't know, and can't imagine. But he had thought out something, probably something foolish that would have given me trouble without saving him. A foolish man in a tight place is as foolish as ever, and Corey was a foolish man—only a fool commits crimes that put him in the power of others. The crimes of the really big captains of industry and generals of finance are of the kind that puts others in their power.

“Buck up, Corey,” said I. “Do you think I'm the man to shut a friend in the hold of a sinking ship? Tell me, who told you I was short on Textile?”

“One of my men,” he slowly replied, as he braced himself together.

“Which one? Who?” I persisted. For I wanted to know just how far the news was likely to spread.

He seemed to be thinking out a lie.

“The truth!” I commanded. “I know it couldn't have been one of your men. Who was it? I'll not give you away.”

“It was Tom Langdon,” he finally said.

I checked an exclamation of amazement. I had been assuming that I had been betrayed by some one of those tiny mischances that so often throw the best plans into confusion.

“Tom Langdon,” I said satirically. “It was he that warned you against me?”

“It was a friendly act,” said Corey. “He and I are very intimate. And he doesn't know how close you and I are.”

“Suggested that you call my loans, did he?” I went on.

“You mustn't blame him, Blacklock; really you mustn't,” said Corey earnestly, for he was a pretty good friend to those he liked, as friendship goes in finance. “He happened to hear. You know the Langdons keep a sharp watch on operations in their stock. And he dropped in to warn me as a friend. You'd do the same thing in the same circumstances. He didn't say a word about my calling your loans. I—to be frank—I instantly thought of it myself. I intended to do it when you came, but”—a sickly smile—“you anticipated me.”

“I understand,” said I good-humoredly. “I don't blame him.” And I didn't then.

After I had completed my business at the National Industrial, I went back to my office and gathered together the threads of my web of defense. Then I wrote and sent out to all my newspapers and all my agents a broadside against the management of the Textile Trust—it would be published in the morning, in good time for the opening of the Stock Exchange. Before the first quotation of Textile could be made, thousands on thousands of investors and speculators throughout the country would have read my letter, would be believing that Matthew Blacklock had detected the Textile Trust in a stock-jobbing swindle, and had promptly turned against it, preferring to keep faith with his customers and with the public. As I read over my pronunciamiento aloud before sending it out, I found in it a note of confidence that cheered me mightily. “I'm even stronger than I thought,” said I. And I felt stronger still as I went on to picture the thousands on thousands throughout the land rallying at my call to give battle.

## XVIII. ANITA BEGINS TO BE HERSELF

I had asked Sam Ellersly to dine with me; so preoccupied was I that not until ten minutes before the hour set did he come into my mind—he or any of his family, even his sister. My first impulse was to send word that I couldn't keep the engagement. “But I must dine somewhere,” I reflected, “and there's no reason why I shouldn't dine with him, since I've done everything that can be done.” In my office suite I had a bath and dressing-room, with a complete wardrobe. Thus, by hurrying a little over my toilet, and by making my chauffeur crowd the speed limit, I was at Delmonico's only twenty minutes late.

Sam, who had been late also, as usual, was having a cocktail and was ordering the dinner. I smoked a cigarette and watched him. At business or at anything serious his mind was all but useless; but at ordering dinner and things of that sort, he shone. Those small accomplishments of his had often moved me to a sort of pitying contempt, as if one saw a man of talent devoting himself to engraving the Lord's Prayer on gold dollars. That evening, however, as I saw how comfortable and contented he looked, with not a care in the world, since he was to have a good dinner and a good cigar afterward; as I saw how much genuine pleasure he was getting out of selecting the dishes and giving the waiter minute directions for the chef, I envied him.

What Langdon had once said came back to me: “We are under the tyranny of to-morrow, and happiness is impossible.” And I thought how true that was. But, for the Sammys, high and low, there is no to-morrow. He was somehow impressing me with a sense that he was my superior. His face was weak, and, in a weak way, bad; but there was a certain fineness of quality in it, a sort of hothouse look, as if he had been sheltered all his life, and brought up on especially selected food. “Men like me,” thought I with a certain envy, “rise and fall. But his sort of men have got something that can't be taken away, that enables them to carry off with grace, poverty or the degradation of being spongers and beggars.”

This shows how far I had let that attack of snobbishness eat into me. I glanced down at my hands. No delicateness there; certainly those fingers, though white enough nowadays, and long enough, too, were not made for fancy work and parlor tricks. They would have looked in place round the handle of a spade or the throttle of an engine, while Sam's seemed made for the keyboard of a piano.

“You must come over to my rooms after dinner, and give me some music,” said I.

“Thanks,” he replied, “but I've promised to go home and play bridge. Mother's got a few in to dinner, and more are coming afterward, I believe.”

“Then I'll go with you, and talk to your sister—she doesn't play.”

He glanced at me in a way that made me pass my hand over my face. I learned at least part of the reason for my feeling at disadvantage before him. I had forgotten to shave; and as my beard is heavy and black, it has to be looked after twice a day. “Oh, I can stop at my rooms and get my face into condition in a few minutes,” said I.

“And put on evening dress, too,” he suggested. “You wouldn't want to go in a dinner jacket.”

I can't say why this was the “last straw,” but it was.

“Bother!” said I, my common sense smashing the spell of snobbishness that had begun to reassert itself as soon as I got into his unnatural, unhealthy atmosphere. “I'll go as I am, beard and all. I only make myself ridiculous, trying to be a sheep. I'm a goat, and a goat I'll stay.”

That shut him into himself. When he re-emerged, it was to say: “Something doing down town to-day, eh?”

A sharpness in his voice and in his eyes, too, made me put my mind on him more closely, and then I saw what I should have seen before—that he was moody and slightly distant.

“Seen Tom Langdon this afternoon?” I asked carelessly.

He colored. “Yes—had lunch with him,” was his answer.

I smiled—for his benefit. “Aha!” thought I. “So Tom Langdon has been fool enough to take this paroquet into his confidence.” Then I said to him: “Is Tom making the rounds, warning the rats to leave the sinking ship?”

“What do you mean, Matt?” he demanded, as if I had accused him.

I looked steadily at him, and I imagine my unshaven jaw did not make my aspect alluring.

“That I'm thinking of driving the rats overboard,” replied I. “The ship's sound, but it would be sounder if there were fewer of them.”

“You don't imagine anything Tom could say would change my feelings toward you?” he pleaded.

“I don't know, and I don't care a damn,” replied I coolly. “But I do know, before the Langdons or anybody else can have Blacklock pie, they'll have first to catch their Blacklock.”

I saw Langdon had made him uneasy, despite his belief in my strength. And he was groping for confirmation or reassurance. “But,” thought I, “if he thinks I may be going up the spout, why isn't he more upset? He probably hates me because I've befriended him, but no matter how much he hated me, wouldn't his fear of being cut off from supplies drive him almost crazy?” I studied him in vain for sign of deep anxiety. Either Tom didn't tell him much, I decided, or he didn't believe Tom knew what he was talking about.

“What did Tom say about me?” I inquired.

“Oh, almost nothing. We were talking chiefly of—of club matters,” he answered, in a fair imitation of his usual offhand manner.

“When does my name come up there?” said I.

He flushed and shifted. “I was just about to tell you,” he stammered. “But perhaps you know?”

“Know what?”

“That—Hasn't Tom told you? He has withdrawn—and—you'll have to get another second—if you think—that is—unless you—I suppose you'd have told me, if you'd changed your mind?”

Since I had become so deeply interested in Anita, my ambition—ambition!—to join the Travelers had all but dropped out of my mind.

“I had forgotten about it,” said I. “But, now that you remind me, I want my name withdrawn. It was a passing fancy. It was part and parcel of a lot of damn foolishness I've been indulging in for the last few months. But I've come to my senses—and it's 'me to the wild,' where I belong, Sammy, from this time on.”

He looked tremendously relieved, and a little puzzled, too. I thought I was reading him like an illuminated sign. “He's eager to keep friends with me,” thought I, “until he's absolutely sure there's nothing more in it for him and his people.” And that guess was a pretty good one. It is not to the discredit of my shrewdness that I didn't see it was not hope, but fear, that made him try to placate me. I could not have possibly known then what the Langdons had done. But—Sammy was saying, in his friendliest tone:

“What's the matter, old man? You're sour to-night.”

“Never in a better humor,” I assured him, and as I spoke the words they came true. What I had been saying about the Travelers and all it represented—all the snobbery, and smirking, and rotten pretense—my final and absolute renunciation of it all—acted on me as I've seen religion act on the fellows that used to go up to the mourners' bench at the revivals. I felt as if I had suddenly emerged from the parlor of a dive and its stench of sickening perfumes, into the pure air of God's Heaven.

I signed the bill, and we went afoot up the avenue. Sam, as I saw with a good deal of amusement, was trying to devise some subtle, tactful way of attaching his poor, clumsy little suction-pump to the well of my secret thoughts.

“What is it, Sammy?” said I at last. “What do you want to know that you're afraid to ask me?”

“Nothing,” he said hastily. “I'm only a bit worried about—about you and Textile. Matt,”—this in the tone of deep emotion we reserve for the attempt to lure our friends into confiding that about themselves which will give us the opportunity to pity them, and, if necessary, to sheer off from them—“Matt, I do hope you haven't

been hard hit?”

“Not yet,” said I easily. “Dry your tears and put away your black clothes. Your friend, Tom Langdon, was a little premature.”

“I'm afraid I've given you a false impression,” Sam continued, with an overeagerness to convince me that did not attract my attention at the time. “Tom merely said, 'I hear Blacklock is loaded up with Textile shorts,'—that was all. A careless remark. I really didn't think of it again until I saw you looking so black and glum.”

That seemed natural enough, so I changed the subject. As we entered his house, I said:

“I'll not go up to the drawing-room. Make my excuses to your mother, will you? I'll turn into the little smoking-room here. Tell your sister—and say I'm going to stop only a moment.”

Sam had just left me when the butler came.

“Mr. Ball—I think that was the name, sir—wishes to speak to you on the telephone.”

I had given Ellerslys' as one of the places at which I might be found, should it be necessary to consult me. I followed the butler to the telephone closet under the main stairway. As soon as Ball made sure it was I, he began:

“I'll use the code words. I've just seen Fearless, as you told me to.”

Fearless—that was Mitchell, my spy in the employ of Tavistock, who was my principal rival in the business of confidential brokerage for the high financiers. “Yes,” said I. “What does he say?”

“There has been a great deal of heavy buying for a month past.”

Then my dread was well-founded—Textiles were to be deliberately rocketed. “Who's been doing it?” I asked.

“He found out only this afternoon. It's been kept unusually dark. It—”

“Who? Who?” I demanded.

“Intrepid,” he answered.

Intrepid—that is, Langdon—Mowbray Langdon!

“The whole thing—was planned carefully,” continued Ball, “and is coming off according to schedule. Fearless overheard a final message Intrepid's brother brought from him to-day.”

So it was no mischance—it was an assassination. Mowbray Langdon had stabbed me in the back and fled.

“Did you hear what I said?” asked Ball. “Is that you?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Oh,” came in a relieved tone from the other end of the wire. “You were so long in answering that I thought I'd been cut off. Any instructions?”

“No,” said I. “Good-by.”

I heard him ring off, but I sat there for several minutes, the receiver still to my ear. I was muttering: “Langdon, Langdon—why—why—why?” again and again. Why had he turned against me? Why had he plotted to destroy me—one of those plots so frequent in Wall Street—where the assassin steals up, delivers the mortal blow, and steals away without ever being detected or even suspected? I saw the whole plot now—I understood Tom Langdon's activities, I recalled Mowbray Langdon's curious phrases and looks and tones. But—why—why—why? How was I in his way?

It was all dark to me—pitch-dark. I returned to the smoking-room, lighted a cigar, sat fumbling at the new situation. I was in no worse plight than before—what did it matter who was attacking me? In the circumstances, a novice could now destroy me as easily as a Langdon. Still, Ball's news seemed to take away my courage. I reminded myself that I was used to treachery of this sort, that I deserved what I was getting because I had, like a fool, dropped my guard in the fight that is always an every-man-for-himself. But I reminded myself in vain. Langdon's smiling treachery made me heart-sick.

Soon Anita appeared—preceded and heralded by a faint rustling from soft and clinging skirts, that swept my nerves like a love-tune. I suppose for all men there is a charm, a spell, beyond expression, in the sight of a delicate beautiful young woman, especially if she be dressed in those fine fabrics that look as if only a fairy loom could have woven them; and when a man loves the woman who bursts upon his vision, that spell must overwhelm him, especially if he be such a man as was I—a product of life's roughest factories, hard and harsh, an elbower and a trampler, a hustler and a bluffer. Then, you must also consider the exact circumstances—I standing there, with destruction hanging over me, with the sense that within a few hours I should be a pariah to her, a masquerader stripped of his disguise and cast out from the ball where he had been making so merry and so free. Only a few hours more! Perhaps now was the last time I should ever stand so near to her! The full realization of all this swallowed me up as in a great, thick, black mist. And my arms strained to escape from my tightly-locked hands, strained to seize her, to snatch from her, reluctant though she might be, at least some part of the happiness that was to be denied me.

I think my torment must have somehow penetrated to her. For she was sweet and friendly—and she could not have hurt me worse! If I had followed my impulse I should have fallen at her feet and buried my face, scorching, in the folds of that pale blue, faintly-shimmering robe of hers.

“Do throw away that huge, hideous cigar,” she said, laughing. And she took two cigarettes from the box, put both between her lips, lit them, held one toward me. I looked at her face, and along her smooth, bare, outstretched arm, and at the pink, slender fingers holding the cigarette. I took it as if I were afraid the spell would be broken, should my fingers touch hers. Afraid—that's it! That's why I didn't pour out all that was in my heart. I deserved to lose her.

“I'm taking you away from the others,” I said. We could hear the murmur of many voices and of music. In fancy I could see them assembled round the little card-tables—the well-fed bodies, the well-cared-for skins, the elaborate toilets, the useless jeweled hands—comfortable, secure, self-satisfied, idle, always idle, always playing at the imitation games—like their own pampered children, to be sheltered in the nurseries of wealth

their whole lives through. And not at all in bitterness, but wholly in sadness, a sense of the injustice, the unfairness of it all—a sense that had been strong in me in my youth but blunted during the years of my busy prosperity—returned for a moment. For a moment only; my mind was soon back to realities—to her and me—to "us." How soon it would never be "us" again!

"They're mama's friends," Anita was answering. "Oldish and tiresome. When you leave I shall go straight on up to bed."

"I'd like to—to see your room—where you live," said I, more to myself than to her.

"I sleep in a bare little box," she replied with a laugh. "It's like a cell. A friend of ours who has the anti-germ fad insisted on it. But my sitting-room isn't so bad."

"Langdon has the anti-germ fad," said I. She answered "Yes" after a pause, and in such a strained voice that I looked at her. A flush was just dying out of her face. "He was the friend I spoke of," she went on.

"You know him very well?" I asked.

"We've known him—always," said she. "I think he's one of my earliest recollections. His father's summer place and ours adjoin. And once—I guess it's the first time I remember seeing him—he was a freshman at Harvard, and he came along on a horse past the pony cart in which a groom was driving me. And I—I was very little then—I begged him to take me up, and he did. I thought he was the greatest, most wonderful man that ever lived." She laughed queerly. "When I said my prayers, I used to imagine a god that looked like him to say them to."

I echoed her laugh heartily. The idea of Mowbray Langdon as a god struck me as peculiarly funny, though natural enough, too.

"Absurd, wasn't it?" said she. But her face was grave, and she let her cigarette die out.

"I guess you know him better than that now?"

"Yes—better," she answered, slowly and absently. "He's—anything but a god!"

"And the more fascinating on that account," said I. "I wonder why women like best the really bad, dangerous sort of man, who hasn't any respect for them, or for anything."

I said this that she might protest, at least for herself. But her answer was a vague, musing, "I wonder—I wonder."

"I'm sure *you* wouldn't," I protested earnestly, for her.

She looked at me queerly.

"Can I never convince you that I'm just a woman?" said she mockingly. "Just a woman, and one a man with your ideas of women would fly from."

"I wish you were!" I exclaimed. "Then—I'd not find it so—so impossible to give you up."

She rose and made a slow tour of the room, halting on the rug before the closed fireplace a few feet from me. I sat looking at her.

"I am going to give you up," I said at last.

Her eyes, staring into vacancy, grew larger and intenser with each long, deep breath she took.

"I didn't intend to say what I'm about to say—at least, not this evening," I went on, and to me it seemed to be some other than myself who was speaking. "Certain things happened down town to-day that have set me to thinking. And—I shall do whatever I can for your brother and your father. But you—you are free!"

She went to the table, stood there in profile to me, straight and slender as a sunflower stalk. She traced the silver chasings in the lid of the cigarette box with her forefinger; then she took a cigarette and began rolling it slowly and absently.

"Please don't scent and stain your fingers with that filthy tobacco," said I rather harshly.

"And only this afternoon you were saying you had become reconciled to my vice—that you had canonized it along with me—wasn't that your phrase?" This indifferently, without turning toward me, and as if she were thinking of something else.

"So I have," retorted I. "But my mood—please oblige me this once."

She let the cigarette fall into the box, closed the lid gently, leaned against the table, folded her arms upon her bosom and looked full at me. I was as acutely conscious of her every movement, of the very coming and going of the breath at her nostrils, as a man on the operating-table is conscious of the slightest gesture of the surgeon.

"You are—suffering!" she said, and her voice was like the flow of oil upon a burn. "I have never seen you like this. I didn't believe you capable of—of much feeling."

I could not trust myself to speak. If Bob Corey could have looked in on that scene, could have understood it, how amazed he would have been!

"What happened down town to-day?" she went on. "Tell me, if I may know."

"I'll tell you what I didn't think, ten minutes ago, I'd tell any human being," said I. "They've got me strapped down in the press. At ten o'clock in the morning—precisely at ten—they're going to put on the screws." I laughed. "I guess they'll have me squeezed pretty dry before noon."

She shivered.

"So, you see," I continued, "I don't deserve any credit for giving you up. I only anticipate you by about twenty-four hours. Mine's a deathbed repentance."

"I'd thought of that," said she reflectively. Presently she added: "Then, it is true." And I knew Sammy had given her some hint that prepared her for my confession.

"Yes—I can't go blustering through the matrimonial market," replied I. "I've been thrown out. I'm a beggar at the gates."

"A beggar at the gates," she murmured.

I got up and stood looking down at her.

“Don't *pity* me!” I said. “My remark was a figure of speech. I want no alms. I wouldn't take even you as alms. They'll probably get me down, and stamp the life out of me—nearly. But not quite—don't you lose sight of that. They can't kill me, and they can't tame me. I'll recover, and I'll strew the Street with their blood and broken bones.”

She drew in her breath sharply.

“And a minute ago I was almost liking you!” she exclaimed.

I retreated to my chair and gave her a smile that must have been grim.

“Your ideas of life and of men are like a cloistered nun's,” said I. “If there are any real men among your acquaintances, you may find out some day that they're not so much like lapdogs as they pretend—and that you wouldn't like them, if they were.”

“What—just what—happened to you down town to-day—after you left me?”

“A friend of mine has been luring me into a trap—why, I can't quite fathom. To-day he sprang the trap and ran away.”

“A friend of yours?”

“The man we were talking about—your ex-god—Langdon.”

“Langdon,” she repeated, and her tone told me that Sammy knew and had hinted to her more than I suspected him of knowing. And, with her arms still folded, she paced up and down the room. I watched her slender feet in pale blue slippers appear and disappear—first one, then the other—at the edge of her trailing skirt.

Presently she stopped in front of me. Her eyes were gazing past me.

“You are sure it was he?” she asked.

I could not answer immediately, so amazed was I at her expression. I had been regarding her as a being above and apart, an incarnation of youth and innocence; with a shock it now came to me that she was experienced, intelligent, that she understood the whole of life, the dark as fully as the light, and that she was capable to live it, too. It was not a girl that was questioning me there; it was a woman.

“Yes—Langdon,” I replied. “But I've no quarrel with him. My reverse is nothing but the fortune of war. I assure you, when I see him again, I'll be as friendly as ever—only a bit less of a trusting ass, I fancy. We're a lot of free lances down in the Street. We fight now on one side, now on the other. We change sides whenever it's expedient; and under the code it's not necessary to give warning. To-day, before I knew he was the assassin, I had made my plans to try to save myself at his expense, though I believed him to be the best friend I had down town. No doubt he's got some good reason for creeping up on me in the dark.”

“You are sure it was he?” she repeated.

“He, and nobody else,” replied I. “He decided to do me up—and I guess he'll succeed. He's not the man to lift his gun unless he's sure the bird will fall.”

“Do you really not care any more than you show?” she asked. “Or is your manner only bravado—to show off before me?”

“I don't care a damn, since I'm to lose you,” said I. “It'll be a godsend to have a hard row to hoe the next few months or years.”

She went back to leaning against the table, her arms folded as before. I saw she was thinking out something. Finally she said:

“I have decided not to accept your release.”

I sprang to my feet.

“Anita!” I cried, my arms stretched toward her.

But she only looked coldly at me, folded her arms the more tightly and said:

“Do not misunderstand me. The bargain is the same as before. If you want me on those terms, I must—give myself.”

“Why?” I asked.

A faint smile, with no mirth in it, drifted round the corners of her mouth.

“An impulse,” she said. “I don't quite understand it myself. An impulse from—from—” Her eyes and her thoughts were far away, and her expression was the one that made it hardest for me to believe she was a child of those parents of hers. “An impulse from a sense of justice—of decency. I am the cause of your trouble, and I daren't be a coward and a cheat.” She repeated the last words. “A coward—a cheat! We—I—have taken much from you, more than you know. It must be repaid. If you still wish, I will—will keep to my bargain.”

“It's true, I'd not have got into the mess,” said I, “if I'd been attending to business instead of dangling after you. But you're not responsible for that folly.”

She tried to speak several times, before she finally succeeded in saying:

“It's my fault. I mustn't shirk.”

I studied her, but I couldn't puzzle her out.

“I've been thinking all along that you were simple and transparent,” I said. “Now, I see you are a mystery. What are you hiding from me?”

Her smile was almost coquettish as she replied:

“When a woman makes a mystery of herself to a man, it's for the man's good.”

I took her hand—almost timidly.

“Anita,” I said, “do you still—dislike me?”

“I do not—and shall not—love you,” she answered. “But you are—”

“More endurable?” I suggested, as she hesitated.

“Less unendurable,” she said with raillery. Then she added, “Less unendurable than profiting by a-creeping up in the dark.”

I thought I understood her better than she understood herself. And suddenly my passion melted in a tenderness I would have said was as foreign to me as rain to a desert. I noticed that she had a haggard look. “You are very tired, child,” said I. “Good night. I am a different man from what I was when I came in here.”

“And I a different woman,” said she, a beauty shining from her that was as far beyond her physical beauty as—as love is beyond passion.

“A nobler, better woman,” I exclaimed, kissing her hand.

She snatched it away.

“If you only knew!” she cried. “It seems to me, as I realize what sort of woman I am, that I am almost worthy of *you*!” And she blazed a look at me that left me rooted there, astounded.

But I went down the avenue with a light heart. “Just like a woman,” I was saying to myself cheerfully, “not to know her own mind.”

A few blocks, and I stopped and laughed outright—at Langdon's treachery, at my own credulity. “What an ass I've been making of myself!” said I to myself. And I could see myself as I really had been during those months of social struggling—an ass, braying and gamboling in a lion's skin—to impress the ladies!

“But not wholly to no purpose,” I reflected, again all in a glow at thought of Anita.

## XIX. A WINDFALL FROM “GENTLEMAN JOE”

I went to my rooms, purposing to go straight to bed, and get a good sleep. I did make a start toward undressing; then I realized that I should only lie awake with my brain wearing me out, spinning crazy thoughts and schemes hour after hour—for my imagination rarely lets it do any effective thinking after the lights are out and the limitations of material things are wiped away by the darkness. I put on a dressing-gown and seated myself to smoke and to read.

When I was very young, new to New York, in with the Tenderloin crowd and up to all sorts of pranks, I once tried opium smoking. I don't think I ever heard of anything in those days without giving it a try. Usually, I believe, opium makes the smoker ill the first time or two; but it had no such effect on me, nor did it fill my mind with fantastic visions. On the contrary, it made everything around me intensely real—that is, it enormously stimulated my dominant characteristic of accurate observation. I noticed the slightest details—such things as the slight difference in the length of the arms of the Chinaman who kept the “joint,” the number of buttons down the front of the waist of the girl in the bunk opposite mine, across the dingy, little, sweet-scented room. Nothing escaped me, and also I was conscious of each passing second, or, rather, fraction of a second.

As a rule, time and events, even when one is quietest, go with such a rush that one notes almost nothing of what is passing. The opium seemed to compel the kaleidoscope of life to turn more slowly; in fact, it sharpened my senses so that they unconsciously took impressions many times more quickly and easily and accurately. As I sat there that night after leaving Anita, forcing my mind to follow the printed lines, I found I was in exactly the state in which I had been during my one experiment with opium. It seemed to me that as many days as there had been hours must have elapsed since I got the news of the raised Textile dividend. Days—yes, weeks, even months, of thought and action seemed to have been compressed into those six hours—for, as I sat there, it was not yet eleven o'clock.

And then I realized that this notion was not of the moment, but that I had been as if under the influence of some powerful nerve stimulant since my brain began to recover from the shock of that thunderbolt. Only, where nerve stimulants often make the mind passive and disinclined to take part in the drama so vividly enacting before it, this opening of my reservoirs of reserve nervous energy had multiplied my power to act as well as my power to observe. “I wonder how long it will last,” thought I. And it made me uneasy, this unnatural alertness, unaccompanied by any feverishness or sense of strain. “Is this the way madness begins?”

I dressed myself again and went out—went up to Joe Healey's gambling place in Forty-fourth Street. Most of the well-known gamblers up town, as well as their “respectable” down town fellow members of the fraternity, were old acquaintances of mine; Joe Healey was as close a friend as I had. He had great fame for squareness—and, in a sense, deserved it. With his fellow gamblers he was straight as a string at all times—to be otherwise would have meant that when he went broke he would stay broke, because none of the fraternity would “stake” him. But with his patrons—being regarded by them as a pariah, he acted toward them like a pariah—a prudent pariah. He fooled them with a frank show of gentlemanliness, of honesty to his own hurt; under that cover he fleeced them well, but always judiciously.

That night, I recall, Joe's guests were several young fellows of the fashionable set, rich men's sons and their parasites, a few of the big down town operators who hadn't yet got hipped on “respectability”—they playing poker in a private room—and a couple of flush-faced, flush-pursed chaps from out of town, for whom one of Joe's men was dealing faro from what looked to my experienced and accurate eye like a “brace” box.

Joe, very elegant, too elegant in fact, in evening dress, was showing a new piece of statuary to the oldest son of Melville, of the National Industrial Bank. Joe knew a little something about art—he was much like the art dealers who, as a matter of business, learn the difference between good things and bad, but in their hearts wonder and laugh at people willing to part with large sums of money for a little paint or marble or the like.

As soon as Joe thought he had sufficiently impressed young Melville, he drifted him to a roulette table, left

him there and joined me.

“Come to my office,” said he. “I want to see you.”

He led the way down the richly-carpeted marble stairway as far as the landing at the turn. There, on a sort of mezzanine, he had a gorgeous little suite. The principal object in the sitting-room or office was a huge safe. He closed and locked the outside door behind us.

“Take a seat,” said he. “You'll like the cigars in the second box on my desk—the long one.” And he began turning the combination lock. “You haven't dropped in on us for the past three or four months,” he went on.

“No,” said I, getting a great deal of pleasure out of seeing again, and thus intimately, his round, ruddy face—like a yachtman's, not like a drinker's—and his shifty, laughing brown eyes. “The game down town has given me enough excitement. I haven't had to continue it up town to keep my hand in.”

In fact, I had, as I have already said, been breaking off with my former friends because, while many of the most reputable and reliable financiers down town go in for high play occasionally at the gambling houses, it isn't wise for the man trying to establish himself as a strictly legitimate financier. I had been playing as much as ever, but only in games in my own rooms and at the rooms of other bankers, brokers and commercial leaders. The passion for high play is a craving that gnaws at a man all the time, and he must always be feeding it one way or another.

“I've noticed that you are getting too swell to patronize us fellows,” said he, his shrewd smile showing that my polite excuse had not fooled him. “Well, Matt, you're right—you always did have good sound sense and a steady eye for the main chance. I used to think the women'd ruin you, they were so crazy about that handsome mug and figure of yours. But when I saw you knew exactly when to let go, I knew nothing could stop you.”

By this time he had the safe open, disclosing several compartments and a small, inside safe. He worked away at the second combination lock, and presently exposed the interior of the little safe. It was filled with a great roll of bills. He pried this out, brought it over to the desk and began wrapping it up. “I want you to take this with you when you go,” said he. “I've made several big killings lately, and I'm going to get you to invest the proceeds.”

“I can't take that big bundle along with me, Joe,” said I. “Besides, it ain't safe. Put it in the bank and send me a check.”

“Not on your life,” replied Healey with a laugh. “The suckers we trimmed gave checks, and I turned 'em into cash as soon as the banks opened. I wasn't any too spry, either. Two of the damned sneaks consulted lawyers as soon as they sobered off, and tried to stop payment on their checks. They're threatening proceedings. You must take the dough away with you, and I don't want a receipt.”

“Trimming suckers, eh?” said I, not able to decide what to do.

“Their fathers stole it from the public,” he explained. “They're drunken little snobs, not fit to have money. I'm doing a public service by relieving them of it. If I'd 'a' got more, I'd feel that much more”—he vented his light, cool, sarcastic laugh—“more patriotic.”

“I can't take it,” said I, feeling that, in my present condition, to take it would be very near to betraying the confidence of my old friend.

