

LIFE

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RUTH.

L I F E

A NOVELIZATION
OF THOMPSON BUCHANAN'S PLAY

BY
D. TORBETT

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS OF
SCENES FROM THE PLAY



NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

THE general verdict among people who knew her was that Ruth Stuyvesant was an unusual girl. And this did not mean that she was extraordinarily beautiful, or even more talented and accomplished than the average girl in her position; neither was she eccentric nor given to fads.

Nevertheless, at nineteen, on the eve of making her formal bow to the great world of society, where she was bound to take a conspicuous place on account of her father's wealth and position, she had already given signs of being a young woman of unusual force of character.

Not that she was aggressive or pushing in the strident manner of many of the young women of the day; aside from a quick temper, which flashed out at unexpected moments at any suggestion of unfairness or injustice, she was unusually quiet and modest. But among the girls of her own age it was well understood that when Ruth Stuyvesant made up her mind, argument and eloquence were alike wasted, nothing could move her.

People of the older generation who remembered her paternal grandmother, whose fame as a "leader" was still a tradition in New

York society, said: "Of course she'd be different; she wouldn't be old Mrs. Stuyvesant's granddaughter if she wasn't!" But the convenient theory of heredity somehow broke down when Ruth's elder brother Ralph, a young man about town, came under discussion. He certainly betrayed none of the ancestral strength of mind. Also, contrary to the Stuyvesant tradition, which allowed for a certain amount of wild-oat sowing among the men of the family, provided that the harvest was soon garnered, without publicity or scandal, Ralph had not settled down.

True, he had married early, as did all the Stuyvesant men, a rather colorless woman of suitable position and fortune, who was seen everywhere wearing a perpetually aggrieved look. But it was pointed out that, while at twenty-five his father, already married, had been made a member of the firm in the old house of Stuyvesant and Company, bankers, Ralph, at twenty-eight, was still only an employee, whose duties seemed to be rather vague, whose responsibilities were nil. It was even rumored that the elder Mr. Stuyvesant contemplated taking an outsider into the firm, passing over Ralph's head. This interesting piece of gossip was supplemented with one even more important to the Stuyvesants' friends in the social world: it was said that this same fortunate young man would eventually become allied with the house by the strongest of pos-

sible ties, namely, that of husband of the daughter and heiress.

Whether this rumor had reached the ears of Ruth, it was impossible to say. And Ruth was not the sort of person to whom one repeated idle gossip. In spite of the fact that she was always alluded to in the society columns of the newspapers as the "beautiful Miss Stuyvesant," Ruth was not, strictly speaking, beautiful. But pretty and charming she was to an exceptional degree. With her reddish hair—which possession she always laughingly blamed for her quick temper—her wide and humorous mouth, her eyes of that indeterminate hue, which some poet has happily described as

"——Too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be grey,"

she was always a most delectable picture.

But, best of all, she was the happy possessor of that greatest of all social gifts, using "social" in its broadest sense—the gift of being sympathetically interested in the people about her. Whatever enemies she had or was to have in the future—and her position was bound to excite both envy and jealousy, the millennium being, as yet, indefinitely postponed—they would never be numbered among any of the dependents of the house of Stuyvesant. Among her father's servants and employees down to the newest office boy in the bank, she was nothing short of adored.

Between Ruth and her father existed a tender and sympathetic relation, beautiful as it was rare. She was at once his pride and his compensation. Although she was a Stuyvesant through and through, there were times when his dead wife, whose memory he tenderly cherished after the lapse of years, looked out at him through her eyes.

And, as far as possible, she made up to him for the bitter disappointment which he suffered in the career and character of his son. How galling this disappointment was he was too proud to confess even to his daughter. But occasionally, under the spur of fresh tidings of Ralph's debts or the tale of his having been seen in public with some of the most notorious women of the town, he showed to the sympathetic eye of his dearly loved daughter a little of his secret hurt.

As a matter of fact, Ruth knew quite as much as her father of Ralph's conduct outside of the bank. That the source of their common information was Ralph's wife did not tend to increase the good feeling between the sisters-in-law. At any fresh evidence that Anna had been complaining to her father, Ruth's resentment increased. At first she had fought against a natural tendency to despise her brother's wife as a superficial, silly and weak woman. But as time went on she had more or less justified herself to herself. Seeing that she was one of those people who must tell her woes to some-

one, Ruth had reluctantly encouraged her to come to her with her troubles. And with the tacit understanding that by so doing she was shielding her father, she had more than once rescued them from some pressing debt. Her own allowance was ample for her needs; there was always some way to economize, something she herself could do without.

Ever since her early school days, Ruth had made it a habit to go down to the bank in the automobile several times a week to bring her father home. This little attention pleased the old gentleman greatly. But it was part of the pleasure to complain loudly in the hearing of the various officers of the establishment that he was the most persecuted man alive. Never could he escape from petticoat tyranny! Other men were permitted to find their way home after a hard day's work by themselves. Not he! Of what he was suspected he did not know. But, as all the world could see, he had to have a keeper! It was mortifying, it was humiliating, it was outrageous! And grumbling at a great rate in this fashion, he would beam happily upon his daughter as they started home together. In his own heart he was already looking forward with dread to the day when her new social duties, after her *début*, would be too absorbing to permit of this complained-of espionage.

Naturally, it frequently happened that Ruth would arrive while her father was in confer-

ence with some of his associates. With old-fashioned courtesy, he always sent out his apologies, promising to be with her shortly. It was during these times that she had gradually come to know many of the humbler members of the establishment. When Mr. Stuyvesant was at length released from his board meeting, or what not, he was sure to find his daughter's chair surrounded by some of the younger clerks and stenographers, with all of whom she was on terms of easy comradeship. Of course, he always affected to regard this demoralization of discipline as one of the many evil consequences of her insistence on "seeing him home." Secretly he was proud of her gift of making friends, of her popularity with all the staff.

"If she had only been the son of the house!" There wasn't a man in the place who wouldn't do anything for her. Whereas Ralph, as his father well knew, was cordially disliked for his overbearing and supercilious manner.

One afternoon toward the end of May, Ruth had had to wait an unusually long time. She had found her father closeted with Ralph, always a sign of fresh worry and annoyance. She had declined to send in word that she was waiting, and while pretending to read a magazine, with which one of the stenographers had provided her, watched with amused and indulgent eyes the progress of a little flirtation between two of the humblest of the bank's em-

ployees, one of the stenographers and the watchman. She knew and liked them both and had already made up her mind that they were people to be helped whenever the time came when they should be ready to settle down seriously. There was no mistaking that they were in earnest, although the girl tried hard to pretend not to be.

They were both very young, although the watchman's face Ruth sometimes fancied had a curiously hunted look, which made him seem prematurely older than his years. She made a mental note that she must ask her father about him. When at length her father came into the outer office, he was accompanied both by Ralph and by Thomas Burnett, the man whose speedy advancement, in a double sense, society was prophesying, as Ruth well knew. The report had caused her much secret annoyance, partly because it had been Ralph's wife who had been her informant. Ruth's ever-ready temper had taken fire at once.

"Of course, it is too much to expect that people mind their business; most of our friends, unfortunately, haven't enough to occupy their minds to keep them from meddling with other people's affairs. I have known Tom Burnett ever since he first went into father's bank. I call him Tom, but then I call a number of the other clerks by their first names. Why don't they marry me off to O'Brien, the watchman. I always call him

Dennis! Oh, it's all too disgusting. I don't see how you can bring yourself to listen to such twaddle, much less how you can repeat it."

Mrs. Ralph Stuyvesant's brown eyes had narrowed for a moment.

"Oh, don't you think you are just a little too severe?" she drawled in her affected manner, which always got on Ruth's nerves. "After all, you know, you do give the report some color, running down to the bank nearly every day as you do. Everybody thinks you go to see Tom."

"Why, I began going down when I was only a girl in short dresses. Tom Burnett had just left college to go into business. I don't suppose he had been in long trousers more than a few years."

"Yes, so I've heard," replied Mrs. Stuyvesant, in a tone which made Ruth feel that she understood why people suddenly were impelled to murder.

She had bitten back a stinging retort, remembering that her sister-in-law always had a weapon in reserve. She could make her poor father more unhappy by carrying him tales of Ralph's misdoings.

But the gossip had had one result. Try as she would, Ruth found to her secret chagrin that all attempts to keep her manner to Tom pitched in the same light, familiar, brother-and-sister key that they had years ago adopted failed to ring true in her own ears.

That Tom, too, detected the false note she was perfectly convinced, although he never betrayed by look or manner that he was conscious of it. But then Tom had always been a very shrewd young person.

The gossip had spoiled everything, she told herself. She was constantly on the watch when with him, and while she fought against it and told herself that her doubts were unjust to him and unworthy of herself, she could not overcome the growing suspicion that young Burnett knew perfectly what people were saying about them, and that, worst of all, he was, in a subtle manner, doing everything he could to furnish additional grounds for the report.

For while his manner remained unchanged when they were alone or when her father only was present, when they met at the opera or the theater, or at any of the luncheons or small dinners which are permitted to a young woman not yet officially "out," he assumed an attitude of tender protection, the more exasperating because it was too intangible for her to combat. After all, Ruth was still a very young girl. It could not be expected that she would be as adroit as a woman of the world.

She had, as it happened, been particularly annoyed by him only the evening before. A reflection of that annoyance displayed itself in her manner as she rose from her chair to greet her father. She noticed that Ralph's face wore a sullen look, which contrasted sharply with

her father's worried expression and the alert, bright look of Burnett.

With a muttered excuse about being late for an appointment and a sulky "Hello, sis," Ralph shrugged himself into a light topcoat and out the door.

"Don't forget to look in on me to-night," called Burnett after him.

Mr. Stuyvesant sank wearily into a chair.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting so long, daughter, but there were some things that I had to attend to at the last minute. We're going to make some changes down here. But Tom shall tell you about them when we get home. You'll ride up with us, won't you, Tom?"

"Now, father, dear," said Ruth, patting his hand tenderly, "you have been working too late. I don't intend to let you even talk business any more to-night. Tom, I'm going to uninvite you to come with us. Father's tired, and besides, I want him to myself. I've some very important business of my own to discuss. You won't mind, I know."

Burnett accepted his dismissal with characteristic good humor, while Mr. Stuyvesant, taking his cue to grumble about not even being permitted to ask a friend to ride home with him, such was the tyranny under which he lived, declared himself ready to depart.

"You're going to see Ralph this evening, didn't you say?" he asked as Burnett stood at the door of the automobile. "Your influence

over him is far stronger than his father's, and has always been for his good. Try and make him see that no one will be more glad than I to see any signs of improvement in his conduct and to reward it. Stuyvesant and Company will welcome him as a partner whenever he shows signs of meriting such an advance."

"Surely, sir, you can count on me. I'll make him see that I am only holding down the place until he is ready to take things a little more seriously."

"Not at all, not at all. But there is no reason why, with our immense business, there should not be room for you both."

For several moments after they had started for home, Mr. Stuyvesant was silent. Ruth always respected his moods, knowing that when he was ready to make any confidences she would be the one person to whom he would turn with his troubles. She knew from long experience that all his troubles originated with Ralph. But for the moment she was at a loss to account for any fresh outbreak on her brother's part. She had seen Anna only yesterday and had congratulated herself that for once she seemed to have no new complaints to make. She was always hoping that Ralph would at last settle down and become a comfort and gratification to his father.

From the time that she was old enough to be any judge of character she had realized that he was lamentably weak and easily influenced. But

she had never thought that he was inherently vicious. With the right sort of associates he would have developed into the average type of man she knew, even if he could never hope to be as universally respected and looked up to as his father. Womanlike, she blamed his wife more than anyone. If Anna had had a shred of real force of character, she told herself, things might have been different. As it was, she still hoped that the combined efforts of her father, Tom Burnett and herself might yet make a man of him. After all, he was very young and curiously undeveloped. In spite of the fact that he was nine years the elder, she always felt as if in some unaccountable manner the family records had been changed and that she herself were really the firstborn of the family.

“You may congratulate your friend Tom when you see him next,” said her father at length. “He has been honored with the post of junior partner in Stuyvesant and Company. He will not be officially appointed before the first of the month, but there is no reason that his advancement should be kept secret from his friends. And I am glad to say that he fully deserves his promotion,” he added with a sigh.

Ruth linked her arm in that of her father. She understood the sigh. How humiliated he must be at the thought that the new associate in the house of which he was the head should be an outsider! Never in the long and honor-

able career of the house had it been headed by anyone not bearing the name of Stuyvesant.

“I am glad, particularly if it will take any care off your shoulders. We have all known Tom so long that he seems quite like one of ourselves. And I think this change may be good for Ralph. Of course, he will be humiliated. But I think it is just what he needs to bring him to his senses. You know Ralph isn't really bad at heart. And if he has any pride this will stimulate him to pull himself together and show that he is really worth something.”

“I have almost given up hope,” said her father sadly. “But I agree with you that this lesson may be the best he has ever had. I cannot quite free myself from the idea that I am largely to blame. I have been too liberal and indulgent with him. He has been spoiled by too much money. But money never spoiled a Stuyvesant before,” he added proudly.

“Yes, I shall be much more free, with Tom to take a large part of the detail of the bank off my hands. He has a good head and is as steady as a rock. He will be the help and comfort that I had always hoped my son would be. I sometimes wish——”

He stopped and looked keenly at his daughter. To her secret annoyance, the color flooded Ruth's face. Her father, too, must have heard the gossip that was linking her name with Tom's.

“Oh, my little girl, my little girl,” he said,

taking her hand in his, "it would be a weight off my mind to know that after I am gone your happiness would be safe in the hands of a man like Tom!"

"Don't, father, don't talk of such a thing. One would think that you were old and decrepit. Just wait a week or two till the boat race. You'll be as much of a boy as any of the crew. Last year you acted as if you were an undergraduate," said Ruth, forcing herself to laugh, although the quick tears had come into her eyes.

"Oh, I know I'm not exactly an old man yet, and thank God my health is still of the best! But one must think of the future. I didn't intend to speak of it yet, but I don't know of any young fellow I would so gladly see you fall in love with as Tom Burnett."

"I didn't know you were so anxious to be rid of me."

"Ruth!"

"It certainly looks like it. You are making plans to marry me off to a man who has always been, if not exactly like a brother, like a sort of a cousin to me. Father!" as she caught the expression of his face, "you don't mean that Tom has—has said anything to you?"

"Yes, he came to me last winter. But I told him to wait, that you were too young. I wanted you to see a little of the world and society first. I didn't intend to speak of it, as I said. But to-day's business has sort of upset

me. And now that I have spoken, I will say that it is the dearest wish of my heart."

"But, father, you wouldn't want me to marry a man I didn't love. I know it's old-fashioned," said Ruth with a shy little laugh, "but I have made up my mind to die an old maid, unless the right man comes along."

"Of course I wouldn't, daughter. Keep to your 'old-fashioned' ideas, as you call them. I have too much confidence in my little girl to think that she could ever love anyone unworthy."

"Thank you, father." Ruth leaned over and kissed him.

"Tell me one thing, Ruthie, and I'll promise not to bring up the subject again until you are ready to reopen it. Is there anyone else?" He looked at her with anxious eyes.

With an heroic effort Ruth succeeded in hiding a smile.

"Yes," she said slowly, "there is. I'm madly, distractedly in love with a man, oh, quite a little older than I; in fact, he's old enough to be my father. And his name—" here she broke into a peal of laughter as she encountered Mr. Stuyvesant's glance of stony horror—"his name is William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant!"

And as the automobile stopped in front of their door she leaned over and kissed him again, to the manifest scandal of a passing nurserymaid.

CHAPTER II

TOM BURNETT had waited, standing on the pavement, hat in hand, until his senior partner's automobile turned the corner, the smile which many people found so winning still curving his lips.

It was his habit when he was not dining out and had a free evening to walk uptown to his club, partly because he enjoyed the exercise and partly because he often found that his mind worked more clearly under the stimulus of locomotion.

As he walked along with his free, swinging gait, he was pleasantly conscious of the covert glances of admiration which were bestowed on him by many women and some men in the passing throng. It was not only that he was a handsome, upstanding figure, but there was something about his whole personality that exhaled success. Years before, his shrewd old grandmother had declared that she foresaw that he would get anything in the world that he wanted. And she had mentally added that he would not be over-scrupulous as to the means employed.

It may have been that as he grew older others divined the same defect in his character without so exactly defining it. Possessing all of

the superficial qualities which make for popularity, he had passed three years at Yale University without distinguishing himself in any way, and had left at the end of his junior year without—if we except his friendship for Ralph Stuyvesant—having formed any of those close ties so natural to his time of life. Ralph, who was two years his junior, admired him extravagantly and was greatly flattered at having been picked out for a friend by so handsome and clever a personage. He had been proud to bring this attractive young man home with him at the holidays and was gratified to find his judgment indorsed by both his father and sister, particularly the former, who had not always in the past approved of the objects of his son's sudden friendships.

Burnett had improved these opportunities to the utmost. He could at will assume an air of appealing frankness, which, added to the fact that he undoubtedly was the possessor of a fine mind and displayed a keen interest and natural aptitude for business, had decided the elder Stuyvesant to make him an offer of a position in his bank, although he deprecated his resolution to cut short his college career.

But Burnett had frankly explained that he was not doing so on any sudden or unconsidered impulse. He had, it seemed, a widowed mother and two younger sisters living in a small country town in the Middle West; and, while his mother's slender income was suffi-

cient for their present needs, he not only chafed at being a further drain on their resources, but was anxious to help them to realize upon the investment made in his education as soon as possible. Then, too, he pointed out, unless he should be able to contribute to the support of his sisters by the time they should be a little older, they would be compelled to do something to support themselves.

“So, you see,” he finished with his charming smile, “it’s ‘up to me.’”

He could hardly have employed an argument which would have appealed more strongly to his host. Mr. Stuyvesant had all the prejudices of his generation in favor of his womankind being sheltered and protected against all knowledge of the rough side of life. That this young man, who unquestionably came of people of breeding and refinement, should hold similar views was a credit alike to his heart and to his manliness of character.

And so, shortly after his twentieth birthday, Burnett had entered the great house of Stuyvesant and Company.

Once there, he had more than justified his employer’s opinion. There was no question but that he had chosen the proper field for the exercise of his undoubted talent for finance. At first, naturally, he saw but little of the head of the firm. He was far too shrewd to trade upon the social side of their relation. But from time to time reports of his industry, his appli-

cation and his abilities were brought to his gratified patron.

For the three years while Ralph was still at the university, and Ruth in the hands of teachers and governesses, Burnett saw but little of the Stuyvesant family. But once Ralph was graduated—he had managed to get through with the smallest of margins—and taken the place waiting for him in the bank, he began once more to frequent the house, where he was doubly welcome as Ralph's friend and as a young man of unusual promise.

That their friendship was as strong as ever, in spite of the fact that the elder Stuyvesant was continually holding up his protégé as a shining example to his son, was, in the beginning, a credit both to Ralph's natural generosity and to his friend's tact. Later on there were more substantial, if less creditable, reasons for its continuance.

It had not taken Tom Burnett three years to come to the conclusion that even with his exceptional talents and the favor of his employer, the direct and honest road to wealth and power was too long for a man of his extravagant tastes and ambitions. He had made up his mind when hardly more than a lad that wealth and power he would have, and that, too, while he was still young enough to enjoy them to the full. That there were men well under middle-age who were great figures in the financial world he very well knew.

But in studying their careers he had almost invariably been confronted with the fact that they had been the fortunate possessors of what to him seemed modest fortunes to begin with. The day had gone by, he told himself, when poor men could become millionaires by talent and industry alone. There were too many competitors with an equal amount of talent and industry plus capital. Things being equal, he would have preferred to be honest. But honesty was a luxury which the struggling poor man could not afford until after he had reached his goal or saw himself well on the way to it. Many a man was held in the highest respect whose business ethics would hardly have conformed to old-fashioned standards. Times had changed. Success was the only criterion. The difference between being known as a "sharp" man of business and a dishonest one was only the difference between success and failure. That was the thing in a nutshell. It was with such sophistries as these that he lulled the voice of a never very active conscience.

But he intended to "play safe." To do otherwise was to confess to being a fool. And the safest game for him was to involve Ralph in any of the numerous little "enterprises" which already teemed in his busy, active, spider brain. Ralph would always be an anchor to windward. If things went wrong—and the percentage against their doing so was all in his favor—the only son of the head of the firm

would be as much involved as he. He had carefully cultivated the acquaintance of a young stockbroker by the name of Davidson, a member of an old and reputable firm, who, however shrewd he might be in a business way, he found singularly gullible in all matters not pertaining to the affairs of his office.

He had been at no small pains to ingratiate himself with this youth, whom he found susceptible to flattery to an almost laughable degree. Like so many of his kind, he considered himself a full-fledged man-of-the-world and a keen judge of character. Naturally he was clay in the hands of a clever and unscrupulous man like Burnett.

It had been an easy thing to fill his ears with the story of some rich maiden aunts in the West, who had a mania for speculation. It would, of course, be a simple matter for their favorite nephew to throw their business where he chose. And there was nowhere he would rather throw it than to Davidson, Post and Davidson. Only the younger Davidson must see to it that his friend did not appear in any of the transactions. While it was true that nearly everyone speculated nowadays, even the safest ventures were barred to the employees of Stuyvesant and Company. Old man Stuyvesant would have a blue fit if it came to his ears that any of them had anything to do with the market. Later on, when certain contemplated changes took place—and Tom had

known how to hint unmistakably that the contemplated changes included his own promotion—things would be different. But for the present——

Davidson had agreed to guarantee the utmost secrecy and Tom had begun to speculate cautiously and in a small way, which was a credit to the discretion of the rich aunts. Beginner's luck is proverbial. Burnett was no exception to the rule. He was too cool-headed to lose his point of view over his first successes, and all might have gone well if he could have equally kept his head over the matter of his personal expenditures. But his greatest weakness was for women. And a woman was his undoing.

It was during his first term at college that Fate crossed his path in the shape of Grace Andrews, the daughter of the trainer of the crew. Little more than a child in years—she was barely fifteen—she already gave promise of developing into unusual beauty, with her wonderful dark eyes, her scarlet lips and her creamy skin. At first Burnett, like all the members of the crew and the men interested in boating, who spent a large part of their spare time around the training quarters, treated her like a child, teasing her and spoiling her by turns. But gradually it began to dawn upon him that she was as unusual in character as in appearance.

Whether or not it was some deep-seated pre-

disposition to evil in her nature that responded to a like quality in his, their relation was almost from the beginning entirely different from that which existed between her and the clean-limbed, clean-minded boys who made up the various crews and their substitutes, at once the pride and the torment of old Tom Andrews and his fat, good-natured wife.

To all outward appearances, Gracie treated them all alike, chaffing them and being plagued by them in turn, calling them all familiarly by their first names or nicknames; now siding with them, now with her mother in the warfare that was constantly waged between them. For these light-hearted lads, full to overflowing with animal spirits, delighted in deviling "Mother" Andrews almost more than they did her daughter; while she, for her part, would have felt that her occupation was gone if she did not have them to scold and abuse.

But when Gracie and Tom Burnett were alone together her manner altered completely. The romping hoyden vanished and she became thoughtful, even grave. No one seeing her for the first time in this mood would ever have dreamed of splashing her with water or pulling her long, thick braids of hair. The first time Burnett had encountered this attitude he had met it with a mocking air of deference, which, however, had not survived the girl's first speech.

"Heavens!" she said scornfully. "I thought

I was talking to a man. But I see you are really as much a child as the others."

"I beg your pardon," he said, considerably taken back, "but how is one to know *how* to take you? I promise not to be so stupid again. But, in self-defense, let me remind you that it is hardly five minutes since you were chasing Phil Painter round the house with the broom."

"And what if I was? I tell you they're all children, every one of them. And I let them treat me as if I were only a child for a reason. Father and mother are too simple to realize that I've really 'grown up.' Why, I'll be sixteen my next birthday. Mother was married when she was only a little older than I!"

"You surely don't want to get married yet."

"Married!" She flashed him a look from her great black eyes. "I should think not. Besides, who is there for me to marry? Joe Hampton, the coach?" Her laugh was curiously hard. "No," she went on soberly, "I have no idea of getting married. But I *do* intend to get away from this hole just as soon as I can. Don't *you* think there's a place for a girl, a girl like me, in New York?"

She faced him with a smile so frankly cynical that he could only relieve his feelings by a long whistle.

"That the child of Tom and old Mother Andrews!" he said to himself on the way back to his room. "Then she's a changeling. If her

father'd seen that smile—well, he'd commit murder or I don't know him."

He did not see her again for over a week. As a matter of fact, she had frightened him. He told himself more than once that she couldn't have meant what he had thought. But in his secret heart he knew better. He cautiously sounded the other fellows to see if the idea that Gracie was anything more than an unsophisticated child had ever occurred to any of them. It hadn't. Apparently he had been the only person to whom she had ever given a hint of her real ambitions.

Partly because he was a little flattered and partly because she intrigued his curiosity, he sought an opportunity to talk to her again at the end of the second week. No, he had not been mistaken.

Certainly she had the virtue of frankness. Her philosophy of life, her plans for the future, her determination to succeed in wresting from the world the things that she could never honestly hope to have, were disclosed with a coolness that took away his breath. She made him feel as if he were a perfect infant in worldly knowledge. The only thing he could never discover was the sources of her extraordinary information.

He ended by admiring her enormously and fearing her almost as much. He would have been surprised to discover that she was fully aware of both these tributes. And while he

was about her father's quarters as much as ever, he was circumspection itself as far as his conduct with the daughter of the house was concerned. He, too, had his formula of worldly wisdom. He could not risk a scandal at the outset of his career. On the whole, they understood each other pretty well.

"Perhaps I'll run across you some day again when you are rich and famous," he said to her at their last meeting before he was to leave college.

"Y-e-s, and perhaps sooner," she said with her mocking smile. "If you get on as fast as you ought." Which reply left him far from happy.

From time to time after coming to New York he had sent her small gifts of candy and such trifles as picture post cards. But aside from prim notes of thanks which he was sure she first showed to her mother, she never wrote. There came a time when even these unsatisfactory responses were not forthcoming. Then Ralph had mentioned casually in one of his frequent letters begging for a loan to pay some uncomfortably pressing debt that Mrs. Andrews had asked him to let Burnett know that Gracie was "away to a young ladies' school," and that unless he wanted to make her mother fatter than ever, he must send no more candy.

And then one morning, the year after Ralph's graduation, a letter had arrived for Burnett by special delivery containing a peremptory com-

mand for him to meet the 7.00 P.M. train from Philadelphia, signed "Grace Andrews." The gentleman thus honored had sworn fervidly and vowed that he would do nothing of the kind. He had never heard of such cheek.

But he was at the Pennsylvania station ten minutes before the time. Curiosity had conquered. He *did* want to see what she was like. But his most ardent expectations fell far short of the actuality. She came toward him down the long platform with her unforgettable smile, so radiantly beautiful, so tastefully and becomingly dressed, that she was the center of all admiring glances.

"There wasn't a woman in the place that didn't look like a washerwoman beside her," was Tom's inward comment.

He forgot all his irritation of the morning, aroused by her letter. By the time their taxi drew up in front of the fashionable restaurant, where he had elected to dine, he felt that he had been looking forward to this moment for years, and almost cheated himself into believing that it was true.

As he sat gazing at her across the table and watched her slowly and languidly draw off her gloves he wondered how he had ever wasted an hour on any of the numerous women who, from time to time, had seemed to him desirable. Why, there wasn't a woman in New York to be compared with her. He could tell, before they had finished the hors d'œuvre, that she had

made a sensation, and that, too, in a resort noted for its beautiful women.

And how and where did old Tom Andrews' daughter acquire that air of distinction and learn to move with such grace? He remembered that he had once thought of her as a changeling. He was more convinced of it than ever. And how she had more than fulfilled the rich promise of her childhood!

All this, and more, he poured out to her in accents of unmistakable sincerity. He could hardly tear his eyes from her face long enough to make a pretense of eating the various courses as they were set before him. Still, fascinated as he was, that part of his cold and calculating brain, which was always on guard, told him to go warily. It was curious how, once more under the spell of her dominating personality, the old fear awoke. Not for a moment did he have an illusion that he was in danger of falling in love with her. He would never love anyone. He was not that sort, any more than the woman opposite him was the sort of woman to inspire love. Men would long for her; they might dare much to possess her. He felt for the moment that he would go to great lengths himself while that flowerlike face bloomed across from his, when he met the kindling glance of those wonderful eyes.

In the meantime, if Grace shared his excitement, she was sufficiently self-controlled not to show any trace of it. She accepted his rhap-

sodies graciously, but her manner suggested that she considered them a necessary concomitant to a dinner at which she was the guest. But secretly she was exultant. She was more than ever convinced that the plan of campaign she had chosen had been the right one. How she had had to fight with herself during these last few years to keep from coming to New York sooner. But ambition had been a wise counselor.

She saw what her career would have been had she yielded to impulse and made her *début* as so many girls did, trusting to their looks alone to make their fortunes. Would a man like Tom Burnett have brought her to a restaurant like this, however pretty she was, if she had come to him directly from her father's home? The simple village maid was all very well in poetry and fiction. But Grace was too instinctively worldly-wise to take any stock in her in reality.

With the swift, appraising glance which women give, she took in the women about her. Many of them were pretty and distinguished and all of them were beautifully dressed. But she comfortably reflected that she did not suffer by comparison with any one of them. Her traveling dress was becoming and in the best taste, and there wasn't a woman who approached her for looks. Yes, the time she had devoted to preparation had been well employed.

"How could you have been so cruel as to

keep me waiting for you so long without ever a word," said Burnett huskily, as he watched her sipping her coffee. "Didn't you remember that I told you I would be waiting for you?"

"No," she said with her dazzling smile, "I don't quite remember that. I seem to recall that you said you *might* run across me—if I were successful."

"You knew I didn't mean that."

"Then you find me—satisfactory? My appearance does you credit?"

"You are the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life! But you always were, and I told you so long ago."

"Y-e-s. Still, if I had arrived unexpectedly a year or two ago, I don't think you would have brought me here. We would probably have gone to one of Childs' places. I can see you taking a raw country girl to a place like this."

"Nonsense! But tell me a little about yourself and your plans."

"There's not much to tell. I've been working hard—yes, really. Father and mother think that I have had an offer of a good position here in New York as a stenographer. Of course, they wanted me to stay at home, but I have persuaded them to let me try it. As a matter of fact, I am depending on you for a helping hand—just at first."

She smilingly showed him her purse, which held a few crumpled bills and some loose silver.

"Twelve dollars and sixty-five cents is all I

have left. And I have two other gowns, only fairly presentable.”

“Don’t bother your head about that,” he said.

Standing before the mirror in the drawing-room of a little suite in a quiet, old-fashioned hotel, Grace slowly took off her hat. In spite of his stormy protests, Tom had had to content himself with a kiss bestowed on him in the discreet shelter of the taxi. He was to be permitted to have tea with his divinity on the following afternoon, and perhaps take her to dinner in some quiet place. Miss Andrews had no idea of showing herself in public again without a suitable costume.

Before undressing she took a little roll of bills from the inside of her waist. She smoothed them out carefully before locking them securely away in her trunk. There were five of them—five one hundred dollar bills. Somehow she had forgotten them when making the inventory of her worldly possessions! She yawned lazily like a cat before putting out the light.

“Things are starting well,” she said to herself. And then, with a laugh, “I wonder what he said when my letter came!”

CHAPTER III

By the end of the month Grace, who had assumed the style and title of "Mrs. Andrews," was established in an old-fashioned, little apartment in one of the oldest apartment houses in the city, situated just off Fifth Avenue not far from Washington Square.

The household consisted of a Frenchwoman of middle-age, a really remarkable cook, who was also maid of all work, and, to Burnett's intense amusement, of an elderly woman, a Mrs. Watson, who was a sort of duenna and companion. The latter lady seemed to be the victim of chronic headaches. At least she always suffered from them when they dined at home and never appeared at the table. What she was supposed to do at other times was a mystery. She had come on from Philadelphia at the summons of her employer. Grace had explained rather vaguely that it was more prudent to have her, and had added that as she was wonderfully clever with her needle, she more than paid for herself by keeping her costumes in order.

Tom accepted this statement with reservations. In his own phrase, Grace "kept him guessing." That she never did anything without a purpose, he was convinced. But her mo-

tives for many things were unfathomable. For instance, she insisted on maintaining the fiction that all the money he gave her was merely a loan. He was, of course, paying the rent of the apartment and the current expenses. These items at the end of each month Grace solemnly inscribed in a small leather-backed book which already contained the cost of the furnishings and the amount he had deposited in her name in an uptown bank.

When, after some months, he had ventured to suggest that he thought the joke a little played out, she had flown into a furious passion, had told him that he was a coarse brute and ordered him out of the house. And for nearly a week madame was invisible when he called. That taught him a lesson. He found that it was permitted to offer her jewels, furs and even costumes; but money, never. As a matter of fact, Grace had seized this opportunity to make a scene in order to get away for a few days. She had not been home for over a year, and she wanted to satisfy herself that her parents had no suspicion that her story of employment in New York was anything but the truth. It would have been perfectly simple to have told Tom that she was going to see her parents, but for some reason, which it would have puzzled her to define, she shrank from ever mentioning them to her lover. At the bottom of her heart she still cared for them too much not to wish to screen them from the

pain and horror that would be theirs, once they knew the life she was living. Besides, she had a genuine fear of her father. Simple and kindly as he was, she knew how jealous he was of his good name. She might argue to herself that this was a new age for women, that the day had dawned when every woman had a right to live her own life as men had always done, but she would never have dared to advance such theories to him.

The useful Mrs. Watson had been dispatched the morning following the quarrel to buy a simple, ready-made dress and a few little inexpensive gifts for the old people, and Grace had departed, leaving her instructions for the disciplining of Burnett.

She was thoroughly glad to be home again for a few days. Also it gave her an opportunity to think things over a little, as somehow she didn't seem to be able to do in New York. Years afterwards she realized that it was during this visit she had come to the decision that was to shape her future. If she had followed her first and better impulse, not only her own life, but the lives of those for whom she still had a genuine affection, might not have been darkened by unhappiness and shame.

For Tom wanted to marry her. After six months he was, if possible, more infatuated with her than ever. He, too, had been thinking things over. At one time he had had other plans, to be sure. He intended to marry some

girl whose money and position could further his ambitions. But the weakest point in Tom Burnett's armor was his proneness to self-indulgence. He had so long been in the habit of convincing himself that the thing he wanted to do was the wisest and best that it was an easy matter to persuade himself that in marrying his mistress he would be doing a sensible and even politic thing. The question of morality, naturally, never bothered him.

And Grace had completely subjugated him, not only by her beauty, but by her cleverness and tact. Her taste was unerring. He had learned much himself from contact with the cultivated rich. And he had expected to find, in spite of the years spent in finishing herself, that many of her ideas were crude and vulgar.

But after inspecting the apartment she had chosen, and particularly after seeing it filled, but not crowded, with a number of good pieces, evidencing not only a sound discrimination, but a fine sense of appropriateness, the last hesitations, born of the counsels of worldly prudence, vanished.

Like many people who pride themselves on their shrewdness, Burnett made the not uncommon error of never crediting others with an equal amount of that useful commodity. He would have been not a little astonished if he had known that Mrs. Watson's usefulness was not confined to the gentle art of needlework, and that it was owing entirely to her ad-

vice and direction that Grace's natural inclination toward the flamboyant, both in personal attire and in the furnishings of her apartment, were kept in check.

In short, Grace's natural taste was exactly what one would have expected from her parentage and upbringing. But she had inherited also an active and eager mind. She was more than willing to learn, and she was as imitative as a Japanese.

The tie which bound these two women together was purely a business one. Their meeting several years before had been accidental. But each had recognized it as a fortunate chance. At sixty, Mrs. Watson was bankrupt, both in money and in reputation. It was plain that she had had the early advantages of breeding and education, in addition to which, out of the abysmal experiences of her later life, she was able to give sound advice. She cleverly anticipated any question as to how, with her knowledge and ability, she had managed to make such a mess of her own life by posing as a Horrible Warning rather than as a Shining Example. On the subject of her birth and family she was a sphinx. No one knew anything as to her childhood, not even where she came from. She summarized her later career by declaring that she had been a fool in letting her heart betray her head, of which romantic phrase she was secretly rather proud.

While Grace felt that as an explanation of

the disasters covering a tolerably long period of time it was somewhat inadequate, leaving, as it did, so much to be supplied by the imagination, she recognized that fundamentally it was the true one.

Mrs. Watson was incurably sentimental and emotional. She never failed to attend performances of "La Dame aux Camélias" and plays of similar character, where she abandoned herself to lachrymations so exhausting as to necessitate spending the entire following day in bed. Such sentimental orgies were the greatest pleasures which her life afforded.

But this weakness did not interfere with her usefulness to her friend or prevent her being keenly alive to her own best interests. No doubt it was because her too susceptible heart was only vicariously involved in Grace's "romance."

At all events, from the moment that Grace had confided to her that Tom was ready to legalize their relation, Mrs. Watson opposed it with every argument she could invent, at least for the present. She darkly hinted that a too precipitate marriage had been the first step in her own undoing. She pointed out that Grace was still in the first flush of her beauty and fascination. There was plenty of time. There was no earthly reason why Burnett should not be equally eager for the marriage six months or a year hence. In the meantime one could look round. The thing to do was to

make him introduce her to some of his men friends. If half the stories he told them were true, he was by way of meeting some of the most prominent men in the world of finance every day. What if he became jealous? Heavens! So much the better.

It was impossible to foresee how Grace was going to be affected by all this eloquence. Mrs. Watson understood perfectly well that the visit to her old home was half a pretext to get away by herself and perhaps come to a decision. At the worst, she was sure that she could delay matters for a few months at least. Grace was both vain and avaricious. Naturally, to one brought up as she had been, her present scale of expenditure must seem little short of magnificent. From now on they must branch out. If Burnett did not balk—well, then, let Grace marry him in a year's time, if she were fool enough. By that time the excellent Mrs. Watson never doubted that she could feather her own nest sufficiently to tide her over until she was able to obtain another position. In the end, it was Burnett himself who played into her hands.

Grace had returned fully determined to marry him. She thought that she had reached her decision by weighing things coldly and dispassionately. Tom was just at the outset of his career, to be sure, but after all he was genuinely in love with her and he had certainly shown himself to be most generous.

With his talents and ambition, and with her at his side continually to spur him on, there was nothing that they might not hope for. And to have a great position in the world, with all the money and power that that entailed, was a stake worth playing for. It fairly dazzled her to think of it.

And they would be perfectly safe, thanks to Mrs. Watson's discretion. Grace gratefully acknowledged to herself her indebtedness. It was entirely owing to her that the quiet apartment and the good neighborhood had been selected. And it was she who had managed to spread the report through the house that the beautiful tenant was a rich, young widow whose grief for the loss of her elderly husband was beginning to be softened after two years of mourning. No, their future need not be darkened by the fear of any old scandal coming out of the past.

On the night of her return she wrote Tom a playful little note, indicating that he might once more hope to be restored to favor if he showed himself properly contrite at dinner the next night. He was to call for her at seven.

But half after seven found Grace, more beautiful than ever in a most becoming new gown, already beginning to be annoyed at her lover's lack of punctuality. During the next hour she passed from violent temper to a whimpering anxiety for fear some accident had befallen him. But when, at a quarter after ten, a messenger arrived with a curt note, explain-

ing that owing to the fact that some out-of-town friends had arrived, he would not be able to take her to dinner, nor, indeed, see her for several days, she gave way to an hysterical rage that if it didn't frighten a veteran like Mrs. Watson, at least made her piously thankful that the house was sufficiently old-fashioned to have thick walls. It would have taxed even her ingenuity to have explained away the distracted "widow's" language.

When at last Grace had smashed most of the perishable things within reach and, completely exhausted, had let herself be put to bed, Mrs. Watson sat down to her own spoiled dinner with an expression that was positively beatific. Verily, the stars in their courses were fighting for her!

For two days the mistress of the establishment stormed and sulked by turns. At one moment she was furiously jealous of the unknown woman—for, of course, it was a woman—who threatened her supremacy; at the next she was dully resentful at being disciplined like a naughty child.

Had she been at all given to self-analysis, she would have realized that her resolution to marry Tom had had its origin solely in the fact that she was as much in love with him as it was possible for a woman of her selfish nature to be, and not, as she flattered herself, in any well-thought-out plan.

Mrs. Watson was too experienced a hus-

bandman not to recognize that the ground was plowed for the sowing. By the time Burnett returned at the end of the week, she had succeeded in persuading her companion to follow her advice in every particular.

When he arrived, bearing a peace offering in the shape of a bouquet of costly orchids, he found Grace in one of her most puzzling moods. All through dinner—they had chosen one of the quieter restaurants, where the noisy Broadway crowd never came—she was her most mischievous and provoking self, teasing, alluring, enticing and ridiculing him; one moment as naïve as a schoolgirl, the next cynically witty.

But with the arrival of the coffee and liquors all her gayety vanished. Looking up suddenly, Burnett was startled to find her gazing at him with tear-brimmed eyes.

“Why, Grace, my darling, what *is* the matter?”

It was nothing, it seemed. She was sorry. Only—only for the moment she really couldn't help it. She had cried so much lately. She was a little unstrung, that was all. He mustn't mind. She promised not to make such an exhibition of herself again. And under the table she convulsively returned the pressure of his hand.

It was then that he realized what a brute he had been. After all, clever and worldly as she was in most ways, at heart she was only a child. He ought to have remembered that! He had

not dreamed that she would be so wounded by his coldness. He saw now how easy it would be to mold her. In spite of her fitful spells of waywardness, she could be easily controlled through her affections. The sooner they were married the better. He had an impulse to propose that they run up to Stamford, where so many runaway couples went, and be married that night. But before he could make any such suggestion, she had brought up the subject of their marriage herself.

Had Mrs. Watson been able to be present, she would have been proud of her pupil. Without reproaching him, except by implication, she showed how his cruelly cold letter had opened her eyes to the fact that he did not really love her as she dreamed of being loved. Marriage, as he well knew, had never been a part of her scheme of life. But loving him as she did, she had been on the point of sacrificing her independence, in the belief that her love was returned, in spite of the fact that he had more than once wounded her most delicate sensibilities in the attitude he assumed in regard to the money she had been obliged to accept from him purely as a loan.

Entreaties, protestations, vows of sincere contrition were powerless to shake her determination. Marry him now, she would not. The only hope she could give him was that after a long time, certainly not less than a year, if he could convince her of his sincerity, she might

follow the dictates of her heart, as she had been on the point of doing only a few days before.

In the meantime it appeared that her sufferings had been so poignant that she could never know another moment's happiness in those rooms, where she had known such heart-ache. She would store the things—his things—and go away with Mrs. Watson for a while.

Considering that it would have taken wild horses to drag Grace away from New York, it took a wonderful amount of eloquence to persuade her not to drive a disheartened man to desperation.

When he reluctantly left her at her door, it was with the understanding that she would accompany him on a little business trip to Washington, leaving Mrs. Watson to attend to the dismantling of the apartment. On their return, at the end of the week, she was to take a small suite, still chaperoned by that invaluable lady, at some quiet little hotel, where the management did not scrutinize too closely the habits of guests who paid well and promptly.

Once back in his own rooms, no longer under the immediate spell of her beauty, Burnett permitted himself to wonder just how much of the little comedy to which his friend had treated him had been genuine. Somehow, Grace, in the rôle of the simple, trusting heroine, seemed just a shade out of character. But he paid her cleverness the tribute of admitting that for

the moment he had certainly been taken in. He was ready to stand by his offer to marry her to-morrow. He acknowledged to himself that he was so far under the spell of her fascination and her beauty. But in a moment of honest introspection he admitted that by the end of his probation he would probably feel very differently.

Doubtless Mrs. Watson numbered among her unhappy experiences some dealing with storage warehouses, which she judged it prudent not to repeat. At all events, having paid off the cook and given her a liberal tip, in lieu of the usual notice, thus removing the embarrassment of her turning up later on as a witness, she proceeded to dispose, at quite remarkable prices, of everything the apartment contained.

With the money thus obtained safely in the bank, deposited to her own credit, she felt that the first step toward securing her future was made. And if she couldn't get something "on Grace" before the day when she would be asked to give an account of her stewardship—well, she wasn't going to worry herself about that. Heaven knew that she had had enough troubles without discounting the future. All of which shows that Mrs. Watson was, in her small way, a philosopher.

CHAPTER IV

RALPH STUYVESANT had been connected with the great house of which his father was the head a little over eighteen months when he was married, with due pomp and circumstance, to Anna, only child of the late Hermann Suydam, in old Saint Mark's-in-the-Bouerie, where his fathers had plighted their troth before him. Ruth always declared that her father regarded a marriage celebrated in any other church as being of doubtful legality.

Rarely do two people begin their married life under more favorable auguries. Both were young. The bride, an orphan, was pretty and accomplished; moreover, she possessed a small fortune in her own right. And certainly no young man in the city possessed more brilliant prospects than Ralph Stuyvesant. Finally, the match had the approval of the family connections on both sides.

The elder Stuyvesant allowed himself to draw the happiest portents from the fact that his son was following the family tradition in every respect. That he had so far given only casual attention to his purely nominal duties, and exhibited an indifference and lack of interest concerning the affairs of the bank, which could only be explained on the ground that he

was having his fling, in common with puppies, colts and the young of all species, his father preferred to believe.

He never denied that he had been a little wild himself. To be sure, he had never allowed his pleasures to interfere with his business. But young men nowadays didn't seem to have the stamina their elders had. They were no longer able to attend to both business and pleasure. Ralph had, as was only natural at his time of life, chosen to devote his attention for a year or two to his pleasure. In short, in his heart, the father acknowledged that the son was a weakling.

But marriage would fix all that. Had anyone suggested to Mr. Stuyvesant that he was in the least superstitious, he would have been both indignant and astonished. But the fact remained that he invested the marriage rite with extraordinary, supernatural qualities. It was to transform his son from a weak man into a strong one; from an idle and dissipated scatterling into a serious, industrious man of affairs.

For with Mr. Stuyvesant business was a sort of religion. He sincerely believed that the head of a great bank was in a position of responsibility and trust second to none in the land. Had anything ever even threatened the credit of Stuyvesant and Company, his own vast fortune, partly acquired by inheritance, but largely the result of his own foresight and

prudence, would have instantly been turned over to the trustees. It would have never entered his honest old head that any other course was possible.

He had not as yet allowed himself to entertain the idea that his only son was not to succeed him. Even if he should not develop along the lines which had made every Stuyvesant who had preceded him a power in the financial world, he could at least, by application and industry, make himself worthy to be the nominal head of a house which had had the same name from the beginning. Honesty was, of course, as much a part of his heritage as wealth.

And it was marriage that was to work this miracle. But, as has been shown, it had failed to perform any of the wonders upon which the old gentleman had confidently counted.

Ralph became, if possible, more dissipated and extravagant than ever. With blind confidence in Burnett, the father was always begging him to exercise his influence over his son, little knowing how baleful that influence was. For in his friend's weakness Burnett saw his long-awaited-for opportunity.

He encouraged Ralph in all his extravagances, pointing out that there was plenty of time to sober down when he was a little older. For his own purposes he screened him as much as possible from his father, lending him from time to time the money for his more pressing debts. If Ralph had ever heard of Grace An-

drews, or known of his friend's connection with her, he might have wondered how he managed to get on on his comparatively modest salary, to say nothing of his always being able to raise funds for his own too frequent crises.

The truth was that Burnett had received an advance, more important from the point of view of responsibility than from the financial. He had been put in charge of the vault, where the securities were kept. It was an easy matter for him to inform himself as to what securities out of the millions intrusted to his care were unlikely to be called for for some time. There was a risk about "borrowing" any of them; but then there were risks in any business venture. He easily persuaded himself that the opportunity, the supreme chance which was to make or mar him, had come.

Coincident with his promotion, the fabled aunts in the West, whom his friend Davidson secretly regarded as "a pair of old pikers," apparently awoke after a long period of inactivity. And they may have been said to have aroused themselves to some purpose.

Davidson found himself, more than once, on the verge of apologizing to the nephew for the contempt in which he had formerly held them. He privately made up his mind that the two old ladies had suddenly gone mad, they plunged to such an extent. He only hoped their madness might last. They certainly were a pair of fairy godmothers to the junior member of the firm

of Davidson and Post. And what securities they produced when called upon. And his friend Burnett was their favorite relative. Well, some people were just born lucky! He had an aunt or two himself not so badly off in this world's goods, but they would faint away if anyone suggested their playing parcheesi for a nickel a corner. He could see them in the stock market.

But somehow, let him play cautiously, or let him play recklessly, the result was always the same—Burnett never got far enough ahead to make it pay. It was a continual, nerve-racking seesaw, the gains balancing the losses. Certainly he was never far enough ahead of the game to pay him for the attendant anxiety. There was always the risk of the "borrowed" securities being missed. He had had to ask favors more than once of his friend Davidson. And while his opinion of the young broker's intelligence was not of the highest, he wasn't exactly a fool. He had once or twice surprised an expression on his face that bordered on the suspicious.

He suddenly displayed a violent interest in the personality of the Western aunts; speculated as to why they never came East, insisted that Burnett press them to come on. He even went to the length of swearing to immolating himself in the sacred cause of showing them a good time, vowing to personally conduct them to church, or to the Eden Musée, should that be

their idea of amusement. There were moments when Burnett could gladly have strangled him, so irritated was he by these and similar pleasures.

For a long period he had prudently laid aside a sum which was to get him out of the country, should he ever be caught. But as time went on, and his luck became no better, he had had to draw heavily on this reserve fund for current expenses. The devil himself seemed to be playing against him in more directions than one. Grace, for example, seemed to be possessed of the very demon of restlessness and extravagance. She had completely changed ever since their return from Washington, now over a year ago—the trip they had taken after their first quarrel.

Their first quarrel! How long ago it seemed. They rarely met now without quarreling. And all because of her outrageous extravagance. How different she had been when she first came up to town! Then she was most careful and economical. He recalled, with a curl of his lip, the account books and the fiction which she had kept up about only borrowing the money from him. She had practically turned him out of the house for showing that he did not believe in her sincerity.

Well, there certainly was no pretense of keeping accounts now or of "borrowing," either. The bills she ran up! He had been mad enough to open accounts for her at any

number of the best shops. And they never dined quietly, alone, together, any more. She had insisted upon meeting his friends. And he, proud of her beauty and wit, had been glad to show her off to a whole lot of racketsy fellows, who were not slow to congratulate him on his luck. He had known how to protest against their insinuations in a manner that served only to turn suspicion into certainty. Consequently, she insisted on going every night to the restaurants where the lights were brightest and the company the fastest. And if he didn't take her, there was always one of those cursed men he had introduced her to who would, and gladly.

He had made a mistake. He was to blame more than she. He was just enough to acknowledge that to himself, if he wouldn't to her. And he was to blame, too, for not frankly telling her that he couldn't keep up the pace. He never doubted that she cared more for him than she did for anyone else. If he only could bring himself to tell her frankly that he was not, and never had been, as well off as he had pretended to be. He was sure that there was still enough good in her, enough generosity to respond to a direct appeal.

As it was, she constantly accused him of meanness and pretended to think he was squandering his money on other women. The subject of marriage had not come up between them for a long time. Apparently, she was perfectly content to let things go on in the

same old way. And as for him, while he was by no means as eager to marry her as he had once been, there were times when he felt a perfect rage of jealousy at the thought of any other man possessing her. In general, he, too, was contented with things as they were.

But there came a time when things couldn't go on any longer. For nearly a month things had gone steadily against him. Davidson was continually calling on him for more securities. Once he had even been imprudent enough to call him up on the telephone at the bank. The only chance to come out even was to plunge more wildly than ever. Luck couldn't always be against him. But the time had come when Ralph must be equally involved. Old Stuyvesant would simply have to make good, if it came to a question of his son's good name.

By a fortunate chance Ralph was in a worse hole than usual. A young lady of the chorus, in whom he was for the time being interested, happened to fancy a diamond and emerald pendant. The jeweler had been restive for some months, and was now threatening to take the bill to his father. As usual, he sent a hurry call to Tom for help, being, as always, "stony broke" himself.

They had dined alone at Ralph's house, his wife having run down to Atlantic City for a few days with a party of friends, and were having their coffee in the room Ralph called his "den." Burnett had listened to the con-

fession of this new folly and the vows of reformation which accompanied it with unusual gravity.

“I’m devilishly sorry for you, Ralph. You know I’d help you if I could. But I give you my sacred word, I’m absolutely cleaned out myself. Can’t you keep the old fool quiet a bit longer?”

“He gives me a week; swears that he won’t wait an hour longer. One week from to-day, by noon at latest, the money must be in his hands. The hound even had the damned impudence to tell me that when he said ‘money’ he didn’t mean a check!”

“You don’t mean,” said Tom, genuinely startled, “that he refused to take a check of yours?”

“No, not quite so bad as that. But he *did* mean that I couldn’t get any more delay by sending him a check, as I might have done.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Now, see here, Tom. You’ve got to help me out of this some way. I swear I’ll never make such a fool of myself again.”

“My dear boy, I think I’ve helped you often enough to have the right to expect to be believed when I say I simply can’t do a thing.”

“Oh, I’m not doubting that. But for heaven’s sake, think of some way out. You’ve got twice the head I have. And beside, I’m worried nearly crazy!”

“You wouldn’t consider going to your father—just this once more? Now that you’ve really resolved that it sha’n’t happen again, I think he’d look at it differently.”

With an impatient gesture, Ralph started to walk toward the window without looking in his friend’s direction. He didn’t see the sneer that curled Burnett’s lip.

“I’d blow my head off first!”

“Ruth—your sister, then. You’ve been to her before.”

“It would come to the same thing. She’s on an allowance; and while the old gentleman is always generous with her, she couldn’t possibly have as much as that in ready cash. She’d go to him and that would make matters worse than ever, if they could be worse. He’d fly in an extra rage because I hadn’t come to him direct. No, you must think of something else.”

Burnett got up and began to pace the floor in his turn.

“No, no! That would be impossible; it’s too much of a risk,” he said, as if to himself.

“What’s too much of a risk? There isn’t any risk I wouldn’t take to save me from a certainty. What’s the idea?”

“Nothing. I tell you it’s too risky. Besides, it wouldn’t be right.”

“Good God! What *are* you maundering about? Do you know any place I could borrow the money? I don’t care what interest I have to pay. I tell you I’ve never been in such a fix

in all my life. I promised the old man I would cut out the 'merry-merry' for good and all after I was married. I only intended having a harmless little flirtation with the damned little devil. But the first thing I knew I was in pretty deep. I must have been drunk when I promised her that hellish pendant. But I'd given my word and——"

His voice trailed off into silence for a moment as the thought came to him that any high-flown sentiments on the sacredness of his word might sound a trifle ridiculous to one who knew how often it had been broken. As yet, any suspicion that Burnett was not almost as much of a paragon as his father considered him had not entered Ralph's simple mind, so skillfully had that gentleman played his cards.

"What's the idea?" he repeated.

"Why," said Burnett slowly, "I was only thinking that I happened to have some inside information that U. S. Steel was going to be pretty active within a day or two. I'm pretty friendly with young Davidson. You know him, don't you? I've dabbled a little in the market occasionally for some of the people back home on tips he's given me. He's always been right. And now he thinks there's a chance to make a fortune for anyone who has the money. You couldn't fail to pick up a few thousands before the week is out, if you cared to try it."

"What with?" said Ralph explosively. "I tell you I haven't a sou. I'm so overdrawn at

the bank that I wouldn't dare draw another check."

"If you only had those bonds your father gave you your last birthday!"

"Pawned. I told you that six months ago. You didn't suppose I'd been able to get them out, the way things have been going?"

"There we are!" said Burnett with a shrug. "Lord! When I think of that vault that I have to go to every day! It's full of gilt-edged things that nobody'll think of wanting for the next six months." He threw himself into a chair and began to poke the fire without looking at his companion. For a long moment neither of them spoke.

Ralph went over to a small table in the corner of the room and poured himself a generous drink.

"So *that's* what you were getting at when you said 'It was too risky' and 'It wouldn't be right,'" he said huskily.

"I don't know what you mean," said Burnett with affected innocence.

"Oh, yes, you do. We understand each other perfectly. Only," said poor Ralph, with a sort of honest scorn, "don't let's be afraid of calling things by their right names. I'm game to steal the securities to speculate with if you are—this once. But if I get myself out of this hole, never again, so help me!"

"Of course not," said Burnett. "I never would have thought of such a thing if there had

been any other way. And, as you say, your case seems to be pretty desperate. Only you must stand by me and take your share of the risk, which honestly, I think, is of the slightest. Davidson swears that his information comes from a source that can't be doubted."

"When can you pull it off?" asked Ralph shortly.

"To-morrow."

"And what do you want from me?"

"Well, naturally, since I'm the one who would be held responsible, I want you to sign a paper saying that we're in on the deal together. If things turn out all right, we divide the profits, if not——"

"We go to jail together," finished Ralph.

"Don't talk such nonsense," said Burnett roughly. "Your father'd make good, if the worst came to the worst."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Ralph grimly. "There's paper and things over in that desk. Go and write what you want and I'll sign it. I'd sign a contract with the old boy himself, the way I feel to-night."

Burnett crossed over to the desk and, seeing that Ralph was staring moodily into the fire, slipped an agreement which he had already drawn up from his pocket and proceeded to copy it.

"There, I think that covers everything."

"Yes, I think it does. I see," said Ralph, with grim humor, "that I get all the credit of

the idea. 'At the suggestion of said Ralph Stuyvesant, said Thomas Burnett consented to withdraw temporarily from the vault committed to his charge certain——' Oh, hell! What a damned hypocrite you are!"

"You don't seem to remember that if it were found out, I'd be looking for a job and that Stuyvesant and Company might hesitate about giving me a character."

"I get this damned paper back, if we pull it off. Mind you, I'll never take a chance like this again."

"Certainly."

Ralph hesitated no longer. Fortified with another drink, he signed the document with a hasty indifference suggesting that he had already dismissed all thoughts of possible consequences from his mind. He tossed it over to his friend, who carefully folded it away in his billcase.

"And now," said Ralph, "let's get out of this. This place gives me the Willies to-night. I suppose our little business is finished."

"I suppose you are going home to your virtuous couch," he continued, as they stood together at the foot of the steps in front of his house. "I don't mind letting you know that I propose to get boiling drunk, and that I don't expect to be cold sober again until you bring me the glad tidings that I can once more become a financially respectable member of society, or

the less cheerful news that my new spring wardrobe will be furnished by the State."

And hailing a passing taxi, he ironically wished Burnett "pleasant dreams," his offer to drop him at his own door having been declined.

Once the cab had turned the corner, Burnett unfastened his coat and filled his lungs with a long breath.

"I wonder if my hair's turned gray," he laughed to himself. "I never could have pulled it off if I had let myself think for more than a moment what it would mean to have him refuse. But while I was waiting for him to speak and sat poking the fire, I could read 'South America' in the coals. I more than half believe that he guesses that I've been playing the game for some time. Well, what of it? He can think what he chooses now that I have this paper in my pocket!"

Standing outside his own door, the key already in the lock, he suddenly changed his mind.

"I could no more sleep than I could fly," he said. "I'll go up and get Grace. She's always ready to go out to supper. Besides, I haven't seen her for two days."

CHAPTER V

IF there be such a thing as a personal devil, he must have smiled contentedly during the week which followed Burnett's conference with Ralph. For their luck certainly changed with a completeness only equaled by its suddenness. At the end of four days, Burnett was able to show Ralph the recovered securities, as he was carrying them under his coat, back to the vault, and better still, turn over to him eighteen thousand dollars as his share in their little venture.

It was one of Ralph's characteristics to run to the extremes of feeling. He was always either extraordinarily elated, or correspondingly cast down. For the moment, the reaction after the suspense and anxiety of the last week led him to commit fresh follies in the way of expenditure. Having paid off his most pressing bills, he used the greater part of the remaining sum so easily acquired in buying his wife a ring she had long coveted, and in dispatching a beautifully fitted dressing-case to the lady who had been the immediate cause of his late difficulties, now, fortunately, *en tour*.

Having let off steam in this fashion, it really looked as if his lesson was to have some beneficial effects. For several weeks, to his father's infinite gratification, he became a model of punc-

tuality and attention to business. His relations with Burnett, while superficially exactly the same as ever, became just a little awkward the moment they found themselves alone together. From the time they had first met as boys, Ralph had always looked up to his friend, had always regarded him as an immensely superior person of unusual ability, charm and force of character.

There had been times, to be sure, after they had grown older, when he had secretly looked upon him as a bit of a prig, almost a spoilsport. For Burnett would never join him in any of his mad escapades, was temperate to a degree, and, no doubt the greatest reason of all, was continually being quoted to him as a model of all that a young man should be, by his father.

The moral shock of the revelation of his true character could hardly be measured. Ralph was by no means deficient in native intelligence. It would have taken stronger evidence than Burnett's bare word to convince him that he had been a partner in the first assault that had ever been made on the vault containing the securities. The whole plan was too daring a one ever to have been entered upon on a first impulse, by any but a practiced criminal, however unscrupulous. And, in spite of his pretended hesitations, his backings and fillings, Ralph now saw clearly that he had walked blindly into a trap already long prepared for his feet. His long

habit of calling upon his friend to help him out of his constantly recurring difficulties, his blind confidence in him, both as friend and guide, had but too well prepared the way for his own downfall.

During the weeks that followed his first absolutely dishonest act, he felt impelled, more than once, to throw himself on his father's mercy and confess the whole disgraceful transaction. For days at a time, he pointedly avoided Burnett, making all sorts of excuses to get out of walking uptown with him after business hours, as was their usual habit. In the end, he lacked the courage to save himself from the net which he felt closing around him. For Ralph was a coward as well as a weakling.

Gradually, he began to excuse himself with all sorts of sophistries. He could not make a confession without involving Burnett, to whom, after all, he was greatly indebted. And ingratitude could never be anything but base. Then, too, while *technically* he had done wrong, actually he had only taken what some day must be his own. His father was getting to be an old man. In a few years at most, all this wealth would be his and Ruth's. It was an axiom that circumstances altered cases.

He even succeeded in working himself up to a virtuous indignation against Burnett. It was an entirely different matter with him. He was in the position of a trusted employee; not at all the same thing. He resolved, more than

once, to speak to him on the subject. Of course he would do it in a perfectly friendly way, some day when he could do so quite naturally without having to make the opportunity. And then, suddenly, for the first time, he recalled that wretched paper to which he had signed his name, which Burnett still had. He didn't remember clearly just what its purport was. He had been fearfully drunk later that night and for several days following. Indeed, he had had a pretty good start before they had finished dinner. That was another thing he was going to do: let up on the drink. He had always found it hard to recall what he did or said when he was full, but, lately, it was almost impossible to remember things that happened some little time before he "went under." He wished he knew just exactly the phrasing of that paper.

But since he had let it go so long, it would be better not to make its recovery seem too important by asking for it too abruptly. That was another of those things that had to be done at the psychological moment. Poor Ralph! It would be investing Burnett with nothing short of supernatural powers of divination to say that he was able to follow all the mental processes of his dupe in detail. But speaking largely, he had long since learned to read him like a book. Consequently, he noted Ralph's studied avoidance of his society with secret amusement, understanding perfectly its cause.

It did not require any great astuteness to foresee that the day could not be far off when the eighteen thousand dollars would be exhausted. Ralph had admitted sending the lady of the chorus a parting gift with a note intimating that, like all good things, their friendship had come to an end, and Anna was too childishly pleased with her new ring not to display it to everyone she knew.

And, most important thing of all, at least from Burnett's point of view, Ralph had never alluded to the incriminating paper which bore his signature. To one who understood his vacillating and cowardly nature, this was not so astonishing. But Burnett saw how he could make capital out of his hesitation. Naturally, he had no intention of parting with a document so vital to his own safety. Had Ralph ever summoned up his courage to demand it, he would have evaded, or resorted to bluff.

He waited until one day after they had resumed their old intimacy and were strolling uptown on their way home. They had reached Burnett's door, when Ralph, with an attempt to appear quite casual, said:

"Oh, by the way, Tom, could you let me have a few hundred until week after next? Anna's dressmaker is bothering her, and I'm overdrawn again, and my allowance isn't due for ten days."

"Certainly," said Burnett cordially. "Come in and I'll write you a check."

“Of course it’s none of my business,” he said with a light laugh, as he sat down at his desk, “but how on earth did you manage to get away with all that money you made last month?”

“Dead horses,” said Ralph laconically.

“Too bad. I don’t know of any way of spending money that seems quite so unsatisfactory.”

“By the way,” he went on carelessly, “Davidson called up this morning. It seems he has another sure thing. Told him I didn’t think the people I represented cared to do anything in his line just now. He said he’d call up again in a day or two and see if they’d changed their minds. That reminds me: I’ve never given you back that little memo. of our agreement. It’s safe enough. I locked it up somewhere. I’ll hunt it up, unless you think you’d sometime want to take another flyer.”

“Why don’t *you* ?”

“Not without you, thanks.”

“I don’t see what that’s got to do with it.”

“Don’t you?”

“Do you think for one moment,” said Ralph with sudden heat, “that I’m damned fool enough to believe that you never tried your little game before you roped me into going in with you?”

Burnett considered a moment, looking out of the window.

“No,” he said quietly, “I don’t mind telling

you that I've done it any number of times. What of it?"

"What of it! Supposing I were to do the decent thing and go to my father with the whole story?"

"You," Burnett sneered. "In the first place, you're not man enough. In the second, what if you did? I would admit that we had slipped up once, produce our little piece of paper, by way of confession, and deny that I had ever touched a single security, except in the way of legitimate business, before. And there wouldn't be any possible way of proving that I wasn't telling the truth."

"Why, you've just admitted it to me!"

"My dear Ralph, what a baby you are! I should, of course, swear I'd never said any such thing, and you have no witnesses. I remember that you once accused me of being a hypocrite in not calling things by their proper names. All right; let's do so. Do you suppose that one thief's word is not just as good as another's? I think you'll find it is."

Ralph made a despairing gesture.

"Now, why not look at things sensibly and like a man. You can't possibly live on your salary and allowance. Your father doesn't realize that the whole scale of living has changed since his day. You're always having the life badgered out of you by people to whom you owe money. What's the answer? You've never been able to find any. Here's what I'd

do in your place. Every time I could get a real tip on the market, I'd take a chance. You only need two or three good days to give you enough money to go on with for ever so long. By and by, you could save enough to speculate with on your own hook. In the meantime, what are you doing after all? Borrowing what will some day be your own in order to get out of debt and be able to devote your time to buckling down to business with an untroubled mind. The result will be that you will be able to please your father more than you have ever done in your life. Don't think I don't know how hard it is for you."

"There's a good deal in what you say. I've thought of it myself. But, Lord, I haven't the nerve."

"That's where I come in. I stand in well with Davidson. He'll protect us when we need it, for of course we can't win all the time. I'll only act when I have a number one tip. And we'll split even on the results. What do you say?"

"Go ahead. I'm on. Only, for God's sake be careful."

"Trust me for that. And now let's have a little drink to the health and prosperity of the new firm of Stuyvesant and Burnett."

"He *is* a fool," said Burnett to himself, after Ralph had gone. "I was all over gooseflesh when he talked of going to his father. It wouldn't take the old man long to find enough

proofs to send me up for life. A few words from Davidson about my dear old aunts in the country would have been all they needed. But I've knocked that idea out of his head, and I've got him where I want him at last. Now, I have a chance to make my pile. And if I go to smash—well, there'll be a Stuyvesant to keep me company."

The history of the three years that followed can be briefly told. Burnett, of course, paid no attention to his pledge to wait for good tips. He plunged constantly with varying fortune. There were times when they were far enough ahead of the game to have satisfied anyone of reasonable desires. Again, their losses were enough to have sobered them had they only to face losing their own money. Time after time, they only escaped detection by a miracle.

Through every chance, Burnett kept his cool head. But the effect of the continual strain on Ralph was to plunge him further into fresh dissipation. His father had at last nearly given up hope that he would ever be more than a trial and an anxiety. One thing only remained to be tried. Humiliate him before his associates and the world by promoting Burnett, in whom his confidence remained boundless, over his head.

During this time, Burnett had abandoned all thoughts of marrying Grace. He saw now that she could never be anything but a stumbling-block as a wife, however desirable she might be as a mistress. He *must* marry money. He

could hardly have told when it was that he first began to think of Ruth Stuyvesant. He had always thought of her as a child until, suddenly, one night when he was dining at the house, she seemed, in some magical way, to have turned into a charming young woman.

It was characteristic of him that, once possessed with the idea of making Ruth his wife, he should set about immediately to accomplish his purpose by every means in his power. He soon decided that there would be no opposition on the part of her father, which was, after all, the only obstacle which he might have found it difficult to overcome. Ralph would never dare oppose him, and if he did, his wishes and opinions would have no weight with anyone, much less Ruth herself. And as for Ruth? He had outstripped all rivals with many a woman. Surely the conquest of the affections of a young inexperienced girl who hardly knew half a dozen men outside of her family and connections would not be difficult, particularly since he had the father whom she idolized on his side.

There remained one person to be reckoned with—Grace. In many ways, she was as much of a puzzle to him as ever. But of one thing he was certain: she would require most delicate handling. He had thought of buying her off, of pensioning her, as it were. But aside from the consideration that Grace, if she should consent to this plan at all, would be sure to drive a hard bargain and demand something more than prom-

ises in the way of fulfilment, she had become too much a part of his life, too much of a habit, for him to be willing to consider existence without her.

No woman had ever held him as she had done. Not by her beauty alone—and even to his jealously critical eye her beauty had suffered no diminution with the passing years—but by a certain sparkling quality which to him was a constant and never-failing stimulus. In a word, while she might irritate, annoy and even enrage him at times, she never bored him.

Whereas, he had no illusion that marriage would not, if for no other reason than that it represented a definite tie. He had been free too long not to realize that any chain, even a chain of gold, was sure to prove irksome. Ruth, charming and appealing as she unquestionably was, was only a schoolgirl. He thought that he detected signs of unusual force of character in her already. But it would take time for her to develop. She could never have the fascination for him that Grace had had from the first moment he had seen her. There was no reason, after all, why the relations between Grace and himself should not continue after an interval. How many men he knew who maintained two establishments without any open scandal! The situation would require careful handling. But he never doubted his ability to carry it through successfully. The first step would be to get his mistress out of the way until his marriage was

either an accomplished fact, or at least so definitely settled that she could not upset it. And even if in the first violence of her rage at finding that he was going to marry another woman she should threaten to tell of their relations—and she probably would—he thought he knew how to quiet her by appealing to her vanity, her love for him, and above all her regard for appearances which was largely prompted by her fear of her father.

Having decided all these things, and arranged his plan of campaign, he lost no time in putting it into execution.

He was too skillful and practiced a liar not to take advantage of the truth as much as possible. He began by staying away from Grace's hotel for days at a time. But he made it a point to call her up each afternoon on the telephone to explain that he was greatly worried by business and wasn't, in consequence, fit company for man or beast. Grace quickly passed from annoyance to genuine concern. Such conduct was quite unlike Tom. He was generally only too glad to forget his troubles in her society. He had often boasted that he kept business cares for business hours and didn't intend to grow old by worrying overtime.

On the few occasions when he did present himself, he managed to look positively haggard, and was so moody and abstracted, so unlike his usual gay self, that she grew really alarmed.

Finally, one night when they had dined quietly

at home, with every evidence of extreme reluctance, he confessed to her that for the time being he was ruined, wiped out by the stock market. He was about to give up his rooms where he had lived for years—he knew, it appeared, a man who would take them off his hands just as they were—and camp out in some cheap hotel. It would take months of rigid economy to put him on his feet. He was frightfully in debt. He had thought of telling her the truth about his speculations from the bank, but had decided to keep this last card still up his sleeve.

There was only one thing to be done, and he asked her to believe that he had gone over every possible plan before coming to a decision. She must go away for a time. Luck was sure to turn. She could not doubt, knowing how empty his life would be without her, that he would send for her at the earliest possible moment. There were lots of places, not half bad, where she and Mrs. Watson could manage to exist for a time. As a matter of fact, he had had to borrow the money to pay her bill at the hotel the last month. He still had enough left to square things if she would be reasonable and arrange to go within the week. Of course, he still had his modest salary. She could count on his sending her a comparatively small sum from time to time. Promising to come up again within a day or two at most, he left her to digest his unwelcome tidings and hold counsel with Mrs. Watson.

How much of the story which the excited Grace poured into the ears of her confidante was believed by her, it is impossible to say. Following her usual custom, she declined to commit herself in any way until she had "slept on" the news. Mrs. Watson was a firm believer in dreams; continually asserting that if she had only been wise enough to listen to the voices that advised her in her sleep when she was younger, she would not have been where she was, whatever that may have meant. One thing, however, she did condescend to suggest: that, as Burnett would not be able to join them on the following night, young Mr. Davidson, who was always bright and amusing, be asked to take them out to dinner.

Grace fell in with this suggestion at once. She knew that Davidson was Burnett's broker through Tom's mentioning it some time before when he had asked to bring him up to dinner. It would be a simple matter to pump him dry on the subject of her lover's losses, that somewhat simple youth being one of her most infatuated adorers.

The dinner, accordingly, took place and Grace and Mrs. Watson were equally convinced that the tale of Burnett's heavy losses was literally true.

It affected the two ladies quite differently. Mrs. Watson firmly announced her intention of remaining in New York, at least for the present. An imaginary doctor whom she was constantly

consulting for some mysterious malady which always prevented her doing anything that she did not really want to had impressed upon her the necessity of consulting him at least bi-weekly, declining to be responsible for the consequences should she leave town at this particular time. Of course, it nearly broke her heart to think of parting from her dear friend, even temporarily; but Grace would be sure to be back in no time—Burnett was far too clever a man to suffer more than a passing eclipse of fortune—and they would once more be reunited. Besides, as all her friends knew, Mrs. Watson had spent her life in thinking of others. The time had come when she must think a little of herself.

The fact was that during the years of their stay at the hotel Mrs. Watson had been able to make a most prudent arrangement with the landlord, whom she had found to be a most amiable man, sympathetic and fair-minded to a degree. Grace had all of the indolence of her class and detested details and anything that had to do with figures. It had fallen to the good-natured Mrs. Watson, therefore, to keep track of the current expenses, just as it had done in the days when they were keeping house. Mrs. Watson had always managed to find time to confer with the landlord before the monthly bill was rendered. That her percentage was not small, her quite respectable bank account was a witness. Although she had been able to verify

Burnett's story of his losses, Mrs. Watson was by no means convinced that he had not seized this opportunity to break with her fair friend. All men were deceitful and double-dealing. No doubt the time had come when he had decided to marry and settle down.

She had long ago come to the conclusion that Grace lacked real force of character. With her looks there was no reason why she shouldn't long ago have aspired higher than a young man with his fortune still to make. Well, let her cling to her Tom and wait for him to make his fortune. She, herself, had no time to waste. Her friend, the landlord, had told her of a lodging-house in the neighborhood which she could have at a reasonable figure. With his help, she thought that she knew how to make it succeed.

Grace, finding herself thus deserted, and being convinced that she would be bored to death anywhere away from New York, hit upon the idea of paying her parents a long deferred and often promised visit. That would give her time to decide upon a place to spend her exile. Always disinclined to mention her old home or her family to Tom, she contented herself with telling him that she was going over to Philadelphia for a few days to see some people she knew. As soon as she made any arrangements, she would let him know.

They had a final dinner together in a secluded restaurant at which they both became astonish-

ingly sentimental, vowing eternal fidelity to each other, and planning for the time when they would once more be together. Once back in the little sitting-room of the hotel, now dismantled of all the pretty little knickknacks which gave it character and individuality, Burnett found himself on the verge of telling her the truth, so genuinely distressed did she appear. But he thought better of it on consideration.

“Now remember,” he said as he held her in a last embrace, “it may take six months to put me back on my feet. But there is to be no coming to New York, not for a day.”

“I know.”

“And I am not going to see you. It will be just as hard for me. You know that. You promise?”

“Yes, I promise.”

And so they parted.

CHAPTER VI

It was a little after nine o'clock when Burnett left his club and started to his rooms, which he had not, after all, given up as he had intended. On thinking it over, he had decided that he could retrench quite as much in other ways. While they were spacious and comfortable, they were simply furnished and not expensive, as rooms in New York went. Until he was once more on his feet, he would cut out dining at expensive restaurants and go to one of his clubs for his dinners.

Noting the time by the clock in the Metropolitan Tower, he quickened his pace. Ralph would be waiting for him. The hallboy knew him and would let him in. Now Ralph had shown signs during the day of being in one of his worst moods. At such times he was often difficult to handle, and was more than ever inclined to drink heavily. He knew where the whisky was kept, and if left to himself too long would drink himself into a fighting humor, always the precursor of a prolonged spree. Burnett had his own reasons for wishing to keep him sober.

He had not intended staying so long at the club. But, somewhat to his surprise, he found that the news of his new honors had leaked

out, and there were a number of men who had detained him with their congratulations. As he went up in the elevator, he remembered that Grace had been gone just two weeks. He supposed she was still in Philadelphia. But it was strange that she had not found time to send him a line.

“What the devil are you sitting in the dark for? I’m sorry I’m late, but I got jawing with some fellows at the club.”

Ralph was lolling in an immense armchair, the whisky and a siphon on a table at his elbow. His only response to his friend’s greeting was a sullen scowl. Burnett picked up the decanter and held it up to the light.

“I’m sorry to seem inhospitable,” he said, as he locked it up in the sideboard, “but I think you’ve had all you need for the evening.”

“Fortunately, I’ve still got a dollar or two, and saloons are on every corner,” said his guest with a sneer.

“Now, Ralph, for God’s sake, don’t make an ass of yourself at this particular moment. You know Ruth’s terribly keen about getting up that party to go up to New Haven on the coach day after to-morrow. You want to keep fit for that, don’t you?”

“Can’t say that I care much. I probably wouldn’t be included, if she wasn’t taking half the town.”

“Don’t talk like a fool! What’s the matter with you anyway?”

“I’m sore, that’s what’s the matter,” said Ralph, sitting up with a jerk. “I’m getting a little tired of the treatment I’m getting. After all, I’m still one of the family, I guess. And it’s a little humiliating to have to depend on outsiders for news of what’s going on.”

“I hope you know what you’re talking about. I give you my word I don’t.”

“Don’t you, indeed?”

“No, I don’t. You’re surely not talking about my being taken into the firm? You knew that that was coming as soon as I did.”

“Damn your being taken into the firm!”

“Now, look here, my young friend,” said Burnett with pretended heat, “you ought to thank your lucky stars that it’s come just when it has. If it had been delayed a month longer, where would you have been, I’d like to know. The only way I could have stayed things off any longer would have been to blow up the damned building with dynamite.”

“Where would I have been? Where would you have been, you mean.”

“Well, where would we both have been? May I ask if you have any idea what we owe Stuyvesant and Company at the present moment?”

“No, and I don’t want to.”

“Of course not. You are glad enough to take your share of the profits, when there are any; but when it comes to the worry and anxiety, no thank you. You are perfectly will-

ing to leave all that to me. Don't be afraid," went on Burnett scornfully, "I've no intention of telling you. You'd only get crazy drunk and tell the whole story to the first person you could get to listen to you. I repeat, I've got into the firm not a day too soon. It's the only thing that could have saved us. And in place of being thankful, you're sore about it."

"How many times do you want me to tell you that I don't give a whoop in hell whether you're made *head* of the firm or not? It's another thing altogether."

"Well, what? Let's get it over."

Ralph lurched to his feet and stood swaying by the table. He had suddenly become ashy white. His lip was curled in an ugly snarl. Whether he had been drinking before he came, and had had more than Burnett suspected, or for the reason that his brain, already inflamed with alcohol, was thrown off its balance by the violence of his passion, it was impossible to say, but on the instant he had become remarkably drunk.

"I'm on to your di-dirty scheme. Your pl-pl-plotting to marry my sister. She's—she's the only si-sister I've got, an' I won't have it, do you hear, I won't have it," he stammered. "Anna—she's m' wife—tol' me all 'bout it." And with a final lurch he collapsed into the chair and burst into a fit of maudlin tears.

"So that's what's troubling you, you poor fool," said Burnett, half to himself. Even as

he stood looking down at him, Ralph was asleep. With a disgusted shrug, he picked him up and carried him over to a couch at the end of the room and, having covered him with a warm traveling rug, turned out the lights and went calmly to bed. As he was falling asleep, he wondered again why he had not heard from Grace.

As it happened, Grace was thinking of him at that very moment. At first, she had enjoyed her visit with her parents even more than she had expected. It was delightful to be made so much of. Then, too, she was actress enough to enjoy playing the simple, unsophisticated girl again. Nothing had really changed. Perhaps her father was a little less erect and her mother a little grayer than when she had last seen them. But at heart they were no older. And their delight at having her home again touched her sincerely.

Still, she was beginning to be fearfully bored. They were so childishly interested in the same old things. Her mother still waged war with the mischief-loving boys who were always trying to take a short cut through her beloved parlor on the way to the bathhouse; her father, as he had done each year since she could remember, swore that the crew was the finest crew he had ever trained and that Bill Reid, the stroke, was the greatest stroke Yale had ever had. And she had to pretend to be as interested as they were!

Each night she resolved to tell them in the morning that she must go. And each morning her heart failed her. She had told them that the firm that employed her had gone out of business and that for the moment she was without a position. But she had provided an avenue of escape in telling them that she was daily expecting to hear from an employment agency that was sure to find her another position before long.

The days she could get through with well enough. Dressed in the simple, cheap gowns appropriate to her supposed condition, the selection of which had been Mrs. Watson's parting office, she strolled about, watched the boats on the river from the boat-house porch, or helped her mother about the house.

But the nights! There were times when seated at the homely supper-table it was all she could do to keep from screaming at the top of her voice, so great was her longing for Tom, her nostalgia for the lighted restaurants of Broadway. At such moments, the purely hysterical impulse to shatter forever the peace of mind of these two simple old people by shrieking the truth about her way of life was almost irresistible. Supper once eaten, she would help her mother clear the table and wash the dishes. And then, having lighted her father's pipe for him, they would all, if the evening were fine, sit out on the porch and watch the silvery river glide by in the moonlight; talking, if they talked

at all, of the crew, the everlasting crew and the chances for winning in the coming race!

Finally, toward half-past nine, when her father's snores made it impossible to keep up any further pretense that he was not fast asleep, her mother would shake him by the shoulder and they would all go up to bed. What an existence! A dozen times she had feverishly packed her small trunk after going up to her room, only to unpack it again in the morning. But things could not go on like this much longer. Why couldn't she come to some decision as to where she was to spend the rest of her exile! She simply must make up her mind. Tom would think it strange that she didn't write. Then, too, she would soon be out of funds. Mrs. Watson, having been in urgent need for money to pay her doctor, had borrowed a large part of the money left over after paying the outstanding bills.

As she sat looking out of her window on the night of Burnett's heart-to-heart talk with Ralph, she little knew that within a few hours Fate would decide things for her.

It was the afternoon of the day of Ruth's coaching party. All day long it had been unusually hot. The crew were out on the river and old Tom and his wife were out on the lawn in front of the house.

"That's a good girl," said Mrs. Andrews, peering through the open window. "Gracie is making some iced tea. I'm that glad, my

head's splitting with the heat! Have some, Tom?"

"I will not. I tell you, Gracie," he called, "a tall one—of the dark kind with a collar on—would be all to the good. Hurry before the crew gets in. They'll be swingin' down the river most any minute now—and it's no use makin' the boys feel bad by the sight of somethin' they can't have."

"Very well, father," called Grace.

"Ah, but it's the comfort to have her home again," said Tom to his wife.

"It is that. But when I look at her, so dainty and sweet, and then look at me and you, Tom, I don't see how she's goin' to stay here."

"Ain't we her parents?"

"Sure'n that's the surprisin' part of it. How you, Tom Andrews, could ever have a daughter like that!"

"Well, I always thought she was mine, Nora, but you know best."

With a laugh, he dodged a blow from the broom with which his wife had been sweeping the porch.

"Here you are, father," said Grace, coming out with a glass in either hand.

"Happy days!"

As her mother stood smacking her lips over her tea, Grace took the broom and began to go on with the sweeping.

"No, no, no, I'll finish that."

"Nonsense! I'm not company. And besides

I want to show you that I haven't forgotten how to sweep."

"'Tis mighty hard for yer mother'n me without yer. An' we've missed yer, I can tell you that," said Tom soberly, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "And if you only stay, we'll be that glad!" chimed in his wife. "Still," she added prudently, "if that there agency gets you another twenty-five-dollar a week job, I suppose it would be wicked not to take it."

"Yes, 'twould," said her husband ruefully.

"An' you gettin' to be such a lady," went on her mother fondly. "Why, you might be married to a millionaire most any Tuesda'."

"No danger of that," said Grace, shaking her head.

"An' why not?"

"Millionaires, mother, aren't looking for girls like me."

"Well, if I was a millionaire——" began Tom hotly.

"Good gracious," interrupted Grace sharply, "we'd better hurry or we won't be through before the crew comes. And didn't Mr. Hampton saw that there were some people coming out to see Dad's pets?"

"He's that proud of them!"

"An' wouldn't any trainer be proud of them! Six years now the Johnny Harvards have trimmed us, but you just wait till Thursda' week. And with Bill Reid stroking, you'll see

the greatest crew Yale ever had come smashing down that lane of boats—ahead!”