“They lost it in a straight game,” he hastened to assure me. “I haven't had a 'brace' box or crooked wheel for four years.” This with a sober face and a twinkle in his eye. “But even if I had helped chance to do the good work of teaching them to take care of their money, you'd not refuse me. Up town and down town, and all over the place, what's business, when you come to look at it sensibly, but trading in stolen goods? Do you know a man who could honestly earn more than ten or twenty thousand a year—good clean money by good clean work?”

“Oh, for that matter, your money's as clean as anybody's,” said I. “But, you know, I'm a speculator, Joe. I have my downs—and this happens to be a stormy time for me. If I take your money, I mayn't be able to account for it or even to pay dividends on it for—maybe a year or so.”

“It's all right, old man. I'll never give it a thought till you remind me of it. Use it as you'd use your own. I've got to put it behind somebody's luck—why not yours?”

He finished doing up the package, then he seated himself, and we both looked at it through the smoke of our cigars.

“It's just as easy to deal in big sums as in little, in large matters as in small, isn't it, Joe,” said I, “once one gets in the way of it?”

“Do you remember—away back there—the morning,” he asked musingly—“the last morning—you and I got up from the straw in the stables over at Jerome Park—the stables they let us sleep in?”

“And went out in the dawn to roost on the rails and spy on the speed trials of old Revell's horses?”

“Exactly,” said Joe, and we looked at each other and laughed. “We in rags—gosh, how chilly it was that morning! Do you remember what we talked about?”

“No,” said I, though I did.

“I was proposing to turn a crooked trick—and you wouldn't have it. You persuaded me to keep straight, Matt. I've never forgotten it. You kept me straight—showed me what a damn fool a man was to load himself down with a petty larceny record. You made a man of me, Matt. And then those good looks of yours caught the eye of that bookmaker's girl, and he gave you a job at writing sheet—and you worked me in with you.”

So long ago it seemed, yet near and real, too, as I sat there, conscious of every sound and motion, even of the fantastic shapes taken by our upcurling smoke. How far I was from the “rail bird” of those happy-go-lucky years, when a meal meant quite as much to me as does a million now—how far from all that, yet how near, too. For was I not still facing life with the same careless courage, forgetting each yesterday in the eager excitement of each new day with its new deal? We went on in our reminiscences for a while; then, as Joe had a little work to do, I drifted out into the house, took a bite of supper with young Melville, had a little go at the tiger, and toward five in the clear June morning emerged into the broad day of the streets, with the precious

bundle under my arms and a five hundred-dollar bill in my waistcoat pocket.

“Give my win to me in a single bill,” I said to the banker, “and blow yourself off with the change.”

Joe walked down the street with me—for companionship and a little air before turning in, he said, but I imagine a desire to keep his eye on his treasure a while longer had something to do with his taking that early morning stroll. We passed several of those forlorn figures that hurry through the slowly-awakening streets to bed or to work. Finally, there came by an old, old woman—a scrubwoman, I guess, on her way home from cleaning some office building. Beside her was a thin little boy, hopping along on a crutch. I stopped them.

“Hold out your hand,” said I to the boy, and he did. I laid the five hundred-dollar bill in it. “Now, shut your fingers tight over that,” said I, “and don't open them till you get home. Then tell your mother to do what she likes with it.” And we left them gaping after us, speechless before this fairy story come true.

“You must be looking hard for luck to-day,” said Joe, who understood this transaction where another might have thought it a showy and not very wise charity. “They'll stop in at the church and pray for you, and burn a candle.”

“I hope so,” said I, “for God knows I need it.”

## XX. A BREATHING SPELL.

Langdon, after several years of effort, had got recognition for Textile in London, but that was about all. He hadn't succeeded in unloading any great amount of it on the English. So it was rather because I neglected nothing than because I was hopeful of results that I had made a point of telegraphing to London news of my proposed suit. The result was a little trading in Textiles over there and a slight decline in the price. This fact was telegraphed to all the financial centers on this side of the water, and reinforced the impression my lawyers' announcement and my own “bear” letter were making.

Still, this was nothing, or next to it. What could I hope to avail against Langdon's agents with almost unlimited capital, putting their whole energy under the stock to raise it? In the same newspapers that published my bear attack, in the same columns and under the same head-lines, were official denials from the Textile Trust and the figures of enormous increase of business as proof positive that the denials were honest. If the public had not been burned so many times by “industrials,” if it had not learned by bitter experience that practically none of the leaders of finance and industry were above lying to make or save a few dollars, if Textiles had not been manipulated so often, first by Dumont and since his death by his brother-in-law and successor, this suave and cynical Langdon, my desperate attack would have been without effect. As it was—

Four months before, in the same situation, had I seen Textiles stagger as they staggered in the first hour of business on the Stock Exchange that morning, I'd have sounded the charge, clapped spurs to my charger, and borne down upon them. But—I had my new-born yearning for “respectability”; I had my new-born squeamishness, which led me to fear risking Bob Corey and his bank and the money of my old friend Healey; finally, there was Anita—the longing for her that made me prefer a narrow and uncertain foothold to the bold leap that would land me either in wealth and power or in the bottomless abyss.

Instead of continuing to sell Textiles, I covered as far as I could; and I bought so eagerly and so heavily that, more than Langdon's corps of rocketers, I was responsible for the stock's rally and start upward. When I say “eagerly” and “heavily,” I do not mean that I acted openly or without regard to common sense. I mean simply that I made no attempt to back up my followers in the selling campaign I had urged them into; on the contrary, I bought as they sold. That does not sound well, and it is no better than it sounds. I shall not dispute with any one who finds this action of mine a betrayal of my clients to save myself. All I shall say is that it was business, that in such extreme and dire compulsion as was mine, it was—and is—right under the code, the private and real Wall Street code.

You can imagine the confused mass of transactions in which I was involved before the Stock Exchange had been open long. There was the stock we had been able to buy or get options on at various prices, between the closing of the Exchange the previous day and that morning's opening—stock from all parts of this country and in England. There was the stock I had been buying since the Exchange opened—buying at figures ranging from one-eighth above last night's closing price to fourteen points above it. And, on the debit side, there were the “short” transactions extending over a period of nearly two months—“sellings” of blocks large and small at a hundred different prices.

An inextricable tangle, you will say, one it would be impossible for a man to unravel quickly and in the frantic chaos of a wild Stock Exchange day. Yet the influence of the mysterious state of my nerves, which I have described above, was so marvelous that, incredible though it seems, the moment the Exchange closed, I knew exactly, where I stood.

Like a mechanical lightning calculator, my mind threw up before me the net result of these selling and buying transactions. Textile Common closed eighteen points above the closing quotation of the previous day; if Langdon's brother had not been just a little indiscreet, I should have been as hopeless a bankrupt in reputation and in fortune as ever was ripped up by the bulls of Wall Street.

As it was, I believed that, by keeping a bold front, I might extricate and free myself when the Coal reorganization was announced. The rise of Coal stocks would square my debts—and, as I was apparently untouched by the Textile flurry, so far as even Ball, my nominal partner and chief lieutenant, knew, I need not fear pressure from creditors that I could not withstand.

I could not breathe freely, but I could breathe.

# XXI. MOST UNLADYLIKE

When I saw I was to have a respite of a month or so, I went over to the National Industrial Bank with Healey's roll, which my tellers had counted and prepared for deposit. I finished my business with the receiving teller of the National Industrial, and dropped in on my friend Lewis, the first vice-president. I did not need to pretend coolness and confidence; my nerves were still in that curious state of tranquil exhilaration, and I felt master of myself and of the situation. Just as I was leaving, in came Tom Langdon with Sam Ellersly.

Tom's face was a laughable exhibit of embarrassment. Sam—really, I felt sorry for him. There was no reason on earth why he shouldn't be with Tom Langdon; yet he acted as if I had caught him “with the goods on him.” He stammered and stuttered, clasped my hand eagerly, dropped it as if it had stung him; he jerked out a string of hysterical nonsense, ending with a laugh so crazy that the sound of it disconcerted him. Drink was the explanation that drifted through my mind; but in fact I thought little about it, so full was I of other matters.

“When is your brother returning?” said I to Tom.

“On the next steamer, I believe,” he replied. “He went only for the rest and the bath of sea air.” With an effort he collected himself, drew me aside and said: “I owe you an apology, Mr. Blacklock. I went to the steamer with Mowbray to see him off, and he asked me to tell you about our new dividend rate—though it was not to be made public for some time. Anyhow, he told me to go straight to you—and I—frankly, I forgot it.” Then, with the winning, candid Langdon smile, he added, ingenuously: “The best excuse in the world—yet the one nobody ever accepts.”

“No apology necessary,” said I with the utmost good nature. “I've no personal interest in Textile. My house deals on commission only, you know—never on margins for myself. I'm a banker and broker, not a gambler. Some of our customers were alarmed by the news of the big increase, and insisted on bringing suit to stop it. But I'm going to urge them now to let the matter drop.”

Tom tried to look natural, and as he is an apt pupil of his brother's, he succeeded fairly well. His glance, however, wouldn't fix steadily on my gaze, but circled round and round it like a bat at an electric light. “To tell you the truth,” said he, “I'm extremely nervous as to what my brother will say—and do—to me, when I tell him. I hope no harm came to you through my forgetfulness.”

“None in the world,” I assured him. Then I turned on Sam. “What are you doing down town to-day?” said I. “Are you on your way to see me?”

He flushed with angry shame, reading an insinuation into my careless remark, when I had not the remotest intention of reminding him that his customary object in coming down town was to play the parasite and the sponge at my expense. I ought to have guessed at once that there was some good reason for his recovery of his refined, high-bred, gentlemanly super-sensibilities; but I was not in the mood to analyze trifles, though my nerves were taking careful record of them.

“Oh, I was just calling on Tom,” he replied rather haughtily.

Then Melville himself came in, brushing back his white tufted burnsides and licking his lips and blinking his eyes—looking for all the world like a cat at its toilet.

“Oh! ah! Blacklock!” he exclaimed, with purring cordiality—and I knew he had heard of the big deposit I was making. “Come into my office on your way out—nothing especial—only because it's always a pleasure to talk with you.”

I saw that his effusive friendliness confirmed Tom Langdon's fear that I had escaped from his brother's toils. He stared sullenly at the carpet until he caught me looking at him with twinkling eyes. He made a valiant effort to return my smile and succeeded in twisting his face into a knot that seemed to hurt him as much as it amused me.

“Well, good-by, Tom,” said I. “Give my regards to your brother when he lands, and tell him his going away was a mistake. A man can't afford to trust his important business to understrappers.” This with a face free from any suggestion of intending a shot at him. Then to Sam: “See you to-night, old man,” and I went away, leaving Lewis looking from one to the other as if he felt that there was dynamite about, but couldn't locate it. I stopped with Melville to talk Coal for a few minutes—at my ease, and the last man on earth to be suspected of hanging by the crook of one finger from the edge of the precipice.

I rang the Ellerslys' bell at half-past nine that evening. The butler faced me with eyes not down, as they should have been, but on mine, and full of the servile insolence to which he had been prompted by what he had overheard in the family.

“Not at home, sir,” he said, though I had not spoken.

I was preoccupied and not expecting that statement; neither had I skill, nor desire to acquire skill, in reading family barometers in the faces of servants. So, I was for brushing past him and entering where I felt I had as much right as in my own places. He barred the way.

“Beg pardon, sir. Mrs. Ellersly instructed me to say no one was at home.”

I halted, but only like an oncoming bear at the prick of an arrow.

“What the hell does this mean?” I exclaimed, waving him aside. At that instant Anita appeared from the little reception-room a few feet away.

“Oh—come in!” she said cordially. “I was expecting you. Burroughs, please take Mr. Blacklock's hat.”

I followed her into the reception-room, thinking the butler had made some sort of mistake.

“How did you come out?” she asked eagerly, facing me. “You look your natural self—not tired or worried—so it must have been not so bad as you feared.”

“If our friend Langdon hadn't slipped away, I might not look and feel so comfortable,” said I. “His brother

blundered, and there was no one to checkmate my moves." She seemed nearer to me, more in sympathy with me than ever before.

"I can't tell you how glad I am!"

Her eyes were wide and bright, as from some great excitement, and her color was high. Once my attention was on it, I knew instantly that only some extraordinary upheaval in that household could have produced the fever that was blazing in her. Never had I seen her in any such mood as this.

"What is it?" I asked. "What has happened?"

"If anything disagreeable should be said or done this evening here," she said, "I want you to promise me that you'll restrain yourself, and not say or do any of those things that make me—that jar on me. You understand?"

"I am always myself," replied I. "I can't be anybody else."

"But you are—several different kinds of self," she insisted. "And please—this evening don't be *that* kind. It's coming into your eyes and chin now."

I had lifted my head and looked round, probably much like the leader of a horned herd at the scent of danger.

"Is this better?" said I, trying to look the thoughts I had no difficulty in getting to the fore whenever my eyes were on her.

Her smile rewarded me. But it disappeared, gave place to a look of nervous alarm, of terror even, at the rustling, or, rather, bustling, of skirts in the hall—there was war in the very sound, and I felt it. Mrs. Ellersly appeared, bearing her husband as a dejected trailer invisibly but firmly coupled. She acknowledged my salutation with a stiff-necked nod, ignored my extended hand. I saw that she wished to impress upon me that she was a very grand lady indeed; but, while my ideas of what constitutes a lady were at that time somewhat befogged by my snobbishness, she failed dismally. She looked just what she was—a mean, bad-tempered woman, in a towering rage.

"You have forced me, Mr. Blacklock," said she, and then I knew for just what purpose that voice of hers was best adapted—"to say to you what I should have preferred to write. Mr. Ellersly has had brought to his ears matters in connection with your private life that make it imperative that you discontinue your calls here."

"My private life, ma'am?" I repeated. "I was not aware that I had a private life."

"Anita, leave us alone with Mr. Blacklock," commanded her mother.

The girl hesitated, bent her head, and with a cowed look went slowly toward the door. There she paused, and, with what seemed a great effort, lifted her head and gazed at me. How I ever came rightly to interpret her look I don't know, but I said: "Miss Ellersly, I've the right to insist that you stay." I saw she was going to obey me, and before Mrs. Ellersly could repeat her order I said: "Now, madam, if any one accuses me of having done anything that would cause you to exclude a man from your house, I am ready for the liar and his lie."

As I spoke I was searching the weak, bad old face of her husband for an explanation. Their pretense of outraged morality I rejected at once—it was absurd. Neither up town nor down, nor anywhere else, had I done anything that any one could regard as a breach of the code of a man of the world. Then, reasoned I, they must have found some one else to help them out of their financial troubles—some one who, perhaps, has made this insult to me the price, or part of the price, of his generosity. Who? Who hates me? In instant answer, up before my mind flashed a picture of Tom Langdon and Sam Ellersly arm in arm entering Lewis' office. Tom Langdon wishes to marry her; and her parents wish it, too; he is the man she was confessing to me about—these were my swift conclusions.

"We do not care to discuss the matter, sir," Mrs. Ellersly was replying, her tone indicating that it was not fit to discuss. And this was the woman I had hardly been able to treat civilly, so nauseating were her fawnings and flatterings!

"So!" I said, ignoring her and opening my batteries full upon the old man. "You are taking orders from Mowbray Langdon now. Why?"

As I spoke, I was conscious that there had been some change in Anita. I looked at her. With startled eyes and lips apart, she was advancing toward me.

"Anita, leave the room!" cried Mrs. Ellersly harshly, panic under the command in her tones.

I felt rather than saw my advantage, and pressed it.

"You see what they are doing, Miss Ellersly," said I.

She passed her hands over her eyes, let her face appear again. In it there was an energy of repulsion that ought to have seemed exaggerated to me then, knowing really nothing of the true situation. "I understand now!" said she. "Oh—it is—loathsome!" And her eyes blazed upon her mother.

"Loathsome," I echoed, dashing at my opportunity. "If you are not merely a chattel and a decoy, if there is any womanhood, any self-respect in you, you will keep faith with me."

"Anita!" cried Mrs. Ellersly. "Go to your room!"

I had, once or twice before, heard a tone as repulsive—a female dive-keeper hectoring her wretched white slaves. I looked at Anita. I expected to see her erect, defiant. Instead, she was again wearing that cowed look.

"Don't judge me too harshly," she said pleadingly to me. "I know what is right and decent—God planted that too deep in me for them to be able to uproot it. But—oh, they have broken my will! They have broken my will! They have made me a coward, a thing!" And she hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

Mrs. Ellersly was about to speak. I could not offer better proof of my own strength of will than the fact that I, with a look and a gesture, put her down. Then I said to the girl:

"You must choose now! Woman or thing—which shall it be? If it is woman, then you have me behind you and in front of you and around you. If it is thing—God have mercy on you! Your self-respect, your pride are gone—for ever. You will be like the carpet under his feet to the man whose creature you become."

She came and stood by me, with her back to them.

“If you will take me with you now,” she said, “I will go. If I delay, I am lost. I shall not have the courage. And I am sick, sick to death of this life here, of this hideous wait for the highest bidder.”

Her voice gained strength and her manner courage as she spoke; at the end she was meeting her mother's gaze without flinching. My eyes had followed hers, and my look was taking in both her mother and her father. I had long since measured them, yet I could scarcely credit the confirmation of my judgment. Had life been smooth and comfortable for that old couple, as it was for most of their acquaintances and friends, they would have lived and died regarding themselves, and regarded, as well-bred, kindly people, of the finest instincts and tastes. But calamity was putting to the test the system on which they had molded their apparently elegant, graceful lives. The storm had ripped off the attractive covering; the framework, the reality of that system, was revealed, naked and frightful.

“Anita, go to your room!” almost screamed the old woman, her fury tearing away the last shreds of her cloak of manners.

“Your daughter is of age, madam,” said I. “She will go where she pleases. And I warn you that you are deceived by the Langdons. I am not powerless, and”—here I let her have a full look into my red-hot furnaces of wrath—“I stop at nothing in pursuing those who oppose me—at nothing!”

Anita, staring at her mother's awful face, was shrinking and trembling as if before the wicked, pale-yellow eyes and quivering, outstretched tentacles of a devil-fish. Clinging to my arm, she let me guide her to the door. Her mother recovered speech. “Anita!” she cried. “What are you doing? Are you mad?”

“I think I must be out of my mind,” said Anita. “But, if you try to keep me here, I shall tell him all—*all*.”

Her voice suggested that she was about to go into hysterics. I gently urged her forward. There was some sort of woman's wrap in the hall. I put it round her. Before she—or I—realized it, she was in my waiting electric.

“Up town,” I said to my man.

She tried to get out.

“Oh, what have I done! What am I doing!” she cried, her courage oozing away. “Let me out—please!”

“You are going with me,” said I, entering and closing the door. I saw the door of the Ellersly mansion opening, saw old Ellersly, bareheaded and distracted, scuttling down the steps.

“Go ahead—fast!” I called to my man.

And the electric was rushing up the avenue, with the bell ringing for crossings incessantly. She huddled away from me into the corner of the seat, sobbing hysterically. I knew that to touch her would be fatal—or to speak. So I waited.

## XXII. MOST UNGENTLEMANLY

As we neared the upper end of the park, I told my chauffeur, through the tube, to enter and go slowly. Whenever a lamp flashed in at us, I had a glimpse of her progress toward composure—now she was drying her eyes with the bit of lace she called a handkerchief; now her bare arms were up, and with graceful fingers she was arranging her hair; now she was straight and still, the soft, fluffy material with which her wrap was edged drawn close about her throat. I shifted to the opposite seat, for my nerves warned me that I could not long control myself, if I stayed on where her garments were touching me.

I looked away from her for the pleasure of looking at her again, of realizing that my overwrought senses were not cheating me. Yes, there she was, in all the luster of that magnetic beauty I can not think of even now without an upblazing of the fire which is to the heart what the sun is to a blind man dreaming of sight. There she was on my side of the chasm that had separated us—alone with me—mine—mine! And my heart dilated with pride. But a moment later came a sense of humility. Her beauty intoxicated me, but her youth, her fineness, so fragile for such rough hands as mine, awed and humbled me.

“I must be very gentle,” said I to myself. “I have promised that she shall never regret. God help me to keep my promise! She is mine, but only to preserve and protect.”

And that idea of *responsibility in possession* was new to me—was to have far-reaching consequences. Now that I think of it, I believe it changed the whole course of my life.

She was leaning forward, her elbow on the casement of the open window of the brougham, her cheek against her hand; the moonlight was glistening on her round, firm forearm and on her serious face. “How far, far away from—everything it seems here!” she said, her voice tuned to that soft, clear light, “and how beautiful it is!” Then, addressing the moon and the shadows of the trees rather than me: “I wish I could go on and on—and never return to—to the world.”

“I wish we could,” said I.

My tone was low, but she started, drew back into the brougham, became an outline in the deep shadow. In another mood that might have angered me. Just then it hurt me so deeply that to remember it to-day is to feel a faint ache in the scar of the long-healed wound. My face was not hidden as was hers; so, perhaps, she saw. At any rate, her voice tried to be friendly as she said: “Well—I have crossed the Rubicon. And I don't regret. It was silly of me to cry. I thought I had been through so much that I was beyond such weakness. But you will find me calm from now on, and reasonable.”

“Not too reasonable, please,” said I, with an attempt at her lightness. “A reasonable woman is as trying as an unreasonable man.”

“But we are going to be sensible with each other,” she urged, “like two friends. Aren't we?”

“We are going to be what we are going to be,” said I. “We'll have to take life as it comes.”

That clumsy reminder set her to thinking, stirred her vague uneasiness in those strange circumstances to active alarm. For presently she said, in a tone that was not so matter-of-course as she had tried to make it: “We'll go now to my Uncle Frank's. He's a brother of my father's. I always used to like him best—and still do. But he married a woman mama thought—queer. They hadn't much, so he lives away up on the West Side—One Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street.”

“The wise plan, the only wise plan,” said I, not so calm as she must have thought me, “is to go to my partner's house and send for a minister.”

“Not to-night,” she replied nervously. “Take me to Uncle Frank's, and to-morrow we can discuss what to do and how to do it.”

“To-night,” I persisted. “We must be married to-night. No more uncertainty and indecision and weakness. Let us begin bravely, Anita!”

“To-morrow,” she said. “But not to-night. I must think it over.”

“To-night,” I repeated. “To-morrow will be full of its own problems. This is to-night's.”

She shook her head, and I saw that the struggle between us had begun—the struggle against her timidity and conventionality. “No, not tonight.” This in her tone for finality.

To argue with any woman in such circumstances would be dangerous; to argue with her would have been fatal. To reason with a woman is to flatter her into suspecting you of weakness and herself of strength. I told the chauffeur to turn about and go slowly up town. She settled back into her corner of the brougham. Neither of us spoke until we were passing Grant's Tomb. Then she started out of her secure confidence in my obedience, and exclaimed: “This is not the way!” And her voice had in it the hasty call-to-arms.

“No,” I replied, determined to push the panic into a rout. “As I told you, our future shall be settled to-night.” That in *my* tone for finality.

A pause, then: “It *has* been settled,” she said, like a child that feels, yet denies, its impotence as it struggles in the compelling arms of its father. “I thought until a few minutes ago that I really intended to marry you. Now I see that I didn't.”

“Another reason why we're not going to your uncle's,” said I.

She leaned forward so that I could see her face. “I can not marry you,” she said. “I feel humble toward you, for having misled you. But it is better that you—and I—should have found out now than too late.”

“It is too late—too late to go back.”

“Would you wish to marry a woman who does not love you, who loves some one else, and who tells you so and refuses to marry you?” She had tried to concentrate enough scorn into her voice to hide her fear.

“I would,” said I. “And I shall. I'll not desert you, Anita, when your courage and strength shall fail. I will carry you on to safety.”

“I tell you I can not marry you,” she cried, between appeal and command. “There are reasons—I may not tell you. But if I might, you would—would take me to my uncle's. I can not marry you!”

“That is what conventionality bids you say now,” I replied. And then I gathered myself together and in a tone that made me hate myself as I heard it, I added slowly, each word sharp and distinct: “But what will conventionality bid you say to-morrow morning, as we drive down crowded Fifth Avenue, after a night in this brougham?”

I could not see her, for she fell back into the darkness as sharply as if I had struck her with all my force full in the face. But I could feel the effect of my words upon her. I paused, not because I expected or wished an answer, but because I had to steady myself—myself, not my purpose; my purpose was inflexible. I would put through what we had begun, just as I would have held her and cut off her arm with my pocket-knife if we had been cast away alone, and I had had to do it to save her life. She was not competent to decide for herself. Every problem that had ever faced her had been decided by others for her. Who but me could decide for her now? I longed to plead with her, longed to let her see that I was not hard-hearted, was thinking of her, was acting for her sake as much as for my own. But I dared not. “She would misunderstand,” said I to myself. “She would think you were weakening.”

Full fifteen minutes of that frightful silence before she said: “I will go where you wish.” And she said it in a tone that makes me wince as I recall it.

I called my partner's address up through the tube. Again that frightful silence, then she was trying to choke back the sobs. A few words I caught: “They have broken my will—they have broken my will.”

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My partner lived in a big, gray-stone house that stood apart and commanded a noble view of the Hudson and the Palisades. It was, in the main, a reproduction of a French château, and such changes as the architect had made in his model were not positively disfiguring, though amusing. There should have been trees and shrubbery about it, but—“As Mrs. B. says,” Joe had explained to me, “what's the use of sinking a lot of cash in a house people can't see?” So there was not a bush, not a flower. Inside—One day Ball took me on a tour of the art shops. “I've got a dozen corners and other big bare spots to fill,” said he. “Mrs. B. hates to give up money, haggles over every article. I'm going to put the job through in business style.” I soon discovered that I had been brought along to admire his “business style,” not to suggest. After two hours, in which he bought in small lots several tons of statuary, paintings, vases and rugs, he said, “This is too slow.” He pointed his stick at a crowded corner of the shop. “How much for that bunch of stuff?” he demanded. The proprietor gave him a figure. “I'll close,” said Joe, “if you'll give fifteen off for cash.” The proprietor agreed. “Now we're done,” said Joe to me. “Let's go down town, and maybe I can pick up what I've dropped.”

You can imagine that interior. But don't picture it as notably worse than the interior of the average New York palace. It was, if anything, better than those houses, where people who deceive themselves about their lack of taste have taken great pains to prevent any one else from being deceived. One could hardly move in Joe's big rooms for the litter of gilded and tapestried furniture, and their crowded walls made the eyes ache.

The appearance of the man who opened the door for Anita and me suggested that our ring had roused him from a bed where he had deposited himself without bothering to take off his clothes. At the sound of my voice, Ball peered out of his private smoking-room, at the far end of the hall. He started forward; then, seeing how I was accompanied, stopped with mouth ajar. He had on a ragged smoking-jacket, a pair of shapeless old Romeo slippers, his ordinary business waistcoat and trousers. He was wearing neither tie nor collar, and a short, black pipe was between his fingers. We had evidently caught the household stripped of “lugs,” and sunk in the down-at-the-heel slovenliness which it called “comfort.” Joe was crimson with confusion, and was using his free hand to stroke, alternately, his shiny bald head and his heavy brown mustache. He got himself together sufficiently, after a few seconds, to disappear into his den. When he came out again, pipe and ragged jacket were gone, and he rushed for us in a gorgeous velvet jacket with dark red facings, and a showy pair of slippers.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Blacklock”—in his own home he always addressed every man as Mister, just as “Mrs. B.” always called him “Mister Ball,” and he called her “Missus Ball” before “company.” “Come right into the front parlor. Billy, turn on the electric lights.”

Anita had been standing with her head down. She now looked round with shame and terror in those expressive blue-gray eyes of hers; her delicate nostrils were quivering. I hastened to introduce Ball to her. Her impulse to fly passed; her lifelong training in doing the conventional thing asserted itself. She lowered her head again, murmured an inaudible acknowledgment of Joe's greeting.

“Your wife is at home?” said I. If one was at home in the evening, the other was also, and both were always there, unless they were at some theater—except on Sunday night, when they dined at Sherry's, because many fashionable people did it. They had no friends and few acquaintances. In their humbler and happy days they had had many friends, but had lost them when they moved away from Brooklyn and went to live, like uneasy, out-of-place visitors, in their grand house, pretending to be what they longed to be, longing to be what they pretended to be, and as discontented as they deserved.

“Oh, yes, Mrs. B.'s at home,” Joe answered. “I guess she and Alva were—about to go to bed.” Alva was their one child. She had been christened Malvina, after Joe's mother; but when the Balls “blossomed out” they renamed her Alva, which they somehow had got the impression was “smarter.”

At Joe's blundering confession that the females of the family were in no condition to receive, Anita said to me in a low voice: “Let us go.”

I pretended not to hear. “Rout 'em out,” said I to Joe. “Then, take my electric and bring the nearest parson. There's going to be a wedding—right here.” And I looked round the long salon, with everything draped for the summer departure. Joe whisked the cover off one chair, his man took off another. “I'll have the women-folks down in two minutes,” he cried. Then to the man: “Get a move on you, Billy. Stir 'em up in the kitchen. Do the best you can about supper—and put a lot of champagne on the ice. That's the main thing at a wedding.”

Anita had seated herself listlessly in one of the uncovered chairs. The wrap slipped back from her shoulders and—how proud I was of her! Joe gazed, took advantage of her not looking up to slap me on the back and to jerk his head in enthusiastic approval. Then he, too, disappeared.

A wait followed, during which we could hear, through the silence, excited undertones from the upper floors. The words were indistinct until Joe's heavy voice sent down to us an angry “No damn nonsense, I tell you. Allie's got to come, too. She's not such a fool as you think. Bad example—bosh!”

Anita started up. “Oh—please—please!” she cried. “Take me away—anywhere! This is dreadful.”

It was, indeed, dreadful. If I could have had my way at just that moment, it would have gone hard with “Mrs. B.” and “Allie”—and heavy-voiced Joe, too. But I hid my feelings.