“The greatest Yale ever had! Do you think they’re that good, Dad?”

“I don’t think it, I know it. The best crew I ever trained, and Bill Reid’s the greatest stroke.”

“Here they come,” said his wife, pointing to the river.

“Ah, the beauties—ain’t it a sight for sore eyes!”

“Come on—come on there,” he shouted. “Easy now—What’s the matter, number two?—Steady—that’s the stuff, Bill Reid—Ah, *you Reid!*—Pull it through—that’s the way.—One, two, three, steady as a clock.—Ah, you could go to sleep in her!” The Yale shell came swinging along, the eight men pulling in the steadiest fashion, thirty-four strokes to the minute. Chugging along behind came the motor-boat with Hampton, the coach, who kept shouting through his megaphone:

“Easy—easy—well pulled.”

Slowly, slowly the shell came to a stop, the men resting on their oars.

“C-c-c-come on now—all—together. Let ’em k-k-know we’re here,” stammered Jimmie Jones, the little coxswain.

“Rah—rah—rah—
Rah—rah—rah—
Rah—rah—rah—
YALE!”

chanted the crew.

“Wh-wh-what’s the ma-matter with Tom Andrews?”

“He’s rotten!” agreed the crew with one voice.

“You shrimp,” called Tom, pretending to be in a great rage. “You wait, I’ll get you!”

“Wh-wh-what’s the matter with Mother Andrews?” continued the undaunted Jones.

“She’s too good for old Tom,” was the gallant response.

“Ah—you wait!”

“Come on in, Tom, the water’s fine,” called one of the men.

“Wait till I get you on the rubbing board. I’ll teach you to talk!” cried Tom, shaking his fist at them, his fierce expression more or less marred by a broad grin.

“Don’t you dare abuse them dear boys,” said his wife, appeased for the moment at the compliment paid her. “Don’t you worry, Mr. Jones, you just stutter as much as you want to.”

“I d-d-don’t want to stutter. I d-d-do it anyhow.”

“Oh, yo-yo-you d-d-do, do you?” laughed Tom, trying to imitate him.

As the shell came paddling down to the float, Tom threw open the doors of the boat-house; and the men, getting out very gingerly, proceeded to carry the shell in on their shoulders, as Hampton, the coach, a burly, middle-aged man, stepped out of the launch. Almost in-

stantly, they came piling out again, all strapping fellows in the pink of condition, weighing from one hundred and sixty-five to a hundred and eighty pounds. All, that is, except the little coxswain who weighed less than a hundred, and seemed remarkably thin for that. Jones advanced with the elaborate caution of an Indian on the warpath, and instantly dodged behind a friendly tree.

"Now I'll get you, you shrimp," said his enemy, making a rush at him. But little Jones was nothing if not agile. Wriggling, squirming, dodging and ducking, finding asylum behind one man after another, they on their part doing their best to aid by getting in Andrews' way, he was finally captured just as he was about to dodge behind big Bill Reid. Old Nora laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks. Even Grace forgot her deadly boredom for the moment.

"Shall I throw him in?" demanded his captor.

"No, no. Give him the blanket!"

With a rush they seized the huge blanket hanging over the railing of the porch and threw the protesting Jones in the middle of it.

"S-s-s-st-stop!" he shrieked in mock terror.

"Now, one, two, three, all together."

Amid yells and cheers, the hapless coxswain was tossed until everyone was exhausted. Bill Reid alone took no part in the sport. As he strode over the lawn to where the coach, Hampton, was standing, Grace had to admit that he

was an unusually striking and attractive figure. It was not alone that he was deep-chested, broad-shouldered, big of bone and muscle, a nearly perfect type of strong, athletic manhood—Grace was too physical herself not to feel the magnetism of all that—but about him was a compelling quality that no mere splendid animal could ever possess. What did it come from? Was it intellectual? Was it moral? Grace could not say. She only knew that, more than any other man she had ever encountered, Bill Reid possessed it.

As she stood in the background noting the frank, fearless glance of his fine eyes, and the winning charm of the smile that occasionally broke down the accustomed gravity of his face, serving to make it suddenly appealingly boyish, it swept over her with a gust of unreasonable anger that she both hated and feared him.

Why? She asked herself the question. Was it because her beauty had failed to arouse even his passing interest? No, she was sure it was not. She had been a little piqued, as was natural, at the discovery just at first, and had made the mistake of attributing his indifference to the fact that he probably considered himself too much "above" old Tom Andrews' daughter, however pretty, to pay any attention to her further than that which a kindly courtesy to her father demanded. But since then she had learned that he had not disdained to work his

way through college by doing any "chores," however humble, that came to his hand, so he was evidently not prompted by any false pride. She repeated to herself that this was *not* the reason. She hated and feared him instinctively, that was all there was to it. It was one of those feelings that can never be accounted for rationally.

She moved away toward a little table upon which the empty glasses were standing, and murmuring something to her mother about tidying up a bit, carried them into the house.

"Satisfied to-day, Mr. Hampton?"

"More than satisfied, Bill. You broke the record for the course."

"Broke the record? That's great, isn't it! They're a great bunch of fellows, coach. I could feel it the way they backed me up to-day."

"Well, you see we have a stroke worth backing up," said Hampton, laying his hand for a moment on his shoulder. "Now get in for your shower and rub-down, Bill."

"Here, you," he called to the rest of the crew in quite another tone. "Get in here, every one of you. What do you think you came here for—to amuse yourselves?"

His words were a signal to more than the members of the crew. With a quickness surprising for such a big woman, Mrs. Andrews jumped on the steps and prepared to defend her beloved parlor at the point of the broom. She

was not a moment too soon, for little Jones was only a second behind her.

"No you don't," she cried, aiming a blow at him. "Around the house with you!"

"Got your tea and cake and stuff like that ready, Mrs. Andrews?" asked Hampton. "I thought the crowd that is drivin' out would be here when we came in from the river."

"Sure'n how many are they goin' to be, Mr. Hampton?" she asked anxiously. "Of course we'll be ready, all right; still I'd like to know."

"Oh, ten or fifteen, I suppose. You know it's Mr. Stuyvesant's party. Mr. William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant, the big banker. He was an old oarsman in his day, you remember."

"Faith an' how old do you think I am!" she asked indignantly.

"Well, you must remember Ralph Stuyvesant, his son, who was coxswain of the crew five years ago."

"Yes, I remember *him*," said Mrs. Andrews in a tone that suggested that the recollection did not carry an enormous amount of pleasure with it. "How are they comin' out, did you say?"

"On a tally-ho."

At that moment there came the sound of a horn still some way off. Grace, who had caught the name Stuyvesant through the open window, made it a pretext for coming out.

"I thought I heard a horn, mother."

“And so you did. It’s Mr. Stuyvesant’s tally-ho. Well, go on, Mr. Hampton. Do I know any of the rest?”

“I don’t know that I can tell many more of them. But, of course, there’ll be Tom Burnett. You remember Tom Burnett?”

“Remember *him!* Will I ever forget him? When *he* was here, he used to be doin’ nothin’ but pesterin’ the life out of Gracie, here.”

At the mention of Burnett’s name, Grace had impulsively started for the house again. She must get up to her room and stay there until these people had gone. A sudden illness, a headache, anything would do for an excuse. Tom must not see her, not know she was here. Or at least she must get him alone and invent some story about her mother’s having been ill and having sent for her. She must watch behind the curtain of her room until a chance came.

But at Hampton’s next words, the house, the boat-house, the whole landscape swam before her eyes. For the first time in her life she feared that she was going to faint. She sank down for a moment on the steps leading up to the porch. Fortunately, Hampton was always rather slow of speech, which gave her time to pull herself together.

“They say he’s goin’ to marry Mr. Stuyvesant’s daughter, Miss Ruth Stuyvesant. She’s a good looker, and will have five or ten million

dollars of her own some day. Gee, it's a cinch it's the money he's after!"

"N-o-o-o!" said Mrs. Andrews in astonishment. "Well, I never! Do you hear that, Grace? Young Burnett is going to marry the rich Miss Stuyvesant."

"My dear mother, why in the world should that interest me?"

"Well, you used to know him, and I thought——"

"Oh, you thought too much, mother, dear," said Grace, getting up and putting her arm affectionately round her mother's ample waist. "That was so long ago, I can scarcely remember Mr. Burnett. Let me see; what *was* he like?"

"Black-haired, rather handsome chap. But no good, I always thought," said Hampton.

"And Miss Stuyvesant, is she pretty?" asked Grace in a tone of polite interest.

"A perfect corker!"

"Really?" And after a moment: "What type?"

"Oh, I don't know. Fair complexion, gray eyes, reddish hair."

"Well, for my part, I never did like them redheads," said Mrs. Andrews with conviction.

Once more came the sound of the horn; this time a perfect fanfare. And then, presently, one could distinguish the sound of fresh young voices, singing. Out of the house, fairly tumbling over each other in their excitement, came

the men of the crew, fresh and glowing in their flannels and blue jerseys, just as the big coach, drawn by six horses and loaded with men and girls, came dashing into the yard.

Followed by her mother, Grace hurried into the house.

CHAPTER VII

MR. STUYVESANT, who had been a noted whip in his day, was driving. He was in his element with the reins in his hands. All the way up from the city he had been as gay and light-hearted as the youngest of his guests; his big voice booming out when they sang any songs he knew, his hearty laugh sounding above all the rest.

If at any moment the fun seemed to be dying out, he always knew how to rekindle it by telling some preposterous story about his friend, Donald MacLaren, a rather dry-as-dust old gentleman who sat beside him on the box, and who was in a continual state of protest, partly on account of the anecdotes and partly because Mr. Stuyvesant insisted upon emphasizing all his points by prodding him in the side with the butt end of his whip.

In after years Ruth always looked back on this day with tear-dimmed eyes. Never again was she to see her dearly loved father so care-free and happy.

By way of showing that his hand had lost none of its old-time cunning, the old gentleman, having slyly flecked the leaders with the lash of his whip, brought the coach up to the door with a flourish that brought a cheer

from the members of the crew waiting to receive him and his party. Acknowledging his reception with a low bow and a flourish of his hat, he motioned to the grooms to take their places at the prancing animals' heads and turned to his guests. "I think, before alighting, that we should respond to our cordial welcome with a song. All ready? One, two, three, begin!"

The response was instantaneous.

“ Row—row—row
 Just a little while,
 Give Johnny Harvard
 A sample of our style.
 Row—row—row
 Your very last bit,
 That's the way
 To make a hit.
 Row—row—row
 Let 'em yell Jim Wray.
 We have Bill Reid,
 He'll show the way.”

And then they suddenly began the famous “Boola-Boola” in which the crew joined.

“ Boola—boola
 Boola—boola
 Boola—boola
 Boola—Boo.
 We'll rough-house
 Johnny Harvard,
 Pennsylvania,
 Princeton, too.
 Boola—Boo.
 Eli—YALE! ”

“What I like about both those songs are the words; they're an inspiration in themselves,” said Mr. MacLaren slyly.

“Nobody cares a hang about words; it’s the tune, man.”

“ You don’t mean to say——”

“ Brackety—cax—coax—coax.
Brackety—cax—coax—coax.
Hooray—hooray,
Hullabaloo
YALE! ”

And with a rush the crew stormed the coach and began to help the girls to get down. Most of them were old acquaintances; indeed, there were rumors of more than one “unofficial” engagement existing. Perhaps the one that excited the greatest amusement was that of “Shrimp” Jones to Jennie Bruce, a large, handsome, fat girl, Ruth’s most intimate friend.

At the imminent risk of having the life crushed out of him, should she chance to miss her footing, little Jones was now assisting his inamorata in her perilous descent. Once more on the firm earth, she proceeded to load the unfortunate youth with all manner of packages which her friends passed down to her.

“I-I-er-I-er, Jennie,” he stammered.

“Yes, I know you’re glad to see me; you ought to be,” replied the fat girl with her placid drawl. “Wait a minute, here’s some more.”

“Wh-what’s a-all this?”

“You didn’t look like you were getting enough to eat, so I brought you some food, you poor, skinny, little thing.”

“Oh!”

“Where’s Mr. Reid? I want Mr. Reid.”

“Do-do you thi-think that’s-that’s the way to tr-tr-treat me? Co-come down h-here, l-l-load me up with pa-pa-packages and then a-a-ask for Bill Reid?”

“Of course it is. Besides, I’ll treat you any way I want to. You’re in love with me.”

“Wh-who s-s-said I w-w-was in l-l-love with you?” demanded little Jones, rising to the bait, as his tormentor knew he would do.

“You don’t have to say it; you act it.—Oh, Mr. Reid!”

“Here I am, Miss Bruce. How are *you*?” said Reid, advancing with his pleasant smile.

“Splendid. I’ve lost six ounces in six weeks. Here’s—Oh, where *is* it?” Seizing Jimmy by the collar, she pulled him forward, and selecting one of the largest of the boxes which completely filled his arms, she held it out to the smiling giant.

“Here’s a five-pound box of Page and Shaw’s chocolates. I brought them especially for you.”

Little Jones gave a vengeful cackle.

“*He c-c-can’t e-e-eat ’em!*”

“Keep quiet!”

“He’s right. You see, Miss Bruce, we’re training and can’t eat candy. Thank you just the same.”

“*Can’t you?*”—with elaborate surprise. “Do you know, I had sort of an idea maybe you couldn’t. I’ll eat ’em myself.”

With a laughing nod of dismissal, she strolled

off with her admirer in tow, already munching her chocolates.

In the meantime, Mr. Stuyvesant having given some directions to the grooms, turned to meet Hampton.

"Hello, Hampton, how are you? How's the crew?" he asked in his hearty voice.

"You're looking bully, Mr. Stuyvesant."

"What the devil difference does it make how I look? How's the crew, I say."

"The greatest ever. It's our year with Bill Reid as stroke."

Turning his head, he saw his favorite looking laughingly after the departing Miss Bruce, and nodded for him to join him.

"So you're Bill Reid," said Mr. Stuyvesant, holding out his hand without waiting for Hampton to introduce the young man. "I'm Bill Stuyvesant. I stroked Yale once myself."

"Oh, I've heard of you, sir. You're the man who brought your boat up three lengths in the last quarter mile, and won."

Mr. Stuyvesant gave a pleased laugh. "Well, you're going to win, too, I'm sure. Can tell by the look of you. Wait a minute." He turned and looked around at the various scattered groups until his eye fell on his friend, Colonel MacLaren, standing next his daughter.

"Mac, come here a minute."

Colonel MacLaren came briskly over, followed more slowly by Ruth.

"MacLaren, here's Bill Reid. The boy who's

going to lick you Johnny Harvards next Thursday week!"

"We'll see about that," said his friend, affecting to bluster.

"MacLaren, here," continued Mr. Stuyvesant, holding his hand beside his mouth, and speaking in the loudest of whispers, "rowed on Harvard the year I rowed on Yale. And what I did to him!" he ended with a burst of laughter.

"Father," said a quiet voice, as he was wiping his eyes, "won't you introduce *me* to Mr. Reid?"

"Of course. Bill Reid, this is my daughter, Miss Stuyvesant."

"I've been looking forward to meeting—Bill Reid," said Ruth, holding out her hand.

For some unaccountable reason, Bill Reid flushed to the roots of his hair. For a long moment, blue eye met gray eye in an unwavering, steadfast glance. Still smiling, Ruth made an effort to release her hand, which was lost in his big one. At that moment, her father's roving eye fell on Tom Andrews, who was just coming out of the house.

"Tom Andrews, well, well! You're beginning to show your age, Tom."

And then, as they were joined by Ralph: "Bill Reid, this is my son, Ralph Stuyvesant."

"Glad to meet you," said Bill cordially. "Wasn't he *her* brother?"

"I was coxswain of the crew five years ago," said Ralph, swaggering a little. "I want you

to meet my wife. Anna, this is Bill Reid, the stroke."

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Reid," said Anna gushingly. "We're all pulling so hard for you to win!"

"It's going to take hard pulling on our part, too," with a shake of his head.

"I understand Harvard has a good crew this year," said a new voice at his elbow.

Bill turned to meet the rather insolent glance of Tom Burnett.

"Oh, my name's Burnett, Thomas Burnett."

Reid returned his bow, but Ruth noticed that neither man offered to shake hands. It was all Tom's fault, she said to herself. He was in one of his most supercilious moods. She could tell that by the very tone of his voice.

"For some strange reason," she said lightly, "Tom seems to think Harvard's going to win. Really, I almost believe he wants them to!"

"I don't, my dear," with a slight emphasis on the term of endearment. "Of course I'm a Yale man, but I can't let my loyalty interfere with my common sense. I saw Harvard row the other day. A good crew."

There was an awkward pause. Nobody spoke.

"I see I've said the unpopular thing." His laugh had the suggestion of a sneer.

The little group melted away and left him, Reid and Ruth strolling over to the boat-house, where most of the others seemed to have gone,

and Ralph and Anna going to look for something she had left on top of the coach. He swore under his breath. He had made up his mind to definitely propose to Ruth to-day and things did not seem to be starting out well.

She had twice already showed that his manner displeased her, and here she was practically snubbing him before the others and particularly before that big booby who was the idol of every silly girl for the moment just because he happened to be stroke of a crew. He had taken a violent dislike to him on sight, and he was glad to believe that he had conveyed as much by his manner. And the airs the fool assumed. By his manner, one might think he was the Grand Mogul himself! He would take a stroll by himself along the bank of the river until he got over his irritation at things in general.

He stopped digging the sod with his stick and looked up to see Grace standing gazing at him from the porch, with a smile that seemed to comprehend and mock at his discomfiture.

“You! Here?” he said in frank dismay.

“Tom!” she said appealingly.

She had the advantage over him of knowing that she was to see him. During the time while with rage in her heart she had been helping her mother prepare the tea, she had planned her campaign. But he should have his chance to explain, to deny the rumor that she was about to be supplanted.

“Sh! sh!” he said under his breath, glancing

hastily about to see that they were alone.
“What are you doing *here?*”

“Where else was there for me to go, after—after you said you weren’t going to see me any more?”

“I’m not the only man in the world,” he said brutally.

He did not look at her, or he would have surprised an ominous flash in her black eyes.

“You’re the only man in *my* world. Wasn’t I true to you always?”

“Sh! I explained to you that we had to part only because I’d lost all my money,” he went on in a changed tone. “You know, dear, how I love you, and you only. Just as soon as I get some money again——”

“When you marry Miss Stuyvesant, I suppose,” she sneered.

Burnett was genuinely frightened. But he set about to extricate himself from his dangerous position with his customary boldness.

“Who repeated that nonsense to you?”

“Never mind. It is sufficient that I have heard it. That’s why you were so anxious to get me out of New York. You were afraid I’d hear it, and make a row. I was to be thrown over, and in the meantime to be sent to some hole where I wouldn’t hear of anything until it was too late. The idea was clever, but——”

“Don’t talk such damned nonsense!”

“Oh, I hate her, I hate her!” said Grace with sudden passion. “I hated her when I first saw

her to-day, when I didn't even know who she was!"

"Hate her all you please, I don't give a damn. Now just listen to me a minute. Try to control yourself and listen to reason. If people find out about you and me in New York it will hurt just one person—yourself. You don't want your father and mother to know the life you've been living, do you?"

Before Grace could make any answer, they saw Ralph Stuyvesant coming toward them over the lawn. Grace made a move to return to the house, but Burnett laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Oh, Ralph, you remember Miss Andrews, don't you? Tom Andrews' daughter, Grace?"

"This is Ralph Stuyvesant. On the crew a few years ago."

Ralph, who had been turning out the pockets of his coat in a vain effort to find something he had lost, was evidently in a temper.

"Glad to meet you again," he said perfunctorily. But as he glanced surlily up at Grace, his whole face became transformed. Amazed admiration spoke from every feature of his face.

"You—little Gracie Andrews!"

Easily flattered, as she always was, Grace rewarded his open admiration with a coquettish smile.

"I remember Mr. Stuyvesant very well," she said demurely.

“Do you? That’s awfully good of you. Why, you were just a little flapper when I was here. And now——” His voice trailed off into an eloquent silence.

“I’m afraid I must be going in,” said Grace, hearing voices coming nearer from the boat-house.

“Oh, don’t go, I haven’t had a chance to talk to you. Say, at least, that I’ll see you again before we start back.”

“Au revoir, then,” smiled Grace, giving him her hand.

“Don’t make it too long, then,” Ralph called after her. “By God, Tom,” he said, turning to Burnett, “she’s a peach, a perfect wonder!”

“A peach that can be picked,” said Burnett with a laugh.

“No! Are you sure?”

“Oh, you married men!” said his friend cynically.

“Ralph!” called a voice from the river bank.

“Good Lord! Anna sent me to get her bag!” and Ralph hurried away.

Out of the boat-house came the chattering boys and girls, scattering in various directions. Jennie Bruce, with her faithful swain and her box of candy, sank down on the porch steps with a sigh of contentment. Dorothy Morgan, Lillian Johnson, Marion Colfax and Alice Henderson, all bright, pretty girls, stood in a group in the center of the lawn, surrounded by mem-

bers of the crew with whom they were flirting outrageously to the manifest displeasure of the young fellows of their own party. Only Ruth and Bill Reid were missing.

“Where’s Ruth?” asked Alice Henderson.

“I think she went down to the shore with her father and Colonel MacLaren, and that man who teaches you boys how to row,” said Marion Colfax.

“She went down to the shore all right, but not with them,” laughed Harry Dalton.

“Who’s with her,” said Burnett sharply.

“Oh, only Bill Reid,” mocked Jennie from her seat on the steps. “He’ll take care of her, Mr. Burnett, he’s so big and strong.”

“Thank you kindly, but I can take care of myself,” called a laughing voice, as Ruth, with Bill Reid, appeared at the top of the steps leading down from the bluff.

“Ruth, won’t you take a walk with me?” asked Burnett in a low tone.

“Not just now; I’m a little tired.”

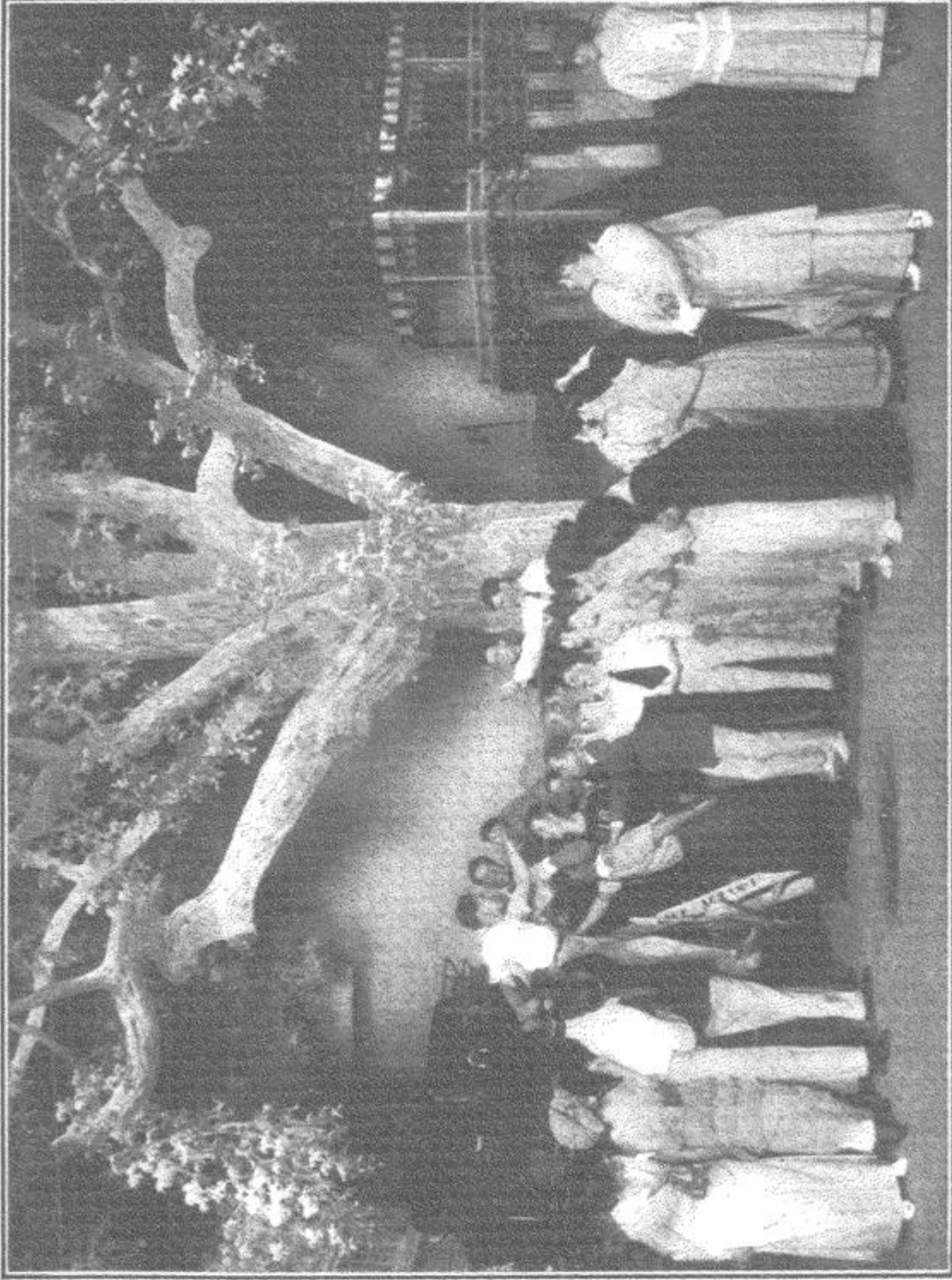
“Go on,” urged Alice. “You’ve been monopolizing Mr. Reid long enough. I want to talk to him myself.”

“Very well, then; just to give Alice a chance, I’ll go.”

Her ungrateful friend made a face at her as she and Tom walked slowly away.

“Ruth doesn’t act a bit like an engaged girl, does she?” asked Dorothy Morgan innocently.

“Engaged!” demanded Reid in a startled



"ONE RED-HEAD WITH A TEMPER: THIRD AND LAST TIME. GOING! GOING! GONE!"
SAID BILL REID'S CLEAR VOICE.

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tone which he tried vainly to hide in a laugh. "I—I mean how does an engaged girl act?"

"Well, that's pretty hard to show you in a crowd like this."

"Is everybody here engaged?"

"No, no, no! I'm not, I'm not, nor I," screamed Marion, Alice and Lillian together.

"Help! Help!"

"I'll protect you," cried the gallant Jimmy, hurling himself down from the step and posing in an heroic attitude before the big stroke, amid the cheers and laughter of the others.

"Jimmy, you're such a goose! Let me explain things, Mr. Reid," said Jennie, sweeping majestically down upon them. "Ruth is engaged to Tom Burnett, and Dorothy, here, to Harry Dalton, and——"

"And you, yourself, to——" began Reid.

"No, I'm not engaged to anybody. Jimmy has tried five indistinct times to ask me; but each time his tongue gets so twisted he can't get it out. It's awful!"

"Th-th-th-th——" began little Jones indignantly.

"There he goes again: time number six."

"I-I-I-I——"

"Never mind, Jimmy. I can wait. Do you know I believe he sort of likes me?"

"I think everybody must like you."

"Look out, Jimmy," said Dorothy maliciously, "I should think the stroke of a Yale crew could win any girl away."

“That will be about all for you,” admonished young Dalton severely.

“You’re right, Harry. She should give the rest of us a chance,” agreed Alice.

“Go it, girls: you’ll have a hard time catching this old woman hater,” chimed in Fred Henderson, Alice’s brother.

“Woman hater! You!! Oh, Mr. Reid, it can’t be true,” cried the girls in a chorus, gathering round him.

“Don’t you believe it, girls. I love,” he made a sweeping gesture, “all of ’em.”

“Oh!”

“All of ’em just the same?” queried Marion.

“No, indeed; all differently.”

“Wait a minute, girls. I have a great idea: I’ll auction him off!”

And with a hasty look around to find the most suitable place for an auction-block, Fred Henderson sprang upon the box of the coach from which the horses had been unhitched, just as Ruth and Burnett returned from their walk.

“Ladies,” he announced in a pompous voice, “the first piece of property I have to offer you to-day is one fine, large, handsome young man—Silence, please, we must have order!” in response to hoots and catcalls from the other men, “where was I? Oh, yes—handsome young man, the most popular student in Yale, captain of the crew, and halfback on the football team. He has fought through four years’ campaign of summer girls and college widows and not one

of them has got his number. Come on now, ladies. Come on now, ladies, start something, and start it up big. What am I bid? Give me a bid! Give me a bid!"

"Five pounds of chocolates—nearly complete," called Jennie Bruce.

"Why, ladies!" scolded the indignant auctioneer, "five pounds of chocolates for the pride of Yale! No, no: it will have to be something sweeter than chocolates."

"One blonde——" began Lillian.

"Ah, that's better. That's something like. One blonde, one blonde. Are there no other bids? Nobody else want to bid?"

"One brunette—with a loving heart," cried Alice, going her friend one better.

"A loving heart—accompanied by one brunette. That's better. That's what we want. That's what we're after. One loving heart. One loving heart. Do I hear anything else? Do I hear anything *more?*"

"One beautiful brown-haired girl would exchange an oarsman named Harry," was the offer of the modest Dorothy.

"Don't know what we can do about exchanges. Still—One beautiful brown-haired girl. One brown-haired—excuse me, ladies—one *beautiful* brown-haired——"

"Wait a minute," called Ruth. "May anyone bid?"

"Sure."

"One redhead—with a temper."

“Oh, one redhead with a temper. Do we hear anything else? One redhead with a temper. One redhead with a temper, once! One redhead with a temper, twice! One redhead with a temper, third, and last time! Going, going, going——”

“Gone!” said Bill Reid’s clear voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” declared the auctioneer in the midst of the general laughter, “I declare Bill Reid sold to one redhead with a temper.”

“Now you’ve got him, what are you going to do with him?” asked Jennie with an interested air.

Ruth gave a little, embarrassed laugh. For a moment the lovely color flooded her eager young face. She looked up into the face of her newly acquired purchase, and again their eyes met bravely.

“I—I haven’t quite decided. I’ll come for him—later.”

“He’ll be waiting,” said Bill Reid so softly that none but she could hear.

“I don’t know,” confided Jennie Bruce to the few remaining chocolates in the box, “but I’m inclined to think that that was a genuine sale!”

CHAPTER VIII

AT this moment a diversion caused by the appearance of Hampton with two magnificent Russian wolfhounds gave Ruth a chance to escape. All the others gathered round the coach with exclamations on the beauty of the two animals. Reid went quickly up onto the porch and sat on the railing, his head against a post. He wanted to be quite alone for a little. If Ruth had the same wish, she was less lucky than he. No sooner had she reached the edge of the lawn than Burnett was beside her.

“Ruth, you shouldn’t have done it.” He was putting a strong restraint on himself, but it was plain that he was angry.

“It was all a joke. The other girls were bidding, too,” she said indifferently.

“It made me look ridiculous.”

“Really? I’m sure I don’t see why it should. But I can see that you’re making yourself ridiculous now,” she said with rising temper. And then recalling the absurd bid, “one red-head—with a temper,” she laughed softly to herself, her good humor completely restored.

“You said you were coming back to get him.”

“Well,” she said teasingly, “a man that a girl has been able to get is always interesting.”

“He’s a cheap, common mucker. Why, when

he first came to Yale he tended furnaces and waited on table.”

“I didn’t know that. I can only tell you that if he had the grit and courage to work his way through college, I’m glad to know it. I admire him for it.”

“I hate to hear you raving about another man!”

“Don’t be silly.”

“I hope you don’t see him again very soon, at any rate.”

“You’re making him terribly interesting.”

“Ruth! Do you think it fair to treat me this way when things are as they are between us?”

“And may I ask just how you consider things are between us? It occurs to me that you are taking a great deal for granted!”

“Ruth! You know that I’ve thought of you as my future wife for years. Your father wishes it. All our friends approve.”

“Yes, I know all that,” she said coldly. “Has it never occurred to you that I might—might want to be consulted about it?”

“Why, you knew that I was in love with you. Ruth, I swear that there’s never been any other girl of any kind that I’ve given a thought to,” he lied. Again, Ruth’s rising anger was calmed by some secret thought.

“I believe you, Tom,” she said kindly. “I know you are always straightforward and honorable, and I on my part have never thought of any other man. I am to blame, as well as

yourself, in a way. I've let things drift. I knew what people were saying. But as long as there was no other person—why, we've both grown sort of used to looking forward to each other that way. You want me to be quite frank, don't you?"

"Of course."

For a moment she hesitated, smiling to herself.

"Well—now, don't laugh at me—somehow there isn't any thrill in thinking of you in that way, that I always imagined there must be when a person's in love."

"Nonsense."

"I mean it. You know I believe that every girl dreams that some day she's going to meet some man—she doesn't know how, nor when, nor where—but *when* they meet, they are going to look into each other's eyes, and just *know* that they were intended for each other from the first, from the beginning of time. That's love!"

"Romantic nonsense, my dear," laughed Tom.

She made no reply, and looking up at her, he saw that she was looking straight across at the porch where Reid, standing with his fine head thrown back, was giving her back her look.

"Ruth, Ruth! Give me my chance. We can't talk here with all these people running about. Come with me for a row on the river," he pleaded.

Ruth brought her eyes back to his.

“Very well,” she said simply.

On the way down to the landing, they met Mr. Stuyvesant and Colonel MacLaren still disputing about some long-forgotten sporting event.

“Tom wants to take me for a row on the river.”

“All right. I’d trust you anywhere with Tom,” said her father significantly.

“Suppose you upset me in the water; you know I can’t swim,” said Ruth as she was taking her place in the boat.

“Then I’d rescue you, and you’d have to marry me out of gratitude.”

“Oh, I’m sure that I’d marry any man who saved me from drowning!”

“It’s a promise, then?”

“Yes, I’ll marry the man who saves me.”

“Oh, look, there go Ruth and Tom Burnett. I wish somebody’d take me rowing,” complained Dorothy Morgan from the porch, where most of the party had now gathered invading Reid’s privacy and intruding upon dreams which he hardly dared to dream when alone.

“That’s a silly thing for Tom to do,” said Ralph with annoyance. “He can’t row much, and he can hardly swim at all.”

“He can’t!” exclaimed Reid, springing to his feet.

“No, neither can Ruth. But I guess it’s all right. Father let her go, and the river’s smooth.”

He drifted away to one of the other groups. Soon the light laughter and chatter began again. Only Bill Reid stood apart in the shadow, his eyes on the river.

On a rustic bench under the tree, Mr. Stuyvesant and his old friend were having the finest dispute of the day. To one who did not know them, it must have seemed only a matter of moments until they were at one another's throats. The next instant there came the sound of a woman's scream and the confused clatter of excited voices from the porch.

"What's the matter?" called Mr. Stuyvesant, springing to his feet.

"Ruth and Tom, father," Ralph answered. His voice was husky with excitement and fear. "Tom's having trouble——"

"It's going over, it's going over!" shrieked Anna, wringing her hands.

The whole place was in an uproar of shrieks, exclamations, prayers and curses. Old Mrs. Andrews, who had rushed out of the house with Grace at the first alarm, was kneeling on the ground by the steps, her apron over her head, objurgating and imploring the Almighty by turns at the top of her voice.

Occasionally, disjointed cries and exclamations detached themselves from the general clutter of sound: "He's crazy: he don't know what he's doing!" "Sit still, Ruth, don't jump,"—this in Ralph's throaty voice, raised now to a sort of Banshee wail. "Steady, Burnett, keep

your head.” “What a God damned fool.”
“My God, they’ll both be drowned.”

But above them all could be heard Bill Reid’s clear, resonant voice. He was standing on top of the porch railing, like a captain on his bridge, calling directions to Burnett, through a trumpet made of his hands.

“Pull on your right oar, man. Your right! Your right! Steady, steady! Keep pulling on your right.”

And out on the little bench under the tree were two old, old men. The one, his face buried in his hands, sobbing: “My God—My little girl—My Ruth!” the other, the tears streaming down his face, endeavoring to comfort him by patting him on the back and babbling that “boats didn’t upset nowadays, that they were too well built, that he hadn’t heard of a drowning accident for years,” and similar idiocies.

Suddenly there was a general gasp, as if everyone had on the same instant felt the need of taking breath—and then a silence. The boat had upset. From a long way off came a faint cry of “Help! Help!” in Ruth’s voice. Mr. Stuyvesant lifted his old, tear-bloated face from his hands in time to see Bill Reid leap from the rail and dash down to the shore, pulling off his coat as he ran. A new hope galvanized him into a semblance of his old self, and brought the color of life back to his livid lips.

Again the porch was a babel of tongues. But

now the tones were vibrant with hope. The note of anguish was hushed.

“See, see! Burnett’s reached the boat! He’s trying to push it toward her! Oh, why can’t he swim!”

And then, with a sudden ecstatic shout: “It’s Bill! Go it, Bill, go it! Oh, you Bill Reid!”

“Now he’s almost to her. She’s shaking her head. Faster, faster, Bill Reid! Ah, my God, she’s down!”

Many of the women hid their heads. Mr. Stuyvesant reeled on his feet. There came a delirious cry from Ralph:

“She’s come up again, there she is, there she is!”

“He’s nearly there! He’s—he’s got her! Bill Reid’s got her!!”

“A-a-a-a-h!”

There was a breath-caught silence for a second, and then a cheer such as the old training quarters had never heard tore the air.

“HOORAY, H-O-O-R-A-Y!!!”

All this time Grace had been standing leaning against a pillar of the porch, staring, staring, with eyes that saw nothing, at the stretch of water. As the ringing cheer broke on her ears, she gave a little moan and buried her face in her hands.

“Tom, oh Tom!”

With a wrenching effort she uncovered her face and forced herself to look again. Reid, with the unconscious girl in his arms, had just

stepped ashore, and Tom, the water no higher than his waist, was not far behind.

“Thank God, he’s safe too,” she murmured, and, hardly knowing what she did, she let herself be swept along with the crowd who were pouring down the steps to meet their darling hero, Mr. Stuyvesant at their head.

Up, up he came, laughing as he tried to shake the dripping hair out of his eyes, Ruth lying in his arms, a limp, wet figure with closed eyes.

“My little girl, my little girl!” whispered her father, holding out his arms.

“She’s all right,” called Reid reassuringly. “She’s just fainted, that’s all.”

But the sight of the unconscious figure was too much for some of the other girls, in their semi-hysterical state.

“She’s dead, she’s dead, I know she is!” shrieked Dorothy.

“She’s so white!” sobbed Alice.

“What can we do?” whimpered Lillian, wringing her hands.

“Why not keep quiet? I tell you she’s all right,” said Reid soothingly, as he as gently as possible shoved a way for himself and his burden through the clustering women, to get into the house where Ruth could receive proper attention.

“I—I—I—I——” began little Jones, fairly dancing in his excitement.

“That will do,” said Jennie sternly. “You can tell us all about yourself later. The best

thing you can do now is to go and find some whisky somewhere.”

“That’s the idea,” said Hampton heartily. “And take her and wrap her in blankets. She’ll be all right.”

“But whatever will she do for clothes?” asked Alice.

“If I took off another thing——” began Dorothy, when Mrs. Andrews came to the rescue.

“Sure the poor darlin’ can have some of Gracie’s. You could lend Miss Stuyvesant something, couldn’t you, dear?” she asked, turning to Grace and furtively wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron.

For a moment Grace hesitated. Her eyes were fastened on Burnett, a dripping, dejected figure, coming slowly toward them. No one was paying the slightest attention to him.

“Certainly; if my poor things are good enough for Miss Stuyvesant,” she said in a tone of mock humility.

But she remained standing where she was, still looking at Burnett, who, without seeming to be conscious of her presence, stalked by her into the house. Most of the young people were still too excited to remain inactive. Some of them ran down to the shore to look at the place where the overturned boat had been hauled up; others gathered around Mr. Stuyvesant, now nearly himself again, shaking his hand and felicitating him on Ruth’s escape; still others

gathered in little knots and went over the thrilling events of a moment before, telling what had been their various emotions as the boat upset, as Ruth sank from sight, and when Bill Reid dashed to the rescue.

And still Grace made no move to get the promised things. He had dared to pass her without even a look, when he must have known how she had suffered during those dreadful moments when he was in such deadly peril. The fool! Did he think that she lacked the courage to take the obvious revenge that lay to her hand? For the moment the rage that consumed her, making her head burn as if it were on fire while her whole body was deadly cold, made all other considerations seem petty by comparison. Father, mother, reputation, all were as nothing when weighed in the scales against her overwhelming desire to ruin her erstwhile lover and crush her insolently pampered rival at one fell swoop!

"I heard you scream above all the others when the boat went over," said an insinuating voice at her elbow. It was Ralph.

"Did I scream? I suppose I was frightened."

"May I say that you are very beautiful when you are frightened?" Ralph lowered his voice so that his father, who refused to be kept out of the house a moment longer, could not hear.

"You didn't say anything like that to me when you were here five years ago."

The glance she gave him had stirred the blood of stronger men than he.

“I was a fool five years ago,” said Ralph hotly. “I couldn’t appreciate a girl like you then.”

Over in the corner of the porch Dorothy, who was talking with Harry Dalton while watching Ralph’s eager face, raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

“Oh, he never overlooks a bet!” was Harry’s comment, as he followed her glance.

“Wouldn’t you like to come to New York to live?” went on Ralph.

Before Grace could reply, the voice of Jennie Bruce, politely ironical, came from the doorway.

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but if you *could* bring the things——”

“How very stupid of me, I’m sure I beg your pardon,” said Grace, starting to go into the house. “Again, it is *au revoir*,” she said in a low tone with her most coquettish smile.

For a moment Mr. Stuyvesant blocked her passage.

“Everything’s lovely. She’s coming around finely. Only Hampton, who is something of a doctor as well as a coach, thinks she ought to rest quietly for a while.”

There was a general clapping of hands and cries of “Splendid!” and “That’s fine!”

“I beg your pardon,” he said, making way for Grace.

At the door, once more she and Burnett came face to face.

It was plain that he was still deeply chagrined, in spite of an assumed bravado. He was wearing a jersey and an old pair of trousers which did not make him appear to advantage.

His semi-jocular, "Sorry to have spoiled the party," was received in chilling silence.

"All right, are you?" said one of the men carelessly after a moment.

Burnett saw his mistake. Turning to Mr. Stuyvesant with something very like genuine emotion, he said:

"Mr. Stuyvesant, I don't know what to say. Somehow I lost control of the boat and the next thing we were in the water. I can't swim. I tried to get the boat to her. My God, it's a nightmare! If she had—— If the worst had happened——" he finished with a shudder.

"I understand, Tom," said the old gentleman, putting his hand affectionately on his shoulder. "I know *just* how you feel. It was just an unfortunate accident. It will make no difference to any of us. Don't let us think any more about it."

"Thank you, sir!"