“There's nowhere else to go,” said I, “except the brougham.”

She sank into her chair.

A few minutes more of silence, and there was a rustling on the stairs. She started up, trembling, looked round, as if seeking some way of escape or some place to hide. Joe was in the doorway holding aside one of the curtains. There entered in a beribboned and beflounced tea-gown, a pretty, if rather ordinary, woman of forty, with a petulant baby face. She was trying to look reserved and severe. She hardly glanced at me before fastening sharp, suspicious eyes on Anita.

“Mrs. Ball,” said I, “this is Miss Ellersly.”

“Miss Ellersly!” she exclaimed, her face changing. And she advanced and took both Anita's hands. “Mr. Ball is so stupid,” she went on, with that amusingly affected accent which is the “Sunday clothes” of speech.

“I didn't catch the name, my dear,” Joe stammered.

“Be off,” said I, aside, to him. “Get the nearest preacher, and hustle him here with his tools.”

I had one eye on Anita all the time, and I saw her gaze follow Joe as he hurried out; and her expression made my heart ache. I heard him saying in the hall, “Go in, Allie. It's O K”; heard the door slam, knew we should soon have some sort of minister with us.

“Allie” entered the drawing-room. I had not seen her in six years. I remembered her unpleasantly as a great, bony, florid child, unable to stand still or to sit still, or to keep her tongue still, full of aimless questions and giggles and silly remarks that she and her mother thought funny. I saw her now, grown into a handsome young woman, with enough beauty points for an honorable mention, if not for a prize—straight and strong and rounded, with a brow and a keen look out of the eyes which it seemed a pity should be wasted on a woman. Her mother's looks, her father's good sense, a personality apparently got from neither, but all her own, and unusual and interesting. No wonder the Balls felt toward her much as a pair of barn-swallows would feel if they were to hatch out an eaglet. These quiet, tame American parents that are always finding their suppressed selves, the bold, fantastic, unadmitted dreams of their youth startlingly confronting them in the flesh as their own children!

“From what Mr. Ball said,”—Mrs. Ball was gushing affectedly to Anita,—“I got an idea that—well, really, I didn't know *what* to think.”

Anita looked as if she were about to suffocate. Allie came to the rescue. “Not very complimentary to Mr. Blacklock, mother,” said she good-humoredly. Then to Anita, with a simple friendliness there was no resisting: “Wouldn't you like to come up to my room for a few minutes?”

“Oh, thank you!” responded Anita, after a quick, but thorough inspection of Alva's face, to make sure she was like her voice. I had not counted on this; I had been assuming that Anita would not be out of my sight until we were married. It was on the tip of my tongue to interfere when she looked at me—for permission to go!

“Don't keep her too long,” said I to Alva, and they were gone.

“You can't blame me—really you can't, Mr. Blacklock,” Mrs. Ball began to plead for herself, as soon as they were safely out of hearing. “After some things—mere hints, you understand—for I'm careful what I permit Mr. Ball to say before *me*. I think married people can not be too respectful of each other. I *never* tolerate *vulgarity*.”

“No doubt, Joe has made me out a very vulgar person,” said I, forgetting her lack of humor.

“Oh, not at all, not at all, Mr. Blacklock,” she protested, in a panic lest she had done her husband damage with me. “I understand, men will be men, though as a pure-minded woman, I'm sure I can't imagine why they should be.”

“How far off is the nearest church?” I cut in.

“Only two blocks—that is, the Methodist church,” she replied. “But I know Mr. Ball will bring an Episcopalian.”

“Why, I thought you were a devoted Presbyterian,” said I, recalling how in their Brooklyn days she used to insist on Joe's going twice every Sunday to sleep through long sermons.

She looked uncomfortable. “I was reared Presbyterian,” she explained confusedly, “but you know how it is in New York. And when we came to live here, we got out of the habit of church-going. And all Alva's little friends were Episcopalians. So I drifted toward that church. I find the service so satisfying—so—elegant. And—one sees there the people one sees socially.”

“How is your culture class?” I inquired, deliberately malicious, in my impatience and nervousness. “And do you still take conversation lessons?”

She was furiously annoyed. “Oh, those old jokes of Joe's,” she said, affecting disdainful amusement.

In fact, they were anything but jokes. On Mondays and Thursdays she used to attend a class for women who, like herself, wished to be “up-to-date on culture and all that sort of thing.” They hired a teacher to cram them with odds and ends about art and politics and the “latest literature, heavy and light.” On Tuesdays and Fridays she had an “indigent gentlewoman,” whatever that may be, come to her to teach her how to converse and otherwise conduct herself according to the “standards of polite society.”

Joe used to give imitations of those conversation lessons that raised roars of laughter round the poker table, the louder because so many of the other men had wives with the same ambitions and the same methods of attaining them.

Mrs. Ball came back to the subject of Anita.

“I am glad you are going to settle with such a charming girl. She comes of such a charming family. I have never happened to meet any of them. We are in the West Side set, you know, while they move in the East Side set, and New York is so large that one almost never meets any one outside one's own set.” This smooth snobbishness, said in the affected “society” tone, was as out of place in her as rouge and hair-dye in a wholesome, honest old grandmother.

I began to pace the floor. “Can it be,” I fretted aloud, “that Joe's racing round looking for an Episcopalian preacher, when there was a Methodist at hand?”

“I'm sure he wouldn't bring anything but a Church of England priest,” Mrs. Ball assured me loftily. “Why, Miss Ellersly wouldn't think she was married, if she hadn't a priest of her own church.”

My temper got the bit in its teeth. I stopped before her, and fixed her with an eye that must have had some fire in it. “I'm not marrying a fool, Mrs. Ball,” said I. “You mustn't judge her by her bringing-up—by her family. Children have a way of bringing themselves up, in spite of damn fool parents.”

She weakened so promptly that I was ashamed of myself. My only apology for getting out of patience with her is that I had seen her seldom in the last few years, had forgotten how matter-of-surface her affectation and snobbery were, and how little they interfered with her being a good mother and a good wife, up to the limits of her brain capacity.

“I'm sure, Mr. Blacklock,” she said plaintively, “I only wished to say what was pleasant and nice about your fiancée. I know she's a lovely girl. I've often admired her at the opera. She goes a great deal in Mrs. Langdon's box, and Mrs. Langdon and I are together on the board of managers of the Magdalene Home, and also on the board of the Hospital for Unfortunate Gentlefolk.” And so on, and on.

I walked up and down among those wrapped-up, ghostly chairs and tables and cabinets and statues many times before Joe arrived with the minister—and he was a Methodist, McCabe by name. You should have seen Mrs. Ball's look as he advanced his portly form and round face with its shaven upper lip into the drawing-room. She tried to be cordial, but she couldn't—her mind was on Anita, and the horror that would fill her when she discovered that she was to be married by a preacher of a sect unknown to fashionable circles.

“All I ask of you,” said I to him, “is that you cut it as short as possible. Miss Ellersly is tired and nervous.” This while we were shaking hands after Joe's introduction.

“You can count on me, sir,” said McCabe, giving my hand an extra shake before dropping it. “I've no doubt, from what my young neighbor here tells me, that your marriage is already made in your hearts and with all solemnity. The form is an incident—important, but only an incident.”

I liked that, and I liked his unaffected way of saying it. His voice had more of the homely, homelike, rural twang in it than I had heard in New York in many a day. I mentally doubled the fee I had intended to give him. And now Alva and she were coming down the stairway. I was amazed at sight of her. Her evening dress

had given place to a pretty blue street suit with a short skirt—white showing at her wrists, at her neck and through slashings in the coat over her bosom; and on her head was a hat to match. I looked at her feet—the slippers had been replaced by boots. “And they're just right for her,” said Alva, who was following my glance, “though I'm not so tall as she.”

But what amazed me most, and delighted me, was that she seemed to be almost in good spirits. It was evident she had formed with Joe's daughter one of those sudden friendships so great and so vivid that they rarely lived long after the passing of the heat of the emergency that bred them. Mrs. Ball saw it, also, and was straightway giddied into a sort of ecstasy. You can imagine the visions it conjured. I've no doubt she talked house on the east side of the park to Joe that very night, before she let him sleep. However, Anita's face was serious enough when we took our places before the minister, with his little, black-bound book open. And as he read in a voice that was genuinely impressive those words that no voice could make unimpressive, I saw her paleness blanch into pallor, saw the dusk creep round her eyes until they were like stars waning somberly before the gray face of dawn. When they closed and her head began to sway, I steadied her with my arm. And so we stood, I with my arm round her, she leaning lightly against my shoulder. Her answers were mere movements of the lips.

At the end, when I kissed her cheek, she said: “Is it over?”

“Yes,” McCabe answered—she was looking at him. “And I wish you all happiness, Mrs. Blacklock.”

At that name, her new name, she stared at him with great wondering eyes; then her form relaxed. I carried her to a chair. Joe came with a glass of champagne; she drank some of it, and it brought life back to her face, and some color. With a naturalness that deceived even me for the moment, she smiled up at Joe as she handed him the glass. “Is it bad luck,” she asked, “for me to be the first to drink my own health?” And she stood, looking tranquilly at every one—except me.

I took McCabe into the hall and paid him off.

When we came back, I said: “Now we must be going.”

“Oh, but surely you'll stay for supper!” cried Joe's wife.

“No,” replied I, in a tone that made it impossible to insist. “We appreciate your kindness, but we've imposed on it enough.” And I shook hands with her and with Allie and the minister, and, linking Joe's arm in mine, made for the door. I gave the necessary directions to my chauffeur while we were waiting for Anita to come down the steps. Joe's daughter was close beside her, and they kissed each other good-by, Alva on the verge of tears, Anita not suggesting any emotion of any sort. “To-morrow—sure,” Anita said to her. And she answered: “Yes, indeed—as soon as you telephone me.” And so we were off, a shower of rice rattling on the roof of the brougham—the slatternly man-servant had thrown it from the midst of the group of servants.

Neither of us spoke. I watched her face without seeming to do so, and by the light of occasional street lamps saw her studying me furtively. At last she said: “I wish to go to my uncle's now.”

“We are going home,” said I.

“But the house will be shut up,” said she, “and every one will be in bed. It's nearly midnight. Besides, they might not—” She came to a full stop.

“We are going—home,” I repeated. “To the Willoughby.”

She gave me a look that was meant to scorch—and it did. But I showed at the surface no sign of how I was wincing and shrinking.

She drew farther into her corner, and out of its darkness came, in a low voice: “How I *hate* you!” like the whisper of a bullet.

I kept silent until I had control of myself. Then, as if talking—of a matter that had been finally and amicably settled, I began: “The apartment isn't exactly ready for us, but Joe's just about now telephoning my man that we are coming, and telephoning your people to send your maid down there.”

“I wish to go to my uncle's,” she repeated.

“My wife will go with me,” said I quietly and gently. “I am considerate of *her*, not of her unwise impulses.”

A long pause, then from her, in icy calmness: “I am in your power just now. But I warn you that, if you do not take me to my uncle's, you will wish you had never seen me.”

“I've wished that many times already,” said I sadly. “I've wished it from the bottom of my heart this whole evening, when step by step fate has been forcing me on to do things that are even more hateful to me than to you. For they not only make me hate myself, but make you hate me, too.” I laid my hand on her arm and held it there, though she tried to draw away. “Anita,” I said, “I would do anything for you—live for you, die for you. But there's that something inside me—you've felt it; and when it says 'must,' I can't disobey—you know I can't. And, though you might break my heart, you could not break that will. It's as much my master as it is yours.”

“We shall see—to-morrow,” she said.

“Do not put me to the test,” I pleaded. Then I added what I knew to be true: “But you will not. You know it would take some one stronger than your uncle, stronger than your parents, to swerve me from what I believe right for you and for me.” I had no fear for “to-morrow.” The hour when she could defy me had passed.

A long, long silence, the electric speeding southward under the arching trees of the West Drive. I remember it was as we skirted the lower end of the Mall that she said evenly: “You have made me hate you so that it terrifies me. I am afraid of the consequences that must come to you and to me.”

“And well you may be,” I answered gently. “For you've seen enough of me to get at least a hint of what I would do, if goaded to it. Hate is terrible, Anita, but love can be more terrible.”

At the Willoughby she let me help her descend from the electric, waited until I sent it away, walked beside me into the building. My man, Sanders, had evidently been listening for the elevator; the door opened without my ringing, and there he was, bowing low. She acknowledged his welcome with that regard for “appearances” that training had made instinctive. In the center of my—our—drawing-room table was a mass of fresh white roses. “Where did you get 'em?” I asked him, in an aside.

“The elevator boy's brother, sir,” he replied, “works in the florist's shop just across the street, next to the church. He happened to be down stairs when I got your message, sir. So I was able to get a few flowers. I'm sorry, sir, I hadn't a little more time.”

“You've done noble,” said I, and I shook hands with him warmly.

Anita was greeting those flowers as if they were a friend suddenly appearing in a time of need. She turned now and beamed on Sanders. “Thank you,” she said; “thank you.” And Sanders was hers.

“Anything I can do—ma'am—sir?” asked Sanders.

“Nothing—except send my maid as soon as she comes,” she replied.

“I shan't need you,” said I.

“Mr. Monson is still here,” he said, lingering. “Shall I send him away, sir, or do you wish to see him?”

“I'll speak to him myself in a moment,” I answered.

When Sanders was gone, she seated herself and absently played with the buttons of her glove.

“Shall I bring Monson?” I asked. “You know, he's my—factotum.”

“*I* do not wish to see him,” she answered.

“You do not like him?”

After a brief hesitation she answered, “No.” Not for worlds would she just then have admitted, even to herself, that the cause of her dislike was her knowledge of his habit of tattling, with suitable embroideries, his lessons to me.

I restrained a strong impulse to ask her why, for instinct told me she had some especial reason that somehow concerned me. I said merely: “Then I shall get rid of him.”

“Not on my account,” she replied indifferently. “I care nothing about him one way or the other.”

“He goes at the end of his month,” said I.

She was now taking off her gloves. “Before your maid comes,” I went on, “let me explain about the apartment. This room and the two leading out of it are yours. My own suite is on the other side of our private hall there.”

She colored high, paled. I saw that she did not intend to speak.

I stood awkwardly, waiting for something further to come into my own head. “Good night,” said I finally, as if I were taking leave of a formal acquaintance at the end of a formal call.

She did not answer. I left the room, closing the door behind me. I paused an instant, heard the key click in the lock. And I burned in a hot flush of shame that she should be thinking thus basely of me—and with good cause. How could she know, how appreciate even if she had known? “You've had to cut deep,” said I to myself. “But the wounds'll heal, though it may take long—very long.” And I went on my way, not wholly downcast.

I joined Monson in my little smoking-room. “Congratulate you,” he began, with his nasty, supercilious grin, which of late had been getting on my nerves severely.

“Thanks,” I replied curtly, paying no attention to his outstretched hand. “I want you to put a notice of the marriage in to-morrow morning's *Herald*.”

“Give me the facts—clergyman's name—place, and so on,” said he.

“Unnecessary,” I answered. “Just our names and the date—that's all. You'd better step lively. It's late, and it'll be too late if you delay.”

With an irritating show of deliberation he lit a fresh cigarette before setting out. I heard her maid come. After about an hour I went into the hall—no light through the transoms of her suite. I returned to my own part of the flat and went to bed in the spare room to which Sanders had moved my personal belongings. That day which began in disaster—in what a blaze of triumph it had ended! Anita—my wife, and under my roof! I slept with good conscience. I had earned sleep.

## XXIII. “SHE HAS CHOSEN!”

Joe got to the office rather later than usual the next morning. They told him I was already there, but he wouldn't believe it until he had come into my private den and with his own eyes had seen me. “Well, I'm jiggered!” said he. “It seems to have made less impression on you than it did on us. My missus and the little un wouldn't let me go to bed till after two. They sat on and on, questioning and discussing.”

I laughed—partly because I knew that Joe, like most men, was as full of gossip and as eager for it as a convalescent old maid, and that, whoever might have been the first at his house to make the break for bed, he was the last to leave off talking. But the chief reason for my laugh was that, just before he came in on me, I was almost pinching myself to see whether I was dreaming it all, and he had made me feel how vividly true it was.

“Why don't you ease down, Blacklock?” he went on. “Everything's smooth. The business—at least, my end of it, and I suppose your end, too—was never better, never growing so fast. You could go off for a week or two, just as well as not. I don't know of a thing that can prevent you.”

And he honestly thought it, so little did I let him know about the larger enterprises of Blacklock and Company. I could have spoken a dozen words, and he would have been floundering like a caught fish in a basket. There are men—a very few—who work more swiftly and more surely when they know they're on the brink of ruin; but not Joe. One glimpse of our real National Coal account, and all my power over him couldn't

have kept him from showing the whole Street that Blacklock and Company was shaky. And whenever the Street begins to think a man is shaky, he must be strong indeed to escape the fate of the wolf that stumbles as it runs with the pack.

"No holiday at present, Joe," was my reply to his suggestion. "Perhaps the second week in July; but our marriage was so sudden that we haven't had the time to get ready for a trip."

"Yes—it *was* sudden, wasn't it?" said Joe, curiosity twitching his nose like a dog's at scent of a rabbit. "How *did* it happen?"

"Oh, I'll tell you sometime," replied I. "I must work now."

And work a-plenty there was. Before me rose a sheaf of clamorous telegrams from our out-of-town customers and our agents; and soon my anteroom was crowded with my local following, sore and shorn. I suppose a score or more of the habitual heavy plungers on my tips were ruined and hundreds of others were thousands and tens of thousands out of pocket. "Do you want me to talk to these people?" inquired Joe, with the kindly intention of giving me a chance to shift the unpleasant duty to him.

"Certainly not," said I. "When the place is jammed, let me know. I'll jack 'em up."

It made Joe uneasy for me even to talk of using my "language"—he would have crawled from the Battery to Harlem to keep me from using it on him. So he silently left me alone. My system of dealing face to face with the speculating and investing public had many great advantages over that of all the other big operators—their system of hiding behind cleverly-contrived screens and slaughtering the decoyed public without showing so much as the tip of a gun or nose that could be identified. But to my method there was a disadvantage that made men, who happened to have more hypocrisy and less nerve than I, shrink from it. When one of my tips miscarried, down upon me would swoop the bad losers in a body to give me a turbulent quarter of an hour.

Toward ten o'clock, my boy came in and said: "Mr. Ball thinks it's about time for you to see some of these people."

I went into the main room, where the tickers and blackboards were. As I approached through my outer office I could hear the noise the crowd was making—as they cursed me. If you want to rile the true inmost soul of the average human being, don't take his reputation or his wife; just cause him to lose money. There were among my speculating customers many with the even-tenored sporting instinct. These were bearing their losses with philosophy—none of them had swooped on me. Of the perhaps three hundred who had come to ease their anguish by tongue-lashing me, every one was a bad loser and was mad through and through—those who had lost a few hundred dollars were as infuriated as those whom my misleading tip had cost thousands and tens of thousands; those whom I had helped to win all they had in the world were more savage than those new to my following.

I took my stand in the doorway, a step up from the floor of the main room. I looked all round until I had met each pair of angry eyes. They say I can give my face an expression that is anything but agreeable; such talent as I have in that direction I exerted then. The instant I appeared a silence fell; but I waited until the last pair of claws drew in. Then I said, in the quiet tone the army officer uses when he tells the mob that the machine guns will open up in two minutes by the watch: "Gentlemen, in the effort to counteract my warning to the public, the Textile crowd rocketed the stock yesterday. Those who heeded my warning and sold got excellent prices. Those who did not should sell to-day. Not even the powerful interests behind Textile can long maintain yesterday's prices."

A wave of restlessness passed over the crowd. Many shifted their eyes from me and began to murmur.

I raised my voice slightly as I went on: "The speculators, the gamblers, are the only people who were hurt. Those who sold what they didn't have are paying for their folly. I have no sympathy for them. Blacklock and Company wishes none such in its following, and seizes every opportunity to weed them out. We are in business only for the bona fide investing public, and we are stronger with that public to-day than we have ever been."

Again I looked from coward to coward of that mob, changed from three hundred strong to three hundred weak. Then I bowed and withdrew, leaving them to mutter and disperse. I felt well content with the trend of events—I who wished to impress the public and the financiers that I had broken with speculation and speculators, could I have had a better than this unexpected opportunity sharply to define my new course? And as Textiles, unsupported, fell toward the close of the day, my content rose toward my normal high spirits. There was no whisper in the Street that I was in trouble; on the contrary, the idea was gaining ground that I had really long ceased to be a stock gambler and deserved a much better reputation than I had. Reputation is a matter of diplomacy rather than of desert. In all my career I was never less entitled to a good reputation than in those June days; yet the disastrous gambling follies, yes, and worse, I then committed, formed the secure foundation of my reputation for conservatism and square dealing. From that time dates the decline of the habit the newspapers had of speaking of me as "Black Matt" or "Matt" Blacklock. In them, and therefore in the public mind, I began to figure as "Mr. Blacklock, a recognized authority on finance," and such information as I gave out ceased to be described as "tips" and was respectfully referred to as "indications."

No doubt, my marriage had something to do with this. Probably one couldn't borrow any great amount of money in New York directly and solely on the strength of a fashionable marriage; but, so all-pervading is the snobbishness there, one can get, by making a fashionable marriage, any quantity of that deferential respect from rich people which is, in some circumstances, easily convertible into cash and credit.

I searched with a good deal of anxiety, as you may imagine, the early editions of the afternoon papers. The first article my eye chanced upon was a mere wordy elaboration of the brief and vague announcement Monson had put in the *Herald*. Later came an interview with old Ellersly.

"Not at all mysterious," he had said to the reporters. "Mr. Blacklock found he would have to go abroad on business soon—he didn't know just when. On the spur of the moment they decided to marry." A good enough story, and I confirmed it when I admitted the reporters. I read their estimates of my fortune and of Anita's with rather bitter amusement—she whose father was living from hand to mouth; I who could not have

emerged from a forced settlement with enough to enable me to keep a trap. Still, when one is rich, the reputation of being rich is heavily expensive; but when one is poor the reputation of being rich can be made a wealth-giving asset.

Even as I was reading these fables of my millions, there lay on the desk before me a statement of the exact posture of my affairs—a memorandum made by myself for my own eyes, and to be burned as soon as I mastered it. On the face of the figures the balance against me was appalling. My chief asset, indeed my only asset that measured up toward my debts, was my Coal stocks, those bought and those contracted for; and, while their par value far exceeded my liabilities, they had to appear in my memorandum at their actual market value on that day. I looked at the calendar—seventeen days until the reorganization scheme would be announced, only seventeen days!

Less than three business weeks, and I should be out of the storm and sailing safer and smoother seas than I had ever known. “To indulge in vague *hopes* is bad,” thought I, “but not to indulge in *a* hope, especially when one has only it between him and the pit.” And I proceeded to plan on the not unwarranted assumption that my Coal hope was a present reality. Indeed, what alternative had I? To put it among the future's uncertainties was to put myself among the utterly ruined. Using as collateral the Coal stocks I had bought outright, I borrowed more money, and with it went still deeper into the Coal venture. Everything or nothing!—since the chances in my favor were a thousand, to practically none against me. Everything or nothing!—since only by staking everything could I possibly save anything at all.

The morality of these and many of my other doings in those days will no doubt be condemned. By no one more severely than by myself—now that the necessities which then compelled me have passed. There is no subject on which men talk and think, more humbug than on that subject of morality. As a matter of fact, except in those personal relations that are governed by the affections, what is morality but the mandate of policy, and what is policy but the mandate of necessity? My criticism of Roebuck and the other “high financiers” is not upon their morality, but upon their policy, which is short-sighted and stupid and base. The moral difference between me and them is that, while I merely assert and maintain my right to live, they deny the right of any but themselves to live. I say I criticize them; but that does not mean that I sympathize with the public at large in its complainings against them. The public, its stupidity and cupidity, creates the conditions that breed and foster these men. A rotten cheese reviling the maggots it has bred!

In those very hours when I was obeying the imperative law of self-preservation, was clutching at every log that floated by me regardless of whether it was my property or not so long as it would help me keep my head above water—what was going on all round me? In every office of the down town district—merchant, banker, broker, lawyer, man of commerce or finance—was not every busy brain plotting, not self-preservation but pillage and sack—plotting to increase the cost of living for the masses of men by slipping a little tax here and a little tax there on to everything by which men live? All along the line between the farm or mine or shop and the market, at every one of the toll-gates for the collection of *just* charges, these big financiers, backed up by the big lawyers and the rascally public officials, had an agent in charge to collect on each passing article more than was honestly due. A thousand subtle ways of levying, all combining to pour in upon the few the torrents of unjust wealth. I laugh when I read of laboring men striking for higher wages. Poor, ignorant fools—they almost deserve their fate. They had better be concerning themselves with a huge, universal strike at the polls for lower prices. What will it avail to get higher wages, as long as the masters control and recoup on the prices of all the things for which those wages must be spent?

I lived in Wall Street, in its atmosphere of the practical morality of “finance.” On every side swindling operations, great and small; operations regarded as right through long-established custom; dishonest or doubtful operations on the way to becoming established by custom as “respectable.” No man's title to anything conceded unless he had the brains to defend it. There was a time when it would have been regarded as wildly preposterous and viciously immoral to deny property rights in human beings. There may come a time—who knows?—when “high finance's” denial of a moral right to property of any kind may cease to be regarded as wicked; may become a generally accepted canon, as our Socialist friends predict. However, I attempt no excuses for myself; I need them no more than a judge in the Dark Ages needed to apologize for ordering a witch to the stake. I could no more have done differently than a fish could breathe on land or a man under water. I did as all the others did—and I had the justification of necessity. Right of might being the prevailing code, when men set upon me with pistols, I met them with pistols, not with the discarded and antiquated weapons of sermon and prayer and the law.

And I thought extremely well of myself and of my pistols that June afternoon, as I was hurrying up town the moment the day's settlement on 'Change was finished. I had sent out my daily letter to investors, and its tone of confidence was genuine—I knew that hundreds of customers of a better class would soon be flocking in to take the places of those I had been compelled to teach a lesson in the vicissitudes of gambling. With a light heart and the physical feeling of a football player in training, I sped toward home.

Home! For the first time since I was a squat little slip of a shaver the word had a personal meaning for me. Perhaps, if the only other home of mine had been less uninviting, I should not have looked forward with such high beating of the heart to that cold home Anita was making for me. No, I withdraw that. It is fellows like me, to whom kindly looks and unsought attentions are as unfamiliar as flowers to the Arctic—it is men like me that appreciate and treasure and warm up under the faintest show or shadowy suggestion of the sunshine of sentiment. I'd be a little ashamed to say how much money I handed out to beggars and street gamins that day. I had a home to go to!

As my electric drew up at the Willoughby, a carriage backed to make room for it. I recognized the horses and the coachman and the crest.

“How long has Mrs. Ellersly been with my wife?” I asked the elevator boy, as he was taking me up.

“About half an hour, sir,” he answered. “But Mr. Ellersly—I took up his card before lunch, and he's still there.”

Instead of using my key, I rang the bell, and when Sanders opened, I said: “Is Mrs. Blacklock in?” in a voice loud enough to penetrate to the drawing-room.

As I had hoped, Anita appeared. Her dress told me that her trunks had come—she had sent for her trunks! “Mother and father are here,” said she, without looking at me.

I followed her into the drawing-room and, for the benefit of the servants, Mr. and Mrs. Ellersly and I greeted each other courteously, though Mrs. Ellersly's eyes and mine met in a glance like the flash of steel on steel. “We were just going,” said she, and then I felt that I had arrived in the midst of a tempest of uncommon fury.

“You must stop and make *me* a visit,” protested I, with elaborate politeness. To myself I was assuming that they had come to “make up and be friends”—and resume their places at the trough.

She was moving toward the door, the old man in her wake. Neither of them offered to shake hands with me; neither made pretense of saying good-by to Anita, standing by the window like a pillar of ice. I had closed the drawing-room door behind me, as I entered. I was about to open it for them when I was restrained by what I saw working in the old woman's face. She had set her will on escaping from my loathed presence without a “scene;” but her rage at having been outgeneraled was too fractious for her will.

“You scoundrel!” she hissed, her whole body shaking and her carefully-cultivated appearance of the gracious evening of youth swallowed up in a black cyclone of hate. “You gutter-plant! God will punish you for the shame you have brought upon us!”

I opened the door and bowed, without a word, without even the desire to return insult for insult—had not Anita evidently again and finally rejected them and chosen me? As they passed into the private hall I rang for Sanders to come and let them out. When I turned back into the drawing-room, Anita was seated, was reading a book. I waited until I saw she was not going to speak. Then I said: “What time will you have dinner?” But my face must have been expressing some of the joy and gratitude that filled me. “She has chosen!” I was saying to myself over and over.

“Whenever you usually have it,” she replied, without looking up.

“At seven o'clock, then. You had better tell Sanders.”

I rang for him and went into my little smoking-room. She had resisted her parents' final appeal to her to return to them. She had cast in her lot with me. “The rest can be left to time,” said I to myself. And, reviewing all that had happened, I let a wild hope send tenacious roots deep into me. How often ignorance is a blessing; how often knowledge would make the step falter and the heart quail!

## XXIV. BLACKLOCK ATTENDS FAMILY PRAYERS

During dinner I bore the whole burden of conversation—though burden I did not find it. Like most close-mouthed men, I am extremely talkative. Silence sets people to wondering and prying; he hides his secrets best who hides them at the bottom of a river of words. If my spirits are high, I often talk aloud to myself when there is no one convenient. And how could my spirits be anything but high, with her sitting there opposite me, mine, mine for better or for worse, through good and evil report—my wife!

She was only formally responsive, reluctant and brief in answers, volunteering nothing. The servants waiting on us no doubt laid her manner to shyness; I understood it, or thought I did—but I was not troubled. It is as natural for me to hope as to breathe; and with my knowledge of character, how could I take seriously the moods and impulses of one whom I regarded as a childlike girl, trained to false pride and false ideals? “She has chosen to stay with me,” said I to myself. “Actions count, not words or manner. A few days or weeks, and she will be herself, and mine.” And I went gaily on with my efforts to interest her, to make her smile and forget the role she had commanded herself to play. Nor was I wholly unsuccessful. Again and again I thought I saw a gleam of interest in her eyes or the beginnings of a smile about that sweet mouth of hers. I was careful not to overdo my part.

As soon as we finished dessert I said: “You loathe cigar smoke, so I'll hide myself in my den. Sanders will bring you the cigarettes.” I had myself telephoned for a supply of her kind early in the day.

She made a polite protest for the benefit of the servants; but I was firm, and left her free to think things over alone in the drawing-room—“your sitting-room,” I called it, I had not finished a small cigar when there came a timid knock at my door. I threw away the cigar and opened. “I thought it was you,” said I. “I'm familiar with the knocks of all the others. And this was new—like a summer wind tapping with a flower for admission at a closed window.” And I laughed with a little raillery, and she smiled, colored, tried to seem cold and hostile again.

“Shall I go with you to your sitting-room?” I went on. “Perhaps the cigar smoke here—”

“No, no,” she interrupted; “I don't really mind cigars—and the windows are wide open. Besides, I came for only a moment—just to say—”

As she cast about for words to carry her on, I drew up a chair for her. She looked at it uncertainly, seated herself. “When mama was here—this afternoon,” she went on, “she was urging me to—to do what she wished. And after she had used several arguments, she said something I—I've been thinking it over, and it seemed I ought in fairness to tell you.”

I waited.

“She said: 'In a few days more he'—that meant you—'he will be ruined. He imagines the worst is over for him, when in fact they've only begun.'”

“They!” I repeated. “Who are 'they'? The Langdons?”

“I think so,” she replied with an effort. “She did not say—I've told you her exact words—as far as I can.”

“Well,” said I, “and why didn't you go?”

She pressed her lips firmly together. Finally, with a straight look into my eyes, she replied: “I shall not discuss that. You probably misunderstand, but that is your own affair.”

“You believed what she said about me, of course,” said I.

“I neither believed nor disbelieved,” she answered indifferently, as she rose to go. “It does not interest me.”

“Come here,” said I.

I waited until she reluctantly joined me at the window. I pointed to the steeple of the church across the way. “You could as easily throw down that steeple by pushing against it with your bare hands,” I said to her, “as 'they,' whoever they are, could put me down. They might take away my money. But if they did, they would only be giving me a lesson that would teach me how more easily to get it back. I am not a bundle of stock certificates or a bag of money. I am—here,” and I tapped my forehead.

She forced a faint, scornful smile. She did not wish me to see her belief of what I said.

“You may think that is vanity,” I went on. “But you will learn, sooner or later, the difference between boasting and simple statement of fact. You will learn that I do not boast. What I said is no more a boast than for a man with legs to say, 'I can walk.' Because you have known only legless men, you exaggerate the difficulty of walking. It's as easy for me to make money as it is for some people to spend it.”

It is hardly necessary for me to say I was not insinuating anything against her people. But she was just then supersensitive on the subject, though I did not suspect it. She flushed hotly. “You will not have any cause to sneer at my people on that account hereafter,” she said. “I settled *that* to-day.”

“I was not sneering at them,” I protested. “I wasn't even thinking of them. And—you must know that it's a favor to me for anybody to ask me to do anything that will please you—Anita!”

She made a gesture of impatience. “I see I'd better tell you why I did not go with them to-day. I insisted that they give back all they have taken from you. And when they refused, I refused to go.”

“I don't care why you refused, or imagined you refused,” said I. “I am content with the fact that you are here.”

“But you misunderstand it,” she answered coldly.

“I don't understand it, I don't misunderstand it,” was my reply. “I accept it.”

She turned away from the window, drifted out of the room—you, who love or at least have loved, can imagine how it made me feel to see *Her* moving about in those rooms of mine.

While the surface of my mind was taken up with her, I must have been thinking, underneath, of the warning she had brought; for, perhaps half or three-quarters of an hour after she left, I was suddenly whirled out of my reverie at the window by a thought like a pistol thrust into my face. “What if 'they' should include Roebuck!” And just as a man begins to defend himself from a sudden danger before he clearly sees what the danger is, so I began to act before I even questioned whether my suspicion was plausible or absurd. I went into the hall, rang the bell, slipped a light-weight coat over my evening dress and put on a hat. When Sanders appeared, I said: “I'm going out for a few minutes—perhaps an hour—if any one should ask.” A moment later I was in a hansom and on the way to Roebuck's.

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When Roebuck lived near Chicago, he had a huge house, a sort of crude palace such as so many of our millionaires built for themselves in the first excitement of their new wealth—a house with porches and balconies and towers and minarets and all sorts of gingerbread effects to compel the eye of the passer-by. But when he became enormously rich, so rich that his name was one of the synonyms for wealth, so rich that people said “rich as Roebuck” where they used to say “rich as Croesus,” he cut away every kind of ostentation, and avoided attention.

He took advantage of his having to remove to New York where his vast interests centered; he bought a small and commonplace and, for a rich man, even mean house in East Fifty-Second Street—one of a row, and an almost dingy looking row at that. There he had an establishment a man with one-fiftieth of his fortune would have felt like apologizing for. To his few intimates who were intimate enough to question him about his come-down from his Chicago splendors he explained that he was seeing with clearer eyes his responsibilities as a steward of the Lord, that luxury was sinful, that no man had a right to waste the Lord's money.

The general theory about him was that advancing years had developed his natural closeness into the stingiest avariciousness. But my notion is he was impelled by the fear of exciting envy, by the fear of assassination—the fear that made his eyes roam restlessly whenever strangers were near him, and so dried up the inside of his body that his dry tongue was constantly sliding along his dry lips. I have seen a convict stand in the door of his cell and, though it was impossible that any one could be behind him, look nervously over his shoulder every moment or so. Roebuck had the same trick—only his dread, I suspect, was not the officers of the law, even of the divine law, but the many, many victims of his merciless execution of “the Lord's will.”

This state of mind is not uncommon among the very rich men, especially those who have come up from poverty. Those who have inherited great wealth, and have always been used to it, get into the habit of looking upon the mass of mankind as inferiors, and move about with no greater sense of peril than a man has in venturing among a lot of dogs with tails wagging. But those who were born poor and have risen under the stimulus of a furious envy of the comfortable and the rich, fancy that everybody who isn't rich has the same savage hunger that they themselves had, and is ready to use similar desperate methods in gratifying it. Thus, where the rich of the Langdon sort are supercilious, the rich of the Roebuck sort are nervous and often become morbid on the subject of assassination as they grow richer and richer.

The door of Roebuck's house was opened for me by a maid—a man-servant would have been a “sinful” luxury, a man-servant might be the hireling of plotters against his life. I may add that she looked the cheap maid-of-all-work, and her manners were of the free and fresh sort that indicates a feeling that as high, or higher, wages, and less to do could be got elsewhere.

“I don't think you can see Mr. Roebuck,” she said.

“Take my card to him,” I ordered, “and I'll wait in the parlor.”

“Parlor's in use,” she retorted with a sarcastic grin, which I was soon to understand.

So I stood by the old-fashioned coat and hat rack while she went in at the hall door of the back parlor. Soon Roebuck himself came out, his glasses on his nose, a family Bible under his arm. “Glad to see you, Matthew,” said he with saintly kindliness, giving me a friendly hand. “We are just about to offer up our evening prayer. Come right in.”

I followed him into the back parlor. Both it and the front parlor were lighted; in a sort of circle extending into both rooms were all the Roebucks and the four servants. “This is my friend, Matthew Blacklock,” said he, and the Roebucks in the circle gravely bowed. He drew up a chair for me, and we seated ourselves. Amid a solemn hush, he read a chapter from the big Bible spread out upon his lean lap. My glance wandered from face to face of the Roebucks, as plainly dressed as were their servants. I was able to look freely, mine being the only eyes not bent upon the floor.

It was the first time in my life that I had witnessed family prayers. When I was a boy at home, my mother had taken literally the Scriptural injunction to pray in secret—in a closet, I think the passage of the Bible said. Many times each day she used to retire to a closet under the stairway and spend from one to twenty minutes shut in there. But we had no family prayers. I was therefore deeply interested in what was going on in those countrified parlors of one of the richest and most powerful men in the world—and this right in the heart of that district of New York where palaces stand in rows and in blocks, and where such few churches as there are resemble social clubs for snubbing climbers and patronizing the poor.

It was astonishing how much every Roebuck in that circle, even the old lady, looked like Roebuck himself—the same smug piety, the same underfed appearance that, by the way, more often indicates a starved soul than a starved body. One difference—where his face had the look of power that compels respect and, to the shrewd, reveals relentless strength relentlessly used, the expressions of the others were simply small and mean and frost-nipped. And that is the rule—the second generation of a plutocrat inherits, with his money, the meanness that enabled him to hoard it, but not the scope that enabled him to make it.

So absorbed was I in the study of the influence of his terrible master-character upon those closest to it, that I started when he said: “Let us pray.” I followed the example of the others, and knelt. The audible prayer was offered up by his oldest daughter, Mrs. Wheeler, a widow. Roebuck punctuated each paragraph in her series of petitions with a loudly-whispered amen. When she prayed for “the stranger whom Thou has led seemingly by chance into our little circle,” he whispered the amen more fervently and repeated it. And well he might, the old robber and assassin by proxy! The prayer ended and, us on our feet, the servants withdrew; then, awkwardly, all the family except Roebuck. That is, they closed the doors between the two rooms and left him and me alone in the front parlor.

“I shall not detain you long, Mr. Roebuck,” said I. “A report reached me this evening that sent me to you at once.”

“If possible, Matthew,” said he, and he could not hide his uneasiness, “put off business until to-morrow. My mind—yours, too, I trust—is not in the frame for that kind of thoughts now.”

“Is the Coal organization to be announced the first of July?” I demanded. It has always been, and always shall be, my method to fight in the open. This, not from principle, but from expediency. Some men fight best in the brush; I don't. So I always begin battle by shelling the woods.

“No,” he said, amazing me by his instant frankness. “The announcement has been postponed.”

Why did he not lie to me? Why did he not put me off the scent, as he might easily have done, with some shrewd evasion? I suspected I owed it to my luck in catching him at family prayers. For I know that the general impression of him is erroneous; he is not merely a hypocrite before the world, but also a hypocrite before himself. A more profoundly, piously conscientious man never lived. Never was there a truer epitaph than the one implied in the sentence carved over his niche in the magnificent mausoleum he built: “Fear naught but the Lord.”

“When will the reorganization be announced?” I asked.

“I can not say,” he answered. “Some difficulties—chiefly labor difficulties—have arisen. Until they are settled, nothing can be done. Come to me to-morrow, and we'll talk about it.”

“That is all I wished to know,” said I, with a friendly, easy smile. “Good night.”

It was his turn to be astonished—and he showed it, where I had given not a sign. “What was the report you heard?” he asked, to detain me.

“That you and Mowbray Langdon had conspired to ruin me,” said I, laughing.

He echoed my laugh rather hollowly. “It was hardly necessary for you to come to me about such a—a statement.”

“Hardly,” I answered dryly. Hardly, indeed! For I was seeing now all that I had been hiding from myself since I became infatuated with Anita and made marrying her my only real business in life.

We faced each other, each measuring the other. And as his glance quailed before mine, I turned away to conceal my exultation. In a comparison of resources this man who had plotted to crush me was to me as giant to midget. But I had the joy of realizing that man to man, I was the stronger. He had craft, but I had daring. His vast wealth aggravated his natural cowardice—crafty men are invariably cowards, and their audacities under the compulsion of their ravenous greed are like a starving jackal's dashes into danger for food. My wealth belonged to me, not I to it; and, stripped of it, I would be like the prize-fighter stripped for the fight. Finally, he was old, I young. And there was the chief reason for his quailing. He knew that he must die long before me, that my turn must come, that I could dance upon his grave.

# XXV. “MY WIFE MUST!”

As I drove away, I was proud of myself. I had listened to my death sentence with a face so smiling that he must almost have believed me unconscious; and also, it had not even entered my head, as I listened, to beg for mercy. Not that there would have been the least use in begging; as well try to pray a statue into life, as try to soften that set will and purpose. Still, many a man would have weakened—and I had not weakened. But when I was once more in my apartment—in our apartment—perhaps I did show that there was a weak streak through me. I fought against the impulse to see her once more that night; but I fought in vain. I knocked at the door of her sitting-room—a timid knock, for me. No answer. I knocked again, more loudly—then a third time, still more loudly. The door opened and she stood there, like one of the angels that guarded the gates of Eden after the fall. Only, instead of a flaming sword, hers was of ice. She was in a dressing-gown or tea-gown, white and clinging and full of intoxicating hints and glimpses of all the beauties of her figure. Her face softened as she continued to look at me, and I entered.

“No—please don't turn on any more lights,” I said, as she moved toward the electric buttons. “I just came in to—to see if I could do anything for you.” In fact, I had come, longing for her to do something for me, to show in look or tone or act some sympathy for me in my loneliness and trouble.

“No, thank you,” she said. Her voice seemed that of a stranger who wished to remain a stranger. And she was evidently waiting for me to go. You will see what a mood I was in when I say I felt as I had not since I, a very small boy indeed, ran away from home; I came back through the chilly night to take one last glimpse of the family that would soon be realizing how foolishly and wickedly unappreciative they had been of such a treasure as I; and when I saw them sitting about the big fire in the lamp-light, heartlessly comfortable and unconcerned, it was all I could do to keep back the tears of strong self-pity—and I never saw them again.

“I've seen Roebuck,” said I to Anita, because I must say something, if I was to stay on.

“Roebuck?” she inquired. Her tone reminded me that his name conveyed nothing to her.

“He and I are in an enterprise together,” I explained. “He is the one man who could seriously cripple me.”

“Oh,” she said, and her indifference, forced though I thought it, wounded.

“Well,” said I, “your mother was right.”

She turned full toward me, and even in the dimness I saw her quick sympathy—an impulsive flash instantly gone. But it had been there!

“I came in here,” I went on, “to say that—Anita, it doesn't in the least matter. No one in this world, no one and nothing, could hurt me except through you. So long as I have *you*, they—the rest—all of them together—can't touch me.”

We were both silent for several minutes. Then she said, and her voice was like the smooth surface of the river where the boiling rapids run deep: “But you *haven't* me—and never *shall* have. I've told you that. I warned you long ago. No doubt you will pretend, and people will say, that I left you because you lost your money. But it won't be so.”

I was beside her instantly, was looking into her face. “What do you mean?” I asked, and I did not speak gently.

She gazed at me without flinching. “And I suppose,” she said satirically, “you wonder why I—why you are repellent to me. Haven't you learned that, though I may have been made into a moral coward, I'm not a physical coward? Don't bully and threaten. It's useless.”

I put my hand strongly on her shoulder—taunts and jeers do not turn me aside. “What did you mean?” I repeated.

“Take your hand off me,” she commanded.

“What did you mean?” I repeated sternly. “Don't be afraid to answer.”

She was very young—so the taunt stung her. “I was about to tell you,” said she, “when you began to make it impossible.”

I took advantage of this to extricate myself from the awkward position in which she had put me—I took my hand from her shoulder.

“I am going to leave you,” she announced.

“You forget that you are my wife,” said I.

“I am not your wife,” was her answer, and if she had not looked so childlike, there in the moonlight all in white, I could not have held myself in check, so insolent was the tone and so helpless of ever being able to win her did she make me feel.

“You are my wife and you will stay here with me,” I reiterated, my brain on fire.

“I am my own, and I shall go where I please, and do what I please,” was her contemptuous retort. “Why won't you be reasonable? Why won't you see how utterly unsuited we are? I don't ask you to be a gentleman—but just a man, and be ashamed even to wish to detain a woman against her will.”

I drew up a chair so close to her that to retreat, she was forced to sit in the broad window-seat. Then I seated myself. “By all means, let us be reasonable,” said I. “Now, let me explain my position. I have heard you and your friends discussing the views of marriage you've just been expressing. Their views may be right, may be more civilized, more 'advanced' than mine. No matter. They are not mine. I hold by the old standards—and you are my wife—mine. Do you understand?” All this as tranquilly as if we were discussing fair weather. “And you will live up to the obligation which the marriage service has put upon you.”

She might have been a marble statue pedestaled in that window seat.

“You married me of your own free will—for you could have protested to the preacher and he would have sustained you. You tacitly put certain conditions on our marriage. I assented to them. I have respected them. I shall continue to respect them. But—when you married me, you didn't marry a dawdling dude chattering 'advanced ideas' with his head full of libertinism. You married a man. And that man is your husband.”

I waited, but she made no comment—not even by gesture or movement. She simply sat, her hands interlaced in her lap, her eyes straight upon mine.

“You say let us be reasonable,” I went on. “Well, let us be reasonable. There may come a time when woman can be free and independent, but that time is a long way off yet. The world is organized on the basis of every woman's having a protector—of every decent woman's having a husband, unless she remains in the home of some of her blood-relations. There may be women strong enough to set the world at defiance. But you are not one of them—and you know it. You have shown it to yourself again and again in the last forty-eight hours. Your bringing-up has kept you a child in real knowledge of real life, as distinguished from the life in that fashionable hothouse. If you tried to assert your so-called independence, you would be the easy prey of a scoundrel or scoundrels. When I, who have lived in the thick of the fight all my life, who have learned by many a surprise and defeat never to sleep except with the sword and gun in hand, and one eye open—when I have been trapped as Roebuck and Langdon have just trapped me—what chance would a woman like you have?”

She did not answer or change expression.

“Is what I say reasonable or unreasonable?” I asked gently.

“Reasonable—from *your* standpoint,” she said.

She gazed out into the moonlight, up into the sky. And at the look in her face, the primeval savage in me strained to close round that slender white throat of hers and crush and crush until it had killed in her the thought of that other man which was transforming her from marble to flesh that glowed and blood that surged. I pushed back my chair with a sudden noise; by the way she trembled I gaged how tense her nerves must be. I rose and, in a fairly calm tone, said: “We understand each other?”

“Yes,” she answered. “As before.”

I ignored this. “Think it over, Anita,” I urged—she seemed to me so like a sweet, spoiled child again. I longed to go straight at her about that other man. I stood for a moment with Tom Langdon's name on my lips, but I could not trust myself. I went away to my own rooms.

I thrust thoughts of her from my mind. I spent the night gnawing upon the ropes with which Mowbray Langdon and Roebuck had bound me, hand and foot. I now saw they were ropes of steel—and it had long been broad day before I found that weak strand which is in every rope of human make.

## XXVI. THE WEAK STRAND

No sane creature, not even a sane bulldog, will fight simply from love of fighting. When a man is attacked, he may be sure he has excited either fear or cupidity, or both. As far as I could see, it was absurd that cupidity was inciting Langdon and Roebuck against me. I hadn't enough to tempt them. Thus, I was forced to conclude that I must possess a strength of which I was unaware, and which stirred even Roebuck's fears. But what could it be?

Besides Langdon and Roebuck and me there were six principals in the proposed Coal combine, three of them richer and more influential in finance than even Langdon, all of them except possibly Dykeman, the lawyer or navigating officer of the combine, more formidable figures than I. Yet none of these men was being assailed. “Why am I singled out?” I asked myself, and I felt that if I could answer, I should find I had the means wholly or partly to defeat them. But I could not explain to my satisfaction even Langdon's activities against me. I felt that Anita was somehow, in part at least, the cause; but, even so, how had he succeeded in convincing Roebuck that I must be clipped and plucked into a groundling?

“It must have something to do with the Manasquale mines,” I decided. “I thought I had given over my control of them, but somehow I must still have a control that makes me too powerful for Roebuck to be at ease so long as I am afoot and armed.” And I resolved to take my lawyers and search the whole Manasquale transaction—to explore it from attic to underneath the cellar flooring. “We'll go through it,” said I, “like ferrets through a ship's hold.”

As I was finishing breakfast, Anita came in. She had evidently slept well, and I regarded that as ominous. At her age, a crisis means little sleep until a decision has been reached. I rose, but her manner warned me not to advance and try to shake hands with her.

“I have asked Alva to stop with me here for a few days,” she said formally.

“Alva!” said I, much surprised. She had not asked one of her own friends; she had asked a girl she had met less than two days before, and that girl my partner's daughter.

“She was here yesterday morning,” Anita explained. And I now wondered how much Alva there was in Anita's firm stand against her parents.

“Why don't you take her down to our place on Long Island?” said I, most carefully concealing my delight—for Alva near her meant a friend of mine and an advocate and example of real womanhood near her. “Everything's ready for you there, and I'm going to be busy the next few days—busy day and night.”

She reflected. “Very well,” she assented presently. And she gave me a puzzled glance she thought I did not see—as if she were wondering whether the enemy was not hiding new and deeper guile under an apparently harmless suggestion.

“Then I'll not see you again for several days,” said I, most businesslike. “If you want anything, there will be Monson out at the stables where he can't annoy you. Or you can get me on the 'long distance.' Good-by. Good luck.”

And I nodded carelessly and friendlily to her, and went away, enjoying the pleasure of having startled her into visible astonishment. “There's a better game than icy hostility, you very young, young lady,” said I to

myself, “and that game is friendly indifference.”

Alva would be with her. So she was secure for the present and my mind was free for “finance.”

At that time the two most powerful men in finance were Galloway and Roebuck. In Spain I once saw a fight between a bull and a tiger—or, rather the beginning of a fight. They were released into a huge iron cage. After circling it several times in the same direction, searching for a way out, they came face to face. The bull tossed the tiger; the tiger clawed the bull. The bull roared; the tiger screamed. Each retreated to his own side of the cage. The bull pawed and snorted as if he could hardly wait to get at the tiger; the tiger crouched and quivered and glared murderously, as if he were going instantly to spring upon the bull. But the bull did not rush, neither did the tiger spring. That was the Roebuck-Galloway situation.

How to bait Tiger Galloway to attack Bull Roebuck—that was the problem I must solve, and solve straightway. If I could bring about war between the giants, spreading confusion over the whole field of finance and filling all men with dread and fear, there was a chance, a bare chance, that in the confusion I might bear off part of my fortune. Certainly, conditions would result in which I could more easily get myself intrenched again; then, too, there would be a by no means small satisfaction in seeing Roebuck clawed and bitten in punishment for having plotted against me.

Mutual fear had kept these two at peace for five years, and most considerate and polite about each other's “rights.” But while our country's industrial territory is vast, the interests of the few great controllers who determine wages and prices for all are equally vast, and each plutocrat is tormented incessantly by jealousy and suspicion; not a day passes without conflicts of interest that adroit diplomacy could turn into ferocious warfare. And in this matter of monopolizing the coal, despite Roebuck's earnest assurances to Galloway that the combine was purely defensive, and was really concerned only with the labor question, Galloway, a great manufacturer, or, rather, a huge levier of the taxes of dividends and interest upon manufacturing enterprises, could not but be uneasy.

Before I rose that morning I had a tentative plan for stirring him to action. I was elaborating it on the way down town in my electric. It shows how badly Anita was crippling my brain, that not until I was almost at my office did it occur to me: “That was a tremendous luxury Roebuck indulged his conscience in last night. It isn't like him to forewarn a man, even when he's sure he can't escape. Though his prayers were hot in his mouth, still, it's strange he didn't try to fool me. In fact, it's suspicious. In fact—”

Suspicious? The instant the idea was fairly before my mind, I knew I had let his canting fool me once more. I entered my offices, feeling that the blow had already fallen; and I was surprised, but not relieved, when I found everything calm. “But fall it will within an hour or so—before I can move to avert it,” said I to myself.

And fall it did. At eleven o'clock, just as I was setting out to make my first move toward heating old Galloway's heels for the war-path, Joe came in with the news: “A general lockout's declared in the coal regions. The operators have stolen a march on the men who, so they allege, were secretly getting ready to strike. By night every coal road will be tied up and every mine shut down.”

Joe knew our coal interests were heavy, but he did not dream his news meant that before the day was over we would be bankrupt and not able to pay fifteen cents on the dollar. However, he knew enough to throw him into a fever of fright. He watched my calmness with terror. “Coal stocks are dropping like a thermometer in a cold wave,” he said, like a fireman at a sleeper in a burning house.

“Naturally,” said I, unruffled, apparently. “What can we do about it?”

“We must do something!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, we must,” I admitted. “For instance, we must keep cool, especially when two or three dozen people are watching us. Also, you must attend to your usual routine.”

“What are you going to do?” he cried. “For God's sake, Matt, don't keep me in suspense!”

“Go to your desk,” I commanded. And he quieted down and went. I hadn't been schooling him in the fire-drill for fifteen years in vain.

I went up the street and into the great banking and brokerage house of Galloway and Company. I made my way through the small army of guards, behind which the old beast of prey was intrenched, and into his private den. There he sat, at a small, plain table, in the middle of the room without any article of furniture in it but his table and his chair. On the table was a small inkstand, perfectly clean, a steel pen equally clean, on the rest attached to it. And that was all—not a letter, not a scrap of paper, not a sign of work or of intention to work. It might have been the desk of a man who did nothing; in fact, it was the desk of a man who had so much to do that his only hope of escape from being overwhelmed was to despatch and clear away each matter the instant it was presented to him. Many things could be read from the powerful form, bolt upright in that stiff chair, and from the cynical, masterful old face. But to me the chief quality there revealed was that quality of qualities, decision—the greatest power a man can have, except only courage. And old James Galloway had both.

He respected Roebuck; Roebuck feared him. Roebuck did have some sort of conscience, distorted though it was, and the dictator of savageries Galloway would have scorned to commit. Galloway had no professions of conscience—beyond such small glozing of hypocrisy as any man must put on if he wishes to be intrusted with the money of a public that associates professions of religion and appearances of respectability with honesty. Roebuck's passion was wealth—to see the millions heap up and up. Galloway had that passion, too—I have yet to meet a multi-millionaire who isn't avaricious and even stingy. But Galloway's chief passion was power—to handle men as a junk merchant handles rags, to plan and lead campaigns of conquest with his golden legions, and to distribute the spoils like an autocrat who is careless how they are divided, since all belongs to him, whenever he wishes to claim it.

He pierced me with his blue eyes, keen as a youth's, though his face was seamed with scars of seventy tumultuous years. He extended toward me over the table his broad, stubby white hand—the hand of a builder, of a constructive genius. “How are you, Blacklock?” said he. “What can I do for you?” He just touched my hand before dropping it, and resumed that idol-like pose. But although there was only repose and deliberation in his manner, and not a suggestion of haste, I, like every one who came into that room and that presence,

had a sense of an interminable procession behind me, a procession of men who must be seen by this master-mover, that they might submit important and pressing affairs to him for decision. It was unnecessary for him to tell any one to be brief and pointed.

“I shall have to go to the wall to-day,” said I, taking a paper from my pocket, “unless you save me. Here is a statement of my assets and liabilities. I call to your attention my Coal holdings. I was one of the eight men whom Roebuck got round him for the new combine—it is a secret, but I assume you know all about it.”

He laid the paper before him, put on his nose-glasses and looked at it.

“If you will save me,” I continued, “I will transfer to you, in a block, all my Coal holdings. They will be worth double my total liabilities within three months—as soon as the reorganization is announced. I leave it entirely to your sense of justice whether I shall have any part of them back when this storm blows over.”

“Why didn't you go to Roebuck?” he asked without looking up.

“Because it is he that has stuck the knife into me.”

“Why?”

“I don't know. I suspect the Manasquale properties, which I brought into the combine, have some value, which no one but Roebuck, and perhaps Langdon, knows about—and that I in some way was dangerous to them through that fact. They haven't given me time to look into it.”

A grim smile flitted over his face. “You've been too busy getting married, eh?”

“Exactly,” said I. “It's another case of unbuckling for the wedding-feast and getting assassinated as a penalty. Do you wish me to explain anything on that list—do you want any details of the combine—of the Coal stocks there?”

“Not necessary,” he replied. As I had thought, with that enormous machine of his for drawing in information, and with that enormous memory of his for details, he probably knew more about the combine and its properties than I did.

“You have heard of the lockout?” I inquired—for I wished him to know I had no intention of deceiving him as to the present market value of those stocks.

“Roebuck has been commanded by his God,” he said, “to eject the free American labor from the coal regions and to substitute importations of coolie Huns and Bohemians. Thus, the wicked American laborers will be chastened for trying to get higher wages and cut down a pious man's dividends; and the downtrodden coolies will be brought where they can enjoy the blessings of liberty and of the preaching of Roebuck's missionaries.”

I laughed, though he had not smiled, but had spoken as if stating colorless facts. “And righteousness and Roebuck will prevail,” said I.

He frowned slightly, a sardonic grin breaking the straight, thin, cruel line of his lips. He opened his table's one shallow drawer, and took out a pad and a pencil. He wrote a few words on the lowest part of the top sheet, folded it, tore off the part he had scribbled on, returned the pad and pencil to the drawer, handed the scrap of paper to me. “I will do it,” he said. “Give this to Mr. Farquhar, second door to the left. Good morning.” And in that atmosphere of vast affairs speedily despatched his consent without argument seemed, and was, the matter-of-course.

I bowed. Though he had not saved me as a favor to me, but because it fitted in with his plans, whatever they were, my eyes dimmed. “I shan't forget this,” said I, my voice not quite steady.

“I know it,” said he curtly. “I know you.” I saw that his mind had already turned me out. I said no more, and withdrew. When I left the room it was precisely as it had been when I entered it—except the bit of paper torn from the pad. But what a difference to me, to the thousands, the hundreds of thousands directly and indirectly interested in the Coal combine and its strike and its products, was represented by those few, almost illegible scrawlings on that scrap of paper.