Grace, having picked out from the modest contents of her trunk the dress which she judged would be the most unbecoming to Ruth's general coloring, slipped out of the house by the back way, having no wish to see Burnett again for the moment. Besides, she wanted to be by herself for a little and think things over. The idea of



"I WAS A FOOL FIVE YEARS AGO!" SAID RALPH HOTLY.

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utilizing Ralph in her general scheme for paying off her score against both Ruth and Tom seemed fraught with possibilities. There was no mistaking his manner. Too many men had looked at her before with wolfish eyes for her to have any doubts on that subject. And Grace was no prude, and had the courage to look things in the face, when she was communing with her own thoughts.

From time to time stories of Ralph's affairs with women had come to her ears. According to the common report, he was as changeable as he was weak; but he was also prodigally generous. It was said that no woman had ever been able to hold him for long. Indeed! Grace, who was never guilty of self-depreciation, was prepared to back herself to hold him as long as it should serve her purpose. And her real purpose, as she acknowledged to herself, was, after all, to get Tom back. The woman did not live who should be permitted to steal him from her for long. In the meantime, she would take toll from all of them in one way or another. She was by no means naturally fastidious, but there was something about Ralph's general appearance, his shortness of stature, his lack of physical impressiveness, that made her mentally characterize him as "a miserable little shrimp." Her meditations were suddenly brought to an end by the voice of the gentleman thus flatteringly described.

"I saw you coming round the corner of the

house. I don't mind confessing that I was watching for you. Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you! What is there to forgive? Besides, I can't help feeling flattered that you should take a passing interest in a poor girl like me."

"A passing interest! Ah, you don't know me. Tell me, how would you like to come to New York to live?"

"How would I like it?" she repeated eagerly. "But why do you say such things, Mr. Stuyvesant, when you must see that for me it is impossible?"

"I don't see that at all, particularly since I could easily make it possible, if you'll only let me help you."

"No, no! I couldn't do that. A girl who does *that*—well, it leads to too much."

As they talked, they slowly made their way over to a little ornamental summer-house standing on a knoll some distance from the house from which, while more or less screened by the vines which covered it from the observation of the people out on the lawn, they themselves could keep a watchful eye on the crowd below them in case they should be missed.

But almost hidden as they were, they had not escaped the watchful eye of Burnett. He had been by no means oblivious of Grace's black looks, and, now that he had sufficiently recovered from his own personal discomfiture over the unfortunate accident in which he had played

so sorry a part to give some thought to her, he had wisely decided that she must be placated one way or another, at least for the present.

He had always considered that an angry woman was one of those forces of nature upon whose action the wise man takes no unnecessary chances. Grace must be soothed, her suspicions lulled to sleep until such time as he could make her see that there was nothing in his plans for the future that need in any way alter their relations.

He had intended all along telling her that he was going to marry Ruth because her money was absolutely necessary for the furtherance of his ambitions, but he had expected to break the news to her once she had settled upon the place of her temporary exile. Coming upon her on this accursed outing had been as disconcerting as it was unexpected.

His eye having been caught by a woman's light dress, only partly hidden by the vine-covered arbor, he had easily recognized the charming outline of the head of the wearer. One swift glance about him had failed to discover the presence of Ralph. To him too, and not for the first time, had come the thought that Ralph might be most useful in the present juncture.

Having no foolish scruples about eavesdropping, he had made a wide *détour*, arriving behind the arbor in time to hear Ralph say, in his most persuasive tones:

“Suppose you think it over. What's here for

you? Nothing but to grow old and die of dry rot. Think of the city, of the cafés, the theaters, and all sorts of jolly times. That's life, while this——” he made a sweeping gesture of contempt.

“But how can a poor girl ever hope to have all that?”

Grace's assumption of country-bred innocence almost made Burnett laugh aloud.

“That's for me to show you,” said Ralph, getting possession of her reluctant hand. “Don't you think that you could trust me? I mean,” as she still hesitated with downcast eyes, “couldn't you trust *yourself* with me?”

“Y-e-s,” she said slowly, flashing an eloquent glance at his flushed face, “I think I could trust myself with you.”

Ralph's natural response was to take her in his arms. Their lips met in a long kiss.

Burnett judged it time to make his presence known. Having slipped away a short distance, he suddenly appeared from around the corner.

“Where the devil did you come from?” demanded Ralph crossly.

Grace looked becomingly confused.

“I'm sorry to interrupt this little party, but your wife's been looking for you everywhere.”

“Oh, damn——” said Ralph, getting slowly to his feet.

For a moment Grace met Burnett's quizzical look with one of open defiance. How much had he overheard? Not for a second did she

believe that he had just come upon them as his manner implied. Very well, let him make the most of it! Perhaps he would realize at last that if she had been true to him, it had only been because she had chosen to be. There were plenty of richer men whom she could have had by merely crooking her little finger. Even this miserable little creature was the son of a multimillionaire. If it was to be war between them, it was well to know it as soon as possible. Why on earth didn't the little beast go on about his business in place of standing there as confused as a child caught stealing jam!

"I—I was just trying to persuade Miss Andrews that she ought to come to New York," said Ralph awkwardly.

"Why, I think that's a splendid idea," his friend assured him.

His words cut Grace like a knife. For the moment, all of her new-found spirit of revolt died within her. It was all she could do to keep back the tears at the cynical callosity of his tone.

With a murmured excuse about "being needed in the house," she hurried away.

"What luck?" asked Burnett.

"She's an angel!" declared Ralph rapturously.

"Y-e-s, only remember, my boy, angels come high."

There came the discordant clang of a bell.

"Ladies and gents! Supper, supper!" called Mrs. Andrews.

From where they stood they could see the girls and fellows, all the terror of an hour before forgotten as completely as if it had all been nothing more than a bad dream, forming in a double line and dancing up to the house to the tune of an improvised march sung at the tops of their voices.

“R-a-l-p-h! T-o-m!” called the voice of Mr. Stuyvesant.

“Aren’t you coming in?”

“No, thanks, I’m not hungry,” said Burnett, turning on his heel and puffing his cigar into a red glow so that Grace might see it from the window.

CHAPTER IX

SHE came, as he knew she would; vainly trying to mask, under a cold and indifferent exterior, the storm of jealousy that was consuming her.

“I thought possibly you might have something to say to me, as that little fool interrupted us the only time I have had the pleasure of seeing you to-day.”

“And so you’re coming back to town under other—what shall I say?—auspices.”

Grace shrugged her shoulders. “You seem amazed,” she mocked him in turn. “He’s been trying to flirt with me all day,” she said with a sort of angry scorn.

“Not altogether unsuccessfully, I should gather. Well, why don’t you?”

“So that’s what your love has come to! After all I’ve been to you. Now, you’d toss me over to another man as though I— Oh, Tom, how can you?”

He drew her a little further away from the house.

“Listen, Grace dearest,” he said in the low, caressing tone she so well remembered, holding both her hands in his, “I’m talking for your own good, because I love you as much as ever. He’s young, and a fool—a rich fool to boot.

You can wind him round your finger. You'll have everything that I can't hope to give you: jewels, a beautiful apartment, servants, motors—you can get rich yourself."

"I can't stand him! I hate him!"

"Many a pretty girl marries a man she hates for money. Why, you know I'm not in love with her myself and yet I've *got* to marry Ruth Stuyvesant." Then, as he felt her shudder, he took her in his arms. "I'm doing the same thing. And there's one thing you're forgetting. He's married. You've always got the upper hand. He can't face a scandal. So, when you get ready to break with him when you can't stand it any longer, he'll have to pay and pay *big!*"

With a violent effort, Grace tore herself free from his arms.

"No, no, I tell you! I won't do it!"

"You won't?"

He made a strong effort for self-control, as he saw that once more she was swept by a wave of jealous rage. Better let it spend itself now while they were sure of not being disturbed. His strongest card; the one that, unless all his experience of women was at fault, would be sure to move her, was still unplayed.

"Why should I? Why should I?" she demanded in a tone hoarse with passion. "It would be giving you to a woman I hate, and taking a man that fairly fills me with loathing! Why should I sacrifice myself for you? You've

shown how much you care for me. Very well; I'll show you how much I think of you. I won't go to him, I tell you. But I'll go to *her!* I'll tell her everything. All about you and me. You must have been making love to her for a long time to be sure that she will marry you. I'll tell her that while you were making love to her, you were living with me. That when you were talking of love and marriage and all that I was waiting and watching for your return. That when you left her with her kisses on your lips, it was to hurry back to me. That while she was dreaming of your love, you were in *my* arms. I'll tell her all that, and I'll tell her now, before she leaves this place!"

She turned toward the house.

"Just one moment," he said, laying a detaining hand on her arm.

"You sha'n't stop me." She shook off his hand.

"I don't intend to try. I only want you to realize *just* what you are doing."

"Oh, I know!"

"No, you don't. Wait, I'll only keep you a moment."

They looked at each other for a moment in silence. She, furious and defiant; he, steadily, with a little smile which suggested triumph, just touching his lips. She was frankly puzzled. He saw that.

"If you do what you say you intend doing,"

he went on in a low but clear tone, "you will send me to prison, neither more nor less. That is God's truth."

She gave an exclamation of terror.

"Prison! But you're joking. You're trying to frighten me. How would anything I said send you to prison?" And as he kept silent, she added, with a new bitterness, "Since when did deceiving a girl become a penitentiary offense?"

"It isn't. But"—he now spoke with marked deliberation, emphasizing each word, that by no possibility could she misunderstand him—"but taking money from a bank with which to support a girl one loves in luxury is. It is called stealing. And that, you know, *is* a penitentiary offense."

"Tom! Tom! You don't mean——"

She gave a little moan, and stretched out her arms with a protecting gesture. All the pride and anger were gone from her face.

He followed up his advantage.

"Ah, my darling, you never knew how much I cared! I loved you too much to be able to say 'no' to anything you wanted. Consequently," with a shrug, "after my recent losses in the market, I find that I owe Stuyvesant and Company the sum of one hundred thousand dollars. Rather more than I can repay, if suddenly called upon to do so!"

"But if you only *owe* it—that's not stealing."

A new hope was bringing the color back to her white face.

“I say I ‘owe’ it,” replied Burnett with a crooked smile, “because I intend to pay it back, and because—to be perfectly honest—I shy at the word that is usually used to cover such cases. But if the ‘debt’ is discovered before it is paid, the law will call it by the harsher name of defalcation; and the sentence for that will be ten years in Sing Sing, at the very least.”

“Oh!” For a moment she buried her face in her hands.

“Now you understand why I must marry Miss Stuyvesant, and why I ask this particular sacrifice of you.”

“Tom! Tom!” she cried in an agony of love and self-reproach. “Forgive me. I didn’t know. I couldn’t. I feel so guilty to think that it was I, I who made you take all that money. Forgive me, forgive me!”

She snatched his hand and pressed it to her lips. For a moment he stroked her bowed head in silence.

“Sh! Sh! Someone might hear you. It’s all right, dearest. I regret nothing. After all, we were very happy, and I’ll pay it all back if only I get the time. But you see now why I need time.”

“I see that, and I see, too, that you want me to get him in my power so that he may be in the same fix that you’re in. You intend to ‘get something’ on him.”

"That's it exactly. Then, even if it is discovered, I'm safe."

"Gra-cie! Gra-cie!" called Mrs. Andrews from the house.

"Yes, mother, I'm coming."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"You darling!"

"I do it for you, Tom."

"I know."

"Gra-cie!"

"Yes, mother!"

"Where are the extra cups?"

"I'm coming; I'll get them. Then it's good-bye between you and me?"

"I don't see why—if we're careful."

A look of joyful surprise made her face bloom once more. With a smile and a nod of comprehension, she ran quickly into the house.

With a long sigh of relief, he threw away his extinguished cigar.

"That settles *that*," he said to himself, as Ruth and Bill Reid appeared in the doorway. He met them at the foot of the steps.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Reid," said Burnett, holding out his hand and speaking with a great show of heartiness, "for what you did. Ruth's life is very precious to me. I'm sure you understand."

Somehow Bill Reid did not seem to see the outstretched hand. At least he made no move to take it.

“Yes, I understand,” was all he vouchsafed in reply.

“Do you know——” began Ruth, seeking to break the awkward silence that followed Reid’s sententious remark, when she was interrupted, to her great relief, by her father’s joining them.

“Mr. Reid, I’ve been waiting to catch you.” His voice was husky with deep feeling. “You’ve put me under an obligation to-day that I’ll never be able to repay.”

This time Reid saw the hand held out to him, and grasped it warmly, blushing a fiery red as he did so.

“Er—er—er, I mean it wasn’t anything, sir.”

“Not anything to save my life!” cried Ruth with a great show of indignation. In spite of Grace’s amiable intentions, she was looking distractingly pretty—which was thoughtless of her, poor Reid being upset enough as it was. The unhappy lad went blundering on.

“I mean—er—I mean—— Why, I’d pull a dog out of the water any time!”

“Oh, thank you!” said Ruth with marked enthusiasm.

Reid gave her a despairing glance.

“I—er—I—I—say—please! I mean the only way to thank me, is not to thank me,” he said with a sudden inspiration.

“Have you ever thought of banking as a profession? Stuyvesant and Company can use a man of courage and quick thought like you.”

“Well, sir, I—I——”

“Father, dear,” said Ruth sweetly, “he thinks you’re trying to pay him for pulling a dog out of the water.”

“Nonsense!” laughed her father. “Think it over,” he added, giving the big shoulder a friendly pat.

“Yes, thanks. I will.”

Burnett had remained silent throughout the conversation. Even when Mr. Stuyvesant had turned to him, as if expecting his indorsement when he made his offer to Reid, he had held his tongue. Indeed, to judge from his expression, one would have said that he had not heard him.

But Ruth knew better. And it was partly to punish him for what she considered a discourtesy both to her father and herself that she turned to the still embarrassed young man with her most engaging smile.

“Won’t you show me the walk along the river, Mr. Reid?”

“Gladly,” said he eagerly.

With a scowl which he was at no pains to conceal, Burnett stalked into the house.

The walk along the river was not especially picturesque and it could hardly have had the charm of novelty for either of them. Miss Stuyvesant had already taken it earlier in the day, and certainly the stroke of the crew must have been tolerably familiar with it. But it is highly probable that had it been paved with

gold and precious stones, neither would have noticed it. Under certain peculiar conditions there is a form of blindness which temporarily affects people, it is said. This is particularly true of the young of the species.

After a silence which seemed to Reid, vainly racking his brains for something to say, to have lasted for a period only to be measured in centuries, and which, however blissful to him personally, must stamp him in the mind of his companion as being a brainless idiot, Ruth said softly:

“You know I didn’t thank you.”

“Miss Stuyvesant, if you start that again, I’ll—I’ll leave you!” He spoke with an eloquence surprising in a young man who had been absolutely tongue-tied only a moment before.

“It’s queer,” said the girl in the tone of one meditating upon purely abstract subjects, “but I never met a man at all like you. Somehow I feel so comfortable, so safe, with you.”

“That’s funny. For I don’t feel a bit safe with you!”

“Why?”

Nothing could have been more innocent than her tone. So overcome with astonishment was she that she sank upon a rustic bench that, fortunately, happened to be by the side of the path. It is barely conceivable that she had seen it earlier in the day. It would have been very awkward to have remained standing, so Bill took the place beside her.

"I don't know why. But look; I'm as shaky as if I had just come in from a hard race."

He held a trembling hand in front of her to prove it.

"That's funny. So am I!"

She also produced the proof. And it shook even harder than his had done. What a wonderful hand it was! So white and small beside his great paw. Mr. Reid was lost in the wonder of it, when, by a perfectly natural accident considering how they both trembled, the small hand and the big one met.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

An electric shock could hardly have startled them more.

"I *beg* your pardon." His tone was husky with contrition.

"Certainly," she said faintly.

"That never happened to me before."

"Nor to me."

There was a long pause.

"Do you know," said Reid at length, with the air of one who has made a discovery as novel as it is startling, "I mean do you suppose that people can sort of know each other without knowing each other before?"

To this extremely complicated question, after several moments devoted to considering it carefully, she gave a nod of assent. From the bluff above and behind them came the soft sound of mandolins, guitars and banjos and the refrain



"YOU KNOW I DIDN'T THANK YOU."

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of college songs. Supper was over and the rest of the party were making the most of the time that remained before they must start back to the city. Over the tops of the trees the moon could just be seen. It would beautify the whole way home, Ruth thought. But she felt strangely disinclined to think of leaving this really charming spot for any ride, however beautiful.

“I wouldn’t have gone rowing with Tom Burnett if you hadn’t been sitting on the porch, you know.”

“You mean it?” His face was alight with eagerness.

“Yes,” she nodded. “I just happened to look over there and saw you, and——”

“I saw you, too.” His hand crept along the bench toward hers.

“You see, I knew Tom couldn’t row much. But I thought—just sort of felt—a sort of ‘he’s there’ feeling.”

He made an abrupt movement as if he were about to take her in his arms, but she was too preoccupied to notice it.

“Even when the boat went over,” she went on, “I wasn’t *really* frightened. It just sort of flashed on me: ‘Now he’ll have to save me!’ And you did.”

“Oh, I wish I had a million dollars!”

The utter irrelevancy of the remark did not seem to strike her as being at all singular.

“You will some day,” she assured him calmly.

“Yes, but I want it *now*.”

“The remarkable thing is that you’ve accomplished so much all by yourself. That’s what makes it seem so wonderful to me.”

“But I haven’t done anything yet, you know.”

“Oh, haven’t you? Why, the boys have told me——”

“What?”

“Oh, how you started by earning your way through college, and that now you’re the most popular man at Yale and the greatest athlete.”

“But I’m really just at the beginning, you know,” he said modestly. “A man’s *hard* life doesn’t begin until he leaves college.”

“If only you would go to work under my father——”

“But don’t you understand? I don’t want having you associated with anything but——but——”

“But what?”

“Oh, well——” He threw out his hands with a gesture of embarrassment.

“Well?”

“I just saw you for the first time to-day,” he said in a low voice.

“You forget that we’ve already decided—— Oh, let’s pretend that we’ve known each other a long, long time.”

“I don’t have to pretend. I feel as if I’d known you always.”

“You certainly acted as though you knew me pretty well,” said Ruth with a little burst of

laughter at the recollection. "You had your arms around me, and I was clinging to your neck. Oh, it was shocking!"

"I liked it!" he said with unmistakable positiveness.

"Well, I must say you didn't act as though you liked it," she replied with equal conviction. "When I tried to get closer to you, you put your hand under my chin and pushed me away. Do you think *that* was a nice way to treat a girl?"

He laughed delightedly. "If you'd been a man I'd have punched you in the jaw!"

"What!"

"You were trying to drown me."

"Oh!"

"But I promise never to push you away again—Ruth." His voice was hardly more than a whisper. But she heard it.

"You *are* getting on—Bill."

He reached for her hand.

"Be careful. Someone might come along and see you."

"I don't care. Let them!"

"Well, I do. They—they wouldn't understand."

"What's the difference, if you and I understand? Oh, I'm a fool, and I know it. But I don't care, I'm going to say it anyhow."

"Say w-h-a-t?"

"Say that you've taken entire possession of me. The moment I saw you—the instant that we looked into each other's eyes, I knew that

you were the one woman in the whole world. The girl *born* into the world for me. The woman I was meant to meet. The one I was meant to love. My mate!"

"Bill!"

He snatched her to his arms and held her in a long embrace.

"My darling! My own! My Ruth!"

"I thought you were never going to say it!" came in a muffled voice from the region of his shoulder.

After he had released her, they sat, both her hands in his, and gazed at each other in silence. Suddenly his face changed.

"Are you engaged?" he demanded.

"Well, I hope so!" she said indignantly.

"You know what I mean. Are you—were you engaged to that fellow, Burnett?"

"I are not and I were not," she reassured him with a fine disregard for the King's English.

"Everybody said you were; that is, Miss Bruce told me so."

"Of course she *may* know more about it than I do," she teased. And, then, seeing that he was sincerely troubled, she became serious.

"Listen, dear, big man! I have never been engaged to anybody. Yes, I know that everyone supposes I am as good as engaged to Tom Burnett. Perhaps, if you and I had not met I might have been in time. My father, who admires and trusts him more than any young man he knows—far more, and with reason, I am

sorry to say, than he trusts my brother, Ralph—has told me that there was no one to whom he would trust me so willingly. And so, although I knew that our friends were taking it for granted that it would all come about in time, and although Tom himself vexed me more than once by assuming a more intimate tone with me before people than the circumstances justified, to please my father I just let things drift.

“Why not? There was no one else. I sometimes wondered if it were not all merely the dream of a young girl, that dear dream of the right man coming at last! The *one* man, as you say, born to be *my* man. And while Tom and I have always had a sort of brother-and-sister affection for each other, he, too, took things for granted—until to-day.

“But to-day he *did* propose. Yes, since we came here. At least it was practically a proposal. It was right after I had bought you at the auction. He was very angry about it. And I told him then that I did not love him as I had always believed a woman should love the man she was going to give herself to for better, for worse. That liking him as much as I do, he had never for a moment given me that thrill which I felt one must always have when one was in love. He laughed, of course; most men would. He told me that it was a silly, romantic dream, or something of the sort, that people only felt when they were very, very young. Something or somebody interrupted us then, I don't quite

remember what. And he asked me to give him 'his chance.' I suppose he meant to try to persuade me to say 'yes.' And so we went out on the river. The rest, I need not tell you."

"And if the boat had not upset when it did, would you—would you?" he demanded.

"How dreadful of you! Don't you intend to leave me even a remnant of pride or self-respect?" she laughed.

But at the look of pain in his eyes, she relented, glorying, as women do, in her complete surrender.

"No, I wouldn't have. For, for the second time our eyes had met—you remember, while you were up on the porch, just as I was about to go down to the landing with Tom—and I had felt the thrill that I told him he never gave me. And I said: 'I will wait a little longer. I will not say 'yes' to him yet awhile.

"And then—I wonder if he remembers it—just as we were ready to start, I reminded him that neither of us knew how to swim and——"

"I never heard of anything so mad as a man taking such a risk! It's one thing to imperil his own neck if he wants to, but it's quite another to ask anyone else to take the same chance."

"I suppose you would have felt just the same about it if he had taken Alice, say."

"Ruth!" Once more she was clasped in his strong arms.

"No, no! Really you mustn't—just now.

Besides, you are interrupting me. As I was saying, we were joking about not knowing how to swim, and he said if he upset me he would rescue me and then I would have to marry him. And I said I would promise to marry the man who rescued me.”

“Ruth! Suppose——”

“But he couldn't have. And haven't I told you that I knew it would be you?”

This time she made no remonstrance.

“Time to go home. Girls and boys, time to go h-o-m-e,” called Mr. Stuyvesant.

CHAPTER X

IF there was one way more than another by which Ralph Stuyvesant showed himself to be the spoiled child, it was in his impatience, not only of all restraint and opposition, but of any delay in getting anything upon which he had set his heart. It may have been that, conscious of his own fickle and vacillating nature, he feared to tire of the desired object even before it was his. Ruth had once said that she was sure that her brother was the original of the man who wanted *what* he wanted, *when* he wanted it. Like many witticisms, its sting lay in its truth. And Ralph had never quite forgiven it.

It can be imagined, therefore, that he knew no peace of mind until the object of his latest fancy was established in New York. As Grace, having once come to her decision, was equally impatient to return to a life which her sojourn in the country had made more than ever alluring by contrast, he met with fewer obstacles to his impatience than he had dared to hope.

Even then, things were not arranged without the exchange of numerous letters and telegrams. Ralph had seized the occasion to make two clandestine visits to New Haven. But he had

little more than his journey for his pains. His divinity had set her foot down on his coming near her father's house; although he had assured her that he had been able to invent most plausible excuses, connected with a sudden interest in the crew and the coming race, for doing so.

The best terms he could make with the cruel fair one were that she should grant him the briefest of audiences in the postoffice, of all places. It is hardly to be wondered at that his return to town after each of these exasperatingly unsatisfactory rendezvous was marked by symptoms of unusual ill humor.

But Grace knew, as well as any woman that ever lived, how to promise with a look. And Ralph, who prided himself upon being a finished man of the world, found constant cause for wonderment in the fact that this inexperienced country girl, as in his simplicity he believed her to be, could continue to keep him at arm's length. As a consequence, never in his life had his interest been so intrigued.

As for Grace herself, never had she been in so complex a mood. Her desire to come back to the city was made up of many elements. Almost from the first, she had spells of being restless, lonely and bored. Still, being naturally indolent, she would probably have lingered on indefinitely basking in the warmth of her parents' affection, until such time as Burnett's affairs should justify their resuming their old

way of life, had it not been for his unexpected advent and the news of his projected marriage with the heiress of the Stuyvesant millions.

Never had his knowledge of women, and of this one woman in particular, stood him in better stead. He had unerringly struck the only chord to which she would have responded. The rôle of the woman heroically sacrificing her body and crucifying her affections to save her lover from the consequences of her own unconscious selfishness was one that appealed irresistibly to her sentimental and theatric nature.

If she had been capable of weighing things calmly, she would have realized that Burnett alone was to blame for the *impasse* in which he found himself. While occasionally quarreling with her over her extravagance, he had never once been frank with her concerning his resources and income, and she had naturally charged his infrequent complaints to that streak of meanness which Mrs. Watson assured her ran through the most generous of men.

But even in the height of her emotional enjoyment of her contemplated sacrifice, the fires of her suspicious jealousy which had been, so to speak, banked, not extinguished, would occasionally flame into life. At such times it seemed impossible to wait even those few days necessitated by Ralph's search for a suitable apartment and for the perfecting of the details of her plans to once more leave home without exciting the suspicion of her father and mother.

Acting on her instructions, Ralph had written her a letter from an imaginary agency offering her a position at a salary which, in the eyes of her prudent parents, it would have been flying in the face of Providence to reject. And so, followed by the tearful lamentations of her mother and the disgusted regrets of her father that her new employer's impatience would not permit of her staying a few days longer to witness Yale's coming triumph, she returned to New York.

Actuated by the sentimental recollection of her first arrival when she had been greeted by Burnett, she had stubbornly refused to allow Ralph to meet her at the station. Indeed, she had had to fight an impish impulse to telegraph to Tom again. On the whole it seemed hardly worth the risk, nor, on consideration, did it appeal to her dramatic instinct as being consistent with the part she was about to play. So she had driven alone to the Waldorf where Ralph was to meet her for dinner and where her room was already engaged.

She had sent word to the hotel where she had lived so long to forward two of the trunks which they were storing for her to her new address. Consequently, when Ralph arrived some hours later, he was divided between amazement and delight on beholding the apparition that floated toward him along Peacock Alley. The same thought came to him that had come to Burnett long ago when *they* had had

their first dinner together. "There wasn't a woman who could touch her!"

At once the plan that he had formed for taking his countrified beauty to some obscure restaurant vanished into thin mist. They would dine right there where they were. There were sure to be lots of people he knew and he was glad of it. It would be no end of fun to rouse the general curiosity. After to-night, he would take precious good care that she was not seen too much in public places. And if, as frequently happened, some gabby should run to his wife with the tale of his having been seen dining with an unusually beautiful woman, he could say that "Mrs. Andrews"—for so Grace was registered—was the wife of an old college friend from Chicago whom he had run into by chance.

Ralph did not shine as a conversationalist in the most favorable circumstances, and to-night he was not even up to his own average. But Grace hardly noticed it. Once more the old intoxication of covert glances of admiration from the men about her and the open stares of their women companions warmed her heart and mounted to her brain. She did not need the further stimulus of a witty companion. For the moment she forgot that Ralph had always seemed to her little more than a brainless fool and that there was something about him physically that she found almost repellent.

Her brilliant eyes, her dazzling smile, the

occasional touch of her slim, white fingers, fired his blood like wine. This incomparable creature was soon to be his. The food lay almost untasted before him. From time to time he gulped down his glass of champagne which the attentive waiter as regularly refilled, until checked by a look of command from Grace's eyes.

"Listen, dearest," she whispered, "you really mustn't drink any more just now. I have some things I want to talk to you about, and I am going to send you away right after dinner as I am tired and a little headachy."

"You don't look it. And see here! Do you mean to say you're not coming round with me to see the apartment I've fixed up? The car, your car's coming at ten."

"My car!" She could hardly believe her ears. "You don't mean to say that I am to have a car of my very own?"

"What do you think I am? I'm no piker!" said Ralph boastfully.

"Of course not, my dear." She gave his hand a little pat. She repented already having been betrayed into such enthusiasm. But, for the moment, the idea of his giving her a car at the very beginning of their friendship had thrown her a little off her balance. He must have money to throw about, with an establishment of his own to maintain.

"Let's wait until to-morrow. I'd so much rather see it with you for the first time by day-

light. And then, really, I'm quite tired, what with packing and unpacking and the dozen little things a woman always has to do when she particularly wants to make herself look presentable. You're not ashamed of me, are you? I've not disgraced you? I wanted to look as pretty as I could for our first dinner together."

"Ashamed of you! Well, I should say not. Gad! You're a queen, all right, all right, when you're dolled up. Where did you get the glad rags, anyhow?" he asked with just a suggestion of ugly suspicion.

For a moment she struggled against an impulse to tell him to his mean, little face never to dare to try to see her again; that his cars and his apartments and his money could never pay a woman for having to endure his hateful society. What had she to fear after all, with her looks? New York was filled with men who would ask nothing better than to pay the expenses of a woman as beautiful as she was. She could safely count on staying at the hotel for a week, what with her three trunks, her costumes and her general air of prosperity. And if by the end of a week——. And then she remembered Tom and her own heroic rôle.

"So you like my dress," she laughed. "I'll tell you a little secret about it. I happened to meet a woman from New York not long ago who took quite a fancy to me. She knew all sorts of useful things. Among others, she knew of a place where one could buy second-hand

dresses almost as good as new. I went there this afternoon directly from the station. That's why I wouldn't let you meet me. I didn't want you to see me until I had some decent clothes. I've been sewing hard ever since. That's why I'm a little tired."

"Well, you're a wonder! All right, I'll let you off till to-morrow. But you can spend the next few days while I'm down at the bank in getting yourself fitted up with new things. *My* girl isn't going to wear anybody's cast-off finery. It's all very well for once. But you can give that to the French maid I've engaged for you."

Shortly after dinner she persuaded him to leave her. Having written a note to Burnett, and one to the only address she knew that might find Mrs. Watson, she found that her imaginary headache had become a real one. After all, she was tired. She went early to bed.

It was the evening before the great race. Grace already felt as if she had spent a lifetime in her present quarters. While a furnished apartment has certain undeniable advantages, living in it is quite like wearing other people's clothes. She recalled what fun it had been, under Mrs. Watson's guidance, picking out the things for the modest little place where she and Burnett had first set up housekeeping. Still, if the truth were known, this was secretly more to her taste, which, as has been intimated, ran rather to the showy. It was more than twice

as large, for one thing, and was more near the center of things. In place of being near lower Fifth Avenue, which was like a country road at night as far as life went, she was now close to her beloved Broadway, well up in the Forties. And here she had a cook and a personal maid as well. If only she had not had to see so much of her proprietor, she would have been fairly contented.

Ralph had furnished it regardless of expense. No one who had seen his home could ever have dreamed that he had had a hand in the selection of the things that crowded the apartment. Whether in choosing them he had been influenced by some long-forgotten barbaric strain in his blood, or whether he had merely given rein to a mordant humor which prompted him to emphasize the difference in what he considered suitable for his wife and for his mistress, it would be impossible to say. Burnett himself inclined to the latter theory.

On this particular evening Grace, no longer Mrs. Andrews, but Miss Barrisford, was in an exceedingly bad temper. In the first place, Burnett had not even telephoned her for several days, which treatment aroused all her dormant suspicions of his good faith. And if that were not enough, Ralph had, for the last three nights, absolutely refused to take her out to dinner, on the ground that he wanted her all to himself. After so large a dose of his unrelieved society, she felt that she had never really

known what boredom meant before. She had seen him for a moment in the afternoon and had given him to understand that unless he promised to take her somewhere for supper, he need not expect to enjoy her society at dinner. She had just finished dressing.

The sight of her reflection in the long mirror in her dressing-room went far toward restoring her to a happier frame of mind. She certainly was a most sumptuous figure in a wonderful new gown of white and silver which had just been brought home from her dressmaker's.

"At what time will Madame be pleased to dine?" asked the maid, as she came into the drawing-room.

"At eight, Marie."

"Thank you, Madame."

"And, Marie," she called as the girl was going out the door, "telephone and have the car come about eleven. We will be going out."

"Yes, Madame. Thank you, Madame."

"Oh, Lord!" said Grace with a yawn, "I almost wish I was back watching the moonlight on the river."

Taking a cigarette from a gold case which lay on the table, she lighted it and threw herself pettishly on a huge white and gold divan which filled up one side of the room.

"Day dreams?" said a mocking voice from the doorway. "They should be golden ones!"

It was Burnett. As he was dressed for dinner, she had a sudden hope that perhaps Ralph

had found it impossible to escape some dinner at home and had sent his friend as his substitute. But she did not mean to show her pleasure until she heard his explanation for his neglect.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” she said carelessly.

“You don’t seem just overjoyed to see me.”

“No? Why should I be? You haven’t been near me for three days.”

“After all, this is Ralph’s flat.”

“Is that any reason why you shouldn’t come, you his best friend.”

“There are some things that men don’t share even with their best friends—if they know it.”

“I hate him!” she said viciously.

“Good! You see already it’s as though you were married to him.”

“Is it!” In sudden anger, she sprang to her feet. “And how are you keeping your word? You promised, if I’d do as you wanted, that it wouldn’t interfere with our being the same to each other as we used to be.”

“Well, we are, aren’t we—when we get the chance.”

With a swift movement she threw her arms about him and drew his face down to hers.

“Care—ful!” he cautioned her, his eyes on the door.

She snatched her arms away and shoved him from her so violently that Burnett would have lost his balance if he had not saved himself by catching at the table.

“It is *you* who should be careful,” she stormed. “I see now that you’ve made a fool of me. You don’t care for me any longer. It’s her you love. But I——”

Something of her own passion blazed in his face on the instant.

“Come here!” He caught her roughly by the shoulder and half dragged her back to him. For a moment he held her head in his two hands, scowling into her defiant, angry eyes. Then, feeling his kisses on her hair, her mouth, her throat, she closed her eyes and lay limply in his arms.

“I love you, and only you! You understand? Don’t ever dare let me hear you say that I don’t. You know it, don’t you? Say so! Say you know it, do you hear?” He shook her so roughly that her hair fell about her happy face.

She broke away from him, and laughing in triumph, ran over to the mirror.

“Heavens, what a man you are. Yes, yes, I know it!”

She smiled coquettishly at him as she twisted up a strand of her hair and deftly fastened it with a jeweled pin.

“How I look! And”—glancing at the clock—“I was particularly anxious to look my best to-night as Ralph is really going to take me out to supper.”

She made a mocking face at him and threw herself once more on the divan.

“Oh, do you know, you’ve never told me what you thought of my new name.”

“Fine! Muriel Barrisford would certainly throw anyone off the scent who was looking for Grace Andrews. Where did you get it?”

“Oh, out of a book I read this summer.”

“I could almost guess who wrote it,” he smiled.

“Could you?” she said, tapping her lips with her long fingers to hide a little yawn. “It’s more than I could. I never know what the creatures call themselves.”

He turned to the window to hide a grin.

“Well. How’s everything going?”

“The furnishings cost ten thousand dollars.”

“Too cheap.”

“Then there’s the car: eight thousand.”

“Y-e-s,” he said with a nod, turning back from the window, “ten and eight are eighteen. Store accounts?”

“Of course.”

“Go only to the best. And the ones that will give you a rebate in cash.”

“Trust me!”

“And allowance?”

“We haven’t discussed that yet.”

“Twenty thousand a month—and send him all the bills.”

“Oh, you generous darling!”

“Yes. I’m not giving it to you, you know. Jewels?”

“These.” Holding out her hand on which were several rings.

“Pugh! That can’t be fifteen thousand worth. You must have a rope of pearls.”

“I shall certainly come over and kiss you!”

“Stay where you are. He’ll be here any minute,” he warned her. “Let me tell you, my friend, you play with me and I’ll get him. I’ll get him where I want him, get him where he can’t get away!” He strode up and down the room, shaking his clenched fist.

Grace’s eyes narrowed again with the old suspicion.

“And what do I get?” she said, going over and helping herself to another cigarette.

“You? You get the pearls, the apartment, the limousine, the——”

“Damn the pearls, damn the limousine, damn the apartment,” chanted Grace. “You’re what I want!”

His back was turned toward her. “Lord! again!” he said under his breath. “Well, you’ll have me too, won’t you, beautiful one? You know—There’s the bell!”

She sprang to her feet, and as Ralph came in beaming with happiness, she threw herself in his arms, kissing him ecstatically.

“Oh, darling, it’s you at last. How late you are! You mustn’t mind us, Mr. Burnett,” making a face over her shoulder, “but I haven’t seen my darling since this afternoon.”

“Oh, I can stand it. Besides, I’m looking out of the window.”

Ralph gave a happy laugh.

“Hello, Tom. How are you, old man?”

“Needn’t ask how you are. You look too confoundedly happy.”

“Haven’t I every right to be? Look! Isn’t she beautiful?” He stood off looking at Grace with adoring eyes.

“She certainly is. How’s your wife?” he asked with a change of tone.

“Very well,” said Ralph sharply. “She and Ruth and the lot of them went on up to-night so as to be in time for the races to-morrow.”

“Oh, couldn’t we just motor up? I’d love to.”

“I shouldn’t advise it,” said Burnett, fearing that Ralph wouldn’t have the strength to refuse. “If your people saw you, or Ralph’s people saw him, then where would you be?”

“I suppose *you’ll* be there to watch Bill Reid stroke Yale for victory,” said Ralph maliciously.

“Oh, I’ll be there.”

“Do you know,” said Ralph, looking delightedly round the room, “that this place is beginning to feel like my real home.”

“You darling!” Grace blew him a kiss.

“In all well regulated families,” laughed Burnett, “that’s the cue for the wife to ask for something.”

“Well, I’m not going to,” said Grace with a pout. “All the same, when I was downtown

to-day, I just happened to stop in Tiffany's, and I *did* see——”

“What?” asked Ralph, pulling her down on the divan beside him.

“No!”—with a shake of her pretty head—
“I'm not going to talk about it. You've given me too much already.”

“Nonsense!”

“No, no. I won't!”

“Not when you know I want you to?”

“It *was* so beautiful! But, no!” with a little sigh of regret, “It wouldn't be right.”

“But I insist, sweetheart.”

But Grace was not to be moved. She got up and went slowly over to the table and began to rearrange the roses in a silver bowl. Burnett watched her with very genuine admiration. What a comedian she was!

“Grace, I command you!” said Ralph with mock-heroics.

She swept him a curtsy.

“Alas! If my lord commands—It was a rope of pearls.”

“A—rope—of—pearls.” Ralph's face was funny in its blank dismay.

“Oh, it's ridiculous! She's only joking,” interposed Burnett.

“He made me say it,” pouted Grace.

“Well, if——” began Ralph.

“Don't be a fool!” said Burnett roughly.
“You're not made of money. A rope of pearls would cost—well, Heaven knows what!”

She ran lightly across the room and taking Ralph's flushed face in her hands, kissed him lightly on the forehead and turned indignantly to Burnett.

"I haven't said I wanted it. Of course I don't. I wouldn't embarrass my boy financially for—for the whole ocean of pearls. *He* knows that."

Ralph needed no further spur.

"I have given my word," he said pompously. "She shall have them."

Burnett felt his face grow purple in his efforts to strangle a laugh. But with a warning glance in his direction, Grace saved the day by throwing herself into Ralph's arms and bursting into a perfect flood of tears. Among her other useful accomplishments was the ability to weep at will without in the least disfiguring herself.

"Oh—my—dearest—you—are—too—good—to—me!" she sobbed.

And she capped her performance by winking at Burnett behind the morsel of lace with which she at length dried her streaming eyes.

"Look at me! I must be a sight. And I just know our dinner's ruined. I forgot all about it. Look at the time."

"Well, let's go out then. Did she need cheering up, after nearly crying her pretty eyes out!"

"I think I would like to. But I must go and

bathe my eyes and powder my nose. It's probably purple!"

"You can't be serious, Ralph," remonstrated Tom after she had left the room.

"But I am, Tom. I tell you, I adore her."

"In the first place, you haven't the money, as you very well know."

"I'll pay twenty-five thousand down, and charge the rest."

"But have you twenty-five thousand on deposit? Your account doesn't generally get that big."

"N—o—o, I haven't," said Ralph with a rueful laugh. "But if I should overdraw five or six thousand—you could O. K. the check. You would, wouldn't you, just this once?"

"And not let your father know. All right, I will. This once. But don't do it too often. Well, now I must be off," he said, looking at his watch.

"Oh, stay and have a bite with Grace and me; or at least wait till she comes back."

"Can't, thanks. I'm late already. I've an engagement uptown. I'll leave you to make my adieus. She'll be so happy about the pearls, she won't know whether I've made them, or not.—She's a wonder!" he said to himself, as he went down in the elevator.

CHAPTER XI

THERE is probably no time in life when one feels lonelier than in the first few weeks following graduation. If, as we grow older, solitude, for one reason or another, becomes our portion, we have either grown accustomed to it, or have learned to bear it with philosophy. But the average youth is essentially a gregarious animal with a pronounced distaste for his own unrelieved society. After four years of constant and close companionship with his kind, he is chilled by the cool aloofness of the world in general. Too proudly shy to make advances himself, he is not unlike a lost dog in a crowded street, running hither and yon in search of his master, both dreading and longing for the friendly touch of even an alien hand.

And to Bill Reid, the popular idol of his little world, this loneliness came with more than the usual force. Never had a summer been so endless as the one that followed his entrance into the house of Stuyvesant and Company. Had anyone told him that, without his knowledge, the whole system of reckoning time had been altered, and that the months now each contained an hundred days, he would not have been

greatly astonished. Certainly all the summers of his life had flown by comparison.

There were several causes that contributed to this state of mind. The confinement, the long hours, the monotonous routine of his days were all so novel, so uncongenial to his temperament. And the maddening multiplicity of detail with which he was expected to familiarize himself wearied and harassed his simple and direct mind.

And oh, how he missed the old outdoor life! After a long day's confinement, as he walked to the dismal little room which he never could even think of as "home," the heated caverns which New York calls streets, on which the blazing sun had beaten all day, at this hour reeking with an endless stream of perspiring and irritated humanity, faded away. In a sort of mirage, he saw again the long stretches of the river—his river—on which, ages ago, he had stroked his crew to victory.

That had been a day! It did not seem now that it could be real. It was only a wonderful, happy dream that he had dreamed. Or else it had happened long, long ago in some previous incarnation. There had not been one thing to mar the whole day or to dim their splendid victory. And that supreme moment, when carried on the shoulders of the yelling, cheering throng, he had seen the one face in all the world—Ruth's face—glowing with pride and happiness! And how her father had cheered!

Yes, he could almost have imagined that he had dreamed it all, if he had not had occasional reminders that it was all real when he chanced across some of the fellows he knew, or when sometimes Mr. MacLaren came into the bank. Mr. Stuyvesant always improved these opportunities to point out the young man busy at his desk and roar with laughter.

“ There he is, there he is! That’s the man who gave you such a walloping. It must make you sore to see him, Mac! ” And he would dig his friend in the ribs and laugh until he was purple in the face. Mr. MacLaren always scowled portentously. But his manner to Reid was most cordial and friendly, and there was a look of approval in his keen, blue eyes whenever they rested on that broad back.

But the greatest of his woes, besides which all his other troubles, even his great loneliness, dwindled into insignificance, was because of Ruth. She was in Europe with some friends. To be sure, she wrote regularly. Her letters were the only thing that made life even tolerable. How he read them and reread them! They were on the point of falling apart at the creases. He intended showing them to her on her return.

Of course he did not really want her back. He was hardly brute enough for that. But all the same, he counted the hours until her return. Even if he couldn’t see her often, the knowledge that she was there, in the big house on the Avenue, would have been tremendously com-

forting. He could at least have walked by it late at night, or stood across the street and looked up at the window which he knew to be hers, after the foolish manner of lovers. As it was, he shunned the great empty house, with its drawn blinds and its boarded-up entrance, always making a *détour* to avoid it when any errand called him to the neighborhood.

Mr. Stuyvesant was spending his summer at his big country place on Long Island. He, too, missed his daughter sorely. But he had insisted on Ruth's accepting the invitation, protesting that he had all sorts of plans for the summer which her presence would only interfere with, and that a man wanted a little freedom from his womankind once in a while.

Ruth understood perfectly that all his blustering cloaked an unselfish desire to give her pleasure and that he would be terribly lonely without her. But, aside from the fact that a trip to Europe with a congenial party was most tempting, there were other reasons which influenced her in coming to a decision. Ralph and Anna, who had no country place of their own, and who usually spent the summer in a round of visits, promised to pass the greater part of the time with his father, and Ruth hoped that the simple, quiet life and the resumption of the closer intimacy which they had known in his earlier years might be not only beneficial to Ralph, but might serve to bring them more

closely together than they had been for many years.

And there was now still another person to be considered: her lover. She foresaw how difficult it was going to be for him to adapt himself to a life so radically different from any he had ever known. But she knew that the same pluck and determination which had carried him through the earlier and harder years at the university would not fail him in this new test.

Ruth was in many ways a very practical person and possessed an ability to look facts in the face unusual in a girl of her years. While her life had been too sheltered a one for her to have any real knowledge of poverty, and while her ideas of the value of money when it came to its purchasing power were of the vaguest, she was too much her father's daughter not to have a large amount of that desirable quality called common sense which enabled her to see things in a large way in their proper prospective.

Still, for her the world was in general divided into two classes: the people who were in actual want of the necessities of life, of whom one heard and read with a heartache, and the people who lived beyond their incomes and ran into debt—Ralph, for example—or had to economize and give up their opera-boxes for a season because the new country house they were building had cost a number of thousands more than they had anticipated. But if, for example, she had

had any idea of the salary at which Mr. William Reid's services were valued; still more could she have looked into his exceedingly modest room and known of the frugality requisite to stretch that same salary until it covered the bare necessities of life, she would have indignantly taken the first boat home to lodge an outraged protest.

As it was, she often thought of him tied down to his desk in the hot town, missing the old companionship which had so long been his, and missing her. She would do her best to make it up to him on her return. But, for the present, it was better that she should be away. She had the vanity to believe that he would be able to apply his mind to learning the banking business more easily with the ocean between them than if she remained at the other end of a telephone on Long Island.

Of one thing she was positive: she would never have been strong-minded enough to resist calling him up several times a day. And she would have certainly wanted him to come down two or three times a week, and of course over Sunday. In which case people would have been sure to suspect something.

For their engagement was still a secret. They had come very near to having a quarrel over it. But on this subject Ruth was adamant. In vain her lover begged and pleaded. Nothing could alter her determination to keep it secret until after her *début*, which was to take

place in the early autumn. And with the promise that after that important event he might go to her father, he had to be contented.

That promise and her letters were all that kept him going. Without them, he afterwards said, he would never have been able to stick it out. Even with them to buoy him up, he had his days of black discouragement, when nothing could go right. There were nights when, sitting in his mean little room, he grew sick at heart at the recollection of the blunders he had made during the day, or the things that he had, somehow, contrived to forget. At such moments he bitterly told himself that he was being kept on out of charity, or what amounted to the same thing, out of gratitude: that a lad of fifteen could perform his simple duties better than he. How he longed for anyone to whom he could have poured out his troubles! But alas! *The* person to whom he would have so gladly turned was on the other side of the world.

There was another thing that both puzzled and worried him. And that was Ralph's attitude toward him. At first he had been friendly enough, putting him up at one of his clubs which boasted of an excellent gymnasium, where he was able to get a little much-needed exercise, and giving him cards to various country clubs to which he belonged, which turned the desert of his Sundays into a comparative oasis. But before the summer was over his manner had completely changed. He no longer

came lounging over to Reid's desk several times a day to talk of racing and the days when he had been coxswain of the crew, but contented himself with giving him a curt nod, when he did not pretend not to see him. For a long time this worried Bill a good deal. Not that Ralph was the type of man whom he found at all attractive, but he was Ruth's brother, and he was prepared to go more than halfway to establish a friendship.

He ended by attributing the change to the influence of Burnett, between whom and himself there had not been from the first the faintest pretense of friendliness. The Junior Partner's thinly veiled hostility showed itself on numerous occasions. But all his attempts to provoke the anger of the new employee met with defeat. Bill Reid was there to learn the banking business, and to learn it well and thoroughly. He was not to be diverted from his purpose by any amount of nagging by such a man as Thomas Burnett.

And then, just at the moment when he had almost decided to go to Mr. Stuyvesant and acknowledge that the experiment had been a failure, that he somehow seemed to lack the capacity necessary for business, and had therefore better seek some employment which required muscle and not brain, he found that all his problems had solved themselves in some mysterious manner overnight. The work, which only the day before he had been on the

point of abandoning as too complex for so mean an intellect as his became not only simple but interesting as well. The hours at the bank were no more like hours spent in prison. His fellow-clerks became human and likable. The very sun seemed to shine with more kindly intent. The air, which during the stifling summer had been heavy and lifeless, as if it had been breathed before, acquired a new invigorating quality. Ruth was on her way back! It was the letter which he carried in his pocket, giving the date of her sailing, that had worked all these miracles.

And as if Fortune, who had turned her back on him during all these hard months of apprenticeship, was desirous of proving that she had relented, his cup of happiness brimmed over when Mr. Stuyvesant, the day after he had moved back to town, sent for him to tell him that he had been so pleased at the reports of his steadiness and application that he had decided to make him his secretary at a substantial advance in salary. What news for Ruth!

Calendars are foolishly inadequate things. They do no more than record the bald succession of days. But when it comes to measuring the flight of time they are peculiarly useless. According to the one that hung over the crazy table in young Mr. Reid's room—heavily scarred with marginal notes and private memoranda—no one could possibly have told that July, August and September had been perfectly

endless and that October, now nearly over, had flown like the wind.

In the two weeks since Ruth's return they had had several delicious luncheons together, they had had walks in the Park and they had met several times in the Natural History Museum. And while over all their meetings there hung something of the furtive and clandestine which could not fail to be distasteful to her lover, they were too happy in being together after their long separation, there was so much to tell on both sides; so many plans to be discussed for the future—their future—that he did not openly rebel, sustained as he was by the thought that all this hateful secrecy would soon be at an end.

While their love affair was progressing thus satisfactorily uptown, down in the office of Stuyvesant and Company another young couple, in whom Ruth had long been interested, were testing the truth of the adage as to the smoothness of the course of true love.

On a certain day Miss Tessie Maginnis, one of the stenographers, had just returned from her lunch and had seated herself at her typewriter prepared to go on with her work, when she was startled at receiving an ardent kiss on the cheek.

“What the—— Oh, it's *you*, Dennis O'Brien!”

“Sure!” said the watchman, having cautiously assured himself that they were not

likely to be interrupted by a hurried glance into the several private offices which opened off the room where Tessie was supposed to be at work.

“ Were you thinkin’ it would be anyone else? ”

“ Well, you had your nerve! ”

“ Tessie,” said the culprit pleadingly, “ have ye thought any more about what I was after sayin’ to ye, Tessie? ”

“ And me, busy as I am, an’ botherin’ my head with foolishness! Forget it! ”

She made a great show of rustling the leaves of her note book while sending a sly glance in his direction.

“ But Father Kelly’s the fine man,” went on O’Brien, à propos of nothing in particular.

“ Is he, then? ”

“ Ye ought to hear him do that weddin’ service. It’s grand! ”

“ Oh, the weddin’ part’s all right: it’s *afterwards!* ” said Miss Maginnis with marked emphasis.

“ Oh, I don’t know. A nice little flat, you know, one of those——”

“ Yes, I know. Where you have to go out in the hall to change your mind.”

“ You wouldn’t be wantin’ to change your mind, with the right flat and the right fellow,” said O’Brien insinuatingly.

“ Roll over,” said Miss Maginnis elegantly.

“ You’re on your back! ”

“ I’m serious.”

“ You’re funny, just the same.”

“ Do you never think of havin’ your own home—your own fireside? ”

Tessie addressed herself to that portion of Heaven represented by the ceiling of the office.

“ Fireside! He ain’t even goin’ to have steam heat! ”

“ With your own little kitchen to play in, ” went on O’Brien with the air of an enthusiast carried away by his dream.

Tessie wheeled about in her chair and faced him.

“ Say, what is this? Are you thinkin’ of gettin’ married? ”

“ I am so. ”

“ Well, I hope you’ll invite me. ”

“ You’ll be there ”—with deep meaning.

“ That’s good. ”

O’Brien permitted himself to come a step nearer, only to be squelched by the lady’s next remark.

“ Sure, I’ll come. I’d like to see the sort of a girl’d take you. ”

“ Indeed! ” he retorted indignantly. “ I don’t mind tellin’ you, Miss Smarty, there are lots of ’em as would. ”

Tessie had to cover a laugh with a cough.

“ I don’t doubt it. You know what Barnum said: one born every minute. ”

“ Is *that* so! Well, let me tell you that *this* one is a very particular friend of yours. ”

“ I wouldn’t be surprised. The smartest girl in my class married a man in Blooming-

dale. It'll be just *my* luck to get a crook out of Sing Sing."

At these words, O'Brien's face underwent a remarkable change. The look which Ruth had long ago characterized as "hunted," which he had lost for the moment, returned and deepened in his eyes. Tessie, who had been expecting a Rowland for her Oliver, caught it as she looked up at him.

"That's all right, Miss Tessie," he said huskily, "forget it. I was just kiddin'."

Her own look of blank amazement was succeeded by one of shame and indignation. She seemed as if she were about to cry.

"Kiddin', were you? And I'm much obliged to you, Mr. O'Brien, for lettin' me know what kind of a gentleman you are."

"Tessie, I—I——"

"It's Miss Maginnis from you, Mr. O'Brien, I'd be pleased to have you remember!"

"No, I'll be damned if it is!" He had been kicking up the end of the rug with the toe of his shoe; watching it roll back with absorbed interest. But now his head flew up and he looked her straightforwardly in the face. "I'm not a-goin' to let you think I'm the kind of a guy that would make love to a girl, and then run away. I'm goin' to tell you the truth, no matter what you think of me. I'm not goin' through with it because—because I ain't *fit* to marry you. What you just said made me come to meself. I love you too much, darlin', to let

you take up with a man you might one day be ashamed of. So," he finished in a low voice, "we'll just forget that little dream, Tessie Maginnis."

"But I don't want to forget it," said Tessie, gulping back a sob.

"Darlin'! But, no, it ain't right."

"It's a cinch it ain't right," said Tessie tearfully, "what you're doin' now. Stealin' the heart out of a girl and then sayin': 'No, thank you!' I want to know *why* you ain't fit, an' I got a right to know. Maybe I ain't no tin angel m'self."

She hid her face in her handkerchief.

"It's—it's—ah, you hit it when you said something just now about Sing Sing, an' stealin'!"

"Sing Sing! Stealin'!! You!!!" Her voice was hardly more than a whisper, but it seemed to fill the room.

"My picture's over in the Rogue's Gallery. I done my bit. I'm an ex-con."

"You! A thief. A pickpocket?"

"Pickpocket!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "What do you think I am? I was Kid Wallace, the bank burglar; the biggest safe-blower in the country."

Amazement and admiration were in her face.

"Well," she said, "that's a *man's* job, anyhow. Why, I've heard of you often. Everybody around banks knows of Kid Wallace."

He smiled with a touch of bitterness. "I

guess we give the banks reason to—me an' my pal, Joe Schmidt, Dutch Joe."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tessie in sudden horror, "then you're here to——"

"No, no! On the level, Tessie. I'm square now. I've been square since I come out—near on to three years. I know it must look funny, my being here as watchman with my rep.," he went on after a moment, "but, you see, when I come out, I just naturally drifted to a bank. Kinder seemed second nature to me to be hanging round a bank vault."

He waited a moment for her to speak. But as she seemed to be at a loss for words, he misinterpreted her silence.

"All right. I don't blame you. I know I ought to have told you, but——"

"What are you going to do?" she asked in a low tone.

"Quit my job, first off. Couldn't stand bein' round seein' you and thinkin' of what might have happened if I had been different. Yes, I'll quit. And then——"

"You'll go back to safe-blowin', maybe?"

"No, by God I won't! When I come out of prison I swore I'd turn square, and I'm goin' to play it out on that string, no matter what."

Tessie got slowly to her feet, and stood looking down at her machine as if it were some strange, unfamiliar thing she had never seen before.

“ I wish,” she said after a long pause, “ you wouldn’t quit the job on my account. I couldn’t stand it either,” she said with sudden passion, “ not seein’ you round, and thinkin’ of—of what might have been if——”

“ Tessie! ”

“ Besides, if you quit ”—her voice was tremulous, but there was just the suggestion of a smile about the corners of her lips—“ how are you going to pay the rent of the flat? ”

“ You darling! ”

He seized her in his arms just as Reid came hurriedly into the room on his way to Burnett’s private office.

“ Don’t mind me, children. Go to it! ” he called with a sympathetic grin.

Tessie gave a little shriek, but stood her ground bravely; while O’Brien, manlike, was covered with confusion and beat a hasty retreat.

“ He’s a fine fellow, O’Brien,” said Reid heartily.

“ So he says! ” said Tessie with withering scorn as she looked after the retreating figure of her cowardly lover.

“ You mustn’t be too hard on him,” laughed Reid. “ Has Mr. Burnett come back from lunch? ”

At that moment the door leading from Burnett’s private office to the outer hall slammed sharply.

“ What is it? Who wants me? ” he snapped.

“ Mr. Jackson told me to call your attention to this, Mr. Burnett.”

Reid went over to him and handed him a slip of paper.

“ Well? ” said Burnett, taking the paper without looking at it.

“ You see it’s a loan of fifty thousand dollars on a thousand shares of New Haven. The bank called it to-day. I went to the vault to get out the stock and it isn’t there.”

“ And what business did you have to go for it? ”

Reid flushed under the insolence of the tone, but he kept himself well in hand.

“ I wanted to hand it over to you with the memo.”

“ You did. Well, in the future, Mr. Reid, will you kindly remember that you have no business in that vault in any conditions. I am responsible for the bonds and stocks kept there, and I don’t propose having irresponsible secretaries and clerks prowling around millions of dollars’ worth of securities placed under my charge.”

“ You don’t mean that——” began Reid angrily.

“ I mean that pulling stroke oar for a crew doesn’t necessarily make you indispensable in a bank, Mr. Reid, remember that. I have that stock on my desk. Tell Mr. Jackson that I say to extend the loan.”

“ Very well, sir,” said Reid, turning on his heel.

“ Damned young cub ! ” said Burnett to himself. “ Glad I got onto that in time. It might have been serious. ” And he slammed the door into the outer office.

“ Looks like he didn’t enjoy his lunch, ” commented the philosophical Tessie.

CHAPTER XII

THERE was nothing showy or brilliant about Bill Reid. Not that he was at all stupid. He was just an average sort of person mentally. What he lacked in quickness, he made up in clear-headedness. And he had a strong sense of justice. For that reason, just because he had from the first felt an instinctive distrust and dislike for Tom Burnett, he would have been the last person in the world to have accused him, even in his own mind, of anything that was not perfectly straight in his conduct of affairs at the bank.

All the same, every now and again little things came under his notice which made him vaguely uncomfortable. Each time this happened, he reminded himself that men, not only older and wiser than he, but men who had known Burnett for a number of years, had unlimited confidence in him. And he would end by taking himself severely to task for allowing his own personal prejudice to color his judgment. And then again something would happen, and he would have to begin the old argument with himself afresh.

To-day, for example, was one of these times. It wasn't that Burnett's tone to him bordered on the insulting. That had happened before.

That was his way of showing that Reid's dislike of him was returned, and he was small enough to stoop to take every advantage of his superior position. But just now he had betrayed unmistakable signs of nervousness and agitation which his displeasure at hearing of Reid's visit to the securities vault, even if it were not largely assumed, could hardly account for. Somehow, Reid could not help connecting the man's evident trouble with a scene which he had witnessed earlier in the day.

For some time a little syndicate of bankers, personal and business friends of Mr. Stuyvesant, had been in a pool to control Kentucky Iron. For several days the market had been unusually active in this particular stock. So active, indeed, that there was no doubt that there was an organized movement on foot to wrest the control away from them. Davidson, Post and Davidson were the brokers who had fought them most strenuously on the floor of the Stock Exchange, but who their principals were was still a mystery.

That morning, all the members of the syndicate had been closeted with Mr. Stuyvesant in the directors' room of Stuyvesant and Company. It had been the secretary's duty to read the quotations from the ticker. It was most exciting to stand there, letting the tape run through your fingers, occasionally looking up to note the effect upon the keen-faced men seated about the long table.

“ Kentucky Iron 80—and $\frac{1}{8}$. 200 at a quarter. 81 asked. 500 at 81— $81\frac{1}{2}$. 200 at 82. 1,000 sold at the eighth. Kentucky Iron 84 and jumping. The Bear movement is checked— Kentucky Iron still climbing at 85.”

Several of the men showed the relief from the strain by relaxing from their stiff attitudes. Old Mr. MacLaren stretched his long legs to their full length and gave a boyish laugh.

“ Well, well! It was a narrow squeak, though.”

With general exclamations of “ Good day,” “ See you later,” “ I wonder how the other fellows feel,” and “ Congratulations,” they separated, at Mr. Stuyvesant’s suggestion, going out different ways. Only MacLaren lingered until Reid followed the last man out.

“ Want to see you a minute,” he said curtly.

But he took an unconscionable long time to light his cigar, while his friend waited.

“ New secretary still satisfactory? ”

“ Best I ever had, Mac.”

“ Good! There’s one young man I *do* believe in.”

“ You didn’t stay behind the others to praise my secretary.”

Mr. MacLaren took from his waistcoat pocket a folded piece of paper.

“ Yesterday, when the fight was hottest and we looked licked, this was presented to me— after we’d paid it.”

He held out the piece of paper to his friend.

Mr. Stuyvesant unfolded it slowly.

“ My check. For twenty thousand dollars! ”

“ Your private check book, mark you. Not a firm check.”

“ What did you think? ” asked the banker in a low tone.

“ If it had been brought to my attention before it was paid, I'd have stopped it and 'phoned you because I thought just what I think now: it's a forgery.”

“ Thanks, Mac.”

He held out his hand, and for a moment the two old friends stood with clasped hands looking at each other in silence. Finally Mr. Stuyvesant spoke.

“ Clever! A check torn out of the back of my check book. And the signature—wonderful! ”

“ It's someone close to you, Bill.”

“ Come over to my office. We must get to the bottom of this.”

In the hall they ran into Reid, who was on his way to see Burnett about the missing New Haven securities.

“ Oh, Reid, just a moment. Have you had any occasion to take my private check book out of my desk for any reason? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Has anyone had access to it but you? ”

“ Not to my knowledge, sir. Anything wrong? ”

“N-o-o. Only it was in the wrong drawer. Wait a moment.”

He took a note book from his pocket, and writing a number on one of the leaves, tore it out and handed it to his secretary.

“Call this number for me. No,” as Reid started to the outer office, “private. Use my own telephone. And ask Mr. Anderson, the detective, to come to see me—privately—at his earliest convenience.”

“Something *is* wrong, then, Mr. Stuyvesant.”

“We’ve missed some stamps, that’s all. Get that number as soon as you can and let me know when I may expect Anderson. After all, Mac, I’ll see you in your place later in the day. Good-by.”

When Reid tapped on his door, later, he found his employer pacing the floor, looking more agitated than he had ever seen him. He thought it wiser to ask no further questions, and, having told him that Anderson was out of town for a day or two, went out quietly, closing the door behind him.

Burnett, alone in his office, sat gnawing his nether lip viciously. How could his well-laid plans have gone amiss? Who could have betrayed him? Not Ralph—unless he had let something fall when he was drunk, the fool! And that was hardly likely; surely he had enough at stake to make him cautious even in his cups. Not Davidson—for he had everything to gain and nothing to lose by attending

strictly to business. No, the whole thing was simply inexplicable for the moment. The thing to do now was not to waste time speculating as to how the catastrophe had come, but to take steps to retrieve their imperiled fortunes. What irony that that infernal stock should be wanted to-day, of all days!

The telephone on his desk jangled loudly. He snatched the receiver from the hook.

“ Hello, hello! Who is it? ”

“ Mr. Davidson, of Davidson and Post, ” came Tessie’s voice.

“ All right. Hello, Davidson. What? Kentucky Iron 90! Good God! What’s that? Going up to a hundred? What? Damn it, I can’t hear you! You’ve sold twenty-five thousand shares for me? I’ll lose thirty dollars on every share: three-quarters of a million! ” he groaned.

“ What? I must send you more money or put up more security? You’ll have to sell that thousand shares of New Haven? No, no, no, man! You mustn’t do that. No, you mustn’t. Now look here, Davidson, you sell me out now, and by God, you’ll regret it! Very well. Now you’re talking sense. ”

He hung up the receiver, and for a moment paced the floor, scowling heavily. Presently his face cleared. Opening the door he called to Tessie:

“ Tessie, if anyone wants me, I’ll be down in the security vault. ”

And opening the door that gave on a corridor, he went whistling down the passage. Ten minutes later he was back. He had just taken a bundle from under his coat, and was locking it up in a drawer of his desk, when Ralph came bursting in, shaking with excitement. He turned to close the door behind him, which gave Burnett time to light a cigarette. He was smoking it with the most nonchalant air in the world when his quaking partner turned to confront him.

“ Good God, Tom! Have you seen the market? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Last night we stood to win nearly a million. ”

“ Two million I'd figured, if everything went right. ”

“ I was happy, madly happy! I didn't go home. Stayed at the flat with Grace. When I got up at noon I read—— How much have we lost? ”

“ Six hundred thousand up to five minutes ago. Three-quarters of a million, I should guess, before we're clear. ”

“ Three-quarters of a million of the bank's money? Good God, Tom, we're criminals! ”
Ralph wrung his hands.

“ What the hell did you think we were— angels? ” sneered Burnett.

With a groan his companion sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

“ Oh, brace up! God hates a quitter, and so does everybody else! ”

“ If they should find out. My father——! ”

Burnett made a gesture of impatience. “ How’s he going to find out? I’m in charge of the security vault. Besides that, you’re his son and I’m going to be his son-in-law. ”

Ralph sprang to his feet and began to pace wildly up and down the room.

“ Oh, why did I ever let you persuade me to go into this sort of thing! ”

Burnett struck his fist violently together in a rage which was only partly assumed.

“ Why did you let yourself be persuaded! I’ll tell you why. You had neither the brains nor the courage to work the scheme yourself. And when, long ago, you were so deep in debt that you didn’t know where to turn you jumped at the chance when I suggested it. I admit that. The idea was mine. But if you hadn’t tied yourself up with an expensive woman like Grace, we could have followed out my original plan and only taken a flyer now and again. But to keep up your two establishments, we have had to keep hammering at it. I tell you, it is *your* fault. *You* got us into this scrape, and I’m going to get us out of it. I don’t intend to listen to any more whining from you! ”

“ All right, Tom, all right. I’m grateful, truly I am. I know it’s really my fault. If only you’ll—— ”

“ Well, I’m glad you realize that.”

“ Only,” said Ralph, avoiding the other’s eye, “ there’s one thing more.”

“ Well? ”

“ I—I—well, there’s a check out for twenty thousand dollars that may cause trouble.”

“ A check for twenty thousand dollars! ”

“ My father’s name is signed to it. I—I signed it.” His voice was hardly more than a whisper.

This time Burnett did not have to simulate rage.

“ You forged your father’s name for twenty thousand dollars! You damned, piking, little fool! You took the chance——”

“ I was desperate, I tell you! I—I’d promised Grace a sable coat. I—I had to make good.”

“ So you took the chance of throwing everything over to give a sable coat to a——”

“ Don’t say anything against her. I love her.”

Burnett stared at him in genuine amazement. For the moment the color had returned to Ralph’s white face. He held his head up and looked at him with shining eyes. And it was Grace who had been able to rouse the only spark of manhood he had seen in Ralph for years. The little coward had actually summoned up the courage to speak in her defense. Truly she was a wonderful woman!

There came a tap at the door.

“ Miss Stuyvesant and Mrs. Ralph Stuyvesant have just come,” announced Tessie.

“ Say we’ll be right with them.”

“ Take hold of yourself now, Ralph, for God’s sake. You look as if you had slept in that collar. You’ll find some clean ones on the shelf in my washroom. I’ll tell the girls you’ll be right out.”

He came out to them as *débonnaire* and smiling as if he had not an anxiety in the world.

“ Ladies,” he exclaimed, as he shook hands with each of them, “ it is seldom that we are honored by a visit from you both together. Don’t tell me that it means a raid on the bank! ”

“ Nothing so desperate, I assure you,” smiled Ruth. “ But father’s been taking advantage of my being unusually busy to come home at all hours. I intend to see that he comes home early to-night.”

“ And Ralph’s been following his bad example,” chimed in Anna. “ Where is he? ”

“ He’ll be right here. He had some papers to sign first.”

They had been chatting only a few moments when Ralph appeared in the doorway, looking greatly refreshed. Ruth, to whom of course Anna had confided the fact that he had not been home at all two nights during the week, wishing to leave them alone, announced that she was going in search of her father.

“ Tessie,” said Burnett, “ I shall have some

dictation for you in a moment. Wait in my office." And he went out into the bank.

"Ralph, dear," said Anna timidly, "you weren't home last night. That's the second time this week. You must be working awfully hard."

"I have been very busy. But you run along. I'll be home early to-night."

"Very well. I think I'll wait for Ruth in the car."

"Why not wait here. She'll only be a minute."

"Oh, will she!" laughed Anna. "She'll not go till she has seen Bill Reid. You can be sure of that. Wake up, you poor silly. One would think that men hadn't eyes in their heads! And be home early."

She gave another laugh as she looked at Ralph's blank face. She had given him something to think of.

"What *do* you mean?" said Ralph, following her out, as Ruth and Burnett came in from opposite doors.

"He literally drove me out," laughed Ruth, pointing to her father's door.

"To me?"

"You wouldn't have a girl who was driven to you?" asked Ruth, still laughing.

"Ruth, dear, how much longer are you going to hold me off?" he asked, catching her hand.

Ruth sobered instantly.

"Please, Tom. Oh, don't, Tom!"

“ Ruth, I love you! ”

“ I thought that was all settled, Tom. You hadn't said anything since that day on the river. I thought you had accepted my attitude, and—and understood.”

“ No, no! As long as you're not married to any other man, as long as you're not in love with anyone else, I'll never give up hope.”

“ But I *do* love someone else, Tom.”

“ Who? I've a right to ask that,” he went on, as she didn't answer. “ Who is it? ”

“ Mr. Reid.”

“ That damned——”

“ Tom! ”

“ I don't care! I——”

The door opened and Reid came in, advancing with a happy smile and holding out his hand to Ruth.

“ This is a surprise. I thought——”

He stopped, looking from one to the other.

“ Bill, I——” began Ruth.

“ I beg your pardon,” interrupted Burnett. And making them a sweeping bow, he went back to his office and closed the door.

“ I told him that we were in love with each other.”

“ I'm glad you did. I want the whole world to know it.”

“ Oh, the whole world will know soon enough. I'll keep my promise. Besides,” she added with feminine logic, “ it's none of the ' whole world's ' business! ”

“ But—— ”

“ Now! ” She held up a warning finger. “ I don’t want to tell yet. It’s more romantic. It’s so much dearer just to have it all our own secret. Somehow, it seems more sacred.”

“ But it makes me feel sort of sneaky. To go on pretending this way. If you would only let me tell your father.”

“ Tell *him!* ” said Ruth with withering scorn. “ Why, he’s the last person in the world to tell. He never could keep a secret in his life. That’s how I know the Masons haven’t any. I’d have known it, if they had. No, I’ll not tell anybody until the day after my ball.”

“ I wonder what they’ll all say. That I’m marrying you for your money, probably.”

“ Nonsense! ”

“ I’m not much of a catch, you know, for Miss Ruth Stuyvesant.”

“ But if I think so, don’t that count for something? ”

“ You darling! ”

He leaned over and kissed her fondly.

“ And when we have our little home—just big enough for us and our love—— ” Ruth went on.

“ We’ll never be able to afford a place big enough for that.”

“ Dear! ” She held up her face to be kissed.

“ Please don’t mind me! ” said Tessie, coming out from Burnett’s office with her note book in her hand. She gave Reid a maliciously mischievous look. It was *her* turn now.

“ Oh! ” said Ruth, starting back, her face crimson.

“ Oh, that’s all right, ” said Tessie airily. “ Mr. Reid caught me kissing the man *I’m* going to marry, just a little while ago. ”

“ Tell me about him, ” said Ruth, going over to Tessie’s table.

“ He’s got such a nice name. Dennis—Dennis O’Brien. Do you know, when he asked me—— ”

“ Did he ask you if he might kiss you? ”

“ Ask me! If he’d have asked I’d have killed him! ”

“ So would I. Any girl would! ” agreed Ruth with spirit.

“ I’ll get him, ” said Tessie, jumping up and running to the door.

“ Dennis, Dennis! ” she called softly, “ come here. ”

Ruth and Bill exchanged glances of amusement, as Tessie returned, leading her embarrassed swain by the hand.

“ How are you, O’Brien? ” said Ruth warmly. “ What’s this I hear about you? ”

“ I’m grand, Miss Ruth, just grand, ” grinned Dennis.

“ She’s engaged, too, ” explained Tessie.

“ Are you, now! It’s fine, ain’t it? ”

“ You bet it is, ” said Reid.

“ When are you going to be married? ” asked Ruth.

“ Not decided, ” said Tessie.

“ Next week, ” said O’Brien with emphasis.

“ Well, I never! Do you hear the man? ” asked Miss Maginnis scornfully.

“ Who’s going to stand up with you, Dennie? ”

“ I’d like to get a gentleman named Bill Reid, if he—— ”

“ Then I know who’s going to be maid of honor, ” interrupted Ruth.

“ You wouldn’t! ” Tessie threw both arms round Ruth’s neck and gave her a resounding kiss. Immediately she was covered with confusion at the thought of her own daring.

“ There’s goin’ to be some class to this weddin, ’ ” said O’Brien enthusiastically.

“ O’Brien! Where’s O’Brien? ” called Mr. Stuyvesant’s voice.

“ Wouldn’t anybody know that the boss would have to spoil the party! ” asked Tessie, in an aggrieved aside.

“ Here I am, Mr. Stuyvesant, ” answered O’Brien as he started on a run for the door.

CHAPTER XIII

At the doorway he nearly collided with his employer and a bull-necked, heavy-jawed man of about forty, with a stubby black mustache and a pair of keen gray eyes.

"Yes, I know," he was saying, in reply to something that Mr. Stuyvesant had asked, "I've got a new fool to break in down at the shop. He doesn't know the regular people yet, and I always tell him to tell strangers that I'm out of town. You never know who may be buttin' in."

"Daughter," began Mr. Stuyvesant, in a worried manner, "I'm very busy just now, and you hadn't better wait."

"All right, father. Oh, where is my bag?"

"Here it is, Miss Ruth," said Tessie, fetching it from her desk.

"O'Brien, show Mr. Anderson into my private office. I'll be with you in a minute, Anderson."

But neither Anderson nor O'Brien moved.

"He's the detective," whispered Tessie.

"And what may you be doin' below the deadline?" asked Anderson with a sneer.

"I'm workin'." Dennis ran his tongue over his dry lips. His voice was husky.

"Workin'? Gettin' ready for a job, you mean."

“What’s the matter, Anderson? This man, O’Brien, has been in my employ for a couple of years.”

“I guess then you don’t know him, Mr. Stuyvesant. O’Brien is his name, all right. But his moniker in the crook world is Kid Wallace, the notorious bank burglar and hold-up man. He’s the most dangerous safe-blower in the country. He’s done time in Sing Sing and Dannemora. A watchman in a bank! Say, I got ter hand it to you, Kid!”

“Is this true, O’Brien,” demanded Mr. Stuyvesant sternly.

O’Brien drew a long breath. He had been standing a shamefaced figure with bowed head. But now he straightened up and looked his employer full in the face. There was something of the light of battle in his eyes. Ruth had started forward at the detective’s words, but Reid laid a detaining hand on her arm. She nodded that she understood. Dennis should have his chance to be heard.

“Yes, Mr. Stuyvesant, it is. But what he don’t tell you is that I switched, and for three years I’ve been runnin’ straight. Oh, you cops never tell that part!” He turned fiercely on Anderson, who still smiled his sneering smile. “A guy that’s started wrong has a great chance to run straight with you fellows at his heels! One hell of a chance!”

He took off his cap and began unbuttoning his coat.

“What are you doing, O’Brien? Where are you going?” asked Ruth, coming forward quietly.

“I don’t know, Miss Ruth. Do you think he’d leave me here? Do you think I’d stay if he did? Why, the first thing that’s pulled off south of the dead line they’d take me and send me away. I wouldn’t have a chance. Just because I’m an ex-con.!”

“You’ve got the dope all right,” Anderson agreed. “You come with me. I think I know something you’re wanted for anyhow.”

At these words, Tessie, who had borne up bravely until now, broke down completely, sobbing her heart out with her head on the typewriter.

“Just one moment, Mr. Anderson,” rang out Ruth’s clear voice. “You are not going to take Dennis O’Brien.”

“No?” Anderson was plainly amused.

“No.”

“May I ask why?”

“Because I won’t let you.”

“And where do you come in on this?”

“My daughter——” began Mr. Stuyvesant.

“Excuse me, Miss,” said Anderson, taking off his hat, “I didn’t——”

“I’ll make myself responsible for him,” Ruth went on. “He’s been honest for three years, and he’s going to marry this poor little girl here. She’s—she’s a friend of mine. I

won't let you spoil their happiness. You sha'n't take him. You understand? You sha'n't."

"But, Ruth dear," interposed her father, "if O'Brien has broken the law, it's Anderson's duty to take him. That's the law."

"I don't care a bit about his duty, and I don't give two straws for the law. He sha'n't take him!"

"That's a woman all over for you!" said Anderson disgustedly. "What do they care about law, any of 'em?"

"Exactly right, Mr. Anderson. And that's because there's far too much law and too little justice. Do you think yourself that it's right to put this man in prison when he's trying to be honest? To ruin his life, and the life of the girl who loves him? If that's law, then the law can go to the devil!"

"Ruth!" exclaimed Mr. Stuyvesant in horror.

"I haven't time to argue with you, Miss Stuyvesant. I'm only paid to do my duty. And my duty is to take this man, and I'm goin' to do it. Come on, O'Brien!"

"Very well. But I warn you, and I warn you too, father, if O'Brien is taken I will go on his bail. And I'll employ the best lawyer in New York to defend him. I sha'n't stop with making my fight in the courts. I'll make it in the newspapers. Then we'll see how public opinion judges of a man who's trying to do right and can't get a chance."

“ My dear, you don’t know what you’re saying! ” protested her father.

“ Oh, yes I do, father! And we’ll have all the publicity I can get, too. I’ll take up a collection myself for the O’Brien Defense Fund. I’ll write to the papers to-night. I’ll see the reporters to-morrow. Tessie and Dennis and I will all have our pictures on the front pages. How will you like that? You can stop it, if you will. But you must act quickly. I’m going in a minute or two. And I’ll begin right away on my campaign—unless you and Mr. Anderson can arrange to leave O’Brien in freedom.”

There was no doubt that she meant every word she said.

“ She’s a Stuyvesant all over, bless her! ” said her father to himself. Of course she should have her way. But, after all, he was a little sheepish, as he turned to the waiting Anderson.

“ After all, Anderson,” he said, half apologetically, “ the man *has* been honest ever since he has been here. Is it absolutely necessary that you should rake up his unfortunate past? ”

“ Well, Mr. Stuyvesant,” said Anderson, scratching his head, “ if you are *personally* interested in the matter, I suppose I could let him go—during good behavior.”

“ I think that would be best. And, by the way, I’ve changed my mind about seeing you just now. I’ll telephone you later. Perhaps to-night.”

“ O. K.,” said Anderson, putting on his hat. “ You can thank Miss Stuyvesant, O’Brien.”

“ Who did you think I was goin’ to thank—you?”

“ If it won’t interfere with ‘ the right ’ in any way, Miss Stuyvesant,” said Anderson with a faint sneer, “ would you mind telling me why you make such a fight for a known crook?”

“ Certainly not, Mr. Anderson,” said Ruth with a laugh. “ I’m to be maid of honor at the wedding next week. Do you suppose I’d let any old law spoil that?”

“ Good Lord!” said Anderson fervently. And he went out shaking his head.

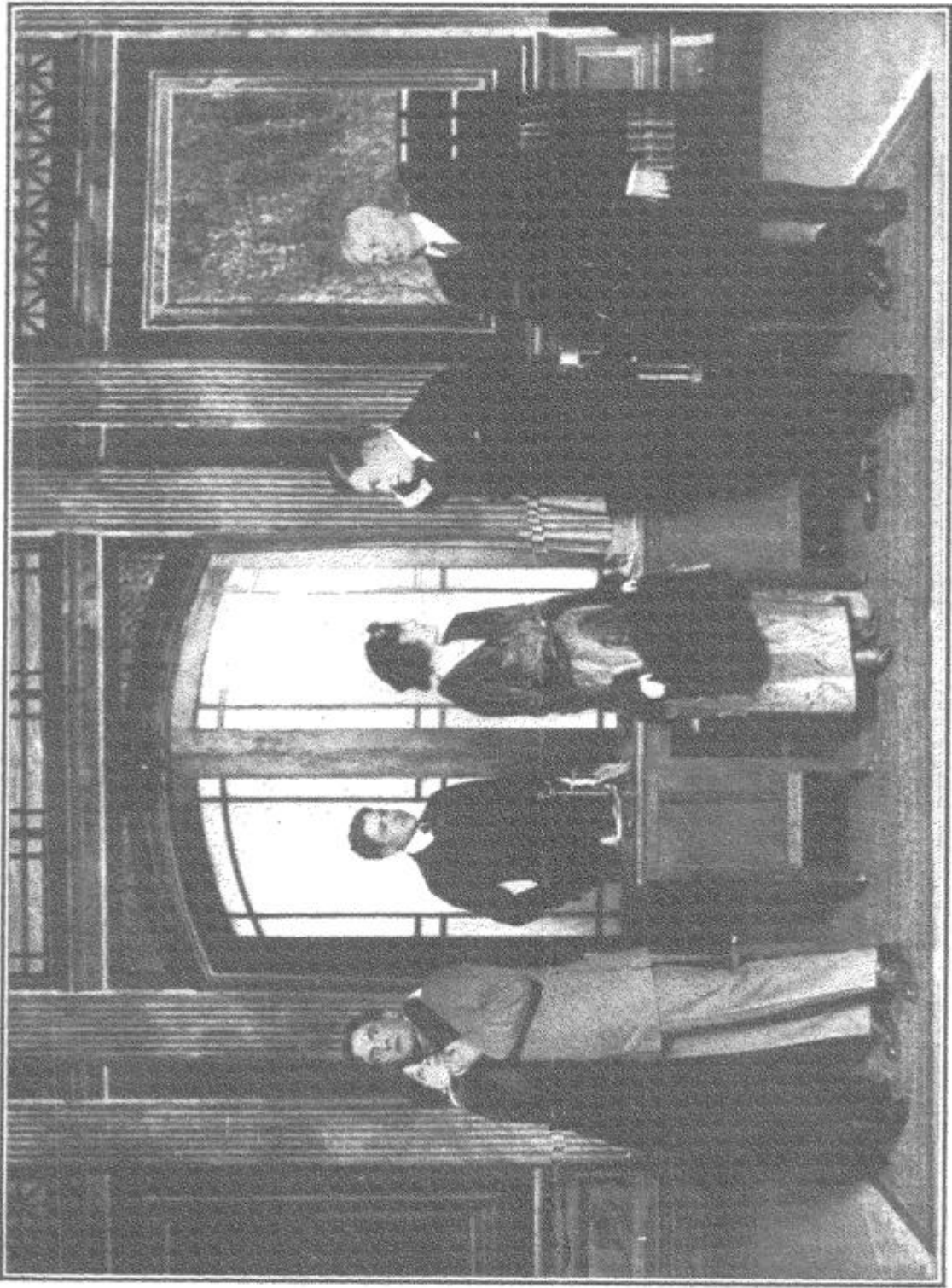
“ Now, Ruth dear,” expostulated her father, “ you’ve taken up a lot of my time, and we’re very busy here.”

“ You poor man! Never mind, I’m going this second. And thank you a thousand times!”

“ Good-by, Tessie. Good-by, O’Brien.” She patted the still tearful Tessie on the shoulder. “ No, no!” as she saw Dennis, with brimming eyes vainly trying to command his voice sufficiently to put his thanks into words. “ If you want to thank me, rush that wedding!”

And followed by grateful and adoring glances, she and Reid went down to the automobile and the waiting Anna.

“ Find Mr. Ralph Stuyvesant and Mr. Burnett. I want to see them at once, here.” Mr. Stuyvesant spoke almost sharply to O’Brien.



"JUST ONE MOMENT, MR. ANDERSON. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE DENNIS O'BRIEN!"

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“Take your things into Mr. Burnett’s office, Miss Maginnis. I want this room for consultation. Close the door after you, please.”

“Well!” said the indignant Tessie to herself, “of all the grouches! As if I’d nothing better to do than listen to his old consultations.” And then recalling the part he had taken in freeing her lover, she was immediately overcome with remorse, and blew him a furtive kiss from the doorway when she saw that his back was safely turned.