Not until I had gone over the situation with Farquhar, and we had signed and exchanged the necessary papers, did I begin to relax from the strain—how great that strain was I realized a few weeks later, when the gray appeared thick at my temples and there was in my crown what was, for such a shock as mine, a thin spot. “I am saved!” said I to myself, venturing a long breath, as I stood on the steps of Galloway's establishment, where hourly was transacted business vitally affecting the welfare of scores of millions of human beings, with James Galloway's personal interest as the sole guiding principle. “Saved!” I repeated, and not until then did it flash before me, “I must have paid a frightful price. He would never have consented to interfere with Roebuck as soon as I asked him to do it, unless there had been some powerful motive. If I had had my wits about me, I could have made far better terms.” Why hadn't I my wits about me? “Anita” was my instant answer to my own question. “Anita again. I had a bad attack of family man's panic.” And thus it came about that I went back to my own office, feeling as if I had suffered a severe defeat, instead of jubilant over my narrow escape.

Joe followed me into my den. “What luck?” asked he, in the tone of a mother waylaying the doctor as he issues from the sick-room.

“Luck?” said I, gazing blankly at him.

“You've seen the latest quotation, haven't you?” In his nervousness his temper was on a fine edge.

“No,” replied I indifferently. I sat down at my desk and began to busy myself. Then I added: “We're out of the Coal combine. I've transferred our holdings. Look after these things, please.” And I gave him the checks, notes and memoranda of agreement.

“Galloway!” he exclaimed. And then his eye fell on the totals of the stock I had been carrying. “Good God, Matt!” he gasped. “Ruined!”

And he sat down, and buried his face and cried like a child—it was then that I measured the full depth of the chasm I had escaped. I made no such exhibition of myself, but when I tried to relight my cigar my hand trembled so that the flame scorched my lips.

“Ruined?” I said to Joe, easily enough. “Not at all. We're back in the road, going smoothly ahead—only, at a

bit less stiff a pace. Think, Joe, of all those poor devils down in the mining districts. They're out—clear out—and thousands of 'em don't know where their families will get bread. And though they haven't found it out yet, they've got to leave the place where they've lived all their lives, and their fathers before them—have got to go wandering about in a world that's as strange to them as the surface of the moon, and as bare for them as the Sahara desert."

"That's so," said Joe. "It's hard luck." But I saw he was thinking only of himself and his narrow escape from having to give up his big house and all the rest of it; that, soft-hearted and generous though he was, to those poor chaps and their wives and children he wasn't giving a thought.

Wall Street never does—they're too remote, too vague. It deals with columns of figures and slips of paper. It never thinks of those abstractions as standing for so many hearts and so many mouths, just as the bank clerk never thinks of the bits of metal he counts so swiftly as money with which things and men could be bought. I read somewhere once that Voltaire—I think it was Voltaire—asked a man what he would do if, by pressing a button on his table, he would be enormously rich and at the same time would cause the death of a person away off at the other side of the earth, unknown to him, and probably no more worthy to live, and with no greater expectation of life or of happiness than the average sinful, short-lived human being. I've often thought of that as I've watched our great "captains of industry." Voltaire's dilemma is theirs. And they don't hesitate; they press the button. I leave the morality of the performance to moralists; to me, its chief feature is its cowardice, its sneaking, slimy cowardice.

"You've done a grand two hours' work," said Joe.

"Grander than you think," replied I. "I've set the tiger on to fight the bull."

"Galloway and Roebuck?"

"Just that," said I. And I laughed, started up, sat down again. "No, I'll put off the pleasure," said I. "I'll let Roebuck find out, when the claws catch in that tough old hide of his."

## XXVII. A CONSPIRACY AGAINST ANITA

On about the hottest afternoon of that summer I had the yacht take me down the Sound to a point on the Connecticut shore within sight of Dawn Hill, but seven miles farther from New York. I landed at the private pier of Howard Forrester, the only brother of Anita's mother. As I stepped upon the pier I saw a fine-looking old man in the pavilion overhanging the water. He was dressed all in white except a sky-blue tie that harmonized with the color of his eyes. He was neither fat nor lean, and his smooth skin was protesting ruddily against the age proclaimed by his wool-white hair. He rose as I came toward him, and, while I was still several yards away, showed unmistakably that he knew who I was and that he was anything but glad to see me.

"Mr. Forrester?" I asked

He grew purple to the line of his thick white hair. "It is, Mr. Blacklock," said he. "I have the honor to wish you good day, sir." And with that he turned his back on me and gazed out toward Long Island.

"I have come to ask a favor of you, sir," said I, as polite to that hostile back as if I had been addressing a cordial face. And I waited.

He wheeled round, looked at me from head to foot. I withstood the inspection calmly; when it was ended I noted that in spite of himself he was somewhat relaxed from the opinion of me he had formed upon what he had heard and read. But he said: "I do not know you, sir, and I do not wish to know you."

"You have made me painfully aware of that," replied I. "But I have learned not to take snap judgments too seriously. I never go to a man unless I have something to say to him, and I never leave until I have said it."

"I perceive, sir," retorted he, "you have the thick skin necessary to living up to that rule." And the twinkle in his eyes betrayed the man who delights to exercise a real or imaginary talent for caustic wit. Such men are like nettles—dangerous only to the timid touch.

"On the contrary," replied I, easy in mind now, though I did not anger him by showing it, "I am most sensitive to insults—insults to myself. But you are not insulting *me*. You are insulting a purely imaginary, hearsay person who is, I venture to assure you, utterly unlike me, and who doubtless deserves to be insulted."

His purple had now faded. In a far different tone he said: "If your business in any way relates to the family into which you have married, I do not wish to hear it. Spare my patience and your time, sir."

"It does not," was my answer. "It relates to my own family—to my wife and myself. As you may have heard, she is no longer a member of the Ellersly family. And I have come to you chiefly because I happen to know your sentiment toward the Ellerslys."

"I have no sentiment toward them, sir!" he exclaimed. "They are non-existent, sir—nonexistent! Your wife's mother ceased to be a Forrester when she married that scoundrel. Your wife is still less a Forrester."

"True," said I. "She is a Blacklock."

He winced, and it reminded me of the night of my marriage and Anita's expression when the preacher called her by her new name. But I held his gaze, and we looked each at the other fixedly for, it must have been, full half a minute. Then he said courteously: "What do you wish?"

I went straight to the point. My color may have been high, but my voice did not hesitate as I explained: "I wish to make my wife financially independent. I wish to settle on her a sum of money sufficient to give her an income that will enable her to live as she has been accustomed. I know she would not take it from me. So, I have come to ask you to pretend to give it to her—I, of course, giving it to you to give."

Again—we looked full and fixedly each at the other. "Come to the house, Blacklock," he said at last in a tone

that was the subtlest of compliments. And he linked his arm in mine. Halfway to the rambling stone house, severe in its lines, yet fine and homelike, quaintly resembling its owner, as a man's house always should, he paused. “I owe you an apology,” said he. “After all my experience of this world of envy and malice, I should have recognized the man even in the caricatures of his enemies. And you brought the best possible credentials—you are well hated. To be well hated by the human race and by the creatures mounted on its back is a distinction, sir. It is the crown of the true kings of this world.”

We seated ourselves on the wide veranda; he had champagne and water brought, and cigars; and we proceeded to get acquainted—nothing promotes cordiality and sympathy like an initial misunderstanding. It was a good hour before this kind-hearted, hard-soft, typical old-fashioned New Englander reverted to the object of my visit. Said he: “And now, young man, may I venture to ask some extremely personal questions?”

“In the circumstances,” replied I, “you have the right to know everything. I did not come to you without first making sure what manner of man I was to find.” At this he blushed, pleased as a girl at her first beau's first compliment. “And you, Mr. Forrester, can not be expected to embark in the little adventure I propose, until you have satisfied yourself.”

“First, the why of your plan.”

“I am in active business,” replied I, “and I shall be still more active. That means financial uncertainty.”

His suspicion of me started up from its doze and rubbed its eyes. “Ah! You wish to insure yourself.”

“Yes,” was my answer, “but not in the way you hint. It takes away a man's courage just when he needs it most, to feel that his family is involved in his venture.”

“Why do you not make the settlement direct?” he asked, partly reassured.

“Because I wish her to feel that it is her own, that I have no right over it whatever.”

He thought about this. His eyes were keen as he said, “Is that your real reason?”

I saw I must be unreserved with him. “Part of it,” I replied. “The rest is—she would not take it from me.”

The old man smiled cynically. “Have you tried?” he inquired.

“If I had tried and failed, she would have been on the alert for an indirect attempt.”

“Try her, young man,” said he, laughing. “In this day there are few people anywhere who'd refuse any sum from anybody for anything. And a woman—and a New York woman—and a New York fashionable woman—and a daughter of old Ellersly—she'll take it as a baby takes the breast.”

“She would not take it,” said I.

My tone, though I strove to keep angry protest out of it, because I needed him, caused him to draw back instantly. “I beg your pardon,” said he. “I forgot for the moment that I was talking to a man young enough still to have youth's delusions about women. You'll learn that they're human, that it's from them we men inherit our weaknesses. However, let's assume that she won't take it: *Why* won't she take your money? What is there about it that repels Ellersly's daughter, brought up in the sewers of fashionable New York—the sewers, sir!”

“She does not love me,” I answered.

“I have hurt you,” he said quickly, in great distress at having compelled me to expose my secret wound.

“The wound does not ache the worse,” said I, “for my showing it—to *you*.” And that was the truth. I looked over toward Dawn Hill whose towers could just be seen. “We live there.” I pointed. “She is—like a guest in my house.”

When I glanced at him again, his face betrayed a feeling of which I doubt if any one had thought him capable in many a year. “I see that you love her,” he said, gently as a mother.

“Yes,” I replied. And presently I went on: “The idea of any one I love being dependent on me in a sordid way is most distasteful to me. And since she does not love me, does not even like me, it is doubly necessary that she be independent.”

“I confess I do not quite follow you” said he.

“How can she accept anything from me? If she should finally be compelled by necessity to do it, what hope could I have of her ever feeling toward me as a wife should feel toward her husband?”

At this explanation of mine his eyes sparkled with anger—and I could not but suspect that he had at one time in his life been faced with a problem like mine, and had settled it the other way. My suspicion was not weakened when he went on to say:

“Boyish motives again! They show you do not know women. Don't be deceived by their delicate exterior, by their pretenses of super-refinement. They affect to be what passion deludes us into thinking them. But they're clay, sir, just clay, and far less sensitive than we men. Don't you see, young man, that by making her independent you're throwing away your best chance of winning her? Women are like dogs—like dogs, sir! They lick the hand that feeds 'em—lick it, and like it.”

“Possibly,” said I, with no disposition to combat views based on I knew not what painful experience. “But I don't care for that sort of liking—from a woman, or from a dog.”

“It's the only kind you'll get,” retorted he, trying to control his agitation. “I'm an old man. I know human nature—that's why I live alone. You'll take that kind of liking, or do without.”

“Then I'll do without,” said I.

“Give her an income, and she'll go. I see it all. You've flattered her vanity by showing your love for her—that's the way with women. They go crazy about themselves, and forget all about the man. Give her an income and she'll go.”

“I doubt it,” said I. “And you would, if you knew her. But, even so, I shall lose her in any event. For, unless she is made independent, she'll certainly go with the last of the little money she has, the remnant of a small legacy.”

The old man argued with me, the more vigorously, I suspect, because he found me resolute. When he could

think of no new way of stating his case—his case against Anita—he said: “You are a fool, young man—that's clear. I wonder such a fool was ever able to get together as much property as report credits you with. But—you're the kind of fool I like.”

“Then—you'll indulge my folly?” said I, smiling.

He threw up his arms in a gesture of mock despair. “If you will have it so,” he replied. “I am curious about this niece of mine. I want to see her. I want to see the woman who can resist *you*.”

“Her mind and her heart are closed against me,” said I. “And it is my own fault—I closed them.”

“Put her out of your head,” he advised. “No woman is worth a serious man's while.”

“I have few wants, few purposes,” said I. “But those few I pursue to the end. Even though she were not worth while, even though I wholly lost hope, still I'd not give her up. I couldn't—that's my nature. But—*she* is worth while.” And I could see her, slim and graceful, the curves in her face and figure that made my heart leap, the azure sheen upon her petal-like skin, the mystery of the soul luring from her eyes.

After we had arranged the business—or, rather, arranged to have it arranged through our lawyers—he walked down to the pier with me. At the gangway he gave me another searching look from head to foot—but vastly different from the inspection with which our interview had begun. “You are a devilish handsome young fellow,” said he. “Your pictures don't do you justice. And I shouldn't have believed any man could overcome in one brief sitting such a prejudice as I had against you. On second thought, I don't care to see her. She must be even below the average.”

“Or far above it,” I suggested.

“I suppose I'll have to ask her over to visit me,” he went on. “A fine hypocrite I'll feel.”

“You can make it one of the conditions of your gift that she is not to thank you or speak of it,” said I. “I fear your face would betray us, if she ever did.”

“An excellent idea!” he exclaimed. Then, as he shook hands with me in farewell: “You will win her yet—if you care to.”

As I steamed up the Sound, I was tempted to put in at Dawn Hill's harbor. Through my glass I could see Anita and Alva and several others, men and women, having tea on the lawn under a red and white awning. I could see her dress—a violet suit with a big violet hat to match. I knew that costume. Like everything she wore, it was both beautiful in itself and most becoming to her. I could see her face, could almost make out its expression—did I see, or did I imagine, a cruel contrast to what I always saw when she knew I was looking?

I gazed until the trees hid lawn and gay awning, and that lively company and her. In my bitterness I was full of resentment against her, full of self-pity. I quite forgot, for that moment, *her* side of the story.

## XXVIII. BLACKLOCK SEES A LIGHT

It was next day, I think, that I met Mowbray Langdon and his brother Tom in the entrance of the Textile Building. Mowbray was back only a week from his summer abroad; but Tom I had seen and nodded to every day, often several times in the same day, as he went to and fro about his “respectable” dirty work for the Roebuck-Langdon clique. He was one of their most frequently used stool-pigeon directors in banks and insurance companies whose funds they staked in their big gambling operations, they taking almost all the profits and the depositors and policy holders taking almost all the risk. It had never once occurred to me to have any feeling of any kind about Tom, or in any way to take him into my calculations as to Anita. He was, to my eyes, too obviously a pale understudy of his powerful and fascinating brother. Whenever I thought of him as the man Anita fancied she loved, I put it aside instantly. “The kind of man a woman *really* cares for,” I would say to myself, “is the measure of her true self. But not the kind of man she *imagines* she cares for.”

Tom went on; Mowbray stopped. We shook hands, and exchanged commonplaces in the friendliest way—I was harboring no resentment against him, and I wished him to realize that his assault had bothered me no more than the buzzing and battering of a summer fly. “I've been trying to get in to see you,” said he. “I wanted to explain about that unfortunate Textile deal.”

This, when the assault on me had burst out with fresh energy the day after he landed from Europe! I could scarcely believe that his vanity, his confidence in his own skill at underground work could so delude him. “Don't bother,” said I. “All that's ancient history.”

But he had thought out some lies he regarded as particularly creditable to his ingenuity; he was not to be deprived of the pleasure of telling them. So I was compelled to listen; and, being in an indulgent mood, I did not spoil his pleasure by letting him see or suspect my unbelief. If he could have looked into my mind, as I stood there in an attitude of patient attention, I think even his self-complacence would have been put out of countenance. You may admire the exploits of a “gentleman” cracksman or pickpocket, if you hear or read them with only their ingenuity put before you. But *see* a “gentleman” liar or thief at his sneaking, cowardly work, and admiration is impossible. As Langdon lied on, as I studied his cheap, vulgar exhibition of himself, he all unconscious, I thought: “Beneath that very thin surface of yours, you're a poor cowardly creature—you, and all your fellow bandits. No; bandit is too grand a word to apply to this game of 'high finance.' It's really on the level with the game of the fellow that waits for a dark night, slips into the barn-yard, poisons the watch-dog, bores an auger-hole in the granary, and takes to his heels at a suspicious sound.”

With his first full stop, I said: “I understand perfectly, Langdon. But I haven't the slightest interest in crooked enterprises now. I'm clear out of all you fellows' stocks. I've reinvested my property so that not even a panic would trouble me.”

“That's good,” he drawled. I saw he did not believe me—which was natural, as he knew nothing of my arrangement with Galloway and assumed I was laboring in heavy weather, with a bad cargo of Coal stocks

and contracts. “Come to lunch with me. I've got some interesting things to tell you about my trip.”

A few months before, I should have accepted with alacrity. But I had lost interest in him. He had not changed; if anything, he was more dazzling than ever in the ways that had once dazzled me. It was I that had changed—my ideals, my point of view. I had no desire to feed my new-sprung contempt by watching him pump in vain for information to be used in his secret campaign against me. “No, thanks. Another day,” I replied, and left him with a curt nod. I noted that he had failed to speak of my marriage, though he had not seen me since. “A sore subject with all the Langdons,” thought I. “It must be very sore, indeed, to make a man who is all manners, neglect them.”

My whole life had been a series of transformations so continuous that I had noted little about my advance, beyond its direction—like a man hurrying up a steep that keeps him bent, eyes down. But, as I turned away from Langdon, I caught myself in the very act of transformation. No doubt, the new view had long been there, its horizon expanding with every step of my ascent; but not until that talk with him did I see it. I looked about me in Wall Street; in my mind's eye I all in an instant saw my world as it really was. I saw the great rascals of “high finance,” their respectability stripped from them; saw them gathering in the spoils which their cleverly-trained agents, commercial and political and legal, filched with light fingers from the pockets of the crowd, saw the crowd looking up to these trainers and employers of pickpockets, hailing them “captains of industry”! They reaped only where and what others had sown; they touched industry only to plunder and to blight it; they organized it only that its profits might go to those who did not toil and who despised those who did. “Have I gone mad in the midst of sane men?” I asked myself. “Or have I been mad, and have I suddenly become sane in a lunatic world?”

I did not linger on that problem. For me action remained the essential of life, whether I was sane or insane. I resolved then and there to map a new course. By toiling like a sailor at the pump of a sinking ship, I had taken advantage to the uttermost of the respite Galloway's help had given me. My property was no longer in more or less insecure speculative “securities,” but was, as I had told Langdon, in forms that would withstand the worst shocks. The attacks of my enemies, directed partly at my fortune, or, rather, at the stocks in which they imagined it was still invested, and partly at my personal character, were doing me good instead of harm. Hatred always forgets that its shafts, falling round its intended victim, spring up as legions of supporters for him. My business was growing rapidly; my daily letter to investors was read by hundreds of thousands where tens of thousands had read it before the Roebuck-Langdon clique began to make me famous by trying to make me infamous.

“I am strong and secure,” said I to myself as I strode through the wonderful canyon of Broadway, whose walls are those mighty palaces of finance and commerce from which business men have been ousted by cormorant “captains of industry.” I must *use* my strength. How could I better use it than by fluttering these vultures on their roosts, and perhaps bringing down a bird or two?

I decided, however, that it was better to wait until they had stopped rattling their beaks and claws on my shell in futile attack. “Meanwhile,” I reasoned carefully, “I can be getting good and ready.”

Their first new move, after my little talk with Langdon, was intended as a mortal blow to my credit Melville requested me to withdraw mine and Blacklock and Company's accounts from the National Industrial Bank; and the fact that this huge and powerful institution had thus branded me was slyly given to the financial reporters of the newspapers. Far and wide it was published; and the public was expected to believe that this was one more and drastic measure in the “campaign of the honorable men of finance to clean the Augean Stables of Wall Street.” My daily letter to investors next morning led off with this paragraph—the first notice I had taken publicly of their attacks on me:

“In the effort to discredit the only remaining uncontrolled source of financial truth, the big bandits have ordered my accounts out of their chief gambling-house. I have transferred the accounts to the Discount and Deposit National, where Leonidas Thornley stands guard against the new order that seeks to make business a synonym for crime.”

Thornley was of the type that was dominant in our commercial life before the “financiers” came—just as song birds were common in our trees until the noisy, brawling, thieving sparrows drove them out. His oldest son was about to marry Joe's daughter—Alva. Many a Sunday I have spent at his place near Morristown—a charming combination of city comfort with farm freedom and fresh air. I remember, one Sunday, saying to him, after he had seen his wife and daughters off to church: “Why haven't you got rich? Why haven't you looked out for establishing these boys and girls of yours?”

“I don't want my girls to be sought for money,” said he, “I don't want my boys to rely on money. Perhaps I've seen too much of wealth, and have come to have a prejudice against it. Then, too, I've never had the chance to get rich.”

I showed that I thought that he was simply jesting.

“I mean it,” said he, looking at me with eyes as straight as a well-brought-up girl's. “How could my mind be judicial if I were personally interested in the enterprises people look to me for advice about?”

And not only did he keep himself clear and his mind judicial but also he was, like all really good people, exceedingly slow to believe others guilty of the things he would as soon have thought of doing as he would have thought of slipping into the teller's cage during the lunch hour and pocketing a package of bank-notes. He gave me his motto—a curious one: “Believe in everybody; trust in nobody.”

“Only a thief wishes to be trusted,” he explained, “and only a fool trusts. I let no one trust me; I trust no one. But I believe evil of no man. Even when he has been convicted, I see the mitigating circumstances.”

How Thornley did stand by me! And for no reason except that it was as necessary for him to be fair and just as to breathe. I shall not say he resisted the attempts to compel him to desert me—they simply made no impression on him. I remember, when Roebuck himself, a large stock-holder in the bank, left cover far enough personally to urge him to throw me over, he replied steadfastly:

“If Mr. Blacklock is guilty of circulating false stories against commercial enterprises, as his enemies allege, the penal code can be used to stop him. But as long as I stay at the head of this bank, no man shall use it for

personal vengeance. It is a chartered public institution, and all have equal rights to its facilities. I would lend money to my worst enemy, if he came for it with the proper security. I would refuse my best friend, if he could not give security. The funds of a bank are a trust fund, and my duty is to see that they are employed to the best advantage. If you wish other principles to prevail here, you must get another president."

That settled it. No one appreciated more keenly than did Roebuck that character is as indispensable in its place as is craft where the situation demands craft—and is far harder to get.

I shall not relate in detail that campaign against me. It failed not so much because I was strong as because it was weak. Perhaps, if Roebuck and Langdon could have directed it in person, or had had the time to advise with their agents before and after each move, it might have succeeded. They would not have let exaggeration dominate it and venom show upon its surface; they would not have neglected to follow up advantages, would not have persisted in lines of attack that created public sympathy for me. They would not have so crudely exploited my unconventional marriage and my financial relations with old Ellersly. But they dared not go near the battle-field; they had to trust to agents whom their orders and suggestions reached by the most roundabout ways; and they were busier with their enterprises that involved immediate and great gain or loss of money.

When Galloway died, they learned that the Coal stocks with which they thought I was loaded down were part of his estate. They satisfied themselves that I was in fact as impregnable as I had warned Langdon. They reversed tactics; Roebuck tried to make it up with me. "If he wants to see me," was my invariable answer to the intimations of his emissaries, "let him come to my office, just as I would go to his, if I wished to see him."

"He is a big man—a dangerous big man," cautioned Joe.

"Big—yes. But strong only against his own kind," replied I. "One mouse can make a whole herd of elephants squeal for mercy."

"It isn't prudent, it isn't prudent," persisted Joe.

"It is not," replied I. "Thank God, I'm at last in the position I've been toiling to achieve. I don't have to be prudent. I can say and do what I please, without fear of the consequences. I can freely indulge in the luxury of being a man. That's costly, Joe, but it's worth all it could cost."

Joe didn't understand me—he rarely did. "I'm a hen. You're an eagle," said he.

## XXIX. A HOUSEWARMING

Joe's daughter, staying on and on at Dawn Hill, was chief lieutenant, if not principal, in my conspiracy to drift Anita day by day further and further into the routine of the new life. Yet neither of us had shown by word or look that a thorough understanding existed between us. My part was to be unobtrusive, friendly, neither indifferent nor eager, and I held to it by taking care never to be left alone with Anita; Alva's part was to be herself—simple and natural and sensible, full of life and laughter, mocking at those moods that betray us into the absurdity of taking ourselves too seriously.

I was getting ready a new house in town as a surprise to Anita, and I took Alva into my plot. "I wish Anita's part of the house to be exactly to her liking," said I. "Can't you set her to dreaming aloud what kind of place she would like to live in, what she would like to open her eyes on in the morning, what surroundings she'd like to dress in and read in, and all that?"

Alva had no difficulty in carrying out the suggestions. And by harassing Westlake incessantly, I succeeded in realizing her report of Anita's dream to the exact shade of the draperies and the silk that covered the walls. By pushing the work, I got the house done just as Alva was warning me that she could not remain longer at Dawn Hill, but must go home and get ready for her wedding. When I went down to arrange with her the last details of the surprise, who should meet me at the station but Anita herself? I took one glance at her serious face and, much disquieted, seated myself beside her in the little trap. Instead of following the usual route to the house, she turned her horse into the bay-shore road.

"Several days ago," she began, as the bend hid the station, "I got a letter from some lawyers, saying that an uncle of mine had given me a large sum of money—a very large sum. I have been inquiring about it, and find it is mine absolutely."

I braced myself against the worst. "She is about to tell me that she is leaving," thought I. But I managed to say: "I'm glad to hear of your luck," though I fear my tone was not especially joyous.

"So," she went on, "I am in a position to pay back to you, I think, what my father and Sam took from you. It won't be enough, I'm afraid, to pay what you lost indirectly. But I have told the lawyers to make it all over to you."

I could have laughed aloud. It was too ridiculous, this situation into which I had got myself. I did not know what to say. I could hardly keep out of my face how foolish this collapse of my crafty conspiracy made me feel. And then the full meaning of what she was doing came over me—the revelation of her character. I trusted myself to steal a glance at her; and for the first time I didn't see the thrilling azure sheen over her smooth white skin, though all her beauty was before me, as dazzling as when it compelled me to resolve to win her. No; I saw her, herself—the woman within. I had known from the outset that there was an altar of love within my temple of passion. I think that was my first real visit to it.

"Anita!" I said unsteadily. "Anita!"

The color flamed in her cheeks; we were silent for a long time.

"You—your people owe me nothing" I at length found voice to say. "Even if they did, I couldn't and wouldn't take *your* money. But, believe me, they owe me nothing."

"You can not mislead me," she answered. "When they asked me to become engaged to you, they told me

about it."

I had forgotten. The whole repulsive, rotten business came back to me. And, changed man that I had become in the last six months, I saw myself as I had been. I felt that she was looking at me, was reading the degrading confession in my telltale features.

"I will tell you the whole truth," said I. "I did use your father's and your brother's debts to me as a means of getting *to* you. But, before God, Anita, I swear I was honest with you when I said to you I never hoped or wished to win you in that way!"

"I believe you," she replied, and her tone and expression made my heart leap with indescribable joy.

Love is sometimes most unwise in his use of the reins he puts on passion. Instead of acting as impulse commanded, I said clumsily, "And I am very different to-day from what I was last spring." It never occurred to me how she might interpret those words.

"I know," she replied. She waited several seconds before adding: "I, too, have changed. I see that I was far more guilty than you. There is no excuse for me. I was badly brought up, as you used to say, but—"

"No—no," I began to protest.

She cut me short with a sad: "You need not be polite and spare my feelings. Let's not talk of it. Let us go back to the object I had in coming for you to-day."

"You owe me nothing," I repeated. "Your brother and your father settled long ago. I lost nothing through them. And I've learned that if I had never known you, Roebuck and Langdon would still have attacked me."

"What my uncle gave me has been transferred to you," said she, woman fashion, not hearing what she did not care to heed. "I can't make you accept it; but there it is, and there it stays."

"I can not take it," said I. "If you insist on leaving it in my name, I shall simply return it to your uncle."

"I wrote him what I had done," she rejoined. "His answer came yesterday. He approves it."

"Approves it!" I exclaimed.

"You do not know how eccentric he is," she explained, naturally misunderstanding my astonishment. She took a letter from her bosom and handed it to me. I read:

"DEAR MADAM: It was yours to do with as you pleased. If you ever find yourself in the mood to visit, Gull House is open to you, provided you bring no maid. I will not have female servants about.

"Yours truly,

"HOWARD FORRESTER."

"You will consent now, will you not?" she asked, as I lifted my eyes from this characteristic note.

I saw that her peace of mind was at stake. "Yes—I consent."

She gave a great sigh as at the laying down of a heavy burden. "Thank you," was all she said, but she put a world of meaning into the words. She took the first homeward turning. We were nearly at the house before I found words that would pave the way toward expressing my thoughts—my longings and hopes.

"You say you have forgiven me," said I. "Then we can be—friends?"

She was silent, and I took her somber expression to mean that she feared I was hiding some subtlety.

"I mean just what I say, Anita," I hastened to explain. "Friends—simply friends." And my manner fitted my words.

She looked strangely at me. "You would be content with that?" she asked.

I answered what I thought would please her. "Let us make the best of our bad bargain," said I. "You can trust me now, don't you think you can?"

She nodded without speaking; we were at the door, and the servants were hastening out to receive us. Always the servants between us. Servants indoors, servants outdoors; morning, noon and night, from waking to sleeping, these servants to whom we are slaves. As those interrupting servants sent us each a separate way, her to her maid, me to my valet, I was depressed with the chill that the opportunity that has not been seen leaves behind it as it departs.

"Well," said I to myself by way of consolation, as I was dressing for dinner, "she is certainly softening toward you, and when she sees the new house you will be still better friends."

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But, when the great day came, I was not so sure. Alva went for a "private view" with young Thornley; out of her enthusiasm she telephoned me from the very midst of the surroundings she found "*so* wonderful and *so* beautiful"—thus she assured me, and her voice made it impossible to doubt. And, the evening before the great day, I, going for a final look round, could find no flaw serious enough to justify the sinking feeling that came over me every time I thought of what Anita would think when she saw my efforts to realize her dream. I set out for "home" half a dozen times at least, that afternoon, before I pulled myself together, called myself an ass, and, with a pause at Delmonico's for a drink, which I ordered and then rejected, finally pushed myself in at the door. What, a state my nerves were in!

Alva had departed; Anita was waiting for me in her sitting-room. When she heard me in the hall, just outside, she stood in the doorway. "Come in," she said to me, who did not dare so much as a glance at her.

I entered. I must have looked as I felt—like a boy, summoned before the teacher to be whipped in presence of the entire school. Then I was conscious that she had my hand—how she had got it, I don't know—and that she was murmuring, with tears of happiness in her voice: "Oh, I can't *say* it!"

"Glad you like your own taste," said I awkwardly. "You know, Alva told me."

"But it's one thing to dream, and a very different thing to do," she answered. Then, with smiling reproach: "And I've been thinking all summer that you were ruined! I've been expecting to hear every day that you had had to give up the fight."

"Oh—that passed long ago," said I.

"But you never told me," she reminded me. "And I'm glad you didn't," she added. "Not knowing saved me

from doing something very foolish." She reddened a little, smiled a great deal, dazzlingly, was altogether different from the ice-locked Anita of a short time before, different as June from January. And her hand—so intensely alive—seemed extremely comfortable in mine.

Even as my blood responded to that electric touch, I had a twinge of cynical bitterness. Yes, apparently I was at last getting what I had so long, so vainly, and, latterly, so hopelessly craved. But—*why* was she giving it? Why had she withheld herself until this moment of material happiness? "I have to pay the rich man's price," thought I, with a sigh.

It was in reaching out for some sweetness to take away this bitter taste in my honey that I said to her, "When you gave me that money from your uncle, you did it to help me out?"

She colored deeply. "How silly you must have thought me!" she answered.

I took her other hand. As I was drawing her toward me, the sudden pallor of her face and chill of her hands halted me once more, brought sickeningly before me the early days of my courtship when she had infuriated my pride by trying to be "submissive." I looked round the room—that room into which I had put so much thought—and money. Money! "The rich man's price!" those delicately brocaded walls shimmered mockingly at me.

"Anita," said I, "do you *care* for me?"

She murmured inaudibly. Evasion! thought I, and suspicion sprang on guard, bristling.

"Anita," I repeated sternly, "do you care for *me*?"

"I am your wife," she replied, her head drooping still lower. And hesitatingly she drew away from me. That seemed confirmation of my doubt and I said to her satirically, "You are willing to be my wife out of gratitude, to put it politely?"

She looked straight into my eyes and answered, "I can only say there is no one I like so well, and—I will give you all I have to give."

"Like!" I exclaimed contemptuously, my nerves giving way altogether. "And you would be my *wife*! Do you want me to *despise* you?" I struck dead my poor, feeble hope that had been all but still-born. I rushed from the room, closing the door violently between us.

Such was our housewarming.

## XXX. BLACKLOCK OPENS FIRE

For what I proceeded to do, all sorts of motives, from the highest to the basest, have been attributed to me. Here is the truth: I had already pushed the medicine of hard work to its limit. It was as powerless against this new development as water against a drunkard's thirst. I must find some new, some compelling drug—some frenzy of activity that would swallow up my self as the battle makes the soldier forget his toothache. This confession may chagrin many who have believed in me. My enemies will hasten to say: "Aha, his motive was even more selfish and petty than we alleged." But those who look at human nature honestly, and from the inside, will understand how I can concede that a selfish reason moved me to draw my sword, and still can claim a higher motive. In such straits as were mine, some men of my all-or-none temperament debauch themselves; others thresh about blindly, reckless whether they strike innocent or guilty. I did neither.

Probably many will recall that long before the "securities" of the reorganized coal combine were issued, I had in my daily letter to investors been preparing the public to give them a fitting reception. A few days after my whole being burst into flames of resentment against Anita, out came the new array of new stocks and bonds. Roebuck and Langdon arranged with the under writers for a "fake" four times over-subscription, indorsed by the two greatest banking houses in the Street. Despite this often-tried and always-good trick, the public refused to buy. I felt I had not been overestimating my power. But I made no move until the "securities" began to go up, and the financial reporters—under the influence where not actually in the pay of the Roebuck-Langdon clique—shouted that, "in spite of the malicious attacks from the gambling element, the new securities are being absorbed by the public at prices approximating their value." Then—But I shall quote my investors' letter the following morning:

"At half-past nine yesterday—nine-twenty-eight, to be exact—President Melville, of the National Industrial Bank, loaned six hundred thousand dollars. He loaned it to Bill Van Nest, an ex-gambler and proprietor of pool rooms, now silent partner in Hoe & Wittekind, brokers, on the New York Stock Exchange, and also in Filbert & Jonas, curb brokers. He loaned it to Van Nest without security.

"Van Nest used the money yesterday to push up the price of the new coal securities by 'wash sales'—which means, by making false purchases and sales of the stock in order to give the public the impression of eager buying. Van Nest sold to himself and bought from himself 347,060 of the 352,681 shares traded in.

"Melville, in addition to being president of one of the largest banks in the world, is a director in no less than seventy-three great industrial enterprises, including railways, telegraph companies, *savings-banks and life-insurance companies*. Bill Van Nest has done time in the Nevada State Penitentiary for horse-stealing."

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That was all. And it was enough—quite enough. I was a national figure, as much so as if I had tried to assassinate the president. Indeed, I had exploded a bomb under a greater than the president—under the chiefs of the real government of the United States, the government that levied daily upon every citizen, and that had state and national and the principal municipal governments in its strong box.

I confess I was as much astounded at the effect of my bomb as old Melville must have been. I felt that I had been obscure, as I looked at the newspapers, with Matthew Blacklock appropriating almost the entire front page of each. I was the isolated, the conspicuous figure, standing alone upon the steps of the temple of

Mammon, where mankind daily and devoutly comes to offer worship.

Not that the newspapers praised me. I recall none that spoke well of me. The nearest approach to praise was the “Blacklock squeals on the Wall Street gang” in one of the sensational penny sheets that strengthen the plutocracy by lying about it. Some of the papers insinuated that I had gone mad; others that I had been bought up by a rival gang to the Roebuck-Langdon clique; still others thought I was simply hunting notoriety. All were inclined to accept as a sufficient denial of my charges Melville's dignified refusal “to notice any attack from a quarter so discredited.”

As my electric whirled into Wall Street, I saw the crowd in front of the Textile Building, a dozen policemen keeping it in order. I descended amid cheers, and entered my offices through a mob struggling to shake hands with me—and, in my ignorance of mob mind, I was delighted and inspired! Just why a man who knows men, knows how wishy-washy they are as individuals, should be influenced by a demonstration from a mass of them, is hard to understand. But the fact is indisputable. They fooled me then; they could fool me again, in spite of all I have been through. There probably wasn't one in that mob for whose opinion I would have had the slightest respect had he come to me alone; yet as I listened to those shallow cheers and those worthless assurances of “the people are behind you, Blacklock,” I felt that I was a man with a mission!

Our main office was full, literally full, of newspaper men—reporters from morning papers, from afternoon papers, from out-of-town and foreign papers. I pushed through them, saying as I went: “My letter speaks for me, gentlemen, and will continue to speak for me. I have nothing to say except through it.”

“But the public—” urged one.

“It doesn't interest me,” said I, on my guard against the temptation to cant. “I am a banker and investment broker. I am interested only in my customers.”

And I shut myself in, giving strict orders to Joe that there was to be no talking about me or my campaign. “I don't purpose to let the newspapers make us cheap and notorious,” said I. “We must profit by the warning in the fate of all the other fellows who have sprung into notice by attacking these bandits.”

The first news I got was that Bill Van Nest had disappeared. As soon as the Stock Exchange opened, National Coal became the feature. But, instead of “wash sales,” Roebuck, Langdon and Melville were themselves, through various brokers, buying the stocks in large quantities to keep the prices up. My next letter was as brief as my first philippic:

“Bill Van Nest is at the Hotel Frankfort, Newark, under the name of Thomas Lowry. He was in telephonic communication with President Melville, of the National Industrial Bank, twice yesterday.

“The underwriters of the National Coal Company's new issues, frightened by yesterday's exposure, have compelled Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Mowbray Langdon and Mr. Melville themselves to buy. So, yesterday, those three gentlemen bought with real money, with their own money, large quantities of stocks which are worth less than half what they paid for them.

“They will continue to buy these stocks so long as the public holds aloof. They dare not let the prices slump. They hope that this storm will blow over, and that then the investing public will forget and will relieve them of their load.”

I had added: “But this storm won't blow over. It will become a cyclone.” I struck that out. “No prophecy,” said I to myself. “Your rule, iron-clad, must be—facts, always facts; only facts.”

The gambling section of the public took my hint and rushed into the market; the burden of protecting the underwriters was doubled, and more and more of the hoarded loot was disgorged. That must have been a costly day—for, ten minutes after the Stock Exchange closed, Roebuck sent for me.

“My compliments to him,” said I to his messenger, “but I am too busy. I'll be glad to see him here, however.”

“You know he dares not come to you,” said the messenger, Schilling, president of the National Manufactured Food Company, sometimes called the Poison Trust. “If he did, and it were to get out, there'd be a panic.”

“Probably,” replied I with a shrug. “That's no affair of mine. I'm not responsible for the rotten conditions which these so-called financiers have produced, and I shall not be disturbed by the crash which must come.”

Schilling gave me a genuine look of mingled pity and admiration. “I suppose you know what you're about,” said he, “but I think you're making a mistake.”

“Thanks, Ned,” said I—he had been my head clerk a few years before, and I had got him the chance with Roebuck which he had improved so well. “I'm going to have some fun. Can't live but once.”

“I know some people,” said he significantly, “who would go to *any* lengths to get an enemy out of the way.” He had lived close enough to Roebuck to peer into the black shadows of that satanic mind, and dimly to see the dread shapes that lurked there.

“I'm the safest man on Manhattan Island for the present,” said I.

“You remember Woodrow? I've always believed that he was murdered, and that the pistol they found beside him was a 'plant.'”

“You'd kill me yourself, if you got the orders, wouldn't you?” said I good-humoredly.

“Not personally,” replied he in the same spirit, yet serious, too, at bottom. “Inspector Bradlaugh was telling me, the other night, that there were easily a thousand men in the slums of the East Side who could be hired to kill a man for five hundred dollars.”

I suppose Schilling, as the directing spirit of a corporation that hid poison by the hogshead in low-priced foods of various kinds, was responsible for hundreds of deaths annually, and for misery of sickness beyond calculation among the poor of the tenements and cheap boarding-houses. Yet a better husband, father and friend never lived. He, personally, wouldn't have harmed a fly; but he was a wholesale poisoner for dividends.

Murder for dividends. Poison for dividends. Starve and freeze and maim for dividends. Drive parents to suicide, and sons and daughters to crime and prostitution—for dividends. Not fair competition, in which the stronger and better would survive, but cheating and swindling, lying and pilfering and bribing, so that the

honest and the decent go down before the dishonest and the depraved. And the custom of doing these things so “respectable,” the applause for “success” so undiscriminating, and men so unthinking in the rush of business activity, that criticism is regarded as a mixture of envy and idealism. And it usually is, I must admit.

Schilling lingered. “I hope you won't blame me for lining up against you, Matt,” said he. “I don't want to, but I've got to.”

“Why?”

“You know what'd become of me if I didn't.”

“You might become an honest man and get self-respect,” I suggested with friendly satire.

“That's all very well for you to say,” was his laughing retort. “You've made yourself tight and tidy for the blow. But I've a family, and a damned expensive one, too. And if I didn't stand by this gang, they'd take everything I've got away from me. No, Matt, each of us to his own game. What *is* your game, anyhow?”

“Fun—just fun. Playing the pipe to see the big fellows dance.”

But he didn't believe it. And no one has believed it—not even my most devoted followers. To this day Joe Ball more than half suspects that my real objective was huge personal gain. That any rich man should do anything except for the purpose of growing richer seems incredible. That any rich man should retain or regain the sympathies and viewpoint of the class from which he sprang, and should become a “traitor” to the class to which he belongs, seems preposterous. I confess I don't fully understand my own case. Who ever does?

My “daily letters” had now ceased to be advertisements, had become news, sought by all the newspapers of this country and of the big cities in Great Britain. I could have made a large saving by no longer paying my sixty-odd regular papers for inserting them. But I was looking too far ahead to blunder into that fatal mistake. Instead, I signed a year's contract with each of my papers, they guaranteeing to print my advertisements, I guaranteeing to protect them against loss on libel suits. I organized a dummy news bureau, and through it got contracts with the telegraph companies. Thus insured against the cutting of my communications with the public, I was ready for the real campaign.

It began with my “History of the National Coal Company.” I need not repeat that famous history here. I need recall only the main points—how I proved that the common stock was actually worth less than two dollars a share, that the bonds were worth less than twenty-five dollars in the hundred, that both stock and bonds were illegal; my detailed recital of the crimes of Roebuck, Melville and Langdon in wrecking mining properties, in wrecking coal railways, in ejecting American labor and substituting helots from eastern Europe; how they had swindled and lied and bribed; how they had twisted the books of the companies, how they were planning to unload the mass of almost worthless securities at high prices, then to get from under the market and let the bonds and stocks drop down to where they could buy them in on terms that would yield them more than two hundred and fifty per cent, on the actual capital invested. Less and dearer coal; lower wages and more ignorant laborers; enormous profits absorbed without mercy into a few pockets.

On the day the seventh chapter of this history appeared, the telegraph companies notified me that they would transmit no more of my matter. They feared the consequences in libel suits, explained Moseby, general manager of one of the companies.

“But I guarantee to protect you,” said I. “I will give bond in any amount you ask.”

“We can't take the risk, Mr. Blacklock,” replied he. The twinkle in his eye told me why, and also that he, like every one else in the country except the clique, was in sympathy with me.

My lawyers found an honest judge, and I got an injunction that compelled the companies to transmit under my contracts. I suspended the “History” for one day, and sent out in place of it an account of this attempt to shut me off from the public. “Hereafter,” said I, in the last paragraph in my letter, “I shall end each day's chapter with a forecast of what the next day's chapter is to be. If for any reason it fails to appear, the public will know that somebody has been coerced by Roebuck, Melville & Co.”

## XXXI. ANITA'S SECRET

That afternoon—or, was it the next?—I happened to go home early. I have never been able to keep alive anger against any one. My anger against Anita had long ago died away, had been succeeded by regret and remorse that I had let my nerves, or whatever the accursed cause was, whirl me into such an outburst. Not that I regretted having rejected what I still felt was insulting to me and degrading to her; simply that my manner should have been different. There was no necessity or excuse for violence in showing her that I would not, could not, accept from gratitude what only love has the right to give. And I had long been casting about for some way to apologize—not easy to do, when her distant manner toward me made it difficult for me to find even the necessary commonplaces to “keep up appearances” before the servants on the few occasions on which we accidentally met.

But, as I was saying, I came up from the office and stretched myself on—the lounge in my private room adjoining the library. I had read myself into a doze, when a servant brought me a card. I glanced at it as it lay upon his extended tray. “Gerald Monson,” I read aloud. “What does the damned rascal want?” I asked.

The servant smiled. He knew as well as I how Monson, after I dismissed him with a present of six months' pay, had given the newspapers the story—or, rather, his version of the story—of my efforts to educate myself in the “arts and graces of a gentleman.”

“Mr. Monson says he wishes to see you particular, sir,” said he.

“Well—I'll see him,” said I. I despised him too much to dislike him, and I thought he might possibly be in want. But that notion vanished the instant I set eyes upon him. He was obviously at the very top of the wave.

“Hello, Monson,” was my greeting, in it no reminder of his treachery.

“Howdy, Blacklock,” said he. “I've come on a little errand for Mrs. Langdon.” Then, with that nasty grin of his: “You know, I'm looking after things for her since the bust-up.”

“No, I didn't—know,” said I curtly, suppressing my instant curiosity. “What does Mrs. Langdon want?”

“To see you—for just a few minutes—whenever it is convenient.”

“If Mrs. Langdon has business with me, I'll see her at my office,” said I. She was one of the fashionables that had got herself into my black books by her treatment of Anita since the break with the Ellerslys.

“She wishes to come to you here—this afternoon, if you are to be at home. She asked me to say that her business is important—and very private.”

I hesitated, but I could think of no good excuse for refusing. “I'll be here an hour,” said I. “Good day.”

He gave me no time to change my mind.

Something—perhaps it was his curious expression as he took himself off—made me begin to regret. The more I thought of the matter, the less I thought of my having made any civil concession to a woman who had acted so badly toward Anita and myself. He had not been gone a quarter of an hour before I went to Anita in her sitting-room. Always, the instant I entered the outer door of her part of our house, that powerful, intoxicating fascination that she had for me began to take possession of my senses. It was in every garment she wore. It seemed to linger in any place where she had been, for a long time after she left it. She was at a small desk by the window, was writing letters.

“May I interrupt?” said I. “Monson was here a few minutes ago—from Mrs. Langdon. She wants to see me. I told him I would see her here. Then it occurred to me that perhaps I had been too good-natured. What do you think?”

I could not see her face, but only the back of her head, and the loose coils of magnetic hair and the white nape of her graceful neck. As I began to speak, she stopped writing, her pen suspended over the sheet of paper. After I ended there was a long silence.

“I'll not see her,” said I. “I don't quite understand why I yielded.” And I turned to go.

“Wait—please,” came from her abruptly.

Another long silence. Then I: “If she comes here, I think the only person who can properly receive her is you.”

“No—you must see her,” said Anita at last. And she turned round in her chair until she was facing me. Her expression—I can not describe it. I can only say that it gave me a sense of impending calamity.

“I'd rather not—much rather not,” said I.

“I particularly wish you to see her,” she replied, and she turned back to her writing. I saw her pen poised as if she were about to begin; but she did not begin—and I felt that she would not. With my mind shadowed with vague dread, I left that mysterious stillness, and went back to the library.

It was not long before Mrs. Langdon was announced. There are some women to whom a haggard look is becoming; she is one of them. She was much thinner than when I last saw her; instead of her former restless, petulant, suspicious expression, she now looked tragically sad. “May I trouble you to close the door?” said she, when the servant had withdrawn.

I closed the door.

“I've come,” she began, without seating herself, “to make you as unhappy, I fear, as I am. I've hesitated long before coming. But I am desperate. The one hope I have left is that you and I between us may be able to—to—that you and I may be able to help each other.”

I waited.

“I suppose there are people,” she went on, “who have never known what it was to—really to care for some one else. They would despise me for clinging to a man after he has shown me that—that his love has ceased.”

“Pardon me, Mrs. Langdon,” I interrupted. “You apparently think your husband and I are intimate friends. Before you go any further, I must disabuse you of that idea.”

She looked at me in open astonishment. “You do not know why my husband has left me?”

“Until a few minutes ago, I did not know that he had left you,” I said. “And I do not wish to know why.”

Her expression of astonishment changed to mockery. “Oh!” she sneered. “Your wife has fooled you into thinking it a one-sided affair. Well, I tell you, she is as much to blame as he—more. For he did love me when he married me; did love me until she got him under her spell again.”

I thought I understood. “You have been misled, Mrs. Langdon,” said I gently, pitying her as the victim of her insane jealousy. “You have—”

“Ask your wife,” she interrupted angrily. “Hereafter, you can't pretend ignorance. For I'll at least be revenged. She failed utterly to trap him into marriage when she was a poor girl, and—”

“Before you go any further,” said I coldly, “let me set you right. My wife was at one time engaged to your husband's brother, but—”

“Tom?” she interrupted. And her laugh made me bite my lip. “So she told you that! I don't see how she dared. Why, everybody knows that she and Mowbray were engaged, and that he broke it off to marry me.”

All in an instant everything that had been confused in my affairs at home and down town became clear. I understood why I had been pursued relentlessly in Wall Street; why I had been unable to make the least impression on the barriers between Anita and myself. You will imagine that some terrible emotion at once dominated me. But this is not a romance; only the veracious chronicle of certain human beings. My first emotion was—relief that it was not Tom Langdon. “I ought to have known she couldn't care for *him*,” said I to myself. I, contending with Tom Langdon for a woman's love had always made me shrink. But Mowbray—that was vastly different. My respect for myself and for Anita rose.

“No,” said I to Mrs. Langdon, “my wife did not tell me, never spoke of it. What I said to you was purely a

guess of my own. I had no interest in the matter—and haven't. I have absolute confidence in my wife. I feel ashamed that you have provoked me into saying so." I opened the door.

"I am not going yet," said she angrily. "Yesterday morning Mowbray and she were riding together in the Riverside Drive. Ask her groom."

"What of it?" said I. Then, as she did not rise, I rang the bell. When the servant came, I said: "Please tell Mrs. Blacklock that Mrs. Langdon is in the library—and that I am here, and gave you the message."

As soon as the servant was gone, she said: "No doubt she'll lie to you. These women that steal other women's property are usually clever at fooling their own silly husbands."

"I do not intend to ask her," I replied. "To ask her would be an insult."

She made no comment beyond a scornful toss of the head. We both had our gaze fixed upon the door through which Anita would enter. When she finally did appear, I, after one glance at her, turned—it must have been triumphantly—upon her accuser. I had not doubted, but where is the faith that is not the stronger for confirmation? And confirmation there was in the very atmosphere round that stately, still figure. She looked calmly, first at Mrs. Langdon, then at me.

"I sent for you," said I, "because I thought that you, rather than I, should request Mrs. Langdon to leave your house."

At that Mrs. Langdon was on her feet, and blazing. "Fool!" she flared at me. "Oh, the fools women make of men!" Then to Anita: "You—you—But no, I must not permit you to drag me down to your level. Tell your husband—tell him that you were riding with my husband in the Riverside Drive yesterday."

I stepped between her and Anita. "My wife will not answer you," said I. "I hope, Madam, you will spare us the necessity of a painful scene. But leave you must—at once."

She looked wildly round, clasped her hands, suddenly burst into tears. If she had but known, she could have had her own way after that, without any attempt from me to oppose her. For she was evidently unutterably wretched—and no one knew better than I the sufferings of unreturned love. But she had given me up; slowly, sobbing, she left the room, I opening the door for her and closing it behind her.

"I almost broke down myself," said I to Anita. "Poor woman! How can you be so calm? You women in your relations with each other are—a mystery."

"I have only contempt for a woman who tries to hold a man when he wishes to go," said Anita, with quiet but energetic bitterness. "Besides"—she hesitated an instant before going on—"Gladys deserves her fate. She doesn't really care for him. She's only jealous of him. She never did love him."

"How do you know?" said I sharply, trying to persuade myself it was not an ugly suspicion in me that lifted its head and shot out that question.

"Because he never loved her," she replied. "The feeling a woman has for a man or a man for a woman, without any response, isn't love, isn't worthy the name of love. It's a sort of baffled covetousness. Love means generosity, not greediness." Then—"Why do you not ask me whether what she said is true?"

The change in her tone with that last sentence, the strange, ominous note in it, startled me,

"Because," replied I, "as I said to her, to ask my wife such a question would be to insult her. If you were riding with him, it was an accident." As if my rude repulse of her overtures and my keeping away from her ever since would not have justified her in almost anything.

She flushed the dark red of shame, but her gaze held steady and unflinching upon mine. "It was not altogether by accident," she said. And I think she expected me to kill her.

When a man admits and respects a woman's rights where he is himself concerned, he either is no longer interested in her or has begun to love her so well that he can control the savage and selfish instincts of passion. If Mowbray Langdon had been there, I might have killed them both; but he was not there, and she, facing me without fear, was not the woman to be suspected of the stealthy and traitorous.

"It was he that you meant when you warned me you cared for another man?" said I, so quietly that I wondered at myself; wondered what had become of the "Black Matt" who had used his fists almost as much as his brains in fighting his way up.

"Yes," she said, her head down now.

A long pause.

"You wish to be free?" I asked, and my tone must have been gentle.

"I wish to free you," she replied slowly and deliberately.

There was a long silence. Then I said: "I must think it all out. I once told you how I felt about these matters. I've greatly changed my mind since our talk that night in the Willoughby; but my prejudices are still with me. Perhaps you will not be surprised at that—you whose prejudices have cost me so dear."

I thought she was going to speak. Instead she turned away, so that I could no longer see her face.

"Our marriage was a miserable mistake," I went on, struggling to be just and judicial, and to seem calm. "I admit it now. Fortunately, we are both still young—you very young. Mistakes in youth are never fatal. But, Anita, do not blunder out of one mistake into another. You are no longer a child, as you were when I married you. You will be careful not to let judgments formed of him long ago decide you for him as they decided you against me."

"I wish to be free," she said, each word coming with an effort, "as much on your account as on my own." Then, and it seemed to me merely a truly feminine attempt to shirk responsibility, she added, "I am glad my going will be a relief to you."

"Yes, it will be a relief," I confessed. "Our situation has become intolerable." I had reached my limit of self-control. I put out my hand. "Good-by," I said.

If she had wept, it might have modified my conviction that everything was at an end between us. But she did not weep. "Can you ever forgive me?" she asked.

“Let's not talk of forgiveness,” said I, and I fear my voice and manner were gruff, as I strove not to break down. “Let's try to forget.” And I touched her hand and hastened away.

When two human beings set out to misunderstand each other, how fast and far they go! How shut-in we are from each other, with only halting means of communication that break down under the slightest strain!

As I was leaving the house next morning, I gave Sanders this note for her:

“I have gone to live at the Downtown Hotel. When you have decided what course to take, let me know. If my 'rights' ever had any substance, they have starved away to such weak things that they collapse even as I try to set them up. I hope your freedom will give you happiness, and me peace.”

“You are ill, sir?” asked my old servant, my old friend, as he took the note.

“Stay with her, Sanders, as long as she wishes,” said I, ignoring his question. “Then come to me.”

His look made me shake hands with him. As I did it, we both remembered the last time we had shaken hands—when he had the roses for my home-coming with my bride. It seemed to me I could smell those roses.

## XXXII. LANGDON COMES TO THE SURFACE

I shall not estimate the vast sums it cost the Roebuck-Langdon clique to maintain the prices of National Coal, and so give plausibility to the fiction that the public was buying eagerly. In the third week of my campaign, Melville was so deeply involved that he had to let the two others take the whole burden upon themselves.

In the fourth week, Langdon came to me.

The interval between his card and himself gave me a chance to recover from my amazement. When he entered he found me busily writing. Though I had nerved myself, it was several seconds before I ventured to look at him. There he stood, probably as handsome, as fascinating as ever, certainly as self-assured. But I could now, beneath that manner I had once envied, see the puny soul, with its brassy glitter of the vanity of luxury and show. I had been somewhat afraid of myself—afraid the sight of him would stir up in me a tempest of jealousy and hate; as I looked, I realized that I did not know my own nature. “She does not love this man,” I thought. “If she did or could, she would not be the woman I love. He deceived her inexperience as he deceived mine.”

“What can I do for you?” said I to him politely, much as if he were a stranger making an untimely interruption.

My look had disconcerted him; my tone threw him into confusion. “You keep out of the way, now that you've become famous,” he began, with a halting but heroic attempt at his customary easy superiority. “Are you living up in Connecticut, too? Sam Ellersly tells me your wife is stopping there with old Howard Forrester. Sam wants me to use my good offices in making it up between you two and her family.”

I was completely taken aback by this cool ignoring of the real situation between him and me. Impudence or ignorance?—I could not decide. It seemed impossible that Anita had not told him; yet it seemed impossible, too, that he would come to me if she had told him. “Have you any *business* with me?” said I.

His eyelids twitched nervously, and he adjusted his lips several times before he was able to say:

“You and your wife don't care to make it up with the Ellerslys? I fancied so, and told Sam you'd simply think me meddlesome. The other matter is the Travelers Club. I've smoothed things out there. I'm going to put you up and rush you through.”

“No, thanks,” said I. It seemed incredible to me that I had ever cared about that club and the things it represented, as I could remember I undoubtedly did care. It was like looking at an outgrown toy and trying to feel again the emotions it once excited.

“I assure you, Matt, there won't be the slightest difficulty.” His manner was that of a man playing the trump card in a desperate game—he feels it can not lose, yet the stake is so big that he can not but be a little nervous.

“I do not care to join the Travelers Club,” said I, rising. “I must ask you to excuse me. I am exceedingly busy.”

A flush appeared in his cheeks and deepened and spread until his whole body must have been afire. He seated himself. “You know what I've come for,” he said sullenly, and humbly, too.

All his life he had been enthroned upon his wealth. Without realizing it, he had claimed and had received deference solely because he was rich. He had thought himself, in his own person, most superior; now, he found that like a silly child he had been standing on a chair and crying: “See how tall I am.” And the airs, the cynicism, the graceful condescension, which had been so becoming to him, were now as out of place as crown and robes on a king taking a swimming lesson.

“What are your terms, Blacklock? Don't be too hard on an old friend,” said he, trying to carry off his frank plea for mercy with a smile.

I should have thought he would cut his throat and jump off the Battery wall before he would get on his knees to any man for any reason. And he was doing it for mere money—to try to save, not his fortune, but only an imperiled part of it. “If Anita could see him now!” I thought.

To him I said, the more coldly because I did not wish to add to his humiliation by showing him that I pitied him: “I can only repeat, Mr. Langdon, you will have to excuse me. I have given you all the time I can spare.”

His eyes were shifting and his hands trembling as he said: “I will transfer control of the Coal combine to you.”

His tones, shameful as the offer they carried, made me ashamed for him. For money—just for money! And I

had thought him a man. If he had been a self-deceiving hypocrite like Roebuck, or a frank believer in the right of might, like Updegraff, I might possibly, in the circumstances, have tried to release him from my net. But he had never for an instant deceived himself as to the real nature of the enterprises he plotted, promoted and profited by; he thought it “smart” to be bad, and he delighted in making the most cynical epigrams on the black deeds of himself and his associates.