Mr. Stuyvesant had been pacing the floor, up and down, up and down, for nearly ten minutes before Burnett and his son came. He looked both tired and old. He had taxed himself more than usual during the morning, and now there was this new trouble to face. Tom and Ralph must help him. He was determined to go through with the matter of the forged check to the end, let the trail lead where it would.

Ralph and Tom arrived almost together. But Ralph, who was a few steps in advance, had caught a look on his father’s face which made him lose his head completely. If Burnett had not followed him so closely he would have broken down absolutely.

“Good God, father! You——”

“Ralph,” cautioned Burnett in an undertone.

“Father looks so—so serious,” stammered Ralph.

“This is enough to make us all serious,” said

Mr. Stuyvesant gravely, holding out the check that MacLaren had given him to Burnett. "Forged!"

Burnett gave a long whistle.

"But who could have done it?"

Mr. Stuyvesant shook his head. Burnett handed the check over to Ralph, who stood staring at it as if fascinated.

"Besides yourself, Mr. Stuyvesant, who is there who can get at your private check book?"

"Only Reid, my secretary. But——"

"How was it cashed?"

"Cashed by a messenger at MacLaren's bank."

"Can the messenger identify the man that gave it to him?"

Ralph drew in his breath sharply, supporting himself by the back of a chair.

"The messenger was run over and killed an hour ago," said Mr. Stuyvesant solemnly.

Ralph wiped the sweat from his forehead and sank into the chair.

"I'm sorry, but it seems to me that there is only one person to suspect: Reid."

"I can't believe it."

"Yes. It's Reid, it's Reid! He did it!"

Ralph was almost hysterical.

Mr. Stuyvesant crossed the room to the bell.

"I'm going to call Reid and question him. But I believe he's perfectly honest."

For a moment the silence was unbroken. Mr. Stuyvesant continued to pace the floor, while

Ralph, warned by Burnett's scowl, fought to regain his self-control.

“ Did you want to see me, Mr. Stuyvesant? ”

As he stood in the doorway Mr. Stuyvesant thought that he had never seen a finer or manlier figure or a more open, candid face. Somehow, the sight gave him fresh courage. The man never in the world was guilty. No thief, since the world began, ever wore that honest look. Unless he were to confess it himself, he never would believe that Bill Reid was the forger.

“ Sit down, will you, Mr. Reid. I wanted to ask you if you knew anything about this. ”

He handed him the check, and stood waiting. Reid scrutinized it closely, turned over and looked for the indorsement, and handed it back, shaking his head.

“ No, sir. Only—— ”

“ Only what? ”

“ Only this check is numbered 1,169. And the last one made out from your check book was 1,068: a jump of a hundred numbers. ”

“ Exactly. And the signature and indorsement are both forged. ”

“ Forged! ”

“ Now, Reid, who has had that book besides yourself? ”

“ Good God, Mr. Stuyvesant! You don't think—— ”

“ It isn't what I think. The crime has been

committed, and we must get to the bottom of it."

"I hope we may. I'll do my best to help."

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure," said Burnett with an evil sneer. "You could help us a lot if you began by telling us what you did with the money."

"Yes! What did you do with it? What did you do with it?"

Ralph sprang from his chair and rushed over to Reid with clenched fist. If Burnett had not restrained him, he might actually have struck him in his frenzy.

"Now then, you damned thief, come through and tell the truth!"

"I'll call the police, Mr. Stuyvesant," said Burnett briskly, on his way to the door.

"Wait!" Mr. Stuyvesant stopped him with a gesture.

"Do *you* think I forged that check?" said Reid to Mr. Stuyvesant. His quiet manner contrasted sharply with that of his two accusers.

"I know you did," called Burnett from the door.

"We've got proof of it," blustered Ralph.

"I am waiting, Mr. Stuyvesant," said Reid, ignoring the others. "Do you think that I'm a thief?"

"No, Reid, I don't!"

"Thank you, sir."

He sprang suddenly to his feet and turned on

Burnett and the cowering Ralph. "As for you two—you can go to hell, both of you!"

Burnett was the first to recover himself.

"Very well, Mr. Reid. But I don't think you'll find others so ready to take your unsupported word as Mr. Stuyvesant. This matter doesn't drop here. And let me add that the man who would steal into his employer's house and try to win the love of his daughter behind his back when she is as good as engaged to another man isn't above other things even more dishonest."

"What is this?"

Mr. Stuyvesant stood staring from Reid to Burnett and back again at Reid.

"Mr. Stuyvesant, I had given my word to——"

"If you are about to speak of my daughter, Mr. Reid, I've only one word to say: *don't!*"

"I have caught you also, Mr. Reid, hanging about the securities vault. I shall start an investigation immediately to see if any of them happen to be missing, too."

It was of course Burnett who spoke.

"If any securities are gone, I know who took them and so do you—and your brokers."

"You lying thief!"

For once in his life Burnett lost his head. He made a rush for his enemy, his clenched fist upraised. The next second he was picking himself up from the floor, holding his handkerchief to his bleeding lip.

“ Reid! What are you doing! ”

“ I’m sorry, Mr. Stuyvesant. I just couldn’t help it.”

“ I demand that man’s arrest,” snarled Burnett.

“ Wait, I tell you. I believe I am still the head of Stuyvesant and Company, Mr. Burnett. I am going to get to the bottom of this, but in my own time, and in my own way.”

“ He goes, or I go.” Here, at least, Burnett was sure of his ground.

For an instant Mr. Stuyvesant hesitated. “ I’m sorry, Reid,” he said with real feeling. “ I believe you are honest. But Mr. Burnett, here, is my junior partner, my son-in-law to be ”—here he froze again at the recollection of what Burnett had revealed. “ I must, therefore, ask for your resignation, and I am sorry to add that in the future you will not be welcome either here or at my home.”

With a gesture which was plainly one of dismissal, the old gentleman turned and went slowly into his private room.

Without deigning to look in the direction of the other men, Bill Reid went out to the cloak room, and getting his hat and coat, went down the steps of Stuyvesant and Company for the last time.

He dined that night in a quiet little restaurant where the food was notably good and well prepared. He even treated himself to a better dinner than he usually thought he could afford;

smiling as he gave the order at the thought that most people would have considered that a young man who had just lost his position and might find it difficult to get another, being, as he was, without a character, would naturally judge this a most appropriate time to practice the virtue of economy. But for some reason or other he was ravenously hungry. Possibly a reaction from the unusual strain he had been under the last hours of the day.

He had gone directly home after leaving the bank. Once in his room, he had closed the old-fashioned shutters so as to darken the room as much as possible. For an hour or more he lay prone on his bed with his eyes closed, going over the whole situation again and again.

It has been said that his was not a particularly quick mind. No one was more fully aware of this than Reid himself. Therefore, when he had as knotty a problem as this one to solve, he purposed taking his time to it. He was happily the possessor of a strong will, and early in life he had learned the lesson of self-control. He had had his moment of natural weakness that afternoon when he had allowed his temper to get the best of him and had knocked Burnett across the table. But it should not happen again. He would not permit his resentment of injustice to interfere with his judgment.

When he finally got up at dinner time, he had weighed all the evidence in his position and decided on his course of action. Like Burnett, he

had no intention of letting the matter drop. But he must see and consult with Ruth. As Mr. Stuyvesant had been unfair enough to forbid him the house without waiting for his explanation, he considered himself under no obligation not to see Ruth as soon and as often as possible.

He dismissed the idea of writing to her. In his present mood, her father was quite capable of seeing that his letters were not delivered. Of course he was perfectly familiar with his former secretary's writing. And then the idea of appealing to Jennie Bruce had come to him. She was Ruth's closest friend and was without doubt more or less in her confidence. And Jennie had a remarkable faculty for making four out of two and two. Besides, Reid himself liked and trusted her and felt that his liking was returned. Jennie, then, should help him.

He found by telephoning her that she was disengaged for the evening. Having loitered over his coffee until it was within a half-hour of the time she had suggested that her father would have started for his club, he paid his check and walked briskly to the house, which was only a short distance away.

He found Jennie in a small room at the back of the house, which she had fitted up for her own particular snuggery. Here she received her more intimate friends, making the men feel perfectly at home by permitting them to smoke their

pet pipes while she, of course, munched chocolates. Standing in front of the fire—for the autumn evening was sufficiently chill to give an excuse for such luxuries—looking down from his great height at Jennie curled up on a divan with the inevitable box of her favorite article of diet, he told his story slowly and carefully, omitting no detail which seemed to him to throw any light on the mystery.

Jennie listened with sympathy and intelligence. From time to time a shrewd little smile flitted across her handsome face, but she only interrupted to ask some pertinent question or to make some comment remarkable for its keenness.

When he had finished with his appeal to her to help him to see Ruth, she rose slowly and stood for a moment looking down into the glowing bed of coals.

“ You haven’t said whom you believed to be at the bottom of all this. You needn’t. I know who is in your mind, and I agree with you. I am one of the few persons who has always distrusted him. I am only surprised that he has waited so long. You are very much in the way, you know. Now I want to think it over a little by myself. So I am going to send you home. Ruth, as it happens, is lunching here with me to-morrow. If you were to come around about two you can talk to her without being interrupted.”

“ Jennie, you’re the best friend in the world.

I'll never forget what you're doing for me as long as I live!"

"No," said Jennie, "I don't think you're the kind that will," and she smiled up at him with her frank, boyish smile.

"I think it would be wiser to let me tell Ruth the whole story before you come," she said as they stood at the door. "You see I'm sure her father will put off saying anything as long as possible. Poor soul! He will dread so to give her pain. And the more quickly you act, the better. And if she knows all about it before you come, there is so much gained."

"I leave it entirely to you. There is no one in whose judgment I have more confidence, believe me."

Ruth was alone in the same little room when he came next day. She had utterly given way when she first saw him and had broken down and cried with her head on his shoulder, his strong arms about her. But after a few minutes she had regained her self-control.

"I didn't mean to make such a little fool of myself. But don't think I am crying from anything but pure rage. You ought to have seen me when Jennie told me! I nearly frightened her, and she's known me and my temper for years. To think that it is Tom that accuses you! Ralph doesn't count. He thinks whatever Tom thinks. I wouldn't have believed it of him. And then his telling our secret to father. Of course he knew it was a secret. He couldn't

help knowing it. Now there's only one thing to be done. Jennie agrees with me, and she's the wisest woman I know. I don't want to tell you until I have all the plan arranged in my mind. I'll write you to-night. And you must do exactly as I tell you. Everything depends upon it. And father will be the first to acknowledge that he has been unjust. Poor man! He was so unhappy last night. But even I couldn't get a thing out of him.

“ I *must* go now. I have an engagement I simply must keep. You'll have my letter the first thing in the morning. Promise me that you'll do exactly as I tell you.”

“ But why all this mystery? ”

“ Oh, never mind that. One would think you didn't trust me. But you promise? ”

“ Surely, sweetheart.”

For a short moment he held her again in his arms. Then he took her out to the waiting automobile.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW YORK was in the first throes of the dance craze. Dancing had become more than a "rage," it was an epidemic. All the world and his wife, irrespective of age or size, danced morning, noon and night; weekdays and Sundays. Restaurants and cafés that had been on the point of closing their doors for lack of trade hired a professional dancer, or dancers, advertised their tango teas, and sat complacently down to gather in the golden harvest with both hands.

Teachers of the new art sprang up overnight on every block. And still New York danced. Physicians uttered cautious words of warning against excess. The church fulminated against Sabbath-breaking. And still New York danced.

Presently the craze spread from Fifth Avenue and Broadway to the dance halls of the lower East Side. The underworld took it up, and danced as hard as their betters. It was not long before some of the denizens of the lowest of these dives asked themselves why they too should not glean after the reapers further uptown. Nimble feet and quick wits were all that were required in the way of testimonials.

It was the afternoon of the day of the long-

heralded Stuyvesant Ball at which the young heiress was to make her bow to society. For weeks paragraphs expatiating on the splendor of the coming entertainment went the rounds of the society columns. There were hints of a closely guarded surprise to be disclosed only on that eventful evening. This latter item gave much amusement to three people; that is to say, to Ruth, to Jennie Bruce, who was now completely in her confidence, and to Mr. William Reid, late secretary to the host of the occasion.

As a matter of fact, the "surprise" at which the papers hinted was a much simpler one than the real thing planned by the conspirators. Ruth had decided to engage the dancer Henri, of the Café Terpsichore, to give an exhibition with his partner for the entertainment of her guests. The only cloud on her anticipated pleasure was the reluctance of her sweetheart to accept the invitation which he could not help but know had been most unwillingly given by her father.

Mr. Stuyvesant was still unconvinced of Reid's guilt in the matter of the forged check, but he was by no means satisfied that Burnett's other charge was not well founded. It was not that, all things being equal, he would not have welcomed as a son-in-law this manly young fellow who had already made himself respected and liked by his associates, Ralph and Tom excepted, but that he cordially detested any-

thing that savored of the underhanded. And if Reid had been making love to his daughter—and he began to believe that he had been—he had not “played the game according to the rules.”

All of which was very true, and it must be admitted that Mr. Stuyvesant was not without justification. Only he did not know certain circumstances, which would have greatly modified his judgment.

So, although it hurt his pride, Reid was to be one of the guests. Both Ralph and Burnett had been informed of his coming by Ruth herself. And she had given them both to understand that, whatever ill feeling existed between them and her guest over business affairs, she would personally resent any lack of courtesy shown to him on the night of her ball.

Greatly against her inclination Ruth had consented to go down to the Café Terpsichore the latter part of the afternoon to see Henri try out the dance he was to do for her that evening. At the last moment she would have gladly sent word that she could not come. She could, with perfect truth, have pleaded fatigue as an excuse. She had been under an unusual strain the past few days, what with her worry over her lover's troubles, her anxiety about her father, who did not seem at all himself, and a natural nervousness connected with her first great entertainment and the effect that the revealing of her secret would have upon all concerned.

But she had arranged the day before that Anna and Jennie Bruce should go down with her and that Bill should be there to meet them. In the end it seemed less trouble to go than to change her arrangements.

And so it happened that, all unconsciously, she prepared the way for the first of that series of calamities which was to come near to shattering the happiness of her whole life!

For Anna had happened to mention to Ralph that she was going with Ruth to see Henri dance. Ralph, in turn, had told Burnett. And Burnett's quick brain had seen in this conjunction of circumstances an opportunity to strike his enemy too good to be neglected. Ralph, as usual, had been his ready tool.

It was still a little early for the habitués of the Café Terpsichore, although a few tables here and there were already occupied by those who came to watch the dancing, when a man whose general appearance and manner suggested that he would have been more at home in a less pretentious resort swaggered in and seated himself at a table.

His air was at once furtive and defiant. It said as plainly as words: you may think I have no right here; well, I challenge you to prove that I have not. His eyes were bold and keen, the eyes of a man who knows how to make himself obeyed through fear. And yet he was no stranger to fear himself. Always he was on his guard. His face showed both humor

and cunning. He was well and strongly made and his fine forehead, surmounted by a shock of curly hair, indicated more than average intelligence.

He was badly dressed. His clothes were not exactly loud in pattern and not exactly ill cut. They suggested, rather, the provincial tailor—with ideas! Every article of his apparel shrieked of newness. His hat, his gloves, his shoes, his topcoat, his suit—all had the look of never having been worn before.

He had already been seated at the table some minutes and still none of the waiters showed any sign of being aware of his presence. He showed his appreciation of their motives in a broad grin. When their impudent neglect no longer amused him, he beckoned the nearest with an imperious gesture.

“Somethin’ to drink and somethin’ to eat.”

“Beer and sandwiches?” questioned the waiter with thinly veiled contempt.

“No. Champagne and duck.”

Instantly the waiter’s manner changed. He bustled and fussed over the table for a moment and then hurried off.

The man drew a folded newspaper from his pocket and with manifest amusement read and reread a marked paragraph. At this moment Ralph and Tom, obsequiously received by the head waiter, were conducted to a large table in the center of the room. The man beckoned to another waiter.

"I've heard out West about these here tango dances. They say you've got the best one in town."

"Oh, yes, sir. We have Henri."

"Trot him out. Show him to me."

"He is not here yet. He will come later."

"Oh! I see by this paper that he dances to-night at the Stuyvesant Ball."

"Henri dances at all the smart balls, sir."

"Well, when he comes in, show him to me. I want to see him, so that I can tell the folks at home."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like your scheme, Tom; I don't see what good it will do," Ralph was saying.

"Can't you understand? When things are coming your way, play big. If we haven't convinced your father that Reid's a crook, at least we've queered him. Now, kill him with Ruth. Have you the invitation?"

"Here." He held out an envelope containing the card.

"'Mr. William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant requests the honor of Miss Muriel Barresford's presence,' etc., etc., etc.," read Burnett in a low tone. "Good! The 'Miss Muriel Barresford' is another example of your penmanship, I suppose."

Ralph nodded. "Copied it from a note of Reid's. But I don't see how that is going to do the trick."

"You leave the details to me—and Grace.

She hates him almost as much as we do. Here she is!"

Grace swept toward them, beautifully dressed, as always. Her furs—the sables which had been Ralph's undoing—were magnificent. She was evidently in one of her worst moods. Her face was hard, and there was a glitter in her eyes which to those weatherwise in "Miss Barresford's" moods suggested the coming storm. Her greeting to the two men who rose to receive her bordered on the curt.

Her appearance greatly interested the man at the other table.

"Waiter!"

"Yes, sir."

"Who's the dame?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Some dame! Who's the poppa?"

"Poppa, poppa? I do not understand, sir."

"The little guy that's eatin' her alive with his eyes."

"Mr. Ralph Stuyvesant, sir."

"Oh! And the big guy she's stuck on?"

"Mr. Thomas Burnett."

"Well, I'm here," said Grace sullenly. "What more do you want?"

At that moment a medium-sized, dapper young man, with a pale, puffy face and mean, shifting, ratlike eyes, came into the room. His black hair was thick with pomade. His clothes were in the extreme of fashion. He reeked of perfume.

"Mr. Stuyvesant," he said, making a low bow to Ralph.

"Hello, Henri. Burnett, this is Henri, the dancer. You dance at my father's to-night, I believe?"

"Yes, Mr. Stuyvesant. Miss Stuyvesant is my very best pupil."

"Good. Mrs. Stuyvesant says she is learning."

"Mrs. Stuyvesant is also a fine dancer."

He gave a little side glance at Grace, and then looked again at Ralph.

"Mrs. Stuyvesant and Miss Stuyvesant are coming here to see me try out my new dance. They should be here shortly."

"Yes, I know," said Ralph coldly.

With another bow Henri disappeared through a door at the far end of the restaurant.

"The little shrimp!" said Grace angrily. "He was trying to warn you. You'd better go."

"I'll be up for dinner, dear," he said as he rose.

"We'll dine early," she said coldly. "I shall want to lie down for an hour or two."

"Where's the invitation?" she asked abruptly, holding out her hand to Burnett, who handed it to her in silence.

"The honor of Miss Muriel Barresford's presence," she read with a curling lip. "I'll honor them all right. I'll wake up their party. You should see my gown!"

“Now listen,” said Burnett, covering her hand with his, “I’m going. Reid is coming here to meet Ruth. Let her find you two having a confidential chat. You know what I mean.”

“I suppose you love me—just as much as ever.”

“Of course, my dear! You don’t doubt that.”

“No, I don’t doubt that you love me as much as ever—since you have never really loved me at all!”

So! She was in one of her old jealous moods.

“I see. You’re not going to help me, after all.”

“Oh, I’ll help you—to the limit! But not because I believe you love me, but because I hate her. I hate her for being rich, for being charming, for being good! For having everything I haven’t! For being everything I’m not! But I hate her most of all because of you! She’s made me suffer. She shall have her turn at suffering. Trust me!”

She spoke in a tone of intense bitterness. Burnett stood looking down at her. For the moment there was not even a trace of beauty in her face. She looked haggard and worn, even old. Then, with one of those sudden transitions so characteristic of her, all light and color and softness came back. Her eyes lost their hard glitter. Her lovely mouth curved

in an enchanting smile. She gave her face a little caressing pat with her handkerchief.

“Order me a brandy and soda,” she said. “I hate it, but it’s in character. How do I look?”

Burnett laughed aloud in sheer relief, and turned to give the waiter the order.

“I won’t tell you,” he smiled. “You don’t deserve it!”

As he was going out he met Henri returning.

“Miss Barresford, over at the table yonder, wants to speak to you, I think.”

“Listen, Henri,” said Grace imperiously as Henri took Ralph’s chair, “if you do as I tell you there’s a hundred dollars in your pocket.” And she leaned over and began talking to him in so low a tone that the waiter gave up trying to overhear her.

The man at the other table had been giving a whole-souled attention to his repast, which did not prevent him, however, from seeing everything that went on about him.

“Waiter!” he called.

“Yes, sir.”

“Is that your Henry?”

“Yes, sir; that is Monsieur Henri.”

“Go over and tell him I want to see him.”

The waiter hesitated a moment, but his customer gave him a look that assisted him greatly to make up his mind.

“The gentleman—over there—wants to see you, Monsieur,” he whispered in Henri’s ear.

“Tell him I’m engaged,” said Henri without looking up.

“Monsieur Henri is engaged, sir.”

“Go back and tell him he’ll be worse engaged if he don’t come, and come quick. Well?”

The waiter hurried away.

“The gentleman says it’s most urgent.”

“Damn his impertinence! Watch me settle him,” swaggered Henri.

He crossed swiftly to the other table.

“Well?”

“Sit down, you rat!” The man at the other table didn’t even look up.

With a gasp of amazement and fear, Henri obeyed.

“Joe Schmidt! Dutch Joe!”

“I see you ain’t forgotten me,” said Joe with a grin.

“I guess nobody wise will ever forget Dutch Joe or Kid Wallace. Guys like you two ain’t forgot!”

“That’s one thing I come East for. Where is the kid?”

“Dropped out. Nobody knows.”

“Who let you off the Bowery?” asked Joe after a moment.

“Ain’t this a free country? Ain’t a fellow got a right to rise in the world?”

The dancer was beginning to recover his nerve a little.

“Huh! Quitting pickin’ pockets, eh? Where’s all the girls that you used to have workin’ for you?”

“Cut it, Dutch, cut it! Somebody might hear you. I reformed.”

“Dago Mike reformed!” laughed Joe. “That’s a good one!”

“I’m givin’ it to you straight,” said the dancer eagerly. “You know me. I was always some dancer. Used to cop my girls that way, in the dance halls on the East Side and on Fourteenth Street, and put ’em to work for me. Nothin’ much in it, and I had to work the Subway and the crosstown cars on the side. Too hard! I got wise. Slicked down my hair, polished my finger nails and moved uptown. Oh, I ain’t the only one. Say, I’ll take you to any popular *dansant* place in New York, and if I can’t show you some guy like me out of the East Side dance halls with a prison record in any one of ’em, I’ll buy the swellest feed in town!”

He talked rapidly with a nervous eagerness which betrayed his deadly fear of the man opposite him. Dutch Joe dropped his eyes to hide the amusement that gleamed in them. He had the catlike love of playing with his victim.

“So! You’ve quit the old game for good?”

“Sure. What’s the use? Why, croakin’ a guy in New York was never worth more than fifty iron men. Now, the swellest chicken on the Avenoo, *débutant* stuff, pays me twenty-

five dollars an hour just to hug her. I tell you it's great! Henri, the Tango King—that's me!"

"Twenty-five an hour!" exclaimed Joe in pretended incredulity. "Forget it!"

"No, on the level. Why, I get two hundred bucks to-night just for dancing at a ball. A swell little dame, too, Miss Stuyvesant. Her old man ain't nothin'. Only the boss of Stuyvesant and Company. Got all the money in the world this side of Hoboken. And the house they live in! And the silver stuff in the dinin'-room! And the jewels the little dame's got!"

Words failed him.

"Swell, is it?"

"Swell! Say, Bo, it's a plush-hung morgue!"

"Yes," said Joe carelessly, "I seen in the paper you was dancin' there. That's why I come to pay my respec's this afternoon."

"W-w-what is it?" stammered the dancer. All his fear had returned.

"I got a job for you."

"Nothin' doin', Dutch, nothin' doin'! I tell you I've quit all that."

Joe gave him a contemptuous look.

"You meet me to-night at 8:15 in front of Childs' on Fourteenth Street," he said savagely.

"No! I——"

Joe bared his teeth in a grin. His thin hand, with its long, nervous fingers, opened and closed

with a catlike movement. He spoke in a low, smooth tone, but to the little wretch opposite him every word was charged with deadly meaning.

“Some stool tipped off the bulls on Kid Wallace and got him a six-year stretch. I never was *sure* it was you—that’s why you’re still alive. But I guess if you want to keep in good health you’d better be there. Make it eight o’clock, that’ll be better. You get me?”

“I’ll be there,” said Dago Mike in a choked voice.

“Here, you!” called Joe, as he rose briskly from his chair.

The waiter came hurrying forward.

“This is Henry’s party. He’ll pay the check.”

Henri nodded sullenly.

“Remember, eight o’clock,” he said sharply. “S’long!”

As he went out of the café with his long stride, he grinned impudently at Grace as he passed her table, chuckling to himself at the furious glance she gave him in return.

“Has Miss Stuyvesant come?” asked a well-remembered voice back of her. She sprang from her chair, her face beaming a welcome.

“Why, Bill Reid!” And then, in pretty confusion: “I *beg* your pardon, Mr. Reid. How are you? Oh, I’m *so* glad to see you!”

“How—how are you?” His blank look be-

trayed the fact that he hadn't the remotest recollection of ever having seen her before.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Reid?"

"Sorry to be so stupid! But——"

"Think a minute," she insisted archly. "You last saw me at New Haven."

"Why, you're not——"

"Exactly! Grace Andrews. Won't you sit down a moment?"

"Thanks, but I'm looking for some friends," he said stiffly.

There could be only one explanation of Tom Andrews' daughter being so richly dressed. He thought of her honest old father and mother with a sudden pity.

"There's no one here yet," she assured him. "I've just been in the other rooms. Can't you sit down just a minute? You don't know how you make me think of—of home!" Her voice broke a little on the word. "Oh, I know the thought in your mind."

At once his heart was touched. Heavens! Who was he that he should judge her? Surely, of all the men in the world, he was the last that should condemn anyone on appearances! He had suffered enough from that sort of judgment himself!

"Why, certainly. I shall be glad to."

He took the nearest chair, which happened to place him with his back to the door.

She had been chatting on aimlessly to gain time for a minute or two, while he listened with

the polite attention which he always gave to every woman, when she saw Ruth, Anna and Jennie Bruce coming in with Tom.

“Look at Mr. Reid with that perfectly stunning woman!” exclaimed Anna. “Who is she?”

That was Grace’s cue. To Reid’s astonishment she suddenly leaned across the table and seized his hand.

“You’ve been so dear!”—she raised her voice so that every word could be distinctly heard all over the room—“I’m so grateful for all you have done for me—have given me! You’ve always been such a true friend!”

Had she suddenly lost her mind—or had he? And then he heard Burnett’s voice say:

“Who is she? Why, she’s one of the most notorious women in New York!”

He sprang to his feet in confusion and amazement, to meet Ruth’s blazing eyes.

“Ruth! Ruth, my darling! It’s all some hideous mistake!”

But with her head proudly high, without so much as a glance in his direction, Ruth swept out of the door, followed by her friends.

CHAPTER XV

It was nearly midnight. Outside the Stuyvesant house, blazing with light, Dutch Joe, clad in a pair of black dress trousers, a sweater under a shabby brown coat and a greasy old cap well pulled down over his eyes, stamped his feet and cursed under his breath. From time to time he shifted a small parcel which he carried from one arm to the other in order to rub his cold hands. For professional reasons he was not wearing his overcoat, not wishing to be encumbered with any useless clothing.

He had already been there some time, varying the monotony of his vigil with strolls around the block whenever a watchman or a policeman appeared in the distance.

“I wish the hell I knew what time it was! Careless of me to leave me diamond-studded watch on the pianny. It can’t be that that damned little skunk—— No fear! I put the fear of God too well in his heart, down there in front of Childs’.”

From which muttered observation it was to be inferred that “Monsieur Henri” had been faithful to his appointment.

Inside the house they had just finished doing the “Paul Jones.” Ruth, quite breathless, was fanning herself, in one of the great windows of

the library—the whole lower floor, with the exception of the dining-room, had been turned into one huge ballroom—when Jennie Bruce, supporting herself, figuratively speaking, on the arm of little Jimmie Jones, joined her and her partner.

“Having a good time, Jennie?”

“Gorgeous! I’ve lost seven ounces. I weighed myself in your bathroom, half an hour ago. If I don’t eat any supper I’ll go home a pound lighter.”

“But you’re going to eat supper.”

“Yes, I know I am.”

“How are you, Jimmy?”

“G-g-g-great!”

“Yes, he’s having a good time,” confirmed Jennie. “Only his mind is on his feet, and he can’t talk.”

“ ’Tis—’tis—’tisn’t my m-m-mind on m-m-my f-feet that hurts. You s-s-stepped on them.”

On the other side of the room Ralph and Burnett met for the first time during the evening.

“What did she do this afternoon?” asked Ralph hurriedly.

“She was furious! Haven’t you noticed she hasn’t danced with him once?”

“Good!”

“Beg pardon, Miss Stuyvesant,” said a servant at Ruth’s elbow, “but Monsieur Henri, the dancer, would like to speak with you.”

“Where is he?”

“He is waiting, Miss, at the door. He didn’t

want to go to the cloakroom until he had seen you.”

“Say that I will be with him in a minute.”

“I have to run away,” she explained to Jennie. “Henri has just come. He wants to see me about something. No doubt the floor is not properly waxed. These dancers are so spoiled!”

She found Henri still bundled up in a wonderful fur coat, his hat crushed under his arm. As she looked at him, she thought she had never seen him so pasty and unhealthy looking.

He explained, with many protestations of grief over having to disappoint her, that his partner had met with a sudden accident which would render it out of the question to give the dance he had composed in her honor. Of course, he himself was entirely at her service, but at this hour it would be impossible to find another professional disengaged. If Miss Stuyvesant herself, or if any of her guests, would so far honor him——

“Why,” said Ruth thoughtfully, “I think it might be managed. I’m very sorry about your partner. She’s such a pretty little thing. If you will come into the ballroom as soon as you are ready, I will see what I can do.”

For a moment it seemed as if Henri hesitated. And then through an open window, loud enough to be heard above the orchestra, came an automobile horn.

“Toot, toot, toot! Toot, toot! Toot, toot, toot! Toot, toot!”

“What *can* that chauffeur be doing?” laughed Ruth. “It sounds almost like a signal.”

She glanced smilingly at Henri. He was completely transformed. His face, just now so heavy, almost sullen, was wreathed in smiles. His dull little eyes sparkled with pleasure.

“Certainly, Miss Stuyvesant. I will not detain you a moment. With your permission, I will go and take off my things.” And with a hasty bow he almost ran toward the dressing-room.

As Ruth came back to the ballroom, Reid came over to her.

“May I have the next dance, Ruth?”

She looked at him without replying.

“Ruth,” he went on in a low voice, “you, above all others, must not misjudge me. I will explain everything if you will only give me a moment.”

“What is there to explain? You were with that woman.”

“She asked me to sit down for a moment. I did so, because I was so surprised at seeing her. I don’t wonder you didn’t recognize her. I didn’t myself. She had to *tell* me who she was. And when she began that tirade——”

“I am ready whenever Miss Stuyvesant is,” said Henri’s voice at his side.

“One moment, Henri. I will let you know,” said Ruth sharply.

“I recognize her! I never saw her before in my life, surely. Who is she, then?”

“Yes, you saw her and talked with her once that I know of. Since this afternoon I’ve found out that she now calls herself——”

“Miss Muriel Barresford,” announced the butler.

“Good God!” said Reid sharply. His face became crimson and then the color faded out, leaving him deathly white.

“This is *beyond* endurance!” said Ruth in a low tone.

For the moment all the light laughter and the sound of gay voices stopped. As it chanced, the orchestra, too, was silent. From across the great room Ruth could see her father wearing a puzzled frown. Grace, alone of all that company, was perfectly self-possessed.

She advanced slowly into the room with the soft glide of a panther. For a moment she stood quite still, a smile, faintly mocking, just touching her too crimson lips. Her wonderful eyes, to-night heavily penciled, had a look of almost childish inquiry, as if she were wondering that no one came forward to greet her. Even Burnett was stirred. His eyes glittered and he drew a deep breath. With a groan Ralph Stuyvesant drew back into the embrasure of the window, where behind the heavy velvet curtains he mopped great beads of sweat from his forehead. Never had she been so transcendently beautiful. But it was the beauty of the

damned. She might have posed as Evil Incarnate.

Her body was draped in some gossamery tissue of crimson and gold that showed every curve and line of her perfect figure and emphasized the warm whiteness of her naked arms, and neck and breast. Through the strands of her dusky hair she had braided the rope of pearls Ralph had given her. She wore no jewels on her hands and arms; but beneath the skirt of her robe one could see her sandaled feet loaded with rings.

Simultaneously Ruth and her father made a step forward. But Henri was too quick for them. He darted to Grace's side, and made her a sweeping bow.

"Mademoiselle, Miss Stuyvesant has instructed me to choose a partner for my exhibition dance. Will *you* do me the honor?" His voice was shrill with excitement.

"But, surely——"

"Let them dance it out," said Reid in Ruth's ear. "Then we'll get her out quietly. No one'll know that she wasn't paid to come."

At a signal from Henri the orchestra struck up, and the dance began. Nothing to compare with it had ever been seen, even on the stage, in New York. For a long time, unknown to both Burnett and Ralph, Grace had been taking lessons from Henri. But to-night it was she who was the teacher and Henri the pupil. Had she not completely dominated him, he would

never have dared go to such extremes of audacity. At length, after one particularly lascivious posture, Mr. Stuyvesant's voice rang out:

"One moment, please."

The dancers paused.

"I think this dance has gone far enough."

"Certainly, Mr. Stuyvesant, as you wish," said Henri humbly. And he added: "I am sorry."

But Grace was not so easily cowed.

"Oh, if you are shocked at anything so mild——"

"You and your partner will leave quietly, and at once." Mr. Stuyvesant continued to address himself to Henri.

"She's not my partner, Mr. Stuyvesant; I'm only a professional. You shouldn't blame me for what a lady makes me do," whined Henri.

"A lady!"

"I am Miss Barresford, Mr. Stuyvesant, one of your daughter's guests," said Grace haughtily.

"Father," said Ruth, coming forward to his side, "there is evidently some mistake. Miss Barresford's name was not on the list of those to be invited."

As she met Grace's eye, the thought shot through her mind: "He is right, he is right! I have seen this woman before. But where—and when?"

"In that case, Miss Barresford, I must ask

you to leave my house at once," said Mr. Stuyvesant coldly.

Grace drew herself up to her full height.

"Certainly, Mr. Stuyvesant. I do not care to stay where I am not wanted. But I most certainly refuse to be put in the position of one who has forced herself into your house."

From her breast she drew the card she had received from Burnett. "Here is my invitation. It was handed to me by Mr. William Reid. He is a dear friend of mine, as well as of your daughter's."

Mechanically he took the card from her hand and scrutinized it carefully through his glasses. There was a moment of intense silence, broken only by the snapping of the sticks of Ruth's fan.

"Mr. Reid gave you this?"

"Yes, this afternoon."

"That statement is absolutely false," said Reid, coming forward.

"Yes?" Grace gave a little mocking laugh. "I appeal to Miss Stuyvesant. *She* saw us together this afternoon. When Mr. Reid gave me the invitation, I naturally presumed that it came from her."

"Call Miss Barresford's car," said Mr. Stuyvesant, turning to a servant who stood near.

"Very well! It required considerable urging to induce me to come to such a dull party; I shall leave without regret. Good night." And, with a slight inclination of the head, she swept from the room.

“Mr. Stuyvesant, I can only give you my word of honor that I had nothing to do with that woman’s coming here.”

“And yet, the name is in your writing. I prefer to say ‘good night’ to you also, Mr. Reid.”

“Father——”

“One moment, Ruth.”

Reid came closer to the old gentleman, and spoke so low that not even Ruth could hear what he said.

“Find who wrote Miss Barresford’s name on that card, and you will know who wrote *your* name on that check.”

“That may be. But until I do——”

“Father, I believe Mr. Reid absolutely. Tonight is *my* night. This is *my* ball. He is *my* guest. I do not wish him to go.”

“Supper is served, Miss Stuyvesant,” announced the butler.

Immediately the constraint which had rested on all of the guests from the time of Grace’s sensational arrival until her departure vanished. Once more they broke up into little chattering groups, slowly moving toward the supper-room.

“Won’t you take me in to supper, Will?” asked Ruth, her hand on Reid’s arm. “Father, won’t you come in with us?”

“Not for a moment, my dear; I have something I want to attend to first.”

Mr. Stuyvesant waited until the big room was

empty—he was still in the library, where Grace's indecent dance had taken place—and he was quite alone. Then he beckoned to one of the footmen.

“Where is Mr. Burnett?”

“He's at supper, sir.”

“Tell him I wish to see him in my study at once.”

“Your study is being used as a coatroom, you know, sir.”

“So it is. I forgot for the moment. Then close those doors and have Mr. Burnett come here.”

“Yes, sir.”

The man started to close the big folding doors, pulling the heavy curtains over them at the same time. Mr. Stuyvesant stopped suddenly in his walk.

“One moment. Have Mr. Burnett wait for me here until I have finished at the telephone.”

“Very good, sir.”

He left the room by one of the side doors and was followed after a moment by the footman, who had hardly disappeared before Henri came sneaking in, closing the door stealthily behind him. A swift glance around assured him that the room was empty. Keeping his eyes toward the double doors, he backed swiftly to one of the windows that gave on a side street, and opening it, gave a signal with his handkerchief. Without looking to see if his signal was observed, leaving the window still open, he began

the steps of an intricate dance, whistling softly to himself.

He kept on without losing a beat, contenting himself with a curt nod by way of salutation when Dutch Joe, still carefully carrying his bundle under his arm, stepped in at the window, closing it cautiously behind him.

"You took your time," snarled Joe. "I'm 'most froze!"

"Cheese, Joe, for God's sake!"

"Ah, shut up! You make me tired. You ain't got nothin' to lose. What you think you are—a damned top?"

Henri went on with his dance. But he had stopped his whistling.

"Got your waiter's outfit?"

"Sure."

Going over to the fireplace, Joe ripped the paper from his bundle and threw it into the grate, and laid a coat and waistcoat, with a dicky and collar on a chair.

"Where's the safe?"

"The wall safe, where they keep the jewels and stuff, is in the old guy's room on the next floor. Right, front."

"Good! That's where I want to get. Now, duck, and see if the way's clear while I get into these duds."

"Very well. Let him know that I'm waiting," came Mr. Stuyvesant's voice from the next room.

With a swift movement, Dutch Joe gathered

up his belongings and made for the embrasure of the window, closing the curtains behind him. Henri went on with his dance.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Mr. Stuyvesant.

“I beg your pardon, sir. I saw that the room was empty and I was just practicing some steps.”

With a bow he left the room, closing the door behind him.

Mr. Stuyvesant was too excited and angry to recall that he had ordered the dancer to leave the house. Taking a paper from his pocket, he put it on the mantelshelf and began to pace restlessly up and down the room, occasionally glancing impatiently at the door. After a moment or two he picked up the paper again and restored it to his pocket, just as Burnett came in through the folding doors.

“You wished to see me, sir?”

For a second Mr. Stuyvesant was incapable of speech. His face became scarlet. He advanced to Burnett with clenched fist, his mouth working painfully.

“You—you damned thief! What have you done with the two million dollars you stole from Stuyvesant and Company?”

“Stolen? Are you mad? Oh, I won’t talk to you!” said Burnett contemptuously.

“You won’t! Then you’ll talk to Bull Anderson. He’s on his way here now to get you. You’re a defaulter and a thief. You’ve robbed

me. Looted my bank of two million dollars, and by God! you're going to pay for it!"

"On what do you base such ridiculous charges?"

"On this!" He held out the paper which he took from his pocket. "On this record in your own writing which I found this afternoon by forcing open your desk, after I found that securities were missing from the vault. While this dance has been going on, I have been going over this list in my room. I had intended waiting to arrest you until to-morrow, but Anderson won't hear of it."

"All right," said Burnett coolly. "You have me."

"Then you don't deny it."

"Certainly not. But you'd better call in Ralph, so that he can have time to pack his bag to take that little trip to the Tombs with me."

"What!"

"He's in just as deep as I am. A little deeper, I should say. I haven't forged any checks!"

"Good God! My boy, too. Then he's lied to me."

"Of course he has. Looks different, doesn't it?" asked Burnett with a sneer.

"No!"

He drew himself up to his full height and looked Burnett squarely in the face, with a sort of noble dignity. For a moment the younger man paid him the tribute of real admiration.

"You know what Stuyvesant and Company

has always stood for. It's the one big bank in New York that has always taken any account, however small. Thousands of our depositors are laborers, clerks, widows and working girls. They've come to us because our name stood for strength and honesty. And my name is going to stand for that to the end. To protect these poor people I'll beggar myself to the last dollar I have in the world. Not one of them shall lose a penny. And I'll send you away, and my son away, too."

"Then you're a fool! No banker is like that."

"Every banker ought to be like that!"

"Now listen to me a minute, Mr. Stuyvesant. It won't wreck you if it doesn't get out. Just keep quiet. Everything will go on just the same. Your name will be saved. But if you disgrace Ralph and me—— Remember he's your son and I'm considered as good as your son-in-law."

"What! You have the effrontery to speak of marrying my daughter!"

"I love her."

"You——!"

"Give me that paper. We'll burn it there in the fire."

"No! You're going to jail, I tell you."

"And I tell *you*, by God, I'm not! I'm going to destroy that paper. Damn you, give it to me!"

With a spring he had the banker by the throat, while with his disengaged hand he tried to snatch the incriminating paper. But Mr.

Stuyvesant had been too powerful a man in his day not to have considerable strength left. Still clutching the paper firmly, he struggled to free himself from Burnett's grasp. Not a sound was uttered by either of them. From the hall outside could be heard the music of the band playing an air from a popular comic opera, and the sound of singing from the supper-room. To and fro, to and fro they swayed with a grotesque effect of keeping time to the music.

At length the banker abandoned the attempt to free himself from his enemy's clutch. With his free hand he reached for his pocket and pulled out a pistol. By this time the struggle had carried them over near the window behind which Joe was still concealed.

"Oh, you would, would you!"

Burnett tightened the hold on his throat and made a grab to get possession of the pistol. Mr. Stuyvesant made one last supreme effort to wrench himself free, fighting all the time to raise his pistol hand, while Burnett, who held him firmly by the wrist, was straining every effort to keep it down. Suddenly the pistol went off.

With a muffled cry, Burnett instantly let go his hold. Mr. Stuyvesant stood swaying on his feet for a moment. Then, with a groan, he crumpled up on the floor.