“Better sell out to Roebuck,” I suggested. “I control all the Coal stock I need.”

“I don't care to have anything further to do with Roebuck,” Langdon answered. “I've broken with him.”

“When a man lies to me,” said I, “he gives me the chance to see just how much of a fool he thinks I am, and also the chance to see just how much of a fool he is. I hesitate to think so poorly of you as your attempt to fool me seems to compel.”

But he was unconvinced. “I've found he intends to abandon the ship and leave me to go down with it,” he persisted. “He believes he can escape and denounce me as the arch rascal who planned the combine, and can convince people that I foozled him into it.”

Ingenious; but I happened to know that it was false. “Pardon me, Mr. Langdon,” said I with stiff courtesy. “I repeat, I can do nothing for you. Good morning.” And I went at my work as if he were already gone.

Had I been vindictive, I would have led him on to humiliate himself more deeply, if greater depths of humiliation there are than those to which he voluntarily descended. But I wished to spare him; I let him see the uselessness of his mission. He looked at me in silence—the look of hate that can come only from a creature weak as well as wicked. I think it was all his keen sense of humor could do to save him from a melodramatic outbreak. He slipped into his habitual pose, rose and withdrew without another word. All this fright and groveling and treachery for plunder, the loss of which would not impair his fortune—plunder he had stolen with many a jest and gibe at his helpless victims. Like most of our debonair dollar chasers, he was a good sportsman only when the game was with him.

That afternoon he threw his Coal holdings on the market in great blocks. His treachery took Roebuck completely by surprise—for Roebuck believed in this fair-weather “gentleman,” foul-weather coward, and neglected to allow for that quicksand that is always under the foundation of the man who has inherited, not earned, his wealth. But for the blundering credulity of rascals, would honest men ever get their dues? Roebuck's brokers had bought many thousands of Langdon's shares at the high artificial price before Roebuck grasped the situation—that it was not my followers recklessly gambling to break the prices, but Langdon unloading on his “pal.” As soon as he saw, he abruptly withdrew from the market. When the Stock Exchange closed, National Coal securities were offered at prices ranging from eleven for the bonds to two for the common and three for the preferred—offered, and no takers.

“Well, you've done it,” said Joe, coming with the news that Thornley, of the Discount and Deposit Bank, had been appointed receiver.

“I've made a beginning,” replied I. And the last sentence of my next morning's “letter” was:

“To-morrow the first chapter of the History of the Industrial National Bank.”

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“I have felt for two years,” said Roebuck to Schilling, who repeated it to me soon afterward, “that Blacklock was about the most dangerous fellow in the country. The first time I set eyes on him, I saw he was a born iconoclast. And I've known for a year that some day he would use that engine of publicity of his to cannonade the foundations of society.”

“He knew me better than I knew myself,” was my comment to Schilling. And I meant it—for I had not finished the demolition of the Coal combine when I began to realize that, whatever I might have thought of my own ambitions, I could never have tamed myself or been tamed into a devotee of dollars and of respectability. I simply had been keeping quiet until my tools were sharp and fate spun my opportunity within reach. But I must, in fairness, add, it was lucky for me that, when the hour struck, Roebuck was not twenty years younger and one-twentieth as rich. It's a heavy enough handicap, under the best of circumstances, to go to war burdened with years; add the burden of a monster fortune, and it isn't in human nature to fight well. Youth and a light knapsack!

But—to my fight on the big bank.

Until I opened fire, the public thought, in a general way, that a bank was an institution like Thornley's Discount and Deposit National—a place for the safe-keeping of money and for accommodating business men with loans to be used in carrying on and extending legitimate and useful enterprises. And there were many such banks. But the real object of the banking business, as exploited by the big bandits who controlled it and all industry, was to draw into a mass the money of the country that they might use it to manipulate the markets, to wreck and reorganize industries and wreck them again, to work off inflated bonds and stocks upon the public at inflated prices, to fight among themselves for rights to despoil, making the people pay the war budgets—in a word, to finance the thousand and one schemes whereby they and their friends and relatives, who neither produce nor help to produce, appropriate the bulk of all that is produced.

And before I finished with the National Industrial Bank, I had shown that it and several similar institutions in the big cities throughout the country were, in fact, so many dens to which rich and poor were lured for spoliation. I then took up the Universal Life, as a type. I showed how insuring was, with the companies controlled by the bandits, simply the decoy; that the real object was the same as the real object of the big bandit banks. When I had finished my series on the Universal Life I had named and pilloried Roebuck, Langdon, Melville, Wainwright, Updegraff, Van Steen, Epstein—the seven men of enormous wealth, leaders of the seven cliques that had the political and industrial United States at their mercy, and were plucking the people through an ever-increasing army of agents. The agents kept some of the feathers—“The Seven” could afford to pay liberally. But the bulk of the feather crop was passed on to “The Seven.”

I shall answer in a paragraph the principal charges that were made against me. They say I bribed employees on the telegraph companies, and so got possession of incriminating telegrams that had been sent by “The Seven” in the course of their worst campaigns. I admit the charge. They say I bribed some of their

confidential men to give me transcripts and photographs of secret ledgers and reports. I admit the charge. They say I bought translations of stenographic notes taken by eavesdroppers on certain important secret meetings. I admit the charge. But what was the chief element in my success in thus getting proofs of their crimes? Not the bribery, but the hatred that all the servants of such men have for them. I tempted no one to betray them. *Every item, of information I got was offered to me*. And I shall add these facts:

First, in not a single case did they suspect and discharge the “guilty” persons.

Second, I have to-day as good means of access to their secrets as I ever had—and, if they discharged all who now serve them, I should be able soon to reestablish my lines; men of their stripe can not hope to be served faithfully.

Third, I had offers from all but three of “The Seven” to “peach” on the others in return for immunity. There may be honor among some thieves, but not among “respectable” thieves. Hypocrisy and honor will be found in the same character when the sun shines at night—not before.

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It was the sardonic humor of fate that Langdon, for all his desire to keep out of my way, should have compelled me to center my fire upon him; that I, who wished to spare him, if possible, should have been compelled to make of him my first “awful example.”

I had decided to concentrate upon Roebuck, because he was the richest and most powerful of “The Seven.” For, in my pictures of the three main phases of “finance”—the industrial, the life-insurance and the banking—he, as arch plotter in every kind of respectable skulduggery, was necessarily in the foreground. My original intention was to demolish the Power Trust—or, at least, to compel him to buy back all of its stock which he had worked off on the public. I had collected many interesting facts about it, facts typical of the conditions that “finance” has established in so many of our industries.

For instance, I was prepared to show that the actual earnings of the Power Trust were two and a half times what its reports to stock-holders alleged; that the concealed profits were diverted into the pockets of Roebuck, his sons, eleven other relatives and four of “The Seven,” the lion's share going, of course, to the lion. Like almost all the great industrial enterprises, too strong for the law and too remote for the supervision of their stock-holders, it gathered in enormous revenues to disburse them chiefly in salaries and commissions and rake-offs on contracts to favorites. I had proof that in one year it had “written off” twelve millions of profit and loss, ten millions of which had found its way to Roebuck's pocket. That pocket! That “treasury of the Lord”!

Dishonest? Roebuck and most of the other leaders of the various gangs, comprising, with all their ramifications, the principal figures in religious, philanthropic, fashionable society, did not for an instant think their doings dishonest. They had no sense of trusteeship for this money intrusted to them as captains of industry bankers, life-insurance directors. They felt that it was theirs to do with as they pleased.

And they felt that their superiority in rank and in brains entitled them to whatever remuneration they could assign to themselves without rousing the wrath of a public too envious to admit the just claims of the “upper classes.” They convinced themselves that without them crops would cease to grow, sellers and buyers would be unable to find their way to market, barbarism would spread its rank and choking weeds over the whole garden of civilization. And, so brainless is the parrot public, they have succeeded in creating a very widespread conviction that their own high opinion of their services is not too high, and that some dire calamity would come if they were swept from between producer and consumer! True, thieves are found only where there is property; but who but a chucklebrain would think the thieves made the property?

Roebuck was the keystone of the arch that sustained the structure of chicane. To dislodge him was the direct way to collapse it. I was about to set to work when Langdon, feeling that he ought to have a large supply of cash in the troublous times I was creating, increased the capital stock of his already enormously overcapitalized Textile Trust and offered the new issue to the public. As the Textile Trust was even better bulwarked, politically, than the Power Trust, it was easily able to declare tempting dividends out of its lootings. So the new stock could not be attacked in the one way that would make the public instantly shun it—I could not truthfully charge that it would not pay the promised dividends. Yet attack I must—for that issue was, in effect, a bold challenge of my charges against “The Seven.” From all parts of the country inquiries poured in upon me: “What do you think of the new Textile issue? Shall we invest? Is the Textile Company sound?”

I had no choice. I must turn aside from Roebuck; I must first show that, while Textile was, in a sense, sound just at that time, it had been unsound, and would be unsound again as soon as Langdon had gathered in a sufficient number of lambs to make a battue worth the while of a man dealing in nothing less than seven figures. I proceeded to do so.

The market yielded slowly. Under my first day's attack Textile preferred fell six points, Textile common three. While I was in the midst of dictating my letter for the second day's attack, I suddenly came to a full stop. I found across my way this thought: “Isn't it strange that Langdon, after humbling himself to you, should make this bold challenge? It's a trap!”

“No more at present,” said I, to my stenographer. “And don't write out what I've already dictated.”

I shut myself in and busied myself at the telephone. Half an hour after I set my secret machinery in motion, a messenger brought me an envelop, the address type-written. It contained a sheet of paper on which appeared, in type-writing; these words, and nothing more:

*“He is heavily short of Textiles.”*

It was indeed a trap. The new issue was a blind. He had challenged me to attack his stock, and as soon as I did, he had begun secretly to sell it for a fall. I worked at this new situation until midnight, trying to get together the proofs. At that hour—for I could delay no longer, and my proofs were not quite complete—I sent my newspapers two sentences:

*“To-morrow I shall make a disclosure that will*

*send Textiles up. Do not sell Textiles!”*

## XXXIII. MRS. LANGDON MAKES A CALL.

Next day Langdon's stocks wavered, going up a little, going down a little, closing at practically the same figures at which they had opened. Then I sprang my sensation—that Langdon and his particular clique, though they controlled the Textile Trust, did not own so much as one-fiftieth of its voting stock. True “captains of industry” that they were, they made their profits not out of dividends, but out of side schemes that absorbed about two-thirds of the earnings of the Trust, and out of gambling in its bonds and stocks. I said in conclusion:

“The largest owner of the stock is Walter G. Edmunds, of Chicago—an honest man. Send your voting proxies to him, and he can take the Textile Company away from those now plundering it.”

As the annual election of the Trust was only six weeks away, Langdon and his clique were in a panic. They rushed into the market and bought frantically, the public bidding against them. Langdon himself went to Chicago to reason with Edmunds—that is, to try to find out at what figure he could be bought. And so on, day after day, I faithfully reporting to the public the main occurrences behind the scenes. The Langdon attempt to regain control by purchases of stock failed. He and his allies made what must have been to them appalling sacrifices; but even at the high prices they offered, comparatively little of the stock appeared.

“I've caught them,” said I to Joe—the first time, and the last, during that campaign that I indulged in a boast.

“If Edmunds sticks to you,” replied cautious Joe.

But Edmunds did not. I do not know at what price he sold himself. Probably it was pitifully small; cupidity usually snatches the instant bait tickles its nose. But I do know that my faith in human nature got its severest shock.

“You are down this morning,” said Thornley, when I looked in on him at his bank. “I don't think I ever before saw you show that you were in low spirits.”

“I've found out a man with whom I'd have trusted my life,” said I. “Sometimes I think all men are dishonest. I've tried to be an optimist like you, and have told myself that most men must be honest or ninety-five per cent. of the business couldn't be done on credit as it is.”

Thornley smiled, like an old man at the enthusiasm of a youngster. “That proves nothing as to honesty,” said he. “It simply shows that men can be counted on to do what it is to their plain interest to do. The truth is—and a fine truth, too—most men wish and try to be honest. Give 'em a chance to resist their own weaknesses. Don't trust them. Trust—that's the making of false friends and the filling of jails.”

“And palaces,” I added.

“And palaces,” assented he. “Every vast fortune is a monument to the credulity of man. Instead of getting after these heavy-laden rascals, Matthew, you'd better have turned your attention to the public that has made rascals of them by leaving its property unguarded.”

Fortunately, Edmunds had held out, or, rather, Langdon had delayed approaching him, long enough for me to gain my main point. The uproar over the Textile Trust had become so great that the national Department of Commerce dared not refuse an investigation; and I straightway began to spread out in my daily letters the facts of the Trust's enormous earnings and of the shameful sources of those earnings. Thanks to Langdon's political pull, the president appointed as investigator one of those rascals who carefully build themselves good reputations to enable them to charge higher prices for dirty work. But, with my facts before the people, whitewash was impossible.

I was expecting emissaries from Langdon, for I knew he must now be actually in straits. Even the Universal Life didn't dare lend him money; and was trying to call in the millions it had loaned him. But I was astounded when my private door opened and Mrs. Langdon ushered herself in.

“Don't blame your boy, Mr. Blacklock,” cried she gaily, exasperatingly confident that I was as delighted with her as she was with herself. “I told him you were expecting me and didn't give him a chance to stop me.”

I assumed she had come to give me wholly undeserved thanks for revenging her upon her recreant husband. I tried to look civil and courteous, but I felt that my face was darkening—her very presence forced forward things I had been keeping in the far background of my mind, “How can I be of service to you, Madam?” said I.

“I bring you good news,” she replied—and I noted that she no longer looked haggard and wretched, that her beauty was once more smiling with a certain girlishness, like a young widow's when she finds her consolation. “Mowbray and I have made it up,” she explained.

I simply listened, probably looking as grim as I felt.

“I knew you would be interested,” she went on. “Indeed, it means almost as much to you as to me. It brings peace to *two* families.”

Still I did not relax.

“And so,” she continued, a little uneasy, “I came to you immediately.”

I continued to listen, as if I were waiting for her to finish and depart.

“If you want, I'll go to Anita.” Natural feminine tact would have saved her from this rawness; but, convinced that she was a “great lady” by the flattery of servants and shopkeepers and sensational newspapers and social climbers, she had discarded tact as worthy only of the lowly and of the aspiring before they “arrive.”

“You are too kind,” said I. “Mrs. Blacklock and I feel competent to take care of our own affairs.”

“Please, Mr. Blacklock,” she said, realizing that she had blundered, “don't take my directness the wrong way. Life is too short for pose and pretense about the few things that really matter. Why shouldn't we be frank with each other?”

“I trust you will excuse me,” said I, moving toward the door—I had not seated myself when she did. “I think I have made it clear that we have nothing to discuss.”

“You have the reputation of being generous and too big for hatred. That is why I have come to you,” said she, her expression confirming my suspicion of the real and only reason for her visit. “Mowbray and I are completely reconciled—*completely*, you understand. And I want you to be generous, and not keep on with this attack. I am involved even more than he. He has used up his fortune in defending mine. Now, you are simply trying to ruin me—not him, but *me*. The president is a friend of Mowbray's, and he'll call off this horrid investigation, and everything'll be all right, if you'll only stop.”

“Who sent you here?” I asked.

“I came of my own accord,” she protested. Then, realizing from the sound of her voice that she could not have convinced me with a tone so unconvincing, she hedged with: “It was my own suggestion, really it was.”

“Your husband permitted *you* to come—and to *me*?”

She flushed.

“And you have accepted his overtures when you knew he made them only because he needed your money?”

She hung her head. “I love him,” she said simply. Then she looked straight at me and I liked her expression. “A woman has no false pride when love is at stake,” she said. “We leave that to you men.”

“Love!” I retorted, rather satirically, I imagine. “How much had your own imperiled fortune to do with your being so forgiving?”

“Something,” she admitted. “You must remember I have children. I must think of their future. I don't want them to be poor. I want them to have the station they were born to.” She went to one of the windows overlooking the street. “Look here!” she said.

I stood beside her. The window was not far above the street level. Just below us was a handsome victoria, coachman, harness, horses, all most proper, a footman rigid at the step. A crowd had gathered round—in those stirring days when I was the chief subject of conversation wherever men were interested in money—and where are they not?—there was almost always a crowd before my offices. In the carriage sat two children, a boy and a girl, hardly more than babies. They were gorgeously overdressed, after the vulgar fashion of aristocrats and apers of aristocracy. They sat stiffly, like little scions of royalty, with that expression of complacent superiority which one so often sees on the faces of the little children of the very rich—and some not so little, too. The thronging loungers, most of them either immigrant peasants from European caste countries or the un-disinfected sons of peasants, were gaping in true New York “lower class” awe; the children were literally swelling with delighted vanity. If they had been pampered pet dogs, one would have laughed. As they were human beings, it filled me with sadness and pity. What ignorance, what stupidity to bring up children thus in democratic America—democratic to-day, inevitably more democratic to-morrow! What a turning away from the light! What a crime against the children!

“For their sake, Mr. Blacklock,” she pleaded, her mother love wholly hiding from her the features of the spectacle that for me shrieked like scarlet against a white background.

“Your husband has deceived you about your fortune, Mrs. Langdon,” I said gently, for there is to me something pathetic in ignorance and I was not blaming her for her folly and her crime against her children. “You can tell him what I am about to say, or not, as you please. But my advice is that you keep it to yourself. Even if the present situation develops as seems probable, develops as Mr. Langdon fears, you will not be left without a fortune—a very large fortune, most people would think. But Mr. Langdon will have little or nothing—indeed, I think he is practically dependent on you now.”

“What I have is his,” she said.

“That is generous,” replied I, not especially impressed by a sentiment, the very uttering of which raised a strong doubt of its truth. “But is it prudent? You wish to keep him—securely. Don't tempt him by a generosity he would only abuse.”

She thought it over. “The idea of holding a man in that way is repellent to me,” said she, now obviously posing.

“If the man happens to be one that can be held in no other way,” said I, moving significantly toward the door, “one must overcome one's repugnance—or be despoiled and abandoned.”

“Thank you,” she said, giving me her hand. “Thank you—more than I can say.” She had forgotten entirely that she came to plead for her husband. “And I hope you will soon be as happy as I am.” That last in New York's funniest “great lady” style.

I bowed, and when there was the closed door between us, I laughed, not at all pleasantly. “This New York!” I said aloud. “This New York that dabbles its slime of sordidness and snobbishness on every flower in the garden of human nature. New York that destroys pride and substitutes vanity for it. New York with its petty, mischievous class-makers, the pattern for the rich and the 'smarties' throughout the country. These 'cut-out' minds and hearts, the best of them incapable of growth and calloused wherever the scissors of conventionality have snipped.”

I took from my pocket the picture of Anita I always carried. “Are *you* like that?” I demanded of it. And it seemed to answer: “Yes,—I am.” Did I tear the picture up? No. I kissed it as if it were the magnetic reality. “I don't care what you are!” I cried. “I want you! I want you!”

“Fool!” you are saying. Precisely what I called myself. And you? Is it the one you *ought* to love that you give your heart to? Is it the one that understands you and sympathizes with you? Or is it the one whose presence gives you visions of paradise and whose absence blots out the light?

I loved her. Yet I will say this much for myself: I still would not have taken her on any terms that did not

make her really mine.

## XXXIV. “MY RIGHT EYE OFFENDS ME”

Now that Updegraff is dead, I am free to tell of our relations.

My acquaintance with him was more casual than with any other of “The Seven.” From the outset of my career I made it a rule never to deal with understrappers, always to get in touch with the man who had the final say. Thus, as the years went by, I grew into intimacy with the great men of finance where many with better natural facilities for knowing them remained in an outer circle. But with Updegraff, interested only in enterprises west of the Mississippi and keeping Denver as his legal residence and exploiting himself as a Western man who hated Wall Street, I had a mere bowing acquaintance. This was unimportant, however, as each knew the other well by reputation. Our common intimacies made us intimates for all practical purposes.

Our connection was established soon after the development of my campaign against the Textile Trust had shown that I was after a big bag of the biggest game. We happened to have the same secret broker; and I suppose it was in his crafty brain that the idea of bringing us together was born. Be that as it may, he by gradual stages intimated to me that Updegraff would convey me secrets of “The Seven” in exchange for a guarantee that I would not attack his interests. I do not know what his motive in this treachery was—probably a desire to curb the power of his associates in industrial despotism.

Each of “The Seven” hated and feared and suspected the other six with far more than the ordinary and proverbial rich man's jealous dislike of other rich men. There was not one of them that did not bear the ever-smarting scars of vicious wounds, front and back, received from his fellows; there was not one that did not cherish the hope of overthrowing the rule of Seven and establishing the rule of One. At any rate, I accepted Updegraff's proposition; henceforth, though he stopped speaking to me when we happened to meet, as did all the other big bandits and most of their parasites and procurers, he kept me informed of every act “The Seven” resolved upon.

Thus I knew all about their “gentlemen's agreement” to support the stock market, and that they had made Tavistock their agent for resisting any and all attempts to lower prices, and had given him practically unlimited funds to draw upon as he needed. I had Tavistock sounded on every side, but found no weak spot. There was no rascality he would not perpetrate for whoever employed him; but to his employer he was as loyal as a woman to a bad man. And for a time it looked as if “The Seven” had checkmated me. Those outsiders who had invested heavily in the great enterprises through which “The Seven” ruled were disposing of their holdings—cautiously, through fear of breaking the market. Money would pile up in the banks—money paid out by “The Seven” for their bonds and stocks, of which the people had become deeply suspicious. Then these deposits would be withdrawn—and I knew they were going into real estate investments, because news of booms in real estate and in building was coming in from everywhere. But prices on the Stock Exchange continued to advance.

“They are too strong for you,” said Joe. “They will hold the market up until the public loses faith in you. Then they will sell out at top-notch prices as the people rush in to buy.”

I might have wavered had I not been seeing Tavistock every day. He continued to wear his devil-may-care air; but I observed that he was aging swiftly—and I knew what that meant. Fighting all day to prevent breaks in the crucial stocks; planning most of the night how to prevent breaks the next day; watching the reserve resources of “The Seven” melt away. Those reserves were vast; also, “The Seven” controlled the United States Treasury, and were using its resources as their own; they were buying securities that would be almost worthless if they lost, but if they won, would be rebought by the public at the old swindling prices, when “confidence” was restored. But there was I, cannonading incessantly from my impregnable position; as fast as they repaired breaches in their walls, my big guns of publicity tore new breaches. No wonder Tavistock had thinner hair and wrinkles and a drawn look about the eyes, nose and mouth.

With the battle thus raging all along the line, on the one side “The Seven” and their armies of money and mercenaries and impressed slaves, on the other side the public, I in command, you will say that my yearning for distraction must have been gratified. If the road from his cell were long enough, the condemned man would be fretting less about the gallows than about the tight shoe that was making him limp and wince at every step. Besides, in human affairs it is the personal, always the personal. I soon got used to the crowds, to the big head-lines in the newspapers, to the routine of cannonade and reply.

But the old thorn, pressing persistently—I could not get used to that. In the midst of the adulation, of the blares upon the trumpets of fame that saluted my waking and were wafted to me as I fell asleep at night—in the midst of all the turmoil, I was often in a great and brooding silence, longing for her, now with the imperious energy of passion, and now with the sad ache of love. What was she doing? What was she thinking? Now that Langdon had again played her false for the old price, with what eyes was she looking into the future?

Alva, settled in a West Side apartment not far from the ancestral white elephant, telephoned, asking me to come. I went, because she could and would give me news of Anita. But as I entered her little drawing-room, I said: “It was curiosity that brought me. I wished to see how you were installed.”

“Isn't it nice and small?” cried she. “Billy and I haven't the slightest difficulty in finding each other—as people so often have in the big houses.” And it was Billy this and Billy that, and what Billy said and thought and felt—and before they were married, she had called him William, and had declared “Billy” to be the most offensive combination of letters that ever fell from human lips.

“I needn't ask if *you* are happy,” said I presently, with a dismal failure at looking cheerful. “I can't stay but a moment,” I added, and if I had obeyed my feelings, I'd have risen up and taken myself and my pain away

from surroundings as hateful to me as a summer sunrise in a death-chamber.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, in some confusion. “Then excuse me.” And she hastened from the room.

I thought she had gone to order, or perhaps to bring, the tea. The long minutes dragged away until ten had passed. Hearing a rustling in the hall, I rose, intending to take leave the instant she appeared. The rustling stopped just outside. I waited a few seconds, cried, “Well, I'm off. Next time I want to be alone, I'll know where to come,” and advanced to the door. It was not Alva hesitating there; it was Anita.

“I beg your pardon,” said I coldly.

If there had been room to pass I should have gone. What devil possessed me? Certainly in all our relations I had found her direct and frank, if anything, too frank. Doubtless it was the influence of my associations down town, where for so many months I had been dealing with the “short-card” crowd of high finance, who would hardly play the game straight even when that was the easy way to win. My long, steady stretch in that stealthy and sinuous company had put me in the state of mind in which it is impossible to credit any human being with a motive that is decent or an action that is not a dead-fall. Thus the obvious transformation in her made no impression on me. Her haughtiness, her coldness, were gone, and with them had gone all that had been least like her natural self, most like the repellent conventional pattern to which her mother and her associates had molded her. But I was saying to myself: “A trap! Langdon has gone back to his wife. She turns to me.” And I loved her and hated her. “Never,” thought I, “has she shown so poor an opinion of me as now.”

“My uncle told me day before yesterday that it was not he but you,” she said, lifting her eyes to mine. It is inconceivable to me now that I could have misread their honest story; yet I did.

“I had no idea your uncle's notion of honor was also eccentric,” said I, with a satirical smile that made the blood rush to her face.

“That is unjust to him,” she replied earnestly.

“He says he made you no promise of secrecy. And he confessed to me only because he wished to convince me that he had good reason for his high opinion of you.”

“Really!” said I ironically. “And no doubt he found you open wide to conviction—*now*.” This a subtlety to let her know that I understood why she was seeking me.

“No,” she answered, lowering her eyes. “I knew—better than he.”

For an instant this, spoken in a voice I had long given up hope of ever hearing from her, staggered my cynical conviction. But—“Possibly she thinks she is sincere,” reasoned my head with my heart; “even the sincerest women, brought up as was she, always have the calculator underneath; they deny it, they don't know it often, but there it is; with them, calculation is as involuntary and automatic as their pulse.” So, I said to her, mockingly: “Doubtless your opinion of me has been improving steadily ever since you heard that Mrs. Langdon had recovered her husband.”

She winced, as if I had struck her. “Oh!” she murmured. If she had been the ordinary woman, who in every crisis with man instinctively resorts to weakness' strongest weakness, tears, I might have a different story to tell. But she fought back the tears in which her eyes were swimming and gathered herself together. “That is brutal,” she said, with not a touch of haughtiness, but not humbly, either. “But I deserve it.”

“There was a time,” I went on, swept in a swift current of cold rage, “there was a time when I would have taken you on almost any terms. A man never makes a complete fool of himself about a woman but once in his life, they say. I have done my stretch—and it is over.”

She sighed wearily. “Langdon came to see me soon after I left your house, and went to my uncle,” she said. “I will tell you what happened.”

“I do not wish to hear,” replied I, adding pointedly, “I have been waiting ever since you left for news of your plans.”

She grew white, and my heart smote me. She came into the room and seated herself. “Won't you stop, please, for a moment longer?” she said. “I hope that, at, least, we can part without bitterness. I understand now that everything is over between us. A woman's vanity makes her belief that a man cares for her die hard. I am convinced now—I assure you, I am. I shall trouble you no more about the past. But I have the right to ask you to hear me when I say that Langdon came, and that I myself sent him away; sent him back to his wife.”

“Touching self-sacrifice,” said I ironically.

“No,” she replied. “I can not claim any credit. I sent him away only because you and Alva had taught me how to judge him better. I do not despise him as do you; I know too well what has made him what he is. But I had to send him away.”

My comment was an incredulous look and shrug. “I must be going,” I said.

“You do not believe me?” she asked.

“In my place, would you believe?” replied I. “You say I have taught you. Well, you have taught me, too—for instance, that the years you've spent on your knees in the musty temple of conventionality before false gods have made you—fit only for the Langdon sort of thing. You can't learn how to stand erect, and your eyes can not bear the light.”

“I am sorry,” she said slowly, hesitatingly, “that your faith in me died just when I might, perhaps, have justified it. Ours has been a pitiful series of misunderstandings.”

“A trap! A trap!” I was warning myself. “You've been a fool long enough, Blacklock.” And aloud I said: “Well, Anita, the series is ended now. There's no longer any occasion for our lying or posing to each other. Any arrangements your uncle's lawyers suggest will be made.”

I was bowing, to leave without shaking hands with her. But she would not have it so. “Please!” she said, stretching out her long, slender arm and offering me her hand.

What a devil possessed me that day! With every atom of me longing for her, I yet was able to take her hand and say, with a smile, that was, I doubt not, as mocking as my tone: “By all means let us be friends. And I

trust you will not think me discourteous if I say that I shall feel safer in our friendship when we are both on neutral ground."

As I was turning away, her look, my own heart, made me turn again. I caught her by the shoulders. I gazed into her eyes. "If I could only trust you, could only believe you!" I cried.

"You cared for me when I wasn't worth it," she said. "Now that I am more like what you once imagined me, you do not care."

Up between us rose Langdon's face—cynical, mocking, contemptuous. "Your heart is *his*! You told me so! Don't *lie* to me!" I exclaimed. And before she could reply, I was gone.

Out from under the spell of her presence, back among the tricksters and assassins, the traps and ambushes of Wall Street, I believed again; believed firmly the promptings of the devil that possessed me. "She would have given you a brief fool's paradise," said that devil. "Then what a hideous awakening!" And I cursed the day when New York's insidious snobbishness had tempted my vanity into starting me on that degrading chase after "respectability."