Burnett stood still, listening, while the orchestra played on.

"Thank God, they didn't hear it!"

He bent swiftly over the body, his head on the fallen man's chest, listening for the beating of his heart. He sprang to his feet.

"Dead! Good God! I didn't mean to. Good God!"

Listening again to assure himself that no one was coming, he half carried, half dragged the body over to a large armchair which he wheeled in front of the fire. Then he went back and got the pistol, which he laid on the floor beside the chair, so that it might look as if it had dropped from the dead man's hand. Yes, that was a good idea. To have it look as if it had dropped from his hand. His hand! Good God, the paper!

He rushed round to the other side of the big chair. But it wasn't in the other hand. He tried to think. Which hand had it been in while they were wrestling over there. Yes, it had been in the right hand. The dead man must have managed somehow to return it to his pocket.

Had he looked over at the window now he would have seen a long, thin hand dart out from behind the curtain and seize upon the crumpled paper which Mr. Stuyvesant had dropped as he fell.

He was in the midst of searching the dead man's pockets when Dutch Joe, making a long arm, put his finger on the electric button and turned out the lights. Only the glow from the fire relieved the darkness of the room. This

was too much for even Burnett's iron nerves. He gave a sort of sobbing cry, and backed away from the dead man, lounging limply in the big chair. For a moment he leaned against the wall, shaking from head to foot. Suddenly his rolling eye caught sight of the bellying curtain still partly drawn in front of the window, which Joe had not taken the time to close in his hurried exit.

“My God! Who's there?”

He rushed over to the open window. But all he saw was the figure of a man scurrying across the street, stooping as he ran.

CHAPTER XVI

As he stood there, fairly petrified with terror, the folding doors were opened and Reid's big figure stood at the entrance, standing out clearly against the background of the brilliantly lighted rooms. Surprised at the darkness, he stood hesitating a moment until his eye happened to fall on the figure of the dead man in the chair which was partly turned toward him.

"Mr. Stuyvesant?"

Receiving no answer, he came slowly into the room down toward the fireplace.

"Mr. Stuyvesant?" he said again. "Poor old fellow! He must have fallen asleep."

As he leaned over and laid his hand gently on Mr. Stuyvesant's shoulder, Burnett, sneaking along the wall, gained the open door—and safety.

"Mr. Stuyvesant!" As he gave him a gentle little shake, the body lurched forward.

"Mr. Stuyvesant! What's the matter?"

Suddenly he started back. "Oh, my God!"

He rushed across the room. As he reached the door he met Burnett, just coming in.

"What's the matter?" asked Burnett coolly.

"Why — why — I — Mr. Stuyvesant — over there."

“What’s the matter with him? Why are you so excited?”

“I—found him—over there—dead!”

“Dead! Great God!”

Switching on the light, Burnett took one look at the body, and then turned on Reid.

“How long were *you* here? Help! Help here!”

“Get help,” he said excitedly to the footman who came hurrying in. “Something has happened to Mr. Stuyvesant. Get a doctor!”

From the other rooms came the sound of hurrying feet and a confused murmur of voices. One of the footmen threw open the doors, and in a crowd the guests came surging in. Already some of the women had begun to cry hysterically.

“I found him here——” began Reid.

“You *just* found him here?”

“Yes, the butler told me he was here in this room.”

“And you found him dead?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean——”

“Father! father!” came Ruth’s voice. She came rushing in, putting the people aside who tried to keep her back. She dropped on her knees beside the big chair.

“Father! Speak to me! Speak to me!”

“A doctor! For God’s sake get a doctor!” she cried, turning to Reid.

“I have a doctor. And let no one leave this

house," came a big bullying voice from the hallway.

It was "Bull" Anderson, the detective. He came into the room, a strangely incongruous figure in contrast to the brilliantly dressed women and the well-groomed men. He wore his hat pulled over his eyes and his coat collar was turned up. With him was a quiet-looking man with a capable face, carrying a small black bag. Without losing a minute, he crossed over to the chair by the fire and began to examine the body with the authoritative air of one who perfectly understood his business.

For a moment Ruth raised her head and looked at him, and then let it fall once more on her arms outstretched on the arm of the chair.

"Thank God it's you, Anderson. In my opinion, Mr. Stuyvesant has been murdered."

"Murdered!" Anderson, too, bent over the body.

"Shot dead," said the doctor briefly. "He couldn't by any possibility have done it himself."

Anderson turned sharply to two detectives who had followed him in.

"John, the window. Mike, the servants. Bring them in here. Bring everybody in here. Watch those doors. Put a man at the front door. And you," he said, turning to the butler, "you watch that door over there. Let no one leave this room. Burnett, 'phone headquarters.

Have them rush the reserves and detectives. And tell 'em to notify the Coroner."

"At once," said Burnett, hurrying toward the door.

"The windows are all closed and locked, Chief," said one of the detectives. On his way to the telephone Burnett smiled to himself. That had been an inspiration, to close and lock that window!

"Oh-ho!" said Anderson, addressing no one in particular. "An *inside* job!"

At this the silence which had held all the guests was broken. A murmur of voices, pitched in a subdued key, filled the room.

"Shut up, all of you!" thundered Anderson. "I'll do all the talking necessary."

He strode over to one of the windows, and, throwing it open, shouted to some men in an automobile in the street outside.

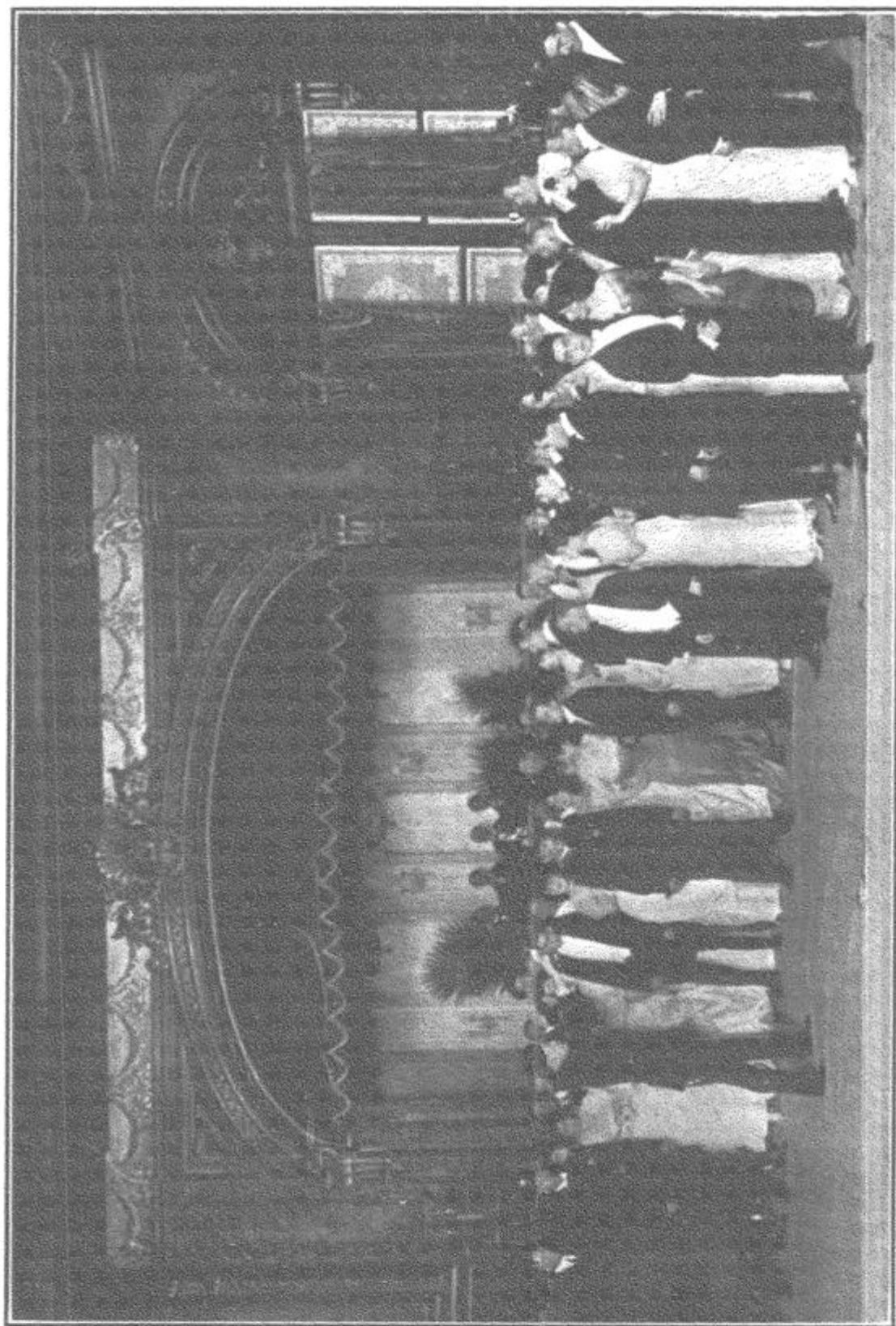
"Jim, pick up the peg post and the man on beat, and put 'em at the front and back of the house. Don't let a soul leave. And you others, come in here. Quick!"

He closed the window and returned to his station beside the fireplace. An elderly gentleman, one of Mr. Stuyvesant's friends, came forward with a little air of self-importance.

"Of course, Inspector, you must do your duty. But there is no necessity for keeping us all shut in here with—with the body."

"I'll be the judge of that."

"But I protest!"



"SHUT UP, ALL OF YOU!" THUNDERED ANDERSON. "I'LL DO ALL THE TALKING NECESSARY."

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Rudely pushing him aside, Anderson went over and stood looking down at Ruth's bowed head.

"I tell you, I protest. I protest strongly!"

"Shut up!"

"How dare you! I'd have you know that I'm Mr. Elliott Keen Van Courtlandt, and——"

"I don't give a damn who you are. There has been a foul murder done here. The police are in charge now. And I'd have you know, all of you, that I don't care for your silks and your satins, or your diamonds and your money. You all look alike to me. All I know is that one of you is a murderer. And I intend to find out which one of you it is, and take him, or her, no matter what his name is."

Half a dozen policemen in uniform came piling through the door in time to hear his last words.

"I'll have you broken for this outrage!" said Van Courtlandt fiercely.

"Will you? And I'll have you in the station house. Take him!"

A couple of policemen seized the unfortunate gentleman by the shoulder and dragged him from the room. One of the guests screamed hysterically.

"If any of you women begin screaming I'll take you, too!" yelled Anderson.

"Look, Chief, there's where he was shot," said one of the detectives, pointing over to the

window. "They must have dragged him over the floor to that chair."

"Here's the gun," said the doctor, holding it out. "I just found it on the floor nearly under the chair."

"Hum!" said Anderson, taking it from his hand, ".38 Colt Automatic. Freshly fired. That's it."

"Do you know this pistol, Miss Stuyvesant?" he asked in a gentler voice than he had used yet.

Ruth gave no sign of having heard him. Reid, who had all this time been kneeling by her, vainly trying to comfort her, whispered in her ear:

"Mr. Anderson is speaking to you, sweetheart. Better try to answer him."

"I don't know anything! My father! My father!"

"Did your father *have* a pistol?"

"Yes—no—I don't know. I don't care! What good can all this do now?"

"Your father has been murdered. We need your help to find who is guilty."

"I don't want to know. Will knowing bring him back to me?"

She raised her tear-stained face and looked about her, seeming to see the room full of people for the first time. With Reid's help she struggled to her feet.

"Get these people out!" She turned on Anderson fiercely. "Get them out, I say. Can't

I be left alone with my dead father? Get them out!"

"Hold on, young woman! You're not in charge here," he said, relapsing into his accustomed brutality.

"Don't you dare speak to her like that!" said Reid, facing him.

"I'll speak to her any way I choose, and to you any way I choose. Who are you and what have you to do with this affair?"

"I am Mr. Reid."

"Mr. Reid was my father's secretary," added Ruth.

"Then do *you* know this gun?"

"It's the one Mr. Stuyvesant kept in his desk."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"What makes you sure?"

"I bought it for him."

"So *you* bought the gun that he kept in his desk," commented the detective with sneering emphasis.

"What are you getting at?" demanded Reid savagely.

"I'm going to get at the murderer before I finish."

He wheeled on the frightened guests.

"Who heard the shot fired? Did you—or you—or you?"

He pointed from one to the other, but there was a general shaking of heads.

“The leader of the orchestra says that the music was playing, Chief, and the doors were shut,” said a policeman.

“Um! Who discovered the body?”

“I did,” said Reid.

“O-h-h, you again! How did *you* happen to discover it?”

“I was looking for Mr. Stuyvesant. The butler told me he was in here. I opened the doors, which someone had closed. The room was dark. I thought at first that he was asleep.”

“How did you see him, if the room was dark?”

“By the firelight.”

“Turn off those lights,” commanded Anderson.

One of the detectives immediately switched off the lights. A number of the women, forgetting their lesson, screamed again.

“Shut up, all of you! Now, Reid, rehearse what you did. Go back to the door, please, and open it just as you did.”

“The room was dark,” said Reid, speaking from the darkness at the doorway; “I opened the door and came in. I saw Mr. Stuyvesant sitting there and started down toward him. I——”

“One moment. Did you see or hear anything to lead you to believe that anyone else was in the room?”

“No, I did not.”

“Could anyone have passed you and gone out of the door?”

“I hardly think so.”

“Go on.”

“I spoke to Mr. Stuyvesant. He didn’t answer. I touched him. He was dead. I turned, hurried to this door to give the alarm and met Mr. Burnett.”

As he turned to illustrate his action, Burnett appeared in the doorway, returning from having sent his various telephone messages.

“And then,” said Burnett, interrupting, “I turned on the light and found Mr. Reid shaking from head to foot, and greatly excited!”

For the first time it dawned on Reid that suspicion was beginning to point toward him. Six months ago he would have scoffed at the idea of any innocent man being falsely accused of crime. He always discounted such stories when he read of them in the papers. Suddenly it came over him with a flash that it was not, after all, a great step from accusing a man of forgery to accusing him of murder.

Burnett had been his accuser in the first place. What if he should take it into his head to accuse him again? Or even mention that his late employer had demanded his resignation while he was under suspicion of another crime? True, Mr. Stuyvesant himself had professed to believe in his innocence. But Ralph and Burnett had not, or at least had pretended that they

had not. And now Mr. Stuyvesant was dead!

“How long were you in the room?”

“I can’t say. Not over an hour—I mean over a minute!” He corrected himself nervously. He looked up and met Burnett’s eye. He showed no signs of nervousness. He seemed perfectly unconcerned, and a faint smile played round his lips.

Upon Ruth, too, had dawned the idea of the way things were drifting. It roused her as nothing else could from her absorption in the death of her father. For the first time she wondered why Ralph had not come forward. He had been the gayest of the gay in the supper-room. But since she had come running at Burnett’s first call for help she had not seen him. But for the moment her chief concern was for Reid.

“I object to all this,” she said coldly. “I won’t have it, Mr. Anderson. My father is dead, and—and——” For a second she could not go on, the full realization of her loss sweeping over her afresh. “It isn’t as if you could bring him back!” she went on passionately. “You can’t do any good. Stop! I demand that you stop!”

“Miss Stuyvesant, I must again remind you that this is one time when you *don’t* direct the law,” Anderson answered her with just a suggestion of malice.

She made a little helpless gesture, and looked appealingly at Reid. Anderson caught the look,

and, if possible, looked more determined and grimmer than ever.

"When *you* entered, Mr. Burnett," he said smoothly, "did you notice anyone in the outside room?"

Burnett thought a minute.

"N-o-o, I—— Oh, yes. The dancing man, Henri."

"Is he here?"

"There he is." Burnett pointed to a cowering figure at the extreme end of the room.

"Come out here, you!"

But the terrified Henri did not move, except to try to hide his face with his arm.

Half a dozen strides brought the detective to his side. Pulling down the protecting arm, he peered into the frightened wretch's face. He gave a shrill laugh of amusement.

"Hel-lo! In the name of all that's wonderful, Dago Mike! Well, well, well! So you've turned dancer, eh? And French? Henri! Did you turn honest at the same time? Pah!"

In a burst of savage rage, he dragged Dago Mike by the collar through the gaping crowd that drew away to make a passage for him and hurled him to the floor, kicking viciously at him as he did so.

"What business have you got with decent people? You dirty little pickpocket!"

The erstwhile dapper "Henri" was a pitifully abject figure. Anderson's heavy hand had torn his collar from his shirt. The terror

under which he was manifestly laboring gave him a shrunken look, so that his modish clothes seemed actually too large for his wizened little body.

“I ain’t done nothin’!” he protested shrilly. “I don’t know nothin’! Honest to God, Chief, I don’t.”

“Well, you’d better know somethin’ and damned quick at that.”

“I—I——” He looked helplessly at Burnett.

“Don’t forget there are a couple of indictments still hanging over you. And if I send you up the river, you go as a third offender.”

“Good God, Chief, that’s life! I’ll tell you anything—anything!”

“Is Mr. Burnett’s story true?”

“Yes, Chief, yes. I saw him going to the door.”

“Did you see this man go in?”

Anderson indicated Reid with a jerk of his head.

Mike looked helplessly from Anderson to Burnett and back to Anderson.

“No, sir.”

“Didn’t you see me?” demanded Reid.

Again Mike hesitated. But reading in Anderson’s face what he interpreted as the police desire for conviction, he again shook his head.

“No, sir.”

“Ah!” said Anderson, with a smile of satisfaction.

“Did anyone here close the doors of this room?” he asked after a short silence.

“I did, sir.” It was the butler who answered.

“Why?”

“Mr. Stuyvesant told me to close the doors and tell Mr. Burnett that he wanted to see him at once.”

This unexpected reply made an immediate sensation on every person present with the exception of Burnett, who was of course prepared for it. The browbeaten guests so far forgot themselves as to make comments in a low tone, so that a low murmur filled the room. Anderson, himself, was sufficiently disconcerted to permit this incipient rebellion to pass unrebuked.

“He sent you for Mr. Burnett?” he repeated, more to gain time than because he had not perfectly understood the man’s reply to his earlier question.

“Yes, sir.”

“And did you carry out his orders?”

“Yes, sir. I told Mr. Burnett, and he came at once.”

“That is true,” said Burnett calmly.

“What did Mr. Stuyvesant want with you?”

“I’d rather not say.”

“I didn’t ask you what you’d *rather* do. Answer my question.”

“He had discharged his secretary, Mr. Reid, a few days ago, and I believe forbidden him the house. He was greatly excited over—over

something. Said he had telephoned you, or was about to telephone you. I am not sure which."

"Did he say why he had telephoned, or was about to telephone, to me?"

"He had decided to press a charge of forgery against Mr. Reid."

"That's a lie!" Reid's voice rang out.

Burnett shrugged his shoulders.

"You will doubtless find the forged check—it is drawn for twenty thousand dollars—in one of Mr. Stuyvesant's pockets."

At a sign from Anderson, one of the detectives began to search the dead man's pockets. After a moment, he found a small, folded piece of paper which he opened and, having scrutinized it sharply, handed it over to his superior.

"Here it is, Chief."

"Mr. Ralph Stuyvesant can confirm my story," volunteered Burnett.

All eyes searched the room for Ralph, but he was not to be seen.

"He was here only——" began Burnett, when the curtains that earlier in this eventful evening had served to conceal the ingenuous countenance of Mr. Joseph Schmidt, yeggman, parted to disclose a Ralph so wan and haggard that his appearance made nearly as great a sensation as the butler's unexpected testimony had done. Only Ruth, who was aware of his extraordinary and morbid fear of death, could have explained his hiding behind the curtain

and his complete transformation from the Ralph of a few hours before.

“Have you heard what Mr. Burnett has just stated in reference to Mr. Reid and a forged check?” asked Anderson.

“Yes, sir,” said Ralph in a tone so low that it was only with the greatest difficulty that those at a little distance could catch his reply.

“Say it’s not true, Ralph! Say it’s not true!” begged Ruth.

“And speak louder, if you’re going to speak at all,” admonished Anderson.

“It’s the truth. I was—present—when—my father discharged Mr. Reid.”

“You hear that, Reid?”

“Yes, and it’s all a lie!” protested Reid stormily.

“Then why were you coming to see Mr. Stuyvesant at the time you say you found him dead?”

“I was coming to——” He stopped short. “I refuse to answer.”

“Really?”

“If Mr. Reid won’t answer, I will,” said Ruth in her ringing voice. “He was seeking my father, at my request, to announce our marriage.”

Dead silence greeted this astounding statement. And then there was a perfect babel of comment, which even Anderson’s raised hand could not check for the nonce.

“It’s the shock. She doesn’t know what she’s

saying," said Ralph with more real conviction than his tone generally showed.

"It isn't true, I'll take my oath on it!" raged Burnett.

"I'll take mine it is!" said Jennie Bruce, who was standing near him. "You see, I was there."

Ruth waited a minute for the clamor to die down. She wore a sort of angry smile. Her eyes held Anderson's.

"It *is* true. *Now*, do you believe him?"

But Anderson's face had grown instantly grave at her first words. And now his gruff voice was almost gentle, as he said:

"I honor your belief in the man you love, Mrs. Reid, but it has remained for you to furnish the strongest motive of all for this crime." And then, sternly: "William Reid, I arrest you on the charge of murder."

"No, no! You sha'n't, you sha'n't! He's innocent. I'll stick to him. I'll clear him. He's innocent, I tell you! My husband!" screamed Ruth.

He had her in his arms, caressing, soothing, attempting to calm her.

"My little wife! My darling! Of course it's a horrid mistake. The charge won't stand a moment in a court. Don't cry, sweetheart, I'll be back again in a few hours!"

"Take him!" said Anderson.

CHAPTER XVII

How Ruth Reid lived through the strain of the awful months that followed her father's murder and kept her reason was a wonder to many of her former friends. But she was young, she had a superb constitution, splendid health and an inexhaustible store of vitality to draw upon. But more sustaining than all, she had her undiminished faith in her husband's innocence, undimmed by the verdict of the world.

For Big Bill Reid, the erstwhile idol of Yale, had been found guilty of murder and condemned to death.

As Ruth sat day after day in the crowded courtroom watching the slow unfolding of the plot, so well worked up, which was to carry conviction of guilt not only to the minds of the jury, but to the world at large, she had absolutely no feeling of reality. It was a grotesque impossibility that a man's life should be sworn away in any such fashion. But Bull Anderson and the District Attorney had done their work only too well.

Facts were distorted, sinister motives ascribed to the simplest acts. Reid was painted as a perfect Frankenstein, a monster of ingratitude, a primitive animal with a natural lust for

blood, and a crafty, scheming creature who would stoop to any act of mean dishonesty to gratify his love of gold, in turn.

And to Ruth's astonishment, the newspapers, almost without exception, condemned her husband from the first. The jurors were called upon to uphold the honor of the community and show that the "Stuyvesant millions could not buy this young ruffian off." She almost felt glad that her father had not lived to know that his fortune so honorably and honestly acquired was regarded as "blood money" wrung from the sweat and labor of the poor! Nor did the papers spare her. She, too, was an unnatural creature without a heart. A weak, neurotic creature, fascinated by her husband's physical charms.

And during the long suspense, pending the decision which was eventually to deny them a new trial, she read with a curling lip the tirades against the law's delays, the angry declarations that in this country the rich were never brought to justice, that only the poor paid the penalty of crime! Over and over again she blessed the millions which enabled her to fight in this unequal contest for the man she loved and whom she knew to be guiltless of all the crimes with which he was charged.

Through her darkest hours, five people had stood faithfully by her. Jennie Bruce and Jimmy, her father's old friend, Mr. MacLaren, and last, but not least, her two humble friends,

Tessie and Dennis. Important changes had taken place in this little group. For Jennie and Jimmy, Tessie and Dennis, had been married in the past year.

And now there was but one hope left. To-day she and Mr. MacLaren were to go to Albany to see the Governor, to make one last appeal.

This same morning Tessie O'Brien was busy at her old desk at Stuyvesant and Company's when she looked up to see a strange figure coming in unannounced from the waiting-room outside. The man was fairly well dressed, but Tessie noted his shifting eye and his extraordinary pallor with inward disapproval. Besides, he had no business walking in on her in that fashion!

"Well, who are you?"

"My name is Schmidt, Joe Schmidt."

"And what's *your* business?"

"Private and personal with Mr. Burnett."

"Well, there's a waiting-room outside full of people with private and personal business. Wait till I get hold of the office boy that let you by!"

"All right, Miss. No offense, but I've got business that will interest him—on the level. Will you give him this letter?"

"All right. Now the waiting-room for yours!"

Joe bowed himself out.

She had been working busily for about five minutes when O'Brien came in, and as usual

they talked on the one topic that absorbed them.

“Hello, hello!” said Tessie at the telephone. “No, Mr. Burnett has not come in. Who’s this? Joe Schmidt? I told you I’d give him your note!”

She hung up the receiver in indignation.

“What name was that?”

“Joe Schmidt. Some crank who’s been writing letters and tryin’ to see Mr. Burnett for the last week. He’s outside now.”

“Tessie! Do you remember me tellin’ you of the man who was my pal before I turned straight? That’s him. Joe Schmidt—Dutch Joe!”

“Dennis!”

“He’s no four-flusher, Dutch Joe ain’t. He wouldn’t be here without he had some good reason. That’s what we got to find out. Where’s that letter?”

“But, Dennis!”

His eye fell on the letter lying on the table. Before Tessie could remonstrate further he had torn it open.

“Listen to this! ‘Mr. Burnett: I have a story to tell that will interest you. It’s about the Stuyvesant case. I’m down and out and desperate. Will you see me, or shall I go to someone else with my confession? The Man Who Turned Off the Lights.’ Well, *what* do you think of that! Here! Put it in another envelope, quick. I hear the boss.”

When Burnett came in, Tessie was fussing

with some papers and Dennis was busy dusting the chairs.

“Anyone call me?”

“Only a man named Schmidt, sir.”

“Don’t know him. Tell him to write for an appointment.”

“He left this note, sir.”

“All right.”

He took the note carelessly and went on into his office, which had once been Mr. Stuyvesant’s private office. He had just begun to open his mail, when Tessie came to say that Miss Barresford was waiting, which was not quite accurate, as Grace was almost on her heels.

“I’m very busy just now,” began Burnett irritably.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Tessie, “but the Schmidt man won’t go. Says you’ll regret it if you don’t see him.”

“Have him thrown out.”

“He says to tell you it’s about the Stuyvesant case.”

Burnett swung his chair around so that Tessie could not see his face.

“Oh, very well. Tell him to wait. I’ll see him later,” he managed to say.

With a show of carelessness, Burnett picked up Joe’s note which he had thrown on his desk. As he read it, a gray pallor spread itself over his face. It is not good to see naked fear in a man’s face. Grace shuddered and turned away her head.

After what seemed a long time, he shoved the note under some papers as if it were of little importance, and, getting up, began to pace the floor in an effort to recover his self-possession.

“What is it, Tom?”

“Nothing.”

When his back was turned, she quietly reached over for the letter and read it, her own face blanching as she did so. He turned and saw it in her hand.

“How dare you read a private letter!”

“Hadn’t you better tell me the truth, Tom?” she said wearily.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, I’ve felt from the first that Reid did not kill Mr. Stuyvesant. I’ve wondered and feared! And now I find this note. Tell me the truth, dear. Surely you can trust the woman who loves you! Won’t it be easier to have me bear it with you?”

He sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands for a moment. Presently he looked up, and these two haggard creatures stared each other in the face. The last few months had played havoc with them both.

“Yes! I—I did it!” His voice was sharply staccato.

She gave a little moan, and came over and stood with her arm about his shoulder.

“I didn’t mean to do it, Grace, God knows I didn’t. But he had me. He knew everything.

He threatened me with prison. I went staring mad! And when I came to, he was lying there on the floor—dead! And the damned music in the next room playing a waltz song!”

“But this note?”

“There was someone else in the room. Someone switched off the light. That’s what’s breaking me! I could have stood the other—the dead man, but the other! The thought that there’s someone who can put me where I’ve put Reid! And now it’s come! It’s come! Grace,” he said, holding out his arms appealingly, “what am I to do?”

“Pull yourself together first, Tom!” She patted his shoulder reassuringly.

“What’s the use? I——”

“You must,” said Grace with decision. “Who is this man? If he *knew*, he never would have waited so long. He says he’s down and out and desperate. Can the story of a man like that hurt *you*, no matter how true it may be?”

“Would you see him?”

“Yes. But put him off. Stall him. Once Reid’s punished for the crime, his story’ll be no good!”

“But until then?”

“You must keep him quiet ”

“And if he won’t?”

“Then there’s just one thing to do.”

At the look she gave him which pointed her dreadful meaning, he fell to shuddering again.

“No, no! I won’t do that! I can’t!”

“You must,” she said firmly. “And see him now. Where can I go?”

“In there.” He nodded toward a little room opening out of his. “Come back in ten minutes.”

“Careful!” she warned, as she went out, closing the door behind her.

Once alone, Burnett made an effort to pull himself together. Drawing a long breath, he lighted a fresh cigar and puffed it until it glowed warmly. Opening a drawer in his desk, he took from it a revolver, and, after examining it carefully, put it back, closed the drawer, and rang for Tessie.

“Show the Schmidt man in.”

“Yes, sir.”

When Joe came in he was making a pretense of working at the desk.

“You sent this note?”

“Surest thing you know,” said Joe genially.

“What does it mean?”

“You went to college. You can read, can’t you?”

“What do you want?”

“Money.”

“What for?”

“Aw!” said Joe in disgust, “for manicuring the Statue of Liberty! You know what I want it for. For saving a guy from sitting on that little throne in Sing Sing. Nothin’ less!”

“You mean you want me to pay you for saving Reid’s life?”

"I mean if *you* pay me, I save you. If *he* pays me, I save him. I should worry!"

"That will do," said Burnett sharply. "If you had any story to tell that would make any difference, would a man like you have waited a year to tell it? Ridiculous!"

"Oh, that's what's troublin' you, is it? Do you know the answer? I was detained."

"Prison, I'll wager."

"You guessed it," said Joe, perfectly unabashed. "An' I didn't see the use of dividin' with a crook lawyer, when I knew I'd be out in time to get it all myself. Get me?"

Burnett reached for the telephone.

"What are you doin'?" asked Joe, starting to his feet.

"I'm going to call the police to take you for attempted blackmail."

"You wouldn't do that to me? You wouldn't!"

Joe simulated fear so well that Burnett was completely deceived.

"You'll see."

"I ain't done nothin' to harm you, Mr. Burnett. I don't want to hurt you. I'm just let out of prison, a poor down-and-out. I need money, that's all."

"Oh! Then it's charity you want?"

"Well, you might call it charity."

"Um! That's different. Now, what is this remarkable story?"

"I was in the room behind the window cur-

tain. I heard everything. I switched off the light to——”

“What were you doing there?” interrupted Burnett.

“Come to rob the house.”

He spoke of it as simply as if he had said that he had come to get his umbrella.

“You damned crook!”

“Sure. You damned murderer!”

“What!” Burnett sprang to his feet savagely.

For the first time Joe showed his teeth.

“I said it. What’s the answer?”

The time to make his bluff had come, it seemed to Burnett.

“This: The story of no convicted crook is going to stand up in court. *And* I warn you that the day you tell it you’ll be arrested for perjury.”

“Oh, I know that a convicted felon’s oath is no good to save a man from the chair. But one word from me to Mrs. Reid, or her lawyers, and they’ll start an investigation that will *ruin you*, and break down the case against Reid; because I have the record of your stealings in your own handwriting—the *paper old man Stuyvesant dropped when you shot him*—to prove it.”

It was Joe’s turn to reach for the telephone.

“What are you doing with that ’phone?”

“Nothin’ much. Just goin’ to call the cops to make that pinch!” said Joe with a laugh

which changed into a snarl. "Now, what the hell are you goin' to do about that?"

There was silence in the room for a minute or two. Burnett's eyes fell before the other's piercing gaze. With a jerk he had the drawer of the desk open and his pistol in his hand. But Joe was quicker than he. *His* pistol was out of his pocket like a flash, covering Burnett.

"Drop it, Burnett! Drop it!"

Sullenly Burnett obeyed. With an oath he shoved the pistol to the back of the drawer, and, closing it, locked it.

"If you want anything from me, you give me that paper," he blustered.

"Nothin' doin'. This ain't cash on delivery. This is delivery on cash."

"How much money do you want?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"Impossible!"

"Don't make me laugh! With a whole bank to draw on? Besides, you've done it before."

"Suppose I pay you: how would I know that you'd stay bought?"

"My word, of course."

"That's great security!"

There was a long pause.

"All right. I'll pay. You'll have to get out of the country, though."

"I can stand it, if the country can. Where do I go?"

"Mexico."

"Say! I may be a crook, but I'm no bandit."

“The bank has some mines near Chihuahua. You’ll be paid through the Bank of Chihuahua. Twenty-five thousand every three months—and you’ll sign a receipt for it. Advance royalties on your invention.”

“Oh, I’m an inventor, am I?”

“When you’ve got the last of your money you can go wherever you wish.”

“To hell, I suppose.”

“Preferably!”

He crossed the room to a small safe, the door of which was already open. With a key which he took from his pocket he unlocked a drawer and took out a roll of bills, which he counted and handed to Joe, who counted it in his turn.

“Here! You said twenty-five thousand. This is only five thousand.”

“I’ll pay you the rest in a few days. We’ll meet in some quiet place. Meantime, in case I want you, where will I find you?”

“You won’t find me. I’ll meet you somewhere. I’ll telephone you where and when.”

Taking a not overclean handkerchief from his pocket, Dutch Joe proceeded to tie up his money in it, having left out a bill or two for current expenses. Burnett had resumed his march across the room, pausing to look out of the window. Neither one of them saw Tessie, who opened the door quietly and stood on the threshold, note book in hand.

“I’ve got to have that paper when I pay you the first twenty-five thousand.”

He half turned and saw Tessie.

“Why don’t you knock!”

“I thought I heard your bell, sir.”

“Get out!”

“Yes, sir.” Tessie vanished.

“You heard what I said about the paper?”

“Forget it, Bo! You’ll get that paper when you make the last payment, and not till then. Well, s’long. Take care of your health. I’d hate to hear you was sick,” Joe grinned at him.

In the doorway he paused to utter a final warning.

“Remember! Don’t you try any double-cross. If you do, you know what’ll happen. S’long.”

Burnett went to the door leading to the other room and tapped on it sharply with a key.

“Sorry to have kept you so long, darling.”

“Well? Did you buy him off?”

“His price is too high. MacLaren is moving Heaven and earth to force an investigation of the bank’s books. I wouldn’t dare take a cent more.”

“Then, Tom, it’s his life or yours. Did you have him followed?”

“Never thought of it! But I’ve got just the man. O’Brien’s an ex-convict, but he’s faithful.”

“Very well. Have this O’Brien follow him, and then, when the time comes, you *must*——”

“Did you ring, sir?” asked O’Brien.

“Yes. There’s a man named Schmidt who has just left me.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know him?”

“Never saw him before, sir,” lied O’Brien easily.

“Do you think you could catch him? He can’t have gone far. I want you to shadow him for a few days without his suspecting it.”

“Excuse me, sir.” Dennis stepped past Burnett to the window. “That’s him, ain’t it, sir?”

He pointed to Dutch Joe, who, in common with a number of others, had stopped to buy an “extra” which half a dozen newsboys were bawling through the street below.

“Yes. Shadow him. Let me know where he goes, what he does, what sort of people he talks to. Here”—he handed him some bills—“handle this job well, and it will mean a good deal to you. The man’s an inventor. I’m afraid he may take my money and try to sell to someone else, too.”

“I’m on!” said O’Brien, as he departed on the run.

“I’ll watch,” said Grace. “He might look up and see you.”

She took her station at the window. Almost immediately she gave a little nod of satisfaction. Dutch Joe, still absorbed in his paper, was moving slowly along the street, with O’Brien, his coat collar turned up and his hat

slouched over his eye, only a few paces in the rear.

Suddenly her expression changed. She threw open the window. From below came the raucous cry of the newsboys.

“Extry! Extry! Governor refuses to grant wife’s prayer! Bill Reid must die!”

CHAPTER XVIII

IN a large, handsome room on the second story of the Stuyvesant house, Ruth was pacing the floor, a look of determination on her pale face. At that moment the likeness to her father was striking. Dago Mike, in a dirty, shabby old suit of clothes, sat huddled in an armchair, occasionally holding out his not overclean hands to the fire that blazed on the hearth.

"Then that is really all you know?" asked Ruth, pausing in her restless walk.

"Yes, ma'm. I've told you everything."

"I'm going to give you a chance, Mike."

"A job?"

"And honest money."

"God!" said Mike with a tragic gesture, "it'll be great to walk along the street again and look a Bull in the eye without dodging!"

"Mr. MacLaren is below, Mrs. Reid," said a servant.

"Show him up, please. Mike, go into the other room until I send for you."

"Yes, ma'm."

"Ruth," said Mr. MacLaren at the door, "I've brought Mr. Anderson with me. He was at my house when your message came."

He came in, followed by Anderson.

"Good evening, Mr. Anderson."

“Good evening, Mrs. Reid.”

“You have told Mr. Anderson what we have learned about the missing bonds?”

“Yes.”

“Doesn’t that prove that my husband is the victim of a conspiracy?”

“No, Mrs. Reid, it doesn’t prove anything.”

“Oh, you’ve believed him guilty from the first!” said Ruth bitterly. “Suppose I prove to you that there was another man in the room?”

“You must show me.”

“Mike, come here,” said Ruth, opening a door.

“Tell Mr. Anderson what you’ve told me.”

“I’ll tell you something first,” said Anderson, glaring at the little pickpocket. “If *you* were in that room, if anybody committed the crime except the man convicted, you did it.”

“No, no, Chief! I ain’t done nothin’. Honest to God, I ain’t!” cried Mike, all of his old terror returning.

“Go on, Mike,” said Ruth soothingly.

“Dutch Joe come to the place I was dancing——”

“Dutch Joe?”

“Yes. Dutch Joe—Joe Schmidt.”

“Well?”

“He said if I didn’t open the window for him he’d get me.”

“Why didn’t you tell the police?”

“Squeal? Say, you know what a squealer gets!”

“Go on.”

“I opened the window just before Mr. Stuyvesant come in. I got out quick, leavin’ him in the room and Dutch Joe behind the curtain.”

“There! You see——” began Ruth.

“It sounds very plausible to me,” said Mr. MacLaren.

Anderson gave a harsh laugh.

“You poor, lyin’ little crook! Dutch Joe hasn’t been in town for six years.”

“Oh, hasn’t he?” said a voice from the door. And O’Brien and Tessie came into the room.

“You’re wrong, Bull Anderson. Dutch Joe at this minute is in Room 1410 at the McAlpin Hotel, registered as Joseph Edwards.”

“What? That’s nonsense!”

“Is it?” laughed Dennis. “That boy’s telling the truth. Dutch Joe was in the room when Mr. Stuyvesant was murdered, and I’ve got his own letter to prove it.”

“Thank God! Thank God!” Ruth sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

“Now, Bull Anderson,” exulted O’Brien, “maybe you’ll believe at last that a crook can tell the truth!”

Anderson’s face flamed.

“I don’t believe it! Not when you have to depend on another squealing crook to back it. Dago Mike, the pickpocket and cadet, and Kid Wallace, the bank robber! A likely story! I

confess I thought at first this was only a dirty plot cooked up by you, Mike, to get money out of Mrs. Reid. But I see now that I was mistaken.

"I don't blame you, Mrs. Reid," he went on after a moment, in a more gentle tone. "It's your husband's life you're fightin' for. And I agree that a wife is justified in doin' 'most anything, even if it is a little crooked. But I *am* surprised at *you*"—he turned on MacLaren "stooping to this! Did you really believe that the cooked-up testimony of these squealing rats could save your man? Pah!"

"Do you mean to insinuate, Anderson, that I——"

"I don't insinuate anything, Mr. MacLaren. Now, here are the facts. You bring——"

"Facts!" broke in O'Brien angrily. "Why the hell don't you stick to facts and get away from your damned police theories? We've got facts. That's what we're tryin' to give you. Facts backed by a letter to prove 'em. You don't want facts! You're willin' to let the real murderer go, and let an innocent man go to the chair, just to save your reputation as a detective!"

Anderson's face grew fairly murderous as he listened to this tirade. For a second it looked as if he were about to strike O'Brien with his clenched fist. But the watchman never flinched. With a great effort he recovered his self-control.

“I think you’re lyin’—all of you. I think it’s a frame-up from beginning to end. I believe Reid’s guilty. *But* if you have one bit of tangible proof to back up this wild story, the whole detective force is at your service. I’ll work day and night to get at the truth. All I want is to have the guilty man punished. And I guess my reputation can take care of itself!”

“Good for you!” said O’Brien. “Now, Tessie O’Brien, go to it!”

“Well, what do you know?” asked Anderson.

“Oh, nothin’ much,” said Tessie coolly. “Only the man you call Dutch Joe and Mr. Burnett were shut up in his private office for nearly twenty minutes this morning. And——”

“You’re sure of that?”

“Yes, sir. And when I *happened* to come in suddenly, Joe was tyin’ up a big roll of bills in his handkerchief and I heard him say: ‘You’ll get that paper when you pay me the last payment, and not till then.’”

“Paper? What paper?”

“Can’t say, sir. But I guess this note from Dutch Joe to Burnett has somethin’ to do with it.”

“Did Dutch Joe write this? It’s not even signed.”

“No, sir. Mr. Burnett tore his note up. But Dutch Joe gave it to me, and Dennis and me both read it. That’s a true copy. I’ll swear to that.”

“And I guess *she’s* no crook!” crowed

O'Brien, his face beaming with triumph. Ruth hurried over to Anderson's side and began to read the note which he held in his hand.

“ ‘Will you see me, or shall I go to someone else with my confession——’ You hear, Mr. Anderson? He wants to make a confession. *Now* are you convinced!”

“ ‘The Man Who Turned Off the Lights,’ ” finished Anderson.

“Well, Bull, what do you think of that?” demanded Dennis.

“The man *must* have been in the room, just as Mike says,” Ruth's voice was once more full of hope.

“And Burnett and this man are working together. You must agree to that,” urged Mr. MacLaren.

“You can't accuse Mr. Burnett of this crime. Remember, he accounted for every second of his time that night. Besides, there's no motive.”

“I believe he'd shield the real murderer,” said Ruth positively.

“Why?”

“He hates my husband so!”

“Who's the administrator of your father's estate?”

“He is.”

“Oh. Has an accounting been rendered?”

“He says there hasn't been time.”

“I'd attend to that, if I were you,” said Anderson grimly.

“I'll see to that,” said MacLaren.

“As to this other story, it’s too far-fetched, too wild. Any court would laugh at it. Unless you can prove that Burnett is deeply, vitally interested in Dutch Joe the whole story isn’t worth the powder——”

“Can I use the ’phone?” asked O’Brien excitedly.