"If she does not move to free herself soon," said I to myself, "I will put my own lawyer to work. My right eye offends me. I will pluck it out."

## XXXV. "WILD WEEK"

"The Seven" made their fatal move on treacherous Updegraff's treacherous advice, I suspect. But they would not have adopted his suggestion had it not been so exactly congenial to their own temper of arrogance and tyranny and contempt for the people who meekly, year after year, presented themselves for the shearing with fatuous bleats of enthusiasm.

"The Seven," of course, controlled directly, or indirectly, all but a few of the newspapers with which I had advertising contracts. They also controlled the main sources through which the press was supplied with news—and often and well they had used this control, and surprisingly cautious had they been not so to abuse it that the editors and the public would become suspicious. When my war was at its height, when I was beginning to congratulate myself that the huge magazines of "The Seven" were empty almost to the point at which they must sue for peace on my own terms, all in four days forty-three of my sixty-seven newspapers—and they the most important—notified me that they would no longer carry out their contracts to publish my daily letter. They gave as their reason, not the real one, fear of "The Seven," but fear that I would involve them in ruinous libel suits. I who had *legal* proof for every statement I made; I who was always careful to understate! Next, one press association after another ceased to send out my letter as news, though they had been doing so regularly for months. The public had grown tired of the "sensation," they said.

I countered with a telegram to one or more newspapers in every city and large town in the United States:

"'The Seven' are trying to cut the wires between the truth and the public. If you wish my daily letter, telegraph me direct and I will send it at my expense."

The response should have warned "The Seven." But it did not. Under their orders the telegraph companies refused to transmit the letter. I got an injunction. It was obeyed in typical, corrupt corporation fashion—they sent my matter, but so garbled that it was unintelligible. I appealed to the courts. In vain.

To me, it was clear as sun in cloudless noonday sky that there could be but one result of this insolent and despotic denial of my rights and the rights of the people, this public confession of the truth of my charges. I turned everything salable or mortgageable into cash, locked the cash up in my private vaults, and waited for the cataclysm.

Thursday—Friday—Saturday. Apparently all was tranquil; apparently the people accepted the Wall Street theory that I was an "exploded sensation." "The Seven" began to preen themselves; the strain upon them to maintain prices, if no less than for three months past, was not notably greater; the crisis would pass, I and my exposures would be forgotten, the routine of reaping the harvests and leaving only the gleanings for the sowers would soon be placidly resumed.

Sunday. Roebuck, taken ill as he was passing the basket in the church of which he was the shining light, died at midnight—a beautiful, peaceful death, they say, with his daughter reading the Bible aloud, and his lips moving in prayer. Some hold that, had he lived, the tranquillity would have continued; but this is the view of those who can not realize that the tide of affairs is no more controlled by the "great men" than is the river led down to the sea by its surface flotsam, by which we measure the speed and direction of its current. Under that terrific tension, which to the shallow seemed a calm, something had to give way. If the dam had not yielded where Roebuck stood guard, it must have yielded somewhere else, or might have gone all in one grand crash.

Monday. You know the story of the artist and his Statue of Grief—how he molded the features a hundred times, always failing, always getting an anti-climax, until at last in despair he gave up the impossible and finished the statue with a veil over the face. I have tried again and again to assemble words that would give some not too inadequate impression of that tremendous week in which, with a succession of explosions, each like the crack of doom, the financial structure that housed eighty millions of people burst, collapsed, was engulfed. I can not. I must leave it to your memory or your imagination.

For years the financial leaders, crazed by the excess of power which the people had in ignorance and over-confidence and slovenly good-nature permitted them to acquire, had been tearing out the honest foundations on which alone so vast a structure can hope to rest solid and secure. They had been substituting rotten beams painted to look like stone and iron. The crash had to come; the sooner, the better—when a thing is wrong, each day's delay compounds the cost of righting it. So, with all the horrors of "Wild Week" in mind, all its

physical and mental suffering, all its ruin and rioting and bloodshed, I still can insist that I am justly proud of my share in bringing it about. The blame and the shame are wholly upon those who made “Wild Week” necessary and inevitable.

In catastrophes, the cry is “Each for himself!” But in a cataclysm, the obvious wise selfishness is generosity, and the cry is, “Stand together, for, singly, we perish.” This was a cataclysm. No one could save himself, except the few who, taking my often-urged advice and following my example, had entered the ark of ready money. Farmer and artisan and professional man and laborer owed merchant; merchant owed banker; banker owed depositor. No one could pay because no one could get what was due him or could realize upon his property. The endless chain of credit that binds together the whole of modern society had snapped in a thousand places. It must be repaired, instantly and securely. But how—and by whom?

I issued a clear statement of the situation; I showed in minute detail how the people standing together under the leadership of the honest men of property could easily force the big bandits to consent to an honest, just, rock-founded, iron-built reconstruction. My statement appeared in all the morning papers throughout the land. Turn back to it; read it. You will say that I was right. Well—

Toward two o'clock Inspector Crawford came into my private office, escorted by Joe. I saw in Joe's seamed, green-gray face that some new danger had arisen. “You've got to get out of this,” said he. “The mob in front of our place fills the three streets. It's made up of crowds turned away from the suspended banks.”

I remembered the sullen faces and the hisses as I entered the office that morning earlier than usual. My windows were closed to keep out the street noises; but now that my mind was up from the work in which I had been absorbed, I could hear the sounds of many voices, even through the thick plate glass.

“We've got two hundred policemen here,” said the inspector. “Five hundred more are on the way. But—really, Mr. Blacklock, unless we can get you away, there'll be serious trouble. Those damn newspapers! Every one of them denounced you this morning, and the people are in a fury against you.”

I went toward the door.

“Hold on, Matt!” cried Joe, springing at me and seizing me, “Where are you going?”

“To tell them what I think of them,” replied I, sweeping him aside. For my blood was up, and I was enraged against the poor cowardly fools.

“For God's sake don't show yourself!” he begged. “If you don't care for your own life, think of the rest of us. We've fixed a route through buildings and under streets up to Broadway. Your electric is waiting for you there.”

“It won't do,” I said. “I'll face 'em—it's the only way.”

I went to the window, and was about to throw up one of the sunblinds for a look at them; Crawford stopped me. “They'll stone the building and then storm it,” said he. “You must go at once, by the route we've arranged.”

“Even if you tell them I'm gone, they won't believe it,” replied I.

“We can look out for that,” said Joe, eager to save me, and caring nothing about consequences to himself. But I had unsettled the inspector.

“Send for my electric to come down here,” said I. “I'll go out alone and get in it and drive away.”

“That'll never do!” cried Joe.

But the inspector said: “You're right, Mr. Blacklock. It's a bare chance. You may take 'em by surprise. Again, some fellow may yell and throw a stone and—” He did not need to finish.

Joe looked wildly at me. “You mustn't do it, Matt!” he exclaimed. “You'll precipitate a riot, Crawford, if you permit this.”

But the inspector was telephoning for my electric. Then he went into the adjoining room, where he commanded a view of the entrance. Silence between Joe and me until he returned.

“The electric is coming down the street,” said he.

I rose. “Good,” said I. “I'm ready.”

“Wait until the other police get here,” advised Crawford.

“If the mob is in the temper you describe,” said I, “the less that's done to irritate it the better. I must go out as if I hadn't a suspicion of danger.”

The inspector eyed me with an expression that was highly flattering to my vanity.

“I'll go with you,” said Joe, starting up from his stupor.

“No,” I replied. “You and the other fellows can take the underground route, if it's necessary.”

“It won't be necessary,” put in the inspector. “As soon as I'm rid of you and have my additional force, I'll clear the streets.” He went to the door. “Wait, Mr. Blacklock, until I've had time to get out to my men.”

Perhaps ten seconds after he disappeared, I, without further words, put on my hat, lit a cigar, shook Joe's wet, trembling hand, left in it my private keys and the memorandum of the combination of my private vault. Then I sallied forth.

I had always had a ravenous appetite for excitement, and I had been in many a tight place; but for the first time there seemed to me to be an equilibrium between my internal energy and the outside situation. As I stepped from my street door and glanced about me, I had no feeling of danger. The whole situation seemed so simple. There stood the electric, just across the narrow stretch of sidewalk; there were the two hundred police, under Crawford's orders, scattered everywhere through the crowd, and good-naturedly jostling and pushing to create distraction. Without haste, I got into my machine. I calmly met the gaze of those thousands, quiet as so many barrels of gunpowder before the explosion. The chauffeur turned the machine.

“Go slow,” I called to him. “You might hurt somebody.”

But he had his orders from the inspector. He suddenly darted ahead at full speed. The mob scattered in every direction, and we were in Broadway, bound up town full-tilt, before I or the mob realized what he was

about.

I called to him to slow down. He paid not the slightest attention. I leaned from the window and looked up at him. It was not my chauffeur; it was a man who had the unmistakable but indescribable marks of the plain-clothes policeman.

“Where are you going?” I shouted.

“You'll find out when we arrive,” he shouted back, grinning.

I settled myself and waited—what else was there to do? Soon I guessed we were headed for the pier off which my yacht was anchored. As we dashed on to it, I saw that it was filled with police, both in uniform and in plain clothes. I descended. A detective sergeant stepped up to me. “We are here to help you to your yacht,” he explained. “You wouldn't be safe anywhere in New York—no more would the place that harbored you.”

He had both common sense and force on his side. I got into the launch. Four detective sergeants accompanied me and went aboard with me. “Go ahead,” said one of them to my captain. He looked at me for orders.

“We are in the hands of our guests,” said I. “Let them have their way.”

We steamed down the bay and out to sea.

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From Maine to Texas the cry rose and swelled:

“Blacklock is responsible! What does it matter whether he lied or told the truth? See the results of his crusade! He ought to be pilloried! He ought to be killed! He is the enemy of the human race. He has almost plunged the whole civilized world into bankruptcy and civil war.” And they turned eagerly to the very autocrats who had been oppressing them. “You have the genius for finance and industry. Save us!”

If you did not know, you could guess how those patriots with the “genius for finance and industry” responded. When they had done, when their program was in effect, Langdon, Melville and Updegraff were the three richest men in the country, and as powerful as Octavius, Antony and Lepidus after Philippi. They had saddled upon the reorganized finance and industry of the nation heavier taxes than ever, and a vaster and more expensive and more luxurious army of their parasites.

The people had risen for financial and industrial freedom; they had paid its fearful price; then, in senseless panic and terror, they flung it away. I have read that one of the inscriptions on Apollo's temple at Delphi was, “Man, the fool of the farce.” Truly, the gods must have created us for their amusement; and when Olympus palls, they ring up the curtain on some such screaming comedy as was that. It “makes the fancy chuckle, while the heart doth ache.”

## XXXVI. “BLACK MATT'S” TRIUMPH

My enemies caused it to be widely believed that “Wild Week” was my deliberate contrivance for the sole purpose of enriching myself. Thus they got me a reputation for almost superhuman daring, for satanic astuteness at cold-blooded calculation. I do not deserve the admiration and respect that my success-worshiping fellow countrymen lay at my feet. True, I did greatly enrich myself; but *not until the Monday after Wild Week*.

Not until I had pondered on men and events with the assistance of the newspapers my detective protectors and jailers permitted to be brought aboard—not until the last hope of turning Wild Week to the immediate public advantage had sputtered out like a lost man's last match, did I think of benefiting myself, of seizing the opportunity to strengthen myself for the future. On Monday morning, I said to Sergeant Mulholland: “I want to go ashore at once and send some telegrams.”

The sergeant is one of the detective bureau's “dress-suit men.” He is by nature phlegmatic and cynical. His experience has put over that a veneer of weary politeness. We had become great friends during our enforced inseparable companionship. For Joe, who looked on me somewhat as a mother looks on a brilliant but erratic son, had, as I soon discovered, elaborated a wonderful program for me. It included a watch on me day and night, lest, through rage or despondency, I should try to do violence to myself. A fine character, that Joe! But, to return, Mulholland answered my request for shore-leave with a soothing smile. “Can't do it, Mr. Blacklock,” he said. “Our orders are positive. But when we put in at New London and send ashore for further instructions, and for the papers, you can send in your messages.”

“As you please,” said I. And I gave him a cipher telegram to Joe—an order to invest my store of cash, which meant practically my whole fortune, in the gilt-edged securities that were to be had for cash at a small fraction of their value.

This on the Monday after Wild Week, please note. I would have helped the people to deliver themselves from the bondage of the bandits. They would not have it. I would even have sacrificed my all in trying to save them in spite of themselves. But what is one sane man against a stampeded multitude of maniacs? For confirmation of my disinterestedness, I point to all those weeks and months during which I waged costly warfare on “The Seven,” who would gladly have given me more than I now have, could I have been bribed to desist. But, when I was compelled to admit that I had overestimated my fellow men, that the people wear the yoke because they have not yet become intelligent and competent enough to be free, then and not until then did I abandon the hopeless struggle.

And I did not go over to the bandits; I simply resumed my own neglected personal affairs and made Wild Week at least a personal triumph.

There is nothing of the spectacular in my make-up. I have no belief in the value of martyrs and martyrdom. Causes are not won—and in my humble opinion never have been won—in the graveyards. Alive and afoot and

armed, and true to my cause, I am the dreaded menace to systematic and respectable robbery. What possible good could have come of mobs killing me and the bandits dividing my estate?

But why should I seek to justify myself? I care not a rap for the opinion of my fellow men. They sought my life when they should have been hailing me as a deliverer; now, they look up to me because they falsely believe me guilty of an infamy.

My guards expected to be recalled on Tuesday. But Melville heard what Crawford had done about me, and straightway used his influence to have me detained until the new grip of the old gang was secure. Saturday afternoon we put in at Newport for the daily communication with the shore. When the launch returned, Mulholland brought the papers to me, lounging aft in a mass of cushions under the awning. “We are going ashore,” said he. “The order has come.”

I had a sudden sense of loneliness. “I'll take you down to New York,” said I. “I prefer to land my guests where I shipped them.”

As we steamed slowly westward I read the papers. The country was rapidly readjusting itself, was returning to the conditions before the upheaval. The “financiers”—the same old gang, except for a few of the weaker brethren ruined and a few strong outsiders, who had slipped in during the confusion—were employing all the old, familiar devices for deceiving and robbing the people. The upset milking-stool was righted, and the milker was seated again and busy, the good old cow standing without so much as shake of horn or switch of tail. “Mulholland,” said I, “what do you think of this business of living?”

“I'll tell you, Mr. Blacklock,” said he. “I used to fuss and fret a good deal about it. But I don't any more. I've got a house up in the Bronx, and a bit of land round it. And there's Mrs. Mulholland and four little Mulhollands and me—that's my country and my party and my religion. The rest is off my beat, and I don't give a damn for it. I don't care which fakir gets to be president, or which swindler gets to be rich. Everything works out somehow, and the best any man can do is to mind his own business.”

“Mulholland—Mrs. Mulholland—four little Mulhollands,” said I reflectively. “That's about as much as one man could attend to properly. And—you are 'on the level,' aren't you?”

“Some say honesty's the best policy,” replied he. “Some say it isn't. I don't know, and I don't care, whether it is or it isn't. It's *my* policy. And we six seem to have got along on it so far.”

I sent my “guests” ashore the next morning.

“No, I'll stay aboard,” said I to Mulholland, as he stood aside for me to precede him down the gangway from the launch. I went into the watch-pocket of my trousers and drew out the folded two one-thousand-dollar bills I always carried—it was a habit formed in my youthful, gambling days. I handed him one of the bills. He hesitated.

“For the four little Mulhollands,” I urged.

He put it in his pocket. I watched him and his men depart with a heavy heart. I felt alone, horribly alone, without a tie or an interest. Some of the morning papers spoke respectfully of me as one of the strong men who had ridden the flood and had been landed by it on the heights of wealth and power. Admiration and envy lurked even in sneers at my “unscrupulous plotting.” Since I had wealth, plenty of wealth, I did not need character. Of what use was character in such a world except as a commodity to exchange for wealth?

“Any orders, sir?” interrupted my captain.

I looked round that vast and vivid scene of sea and land activities. I looked along the city's titanic sky-line—the mighty fortresses of trade and commerce piercing the heavens and flinging to the wind their black banners of defiance. I felt that I was under the walls of hell itself.

“To get away from this,” replied I to the waiting captain. “Go back down the Sound—to Dawn Hill.”

Yes, I would go to the peaceful, soothing country, to my dogs and horses and those faithful servants bound to me by our common love for the same animals. “Men to cross swords with, to amuse oneself with,” I mused; “but dogs and horses to live with.” I pictured myself at the kennels—the joyful uproar the instant instinct warned the dogs of my coming; how they would leap and bark and tremble in a very ecstasy of delight as I stood among them; how jealous all the others would be, as I selected one to caress.

“Send her ahead as fast as she'll go,” I called to the captain.

As the *Albatross* steamed into the little harbor, I saw Mowbray Langdon's *Indolence* at anchor. I glanced toward Steuben Point—where his cousins, the Vivians, lived—and thought I recognized his launch at their pier. We saluted the *Indolence*; the *Indolence* saluted us. My launch was piped away and took me ashore. I strolled along the path that wound round the base of the hill toward the kennels. At the crossing of the path down from the house, I paused and lingered on the glimpse of one of the corner towers of the great showy palace. I was muttering something—I listened to myself. It was: “Mulholland, Mrs. Mulholland and the four little Mulhollands.” And I felt like laughing aloud, such a joke was it that I should be envying a policeman his potato patch and his fat wife and his four brats, and that he should be in a position to pity me.

You may be imagining that, through all, Anita had been dominating my mind. That is the way it is in the romances; but not in life. No doubt there are men who brood upon the impossible, and moon and maunder away their lives over the grave of a dead love; no doubt there are people who will say that, because I did not shoot Langdon or her, or myself, or fly to a desert or pose in the crowded places of the world as the last scene of a tragedy, I therefore cared little about her. I offer them this suggestion: A man strong enough to give a love worth a woman's while is strong enough to live on without her when he finds he may not live with her.

As I stood there that summer day, looking toward the crest of the hill, at the mocking mausoleum of my dead dream, I realized what the incessant battle of the Street had meant to me. “There is peace for me only in the storm,” said I. “But, thank God, there is peace for me somewhere.”

Through the foliage I had glimpses of some one coming slowly down the zigzag path. Presently, at one of the turnings half-way up the hill, appeared Mowbray Langdon. “What is he doing here,” thought I, scarcely able to believe my eyes. “Here of all places!” And then I forgot the strangeness of his being at Dawn Hill in the strangeness of his expression. For it was apparent, even at the distance which separated us, that he was

suffering from some great and recent blow. He looked old and haggard; he walked like a man who neither knows nor cares where he is going.

He had not seen me, and my impulse was to avoid him by continuing on toward the kennels. I had no especial feeling against him; I had not lost Anita because she cared for him or he for her, but because she did not care for me—simply that to meet would be awkward, disagreeable for us both. At the slight noise of my movement to go on, he halted, glanced round eagerly, as if he hoped the sound had been made by some one he wished to see. His glance fell on me. He stopped short, was for an instant disconcerted; then his face lighted up with devilish joy. “You!” he cried. “Just the man!” And he descended more rapidly.

At first I could make nothing of this remark. But as he drew nearer and nearer, and his ugly mood became more and more apparent, I felt that he was looking forward to provoking me into giving him a distraction from whatever was tormenting him. I waited. A few minutes and we were face to face, I outwardly calm, but my anger slowly lighting up as he deliberately applied to it the torch of his insolent eyes. He was wearing his old familiar air of cynical assurance. Evidently, with his recovered fortune, he had recovered his conviction of his great superiority to the rest of the human race—the child had climbed back on the chair that made it tall and had forgotten its tumble. And I was wondering again that I, so short a time before, had been crude enough to be fascinated and fooled by those tawdry posings and pretenses. For the man, as I now saw him, was obviously shallow and vain, a slave to those poor “man-of-the-world” passions—ostentation and cynicism and skill at vices old as mankind and tedious as a treadmill, the commonplace routine of the idle and foolish and purposeless. A clever, handsome fellow, but the more pitiful that he was by nature above the uses to which he prostituted himself.

He fought hard to keep his eyes steadily on mine; but they would waver and shift. Not, however, before I had found deep down in them the beginnings of fear. “You see, you were mistaken,” said I. “You have nothing to say to me—or I to you.”

He knew I had looked straight to the bottom of his real self, and had seen the coward that is in every man who has been bred to appearances only. Up rose his vanity, the coward's substitute for courage.

“You think I am afraid of you?” he sneered, bluffing and blustering like the school bully.

“I don't in the least care whether you are or not,” replied I. “What are you doing here, anyhow?”

It was as if I had thrown off the cover of a furnace. “I came to get the woman I love,” he cried. “You stole her from me! You tricked me! But, by God, Blacklock, I'll never pause until I get her back and punish you!” He was brave enough now, drunk with the fumes from his brave words. “All my life,” he raged arrogantly on, “I've had whatever I wanted. I've let nothing interfere—nothing and nobody. I've been too forbearing with you—first, because I knew she could never care for you, and, then, because I rather admired your pluck and impudence. I like to see fellows kick their way up among us from the common people.”

I put my hand on his shoulder. No doubt the fiend that rose within me, as from the dead, looked at him from my eyes. He has great physical strength, but he winced under that weight and grip, and across his face flitted the terror that must come to any man at first sense of being in the angry clutch of one stronger than he. I slowly released him—I had tested and realized my physical superiority; to use it would be cheap and cowardly.

“You can't provoke me to descend to your level,” said I, with the easy philosophy of him who clearly has the better of the argument.

He was shaking from head to foot, not with terror, but with impotent rage. How much we owe to accident! The mere accident of my physical superiority had put him at hopeless disadvantage; had made him feel inferior to me as no victory of mental or moral superiority could possibly have done. And I myself felt a greater contempt for him than the discovery of his treachery and his shallowness had together inspired.

“I shan't indulge in flapdoodle,” I went on. “I'll be frank. A year ago, if any man had faced me with a claim upon a woman who was married to me, I'd probably have dealt with him as your vanity and what you call 'honor' would force you to try to deal with a similar situation. But I live to learn, and I'm, fortunately, not afraid to follow a new light. There is the vanity of so-called honor; there as also the demand of justice—of fair play. As I have told her, so I now tell you—she is free to go. But I shall say one thing to you that I did not say to her. If you do not deal fairly with her, I shall see to it that there are ten thorns to every rose in that bed of roses on which you lie. You are contemptible in many ways—perhaps that's why women like you. But there must be some good in you, or possibilities of good, or you could not have won and kept her love.”

He was staring at me with a dazed expression. I rather expected him to show some of that amused contempt with which men of his sort always receive a new idea that is beyond the range of their narrow, conventional minds. For I did not expect him to understand why I was not only willing, but even eager, to relinquish a woman whom I could hold only by asserting a property right in her. And I do not think he did understand me, though his manner changed to a sort of grudging respect. He was, I believe, about to make some impulsive, generous speech, when we heard the quick strokes of iron-shod hoofs on the path from the kennels and the stables—is there any sound more arresting? Past us at a gallop swept a horse, on his back—Anita. She was not in riding-habit; the wind fluttered the sleeves of her blouse, blew her uncovered hair this way and that about her beautiful face. She sped on toward the landing, though I fancied she had seen us.

Anita at Dawn Hill—Langdon, in a furious temper, descending from the house toward the landing—Anita presently, riding like mad—“to overtake him,” thought I. And I read confirmation in his triumphant eyes. In another mood, I suppose my fury would have been beyond my power to restrain it. Just then—the day grew dark for me, and I wanted to hide away somewhere. Heart-sick, I was ashamed for her, hated myself for having blundered into surprising her.

She reappeared at the turn round which she had vanished. I now tooted that she was riding without saddle or bridle, with only a halter round the horse's neck—then she had seen us, had stopped and come back as soon as she could. She dropped from the horse, looked swiftly at me, at him, at me again, with intense anxiety.

“I saw your yacht in the harbor only a moment ago,” she said to me. She was almost panting. “I feared you

might meet him. So I came."

"As you see, he is quite—intact," said I. "I must ask that you and he leave the place at once." And I went rapidly along the path toward the kennels.

An exclamation from Langdon forced me to turn in spite of myself. He was half-kneeling, was holding her in his arms. At that sight, the savage in me shook himself free. I dashed toward them with I knew not what curses bursting from me. Langdon, intent upon her, did not realize until I sent him reeling backward to the earth and snatched her up. Her white face, her closed eyes, her limp form made my fury instantly collapse. In my confusion I thought that she was dead. I laid her gently on the grass and supported her head, so small, so gloriously crowned, the face so still and sweet and white, like the stainless entrance to a stainless shrine. How that horrible fear changed my whole way of looking at her, at him, at her and him, at everything!

Her eyelids were quivering—her eyes were opening—her bosom was rising and falling slowly as she drew long, uncertain breaths. She shuddered, sat up, started up. "Go! go!" she cried. "Bring him back! Bring him back! Bring him—"

There she recognized me. "Oh," she said, and gave a great sigh of relief. She leaned against a tree and looked at Langdon. "You are still here? Then tell him."

Langdon gazed sullenly at the ground. "I can't," he answered. "I don't believe it. Besides—he has given you to me. Let us go. Let me take you to the Vivians." He threw out his arms in a wild, passionate gesture; he was utterly unlike himself. His emotion burst through and shattered pose and cynicism and hard crust of selfishness like the exploding powder bursting the shell. "I can't give you up, Anita!" he exclaimed in a tone of utter desperation. "I can't! I can't!"

But her gaze was all this time steadily on me, as if she feared I would go, should she look away. "I will tell you myself," she said rapidly, to me. "We—uncle Howard and I—read in the papers how they had all turned against you, and he brought me over here. He has been telegraphing for you. This morning he went to town to search for you. About an hour ago Langdon came. I refused to see him, as I have ever since the time I told you about at Alva's. He persisted, until at last I had the servant request him to leave the house."

"But *now* there's no longer any reason for your staying, Anita," he pleaded. "He has said you are free. Why stay when *you* would really no more be here than if you were to go, leaving one of your empty dresses?"

She had not for an instant taken her gaze from me; and so strange were her eyes, so compelling, that I seemed unable to move or speak.

But now she released me to blaze upon him—and never shall I forget any detail of her face or voice as she said to him: "That is false, Mowbray Langdon. I told you the truth when I told you I loved him!"

So violent was her emotion that she had to pause for self-control. And I? I was overwhelmed, dazed, stunned. When she went on, she was looking at neither of us. "Yes, I loved him, almost from the first—from the day he came to the box at the races. I was ashamed, poor creature that my parents had made me! I was ashamed of it. And I tried to hate him, and thought I did. And when he showed me that he no longer cared, my pride goaded me into the folly of trying to listen to you. But I loved him more than ever. And as you and he stand here, I am ashamed again—ashamed that I was ever so blind and ignorant and prejudiced as to compare him with"—she looked at Langdon—"with you. Do you believe me now—now that I humble myself before him here in your presence?"

I should have had no heart at all if I had not felt pity for him. His face was gray, and on it were those signs of age that strong emotion brings to the surface after forty. "You could have convinced me in no other way," he replied, after a silence, and in a voice I should not have recognized.

Silence again. Presently he raised his head, and with something of his old cynicism bowed to her.

"You have avenged much and many," said he. "I have often had a presentiment that my day of wrath would come."

He lifted his hat, bowed to me without looking at me, and, drawing the tatters of his pose still further over his wounds, moved away toward the landing.

I, still in a stupor, watched him until he had disappeared. When I turned to her, she dropped her eyes. "Uncle Howard will be back this afternoon," said she. "If I may, I'll stay at the house until he comes to take me."

A weary, half-suppressed sigh escaped from her. I knew how she must be reading my silence, but I was still unable to speak. She went to the horse, browsing near by; she stroked his muzzle. Lingeringly she twined her fingers in his mane, as if about to spring to his back! That reminded me of a thousand and one changes in her—little changes, each a trifle in itself, yet, taken all together, making a complete transformation.

"Let me help you," I managed to say. And I bent, and made a step of my hand.

She touched her fingers to my shoulder, set her narrow, graceful foot upon my palm. But she did not rise. I glanced up; she was gazing wistfully down at me.

"Women have to learn by experience just as do men," said she forlornly. "Yet men will not tolerate it."

I suppose I must suddenly have looked what I was unable to put into words—for her eyes grew very wide, and, with a cry that was a sigh and a sob, and a laugh and a caress all in one, she slid into my arms and her face was burning against mine.

"Do you remember the night at the theater," she murmured, "when your lips almost touched my neck?—I loved you then—Black Matt—*Black Matt*!"

And I found voice; and the horse wandered away.

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What more?

How Langdon eased his pain and soothed his vanity? Whenever an old Babylonian nobleman had a misfortune, he used to order all his slaves to be lashed, that their shrieks and moans might join his in appeasing the god who was punishing him. Langdon went back to Wall Street, and for months he made all within his power suffer; in his fury he smashed fortunes, lowered wages, raised prices, reveled in the blasts of

a storm of impotent curses. But you do not care to hear about that.

As for myself, what could I tell that you do not know or guess? Now that all men, even the rich, even the parasites of the bandits, groan under their tyranny and their taxes, is it strange that the resentment against me has disappeared, that my warnings are remembered, that I am popular? I might forecast what I purpose to do when the time is ripe. But I am not given to prophecy. I will only say that I think I shall, in due season, go into action again—profiting by my experience in the futility of trying to hasten evolution by revolution. Meanwhile—

As I write, I can look up from the paper, and out upon the lawn, at a woman—what a woman!—teaching a baby to walk. And, assisting her, there is a boy, himself not yet an expert at walking. I doubt if you'd have to glance twice at that boy to know he is my son. Well—I have borrowed a leaf from Mulholland's philosophy. I commend it to you.

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