“Certainly.”

“Can a call from here be traced?”

“No,” said Ruth. “It’s my private number.”

“Good! Give me 6478 Plaza.”

“That’s Tom’s private number,” explained Ruth.

“Come closer, Bull, come closer! You mustn’t miss this.”

“6478? This is O’Brien to speak to Mr. Burnett.”

“He’s gettin’ him,” he explained, his hand over the mouth of the telephone.

“Oh, Mr. Burnett? This is O’Brien. Wanted to make my report on Dutch Joe. Beg pardon, sir. I won’t use his name again. Followed our party to Smith, Gray & Co. He bought a suit, and changed in store. Went from there over to the Avenue. Stopped a long while near the Stuyvesant house. No, sir, I’m sure. I know the house well. I couldn’t be mistaken. Rang bell and asked for Mrs. Reid. Positive, sir. Came away without leavin’ his name. Then went to McAlpin Hotel. Registered Joseph Edwards, Room 1410. Called up Mrs. Reid on

public 'phone. Left word Mr. Edwards called her on important, confidential business. Sure, sir. I was in the next booth and heard him. You may rest easy, sir, I'll see he doesn't get to Mrs. Reid. Oh, thank you, sir!"

He hung up the receiver and glanced excitedly around.

"If that's all true, and there's anything crooked between Burnett and Dutch Joe, he'll call up Mrs. Reid before many minutes," said Anderson positively.

As if to prove his words, the telephone rang on the instant.

"There!" said Ruth, starting forward.

"One moment, Mrs. Reid. Be good enough to have the servant answer it."

"Jenkins!" called Ruth.

A footman appeared from the hall.

"The 'phone, Jenkins, please."

"I don't know, Miss," said Jenkins at the 'phone. Then turning to Ruth, he said:

"She wants to know if you're through with the party, ma'am."

Ruth nodded her head. She could not trust herself to speak.

"Your story's interesting, but hardly conclusive, O'Brien," said Anderson.

The telephone rang again. Jenkins, who had just reached the door, came back at a sign from Ruth.

"Ringin' off again, probably," said Anderson, turning away.

"I told you that——" began Jenkins importantly. "Oh, beg pardon, sir. Yes, sir, Mr. Burnett, this is Jenkins, sir. I'll see, sir."

"Very well, Jenkins." Ruth snatched the receiver from his hand.

"Hello, hello! Oh, hello, Tom! *Do* I sound cheerful? I feel so, for some reason or other. *You* sound excited. What's the matter?" There was a long pause. "Oh, yes. A man *did* call up and left the name of Edwards. Yes, I was at home, but I didn't know him, so of course I sent word I was out. Really? Thank you for warning me. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver.

"What do you think now, Mr. Anderson!"

"Quick!" said Anderson, without paying any attention to her. "He may get his man at the McAlpin!"

"Oh, no, he won't!" laughed O'Brien. "Dutch Joe ain't there any more. He's moved. You didn't think I'd tell *everything* I knew, did you, Bull?"

"Mrs. Reid!" said Anderson, turning to her and holding out his hand frankly, "I'm licked! I've got to say something that I never thought I'd have to say to anyone: I've helped convict an innocent man. I only hope to God I can save him!"

"I'll go to the Governor again the first thing in the morning," said Mr. MacLaren.

"No good. Without the original of that note,

you haven't a leg to stand on. They'd only say," he said, turning again to Ruth, "that it was an eleventh-hour trick to save your husband by perjured testimony."

"The District Attorney, then."

"He'd laugh in your face!"

"What *can* we do? Don't tell me that you are going to do nothing, now that you say you believe in my husband's innocence!"

"There's just one chance: Schmidt."

"Schmidt?"

"Yes. We've got to get him. Break him! *Make* him confess!"

"But how?"

He turned on O'Brien.

"You know him: what's his weakness—booze?"

"No."

"Dope?"

"Never."

"Women?"

"Laughs at 'em."

"What then?"

"He's hasn't got but one: gamblin'. And, like all gamblers, he's superstitious."

"He is, is he?"

"Never turns a trick except on lucky, odd-number days. And he always runs the cards first, or tries a fortune-teller."

"Good! We've got him!"

"How?"

"What are you going to do?"

“I’m goin’ to get a confession out of him, that’s what!”

“But how?”

“Through his superstition. You, O’Brien, get in touch with him, and by Monday get him to go to see Madame Clarice, the great spiritualist and psychic.”

O’Brien nodded his comprehension.

“We’ll be there!”

“And you, Mrs. Reid,” said Anderson, turning to Ruth, “can you manage to get your friends together and have them attend? Particularly your brother Ralph and Burnett. The more the merrier.”

“Of course I will. But who *is* Madame Clarice? I never heard of her.”

“No, but you will. I’m goin’ to be her manager. All New York will hear of her by Monday. The detective force is goin’ into the fortune-tellin’ business, and goin’ in in style!”

And, with a boyish laugh, he hurried away.

CHAPTER XIX

It was Monday night. Ruth was in a fever of expectation. Mad as Anderson's plan for entrapping Joe seemed, she would not allow herself to doubt for a moment of its being successful and bringing her father's death home to the real murderer. But she acknowledged to herself that she was nearing the end of her own endurance.

She had almost lived at the telephone for the last few days, waiting for reports from Jennie Jones, who was rounding up as many of her friends as possible for the coming séance, and from O'Brien, who was meeting with unexpected difficulties in persuading his old pal to consult this new oracle, whose name shone from all the billboards in New York.

Getting in touch with Joe had been an easy matter. Dressed in a new and flashy suit of clothes, of which Tessie strongly disapproved, Dennis had run into him in the corridor of his hotel, to their mutual pleasure and satisfaction. The meeting once accomplished, they had spent most of their time together, talking over old times and old adventures up in Joe's room. But although Joe seemed to be entirely unsuspecting, he betrayed a curious reticence as to anything that he had "on," contenting himself

with dark hints that he might find it profitable to take a trip shortly.

But he read everything in the papers about the state of Mexico, and frequently voiced the opinion that it wasn't a country for a dog to live in. O'Brien could see that something was troubling him. Finally, by dint of "playing up" the subject of Mexico and its outlawed state, he got Joe to admit that he had some thoughts of going there for a stay of some duration, *if* only he could satisfy himself that it would be safe. After that, it was a comparatively easy matter to persuade him to consult the celebrated Madame Clarice, the chief trouble being that, for some unexplained reason, Joe was loath to go on the all-important evening when his presence was so ardently desired.

O'Brien, of course, feared to be too insistent, and it was only a short hour before the time set for the séance that he was able to telephone Ruth that she could count on their being there.

An hour before the séance was advertised to begin, Anderson, accompanied by several detectives in plain clothes, arrived to consult with Clarice and see that no hitch could occur in his arrangements.

Clarice's "studio" was a large, bare, Gothic room, with several windows of a bluish glass. It contained a number of chairs, a cabinet on a platform, two or three tables of various sizes—in short, the usual equipment of people of her

profession. There was a large fireplace with a gas log, behind which red, blue and green electric bulbs were concealed, which the medium could turn on at her pleasure—whenever she wished to produce a particularly ghastly effect—from her place on the platform.

Madame Clarice was a large, magnetic, imposing woman with an elaborate coiffure of blond hair and prominent eyes. She was dressed in a heavy, lustrous black silk gown with a long train. Her bodice was extremely décolleté, and she wore many bracelets and rings, with a dog collar of immense diamonds, which would have been worth a king's ransom had they been real, around her throat. She watched Anderson's every movement with a coldly suspicious eye.

"Put two men at the door. I want some of you in here as cappers. Are the windows fastened?"

"Locked 'em myself, dearie," remarked Madame Clarice without the look of affection that one might have expected to accompany the term of endearment.

"The chimney's all right. He ain't no Santy Claus," said Anderson, after examining it for himself. "Now, remember, this Schmidt is a desperate guy. Don't take any chances.

"Well!" he said, apparently satisfied with his inspection, "if he gets out of here now he'll deserve it. How about it, Clarice, can you put it over?"

“Can a baby cry?” asked Clarice in her turn.

“Remember, if you don’t——!”

“Oh, I know, dearie. If I don’t, you’ll have your bulls run me out of town as a fakir. There ain’t no such thing as justice in this world!”

“If you ain’t a fakir, what are you?”

“Oh, I’m one, all right.”

“Guess we understand each other.”

“Yes, dear. Both members of this club.”

“Remember this is a desperate case. There’s only one way to break this murderer. Bring him face to face with the dead.”

“I get yer.”

“Where’s the man who is to play old Stuyvesant?”

“He’s making up for the part now.”

“I want to see him.”

“Bil-ly! Bil-ly! Here!”

“Yes, ma’am,” came a voice from somewhere in back of the cabinet.

A thin, flashily dressed young man came slowly down to Madame Clarice. In one hand he carried a make-up box and a false mustache, in the other a made-up cravat and a standing collar, slightly soiled.

“There he is,” said Clarice in a bored tone.

Anderson looked at him in astonishment.

“*You* the man who’s goin’ to act Stuyvesant in the séance? Why, you don’t look anything like him. You’re too skinny and too young, and your voice isn’t anything like his.”

“Just wait till I get through making up. Here, hold this, will you?”

Clarice obligingly held the mirror which he took from his jacket pocket. From another pocket he produced a white wig which he adjusted with a few deft pats. Propping the make-up box on a chair, he seemed to Anderson, to whom he still offered the view of his back, to make a few rapid passes with the various pencils which the box contained. Another minute to fasten on the false mustache, and he turned round.

“How’s that?”

In all its deathly pallor, it was the face of Mr. Stuyvesant as he had last seen it.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” said Anderson.

The artist understood the tribute, and bowed.

“The only thing is you’re too skinny. You can’t fill out the clothes.”

“Oh, I’ll fix that,” said Billy easily.

He reached under his arm and drew out a long rubber tube. Putting the end in his mouth, he blew into it slowly and steadily, and his stomach swelled as he blew. When he judged it to be the proper size, he looked to Anderson for approval, raising his eyebrows slightly, so as not to disarrange his make-up.

“That’s enough. Have you got the clothes?”

“Yes, they’re back there.”

“Well, be careful of ’em. It’s the suit Mr. Stuyvesant had on when he was murdered, and it’s evidence.”

“The ones he had on when he was murdered? Gee! I don’t care for that. It’s creepy!”

“You’re playin’ a ghost, ain’t you?”

“Sure. But there ain’t no call for bein’ so damned realistic. I don’t like it.”

“He’ll do,” approved Anderson.

“One of my best,” said Clarice carelessly.

“You’ve got everything just right?”

“Sure and I have, dearie. If you don’t believe it, take a look in there. I’ve got my little girl and my little boy, my widow, my old man, two broken-hearted lovers—all the stock spirits and a couple of extras. This is goin’ to be some séance!”

An elderly woman, dressed in rusty black, came in at that minute and took her place in the front row of seats.

“Good ev’ning to you,” she said meekly.

“Here, you, Carrie,” said Clarice with some asperity, “you ain’t half mournful enough! And the last time when the lights dimmed you went to sleep right in the middle of my best spiel. I ain’t forgot it, Miss. Now if——”

“I know, Clarice,” Carrie hastened to admit, “but I’ll be a great mourner this time. I got such a lovely cold in my head.”

And she proceeded to illustrate her fitness for her rôle by sniffing loudly an inordinate number of times.

“Who’s she?”

“Head capper. How do you think we’d run without cappers?”

“And you’ve got the dope on all the people who are coming and what they look like?”

“Got it here,” said Clarice, tapping her forehead. And closing her eyes, she chanted in a high, colorless voice, parrot fashion: “Andrews and wife, old people: been to police to find daughter; Joe Schmidt and O’Brien: advise against Mexico trouble, and manifestations; Burnett and Stuyvesant——”

“O. K. I’ll go now, and come back when you dim down the lights. Now, remember, it’s the Tombs if you fail!”

“I’ll remember, dearie. Nobody forgets the Tombs, you know. Gee! What a disposition!” she said to herself as she went behind the curtains.

A few people began to come straggling in; among them Jimmy Jones and Jennie.

“Let’s get a front seat, Jimmy.”

“N-n-no; we’ll sit back here,” said Jimmy, starting for the rear.

“But I want to sit up close,” protested Jennie.

“M-m-mebbe you d-d-do, I don’t. I’d r-r-rather have a seat out in the—in the m-m-middle of the n-n-n-next street!”

“I’m ashamed of you, Jimmy. You’re afraid of the spirits!”

“I—I—I’m not a-afraid of ’em. But I don’t w-w-w-want to k-k-kiss ’m, either!”

“Nonsense, Jimmy. This is a perfectly wonderful medium. Ruth Reid told me all about

her. You've got to stay and see it out. If you get frightened, I'll—I'll hold you."

At this moment the lights, which had gradually been getting dimmer and dimmer, changed to an unpleasant hue, caused by Clarice turning on the blue ones from the fireplace. More people were coming in from time to time; among them Tom Andrews and Nora, closely followed by Dutch Joe and O'Brien.

"I'm wonderin' what Father Kelly would think of our comin' here, Tom," said Nora in a troubled tone.

"I can't help whether the father would like it or not. He's prayed for her and *he* can't find her. And the police have looked for her and *they* can't find her. And the place she said she worked never heard of her. I'll try anything to get some news of her and get her back!"

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" said Jennie in great excitement, "isn't that your old trainer, Mr. Andrews?"

"Sh—sh——!"

"What's the matter? Why don't you call him over?"

"I don't want h-h-him to k-k-know that I'm fool enough to e-e-come here!"

Joe and Dennis had found seats on the end of the very back row. Joe was apparently not at all at ease. He kept moving about and clearing his throat.

"Say, Kid, this dump's creepy!"

“Cheese it, Dutch, you’ll worry the spirits.”

“I won’t worry them if they don’t worry me. Say, Kid, they don’t do nothin’ to you, do they?”

“Who?”

“The spirits.”

Several people—the place was now rapidly filling up—moved restlessly and glared at Joe to keep silence.

“Hush! Hush! Hush!”

“All right,” said Joe, “have it your own way.”

He kept silent for nearly a minute.

“Say, Kid.”

“What?”

“Do you guess she can tell us how it’s goin’ to turn out?”

“She told me a week ago I was goin’ to meet you.”

“She *did*? Herself?”

“Sure she did.”

“Well, I don’t mind what she tells me herself. But if she brings in any dead ones to tell me, I’m goin’ to leave, and I’m goin’ to leave *sudden!*”

“Sh—sh! Hush!”

“Gee, this is a peevish bunch!”

“If you don’t keep quiet they’ll give you your money back and put you out.”

“Give me my money back! Don’t make me laugh. This is New York. They don’t give you anything back!”

The lights began to grow dimmer and dimmer. From far away a bell struck mournfully two or three times. There was a sigh of expectation from the crowd. Suddenly a sort of ghostly light appeared over their heads. There was a roar of thunder. Lightning seemed to flash from side to side of the room. The walls shivered and parted, and for a moment dim ghostly figures appeared and vanished on the instant. A table rose and floated about the room over the heads of the audience. From nowhere, a hair-raising voice slowly demanded:

“What—do—you—want—with—me?”

“Nothin’! Nothin’ at all, Mister! Honest!” Dutch Joe assured the spirit in a choking voice.

The table dropped back to its place in front of the watchers. The lights came on once more. Madame Clarice was seen standing on the platform. Everything was once more calm and serene with the exception of a few nervous spectators who displayed unmistakable signs of having passed through a disconcerting experience.

Jimmy, with one foot on the seat of his chair and the other thrown over the back, was only prevented from seeking the seat of his choice in the middle of the next street by Jennie’s detaining hands on his coat tails. Mrs. Andrews was on her knees, her back to the platform, while Tom gripped his chair so tightly that his hands were white. Dutch Joe was lying flat on the floor, with a gun in each hand,

a circumstance which in the general absorption fortunately escaped notice. But it was with considerable difficulty that O'Brien prevailed upon him to restore his weapons to his pocket and resume his seat.

When order seemed to be completely restored, Madame Clarice remarked pleasantly:

"Friends, I think that the dear spirits are in a good humor to-night."

"I-I-I'd h-h-hate to s-s-see 'em mad!" commented Jimmy.

The table began to waltz slowly about.

"Be quiet, Ellen, let that table alone!" admonished the medium.

"Excuse me, Mrs.," said Joe, "but did Ellen do all that just now?"

"Yes, that was all little Ellen's work."

"She's some female!" said Joe sincerely. "Come on, Kid. Don't let's wait for de men spirits!"

"Cheese!" expostulated O'Brien.

At that moment Burnett, accompanied by Ralph and Anna, came in.

"Let no one speak, and let no more enter," commanded the medium. At once she assumed her most professional manner.

"Friends, we're sittin' here to-night with the glorious hope of perhaps welcomin' back to our sorrowin' midst those happy faces that has already gone over into the glorious beyond. Now, friends, will you kindly sit still, and all of you hold hands to establish the psychic circuit.

Also, if you hold hands, there won't be no chance for one of you to get crazy an' try to kiss a spook. Spooks wasn't made to be kissed. An' there's no tellin' what might happen. Gawd knows it's hard enough to be a medium without people tryin' to kiss your spooks! I'm about to give a séance made up of clairvoyance, physical manifestations and materializations. And kindly remember that I'm in a trance and don't know anything about what I may say or do. I'm only the poor human funnel through which the spirits flow. Now, we'll start the séance with our Spirit Hymn."

She began to sing in a high, shrill voice. All the cappers, who were of course familiar with the doggerel, joined in. Soon everybody was singing—Dutch Joe loudest of all.

"We are waitin',
We are waitin',
We are waitin' just now;
Just now we are waitin',
We are waitin' just now.

Show your faces,
Show your faces,
Show your faces just now!
Just now show your faces,
Show your faces just now!"

With a dramatic gesture, she threw open the doors of the cabinet.

"You see, dear friends, it's empty."

"Here I am!" piped a childish voice.

"That voice!" exclaimed the capper in widow's weeds.

“And who are you?” inquired the medium.

“I’m little Billy.”

“And what do you want, little Billy?”

“I don’t like to tell you!” said little Billy bashfully.

“Please tell us.”

“No.”

“You must.”

“All right. I want to raise hell, and I’m going to!”

Instantly the room became black again, and again the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed. The walls seemed to part and come together again, there was a red glare followed by a ghostly light, and a smell of burning sulphur. Out from behind the fireplace danced a troop of figures, carrying pitchforks whose phosphorus-covered bodies gleamed in the ghastly light. The table danced once more. Tambourines and banjos were heard playing from the cabinet. There was a sound of mocking, childish laughter.

And then, just as suddenly, the dancing figures disappeared, the tables became stationary, all sounds ceased, and the lights came on again. With a flourish Madame Clarice threw open the cabinet and showed it to be empty.

“Come on, Bo, I’m goin’!” said Joe, getting to his feet with an air of decision. “If women can shake this damned house, and kids open the gates of hell, I’ll be damned if I wait for the men. This ain’t no place for yours truly.”

“Cut it out, Joe. They ain’t hurtin’ you. Wait, we’ll ask her now.”

“You *must* stop talkin’, or you’ll break the circle,” admonished Clarice. “I feel a feelin’ of clairvoyance stealin’ over me!” she went on. “I hope what I say won’t offend no gent nor lady. Remember, I’m only the poor human funnel through which the spirits flow!”

After passing her hands a number of times across her forehead, her whole figure became rigid. There was a moment’s pause. Then, in a far-away, dead voice, she began:

“There is a man and a woman here with us to-night, an old man and an old woman who is in trouble. He is a strong man, and he has somethin’ to do with boats. When I see him, I see men rowin’. His first name is Tom. I’ll give his last name, if he wants me to.”

“I ain’t never been ashamed of my name, ma’am,” said honest Tom.

“You are lookin’ for your daughter, Mister.”

“Yes, ma’am: that’s what her mother an’ me come to New York for.”

“She is not as she was when she first left you. She is in great danger. She has another name. Look on the eighth floor of a big, white apartment house on Madison Avenue between Fortieth and Fiftieth Streets.”

Ralph uttered a slight exclamation, but was checked by the glance that Burnett gave in the direction of his wife.

“What do you make of it?” whispered Ralph.

"I'm not sure yet. Wait a bit."

"Thank you, ma'am. We're goin' now," said Tom. And supporting his sobbing wife, he left the room.

"Join hands again, and close the psychic circle!" commanded Madame Clarice.

"The current is gettin' stronger! I can feel it, I can feel it!" she said in a sort of ecstasy. "There is a spirit strugglin' to make hisself known!"

"There's somethin' in this, Kid," whispered Joe. "She got the dope right on that old guy. *He* was real. *He* wasn't no capper."

"Hush!"

"It is a new spirit that has not yet learned how to communicate. How he struggles! I feel it here in my heart! It has a wrong that must be set right. What!" Her voice took on a tone of horror. There was a long pause, while she appeared to listen intently.

"It is the spirit of one who was *murdered!* What name? What? Can you understand? Can't you speak through me?" Another long pause.

"Can you make yourself known by rapping, then? Rap three times for 'yes,' once for 'no.' Will that do?"

Three loud, solemn raps were heard.

"Were you murdered?"

Again the three raps.

"By a woman?"

The spirit denied this in one vigorous rap.

“A man?”

Three raps.

“Has he been convicted?”

Three raps.

“Sentenced?”

Three raps.

“To imprisonment?”

One rap.

“Then he has been sentenced to death!”

Three raps.

“Is he guilty?”

One rap.

“Then he is innocent?”

Three raps.

“Have you come to save him?”

Three raps.

“Can you tell us the name you bore in this life?”

There was a long and impressive pause. Then, in a voice which was a marvel of imitation, came the reply.

“I was William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant!”

“My father!” said Ralph in a terrified shriek.

“Good God!” said Burnett under his breath.

“That’s him! That’s the old man’s voice,” came Joe’s horrified confirmation.

But Burnett had recovered his nerve. “This must stop! I protest against this humbug. I’ll call the police!”

“Sit down, Burnett!” commanded Anderson. In the darkness, unseen by anyone, he had taken

a chair immediately behind Burnett, where he could watch Joe's every movement.

"Mr. Stuyvesant, where is the real murderer?" moaned the medium, as if she were about to faint under the strain to which she was subjecting herself.

"He is here!" came the awful voice from the cabinet.

"Can you show yourself and confront him?"

In answer to this question, the thunder crashed once more and all the lights went out, leaving the hall in utter blackness. In another moment, two greenish-white lights appeared. One hovered above the terrified assembly until it hung over the unconscious head of Dutch Joe, for the moment fairly paralyzed with superstitious terror. The other lit up the doors of the cabinet, which opened to disclose the counterfeit presentment of the late Mr. Stuyvesant, wearing the clothes he had worn on the night of the murder. A ghastly crimson stain could be seen on his left side in the region of the heart.

Ralph's voice rattled in his throat.

"It is my father!"

"The clothes he wore when——" whispered Burnett, half to himself.

"God! The old man himself! Just as he looked!" shrieked Joe.

"Point out the murderer!" commanded Clarice.

Slowly that dreadful arm came up, the fore-

finger of the hand extended. For a dreadful moment the eyes seemed to search the room. Then, suddenly, the arm shot out straight, the finger pointing to the cowering Joe.

“It’s a lie! a lie! I didn’t do it! I was there! I saw it! But I didn’t do it! The real murderer is——”

With a rush, Anderson and two other detectives made for him.

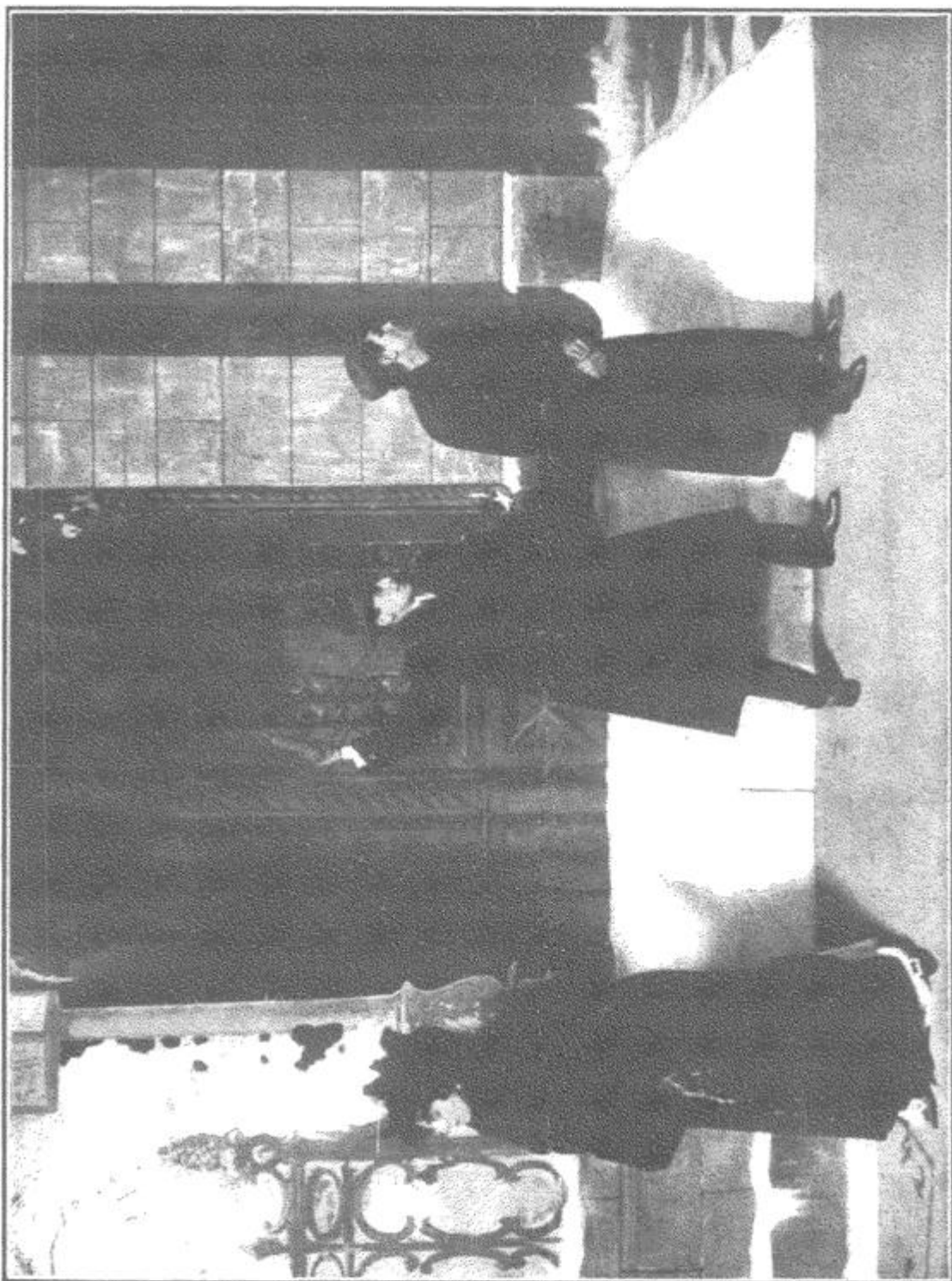
“Joseph Schmidt, I arrest you for the murder of William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant!” shouted Anderson.

Amid the screams and cries that pierced the darkness which had once more fallen could be heard the sounds of a struggle, and then the noise of crashing glass.

“Lights! Lights!” yelled Anderson.

The lights came on to show a scene of the wildest confusion and the shattered glass of one of the rear windows.

“My God, he’s escaped!” yelled Anderson.



RAISING THE SLUNG SHOT, HE CRASHED IT DOWN ON JOE'S HEAD.

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CHAPTER XX

IT was five o'clock Christmas morning. Along the streets leading to Saint Patrick's people were hurrying to Mass. In front of the Cathedral, and standing on the steps near the door, were grouped a number of beggars and fakirs making the most of the latitude allowed them on this day, hoping to cajole money from the tide of worshipers whose hearts were presumably softened at this season.

Either because they had exhausted the field, or because they judged it would be more profitable to work the side streets; meeting the crowds before they reached the church, they had nearly all moved off when Dutch Joe, wearing a long, black overcoat and a cap well pulled over his eyes, came round the corner so suddenly that he nearly collided with an old beggar woman who cursed him with fervor.

"Here! Don't yell before you're hurt!" remonstrated Joe, looking fearfully around. He reached in his pocket and took out a half dollar.

"I'm lookin' for a swell guy with a smooth face and a fur coat. Seen him?"

"No, I ain't seen nobody like him. I'll watch out if you want me to," she said, her eyes fastened greedily on the money.

"No, never mind. I'll take a little walk my-

self an' come back. Guess I'm early. Here you are, though, for luck." He dropped the coin into her outstretched hand and hurried away. The woman went on.

Around the corner opposite from the one Joe had taken came two young men who showed the effects of a Christmas Eve too hilariously spent. The elder, although he showed that he had been drinking, was by no means as far gone as his friend, whom he was apparently piloting to his home. The task seemed to present new difficulties as they arrived in front of the Cathedral door. For the younger seemed to be struck for the first time with the beauty of the façade which he wished to examine at his leisure. He was finally persuaded to continue his journey, and they went on down Fifty-second Street, pausing every few steps to argue some matter which seemed to have something to do with the wisdom of "having just *one* more."

From time to time a woman, shivering in spite of the long fur coat that completely enveloped her figure, peered out from one of the swinging doors. Burnett, on his way up the steps, caused her to give a little cry of fright.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"You know."

"What?"

"To keep you to your resolution, and to help you if I can."

"I can't do it, Grace, I can't!"

“You must. If they get him, what will he do? Confess everything he knows.”

“But he’s clever. He might get away.”

“Even so: so long as he lives, he’ll hold you in the hollow of his hand.”

“I know that. But——”

“Where’s your nerve, Tom?”

“It’s an awful thing to do. Here, in the shadow of a church. Listen! There goes the organ. And before they have finished, I’ll have——” He broke off, shuddering violently.

“It’s his life or yours, Tom. Think of that.”

“I know.”

“I’ll be in the runabout, waiting on Fifty-second Street. If you are pushed——”

She made a warning sign, and started rapidly down the steps as Dutch Joe came into view. Burnett crouched in the shadow of the great doors.

In front of the steps, Joe paused a moment, looking about him with a frown. He made a move as if to go away again, when Burnett stepped forward.

“I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Got the stuff?” he started up to meet him.

“Yes, but come on down and we’ll walk up a side street.”

He waited until Joe turned and started down. When he was a step below him, he drew a slung-shot from his pocket and, raising it high in the air, brought it down on Joe’s head twice.

With a muffled gasp, Joe pitched forward,

and diving headlong down the steps, lay huddled at the bottom.

Quick as a flash, Burnett was beside him. Tearing open his coat, he searched rapidly for the coveted paper. Yes, it was there. With a hasty glance to assure himself that it was the original and not merely a copy, without another look at his victim, who lay where he had fallen, he dashed along the Avenue to Fifty-second Street. At the far end of the block was Grace's runabout. He could see her gazing anxiously from the window. The only other human beings in sight were the two young men who were standing in the middle of the pavement still arguing the matter of another drink.

"Get out of the way, will you?"

"Wacha want? The whole st-street?" demanded the drunker of the two aggressively. He made a snatch at Burnett's coat and caught him by the lapel. With an oath, Burnett freed himself with a jerk, toppling over the drunkard as he dashed on. His friend divided his attention between helping his companion, who was now weeping in a maudlin manner, and cursing Burnett with ardor and fluency.

Grace threw open the door, and as he sprang in the runabout started off.

Joe had rolled over so that he was now lying on his face. He moaned piteously. Occasionally he made a feeble effort to call for help. But for nearly a quarter of an hour no one chanced to pass by or hear him.

Finally, one of the vergers of the Cathedral opened the door and came out onto the steps. Seeing him lying there, he at first thought that he had only a drunken man to deal with.

“Get along out of here!” he said. “You ought to be ashamed, lyin’ drunk at the very door of the church on Christmas mornin’.”

In trying to raise his head, his hand came in contact with something wet and sticky. It was blood. With an exclamation of alarm, he ran back into the church. He returned in a second with a number of men. In that magic manner, which is the secret of all great cities, a crowd had already sprung up from nowhere. While some ran in search of a policeman, others bent over the prostrate body in a vain attempt to be of some assistance. Others, again, started for a doctor.

“Somebody ought to ring for the ambulance,” volunteered one.

“Here! Let me through. I’m a doctor.”

A man with graying hair pushed his way through the crowd and bent down over Joe.

“Well?” asked an authoritative voice which made the policeman look up quickly.

“Just a chance—if we can get him on the operating table right away.”

“You *must* save him, you *must!*” said Anderson, for it was he. “An innocent man’s life depends on it.”

“Make way, make way for Father Kelly!” cried a voice.

A priest, still in his robes, was coming down the steps.

“He is still alive?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Father,” said Anderson, stepping forward, “I am Chief of Detectives Anderson. This man is a criminal with an innocent man’s life in his hands. Let the doctor revive him and get a confession first. Then——”

“The Church, my son,” said the priest gently, “thinks only of the good of this dying sinner’s soul.”

“But——”

Joe gave another moan, and opening his eyes, struggled to speak.

“You are dying, my son; have you anything to confess?” He lifted him in his arms.

“I—am—innocent——” Here he choked, but with a last effort managed to go on in a voice that was only a hoarse whisper. The doctor, the priest and Anderson bent over him. “Stuyvesant murder.—I saw—it.—It—was——”

His head fell over on one side.

“It’s all over,” said the doctor.

It was New Year’s Eve, and Warden McCarthy of Sing Sing prison had been entertaining some friends at dinner. It would have greatly surprised some of the people in the set in which Ruth moved, if they could have looked in upon the Warden and his guests, to discover Jennie and Jimmy Jones at his hospitable

board. Anderson, too, was of the number. But that was hardly so surprising, as he and the genial Warden had known each other for a number of years.

The Warden's dining-room was large and spacious and handsomely furnished. At one end was a curtained doorway which led to the other rooms comprising the private apartments. At the other end, in grim contrast, was a heavily barred door which led into the prison itself. That, and the view of high stone walls to be had from the large bay window, was the only thing that suggested that the guests might not be in any private house, until one happened to glance at the servants who were waiting on the table, who all wore the prison uniform.

The dessert had been removed, and the guests, some of them with their chairs a little pushed back, were discussing their host's coffee and liqueurs.

"Try one of those cigars, Anderson," said the host genially. "I have them made specially for me."

Anderson took one.

"Wonderful! Where do you get them?" he asked, after puffing appreciatively at it for a moment.

"Oh!" laughed the Warden, "a chap who *boarded* here with me a couple of years afterwards went to Havana. He made good, and now he sends them to me regularly."

"Pretty soft for him, isn't it?" asked Ander-

son of the table generally. "Nothin' to do but run this State Boarding House at a good salary, with no chance of loss. And when they leave, the boarders send him presents! Pretty soft!"

"As Chief of Detectives you have rather a nice life yourself," McCarthy reminded him.

"A nice life! Do you think a boarding-house runner has a nice life? That's what I am. I work twenty-four hours a day to keep your boarding-house full for you. And it's some job, believe me. Nobody wants to come!"

"Don't they ever get out?" asked Jennie.

"From Sing Sing? Not a chance, Mrs. Jones. No one has gotten away since I've been here, and I don't think anyone will. Why, it would ruin me reputation as a boardin'-house keeper entirely!"

"What would you do if one tried to get away?" pursued Jennie.

"Shoot him like a dog. That's all he'd deserve."

Jennie changed color. But her glance never wavered.

"That seems a terrible thing to do to a man just because he wants liberty."

"My dear Mrs. Jones, nowadays, when a man's convicted you may be sure he's guilty. He's gettin' only what's comin' to him."

"The husband of a woman I used to know very slightly is here now. Somehow, I have never been able to believe in his guilt."

"What was he accused of?"

“Murder.”

“Who is he?”

“William Reid.”

“Mrs. Jones, there *have* been men I felt sorry for when they went to the chair; but I firmly believe he’s as guilty as hell!”

“I guess there’s no chance of his escaping, then,” put in Anderson.

“I wish he’d only try,” said the Warden grimly. “I’d be glad to take a shot at him myself!”

“Why are you so bitter, Mac? I convicted the fellow myself, and I don’t feel that way.”

“Well, you see, I happened to meet young Stuyvesant and his partner, Burnett. They told me a lot about Reid—stuff they couldn’t get in at the trial—and it showed me what kind of a fellow he was.”

“I should think, Mrs. McCarthy, you’d be afraid to stay here with so many desperate criminals. Don’t you ever get frightened?” asked one of the women.

“The idea never enters my head!” protested Mrs. McCarthy stoutly. “You see, I have them all about me as servants.”

“Yes,” said Anderson. “I have already recognized several old friends whom I induced to come here.”

“Then the servant problem doesn’t worry you, Mrs. McCarthy?” said Jennie.

“Why, I don’t know what I’d ever do if Mr. McCarthy had to give up this place,” laughed

Mrs. McCarthy. "I couldn't think of anything less than a bank teller for butler!"

"You don't limit your house servants to bank tellers, do you?" asked another of the guests.

"Oh, no! I'm not that particular. Harding, here"—she pointed to the most dignified of the serving men—"was superintendent of a Sunday school when they caught him with his *fifth* wife."

"Fifth wife!" exclaimed the women in horror.

"I—I—I—say! Wasn't one e-e-e-enough?"

"Jimmy!"

"Each one was too much, sir. That's why I had to try five," replied the ex-superintendent.

"Old Bill, there," said Mrs. McCarthy, pointing to an old man with white hair, "is the favorite. He's been in prison almost fifty years."

"Fifty years!"

"Ask him about it. He's a privileged character."

"And you've been a prisoner fifty years?" asked Jennie kindly.

"Yes, ma'am," said the old man, almost with an air of pride, "comin' March."

"Don't you want to be free?"

"No man ever quits wantin' to be free, ma'am. But I don't hardly know what I'd do if I was!"

"You've never been out since you came here?"

"Twict. They took me to the station to see the trains go by. And onct I was away two days. But they caught me before I ever got to New York. That was forty years ago."

"New York has changed a lot in fifty years!"

"It must have, ma'am. They tell me it's built clean up to Thirty-fourth Street. May I give you some more coffee, ma'am?"

"Thank you. What did they put you in here for, Bill?"

"I slipped poison in my old woman's coffee, ma'am. She bothered me talkin' too much!"

Jennie hastily replaced her cup untasted.

"I think we'd better leave the gentlemen to their cigars," suggested Mrs. McCarthy.

In the slight confusion of picking up gloves and moving back chairs, Jennie managed to whisper to Anderson:

"If I had any qualms before, I've lost them now—after hearing him talk."

"Easy!" cautioned Anderson.

"What time is it? She ought to be here!"

A guard came in and crossed over to the Warden, carrying a salver on which was a card with some writing on it.

The Warden looked at it angrily through his eyeglass.

"Damned impertinence, interruptin' me at me dinner! I've half a notion not to see her!"

"Who is it, Dennis?" asked his wife.

"That fellow Reid's wife! Comin' here and

interruptin' me at me dinner, wantin' to see her husband!"

"Why don't you let her see him, Mac?" asked Anderson carelessly.

"Sure, I'll let her see him—before he dies. There's plenty of time."

Ruth came quietly into the room, following the guard. She bowed coldly to Anderson, but took no notice of either Jennie or Jimmy.

"Can't you let me see my husband, Mr. McCarthy? I mean see him in your office or—or here?"

"Mrs. Reid, I appreciate how you feel. But do you suppose I'm goin' to bring a condemned murderer out of the prison to see you? Nonsense! I told your lawyer, and I told your friend Mr. MacLaren that, when they made the request."

"Yes, I know you did. They tried to keep me from coming to-day, but——" For a moment she could not go on. She buried her face in her handkerchief.

"If you were to be allowed to walk through the corridor of the Death House, and stop a moment outside his cell——"

"And he inside a steel grating, and I outside another steel grating—with six feet of open space between us!"

"You could see him for a moment."

"Could I touch him? Could I come close to him? Could he take me in his arms? Oh, Mr. McCarthy! You wouldn't condemn me to go

through life without even the memory of his kiss! Oh, you won't! You can't! You haven't the right to refuse me!"

"You can see him in the prison to-morrow night—the night before he dies," said McCarthy coldly.

Ruth turned passionately to Mrs. McCarthy.

"Won't *you* plead for me!"

"Dennis, dear! She's so young, and she'll never see him again. Couldn't——"

"Don't, Nora, don't."

Ruth's manner changed. A new light of determination shone in her eyes.

"Then you won't let me see him here and now?"

"No."

"You could if you would?"

"Yes, but I won't! Now, that ends it!"

"But it doesn't end it! Here!" She pulled a paper from her muff. "From the Governor!"

"Why didn't you say, in the first place, that you had this order?" asked McCarthy angrily.

"Because I wanted to see what kind of a man you were!"

McCarthy's face turned scarlet. He turned to the guard.

"Tell the Head Keeper to bring William Reid, well guarded, over here to see his wife for the last time, by order of the Governor. Nora, you'd better ask our guests to go into the other room with you. Not you, Anderson; just wait a minute, will you?"

Drawing Anderson down to the fireplace, he missed seeing the significant glance which Jennie and Ruth exchanged before the former left the room.

"I tell you, Bull, it's an outrage! Her makin' me look like a boob, and before all those people, too! I've a great mind to call up the Governor and tell him what I think of his givin' an order over my head," stormed the mortified Warden.

"Oh, better go slow," soothed Anderson.

"Well, I'll take it out on them!"

"How?"

"I'm goin' to sit right here in this chair, let 'em talk in front of me, and walk him out again!"

"I wouldn't do that. It'll put you in bad."

"I don't see that."

"She must have a pretty good pull to get that order out of the Governor. She'll get the story printed—there are papers that don't like you, remember—'Cruel Warden Insults Wife at Farewell Interview!' How would you like to see that?"

"That's so."

"You got a chance to be decent and not lose anything." The telephone rang violently. "Maybe that's the Governor calling now."

The Warden hurried over to the 'phone.

"Hello! Yes, this is McCarthy. Oh, Barnes and Co., New York. Well, what are you callin' me up at this time of day for? What's that! Five thousand dollars! Say, wait a minute. I

can't talk to you on this 'phone. Wait! I'll call you up in three minutes."

"If it's somethin' important, Mac," suggested Anderson, "why don't you leave this to me. I'll watch him."

"Thanks, I'll take you! I've just *got* to talk to that fellow right away!"

"Guess so. Business won't wait even on the Warden of Sing Sing!"

"When Reid comes in," said McCarthy, turning to a guard, "take your orders from Mr. Anderson."

"Yes, sir."

"You can see your husband, Mrs. Reid, for five minutes only. I *was* goin' to give you an hour to-morrow night. But you went over my head. So you can just consider this your good-by!"

He hurried out, followed by the keeper.

Ruth turned to Anderson with outstretched hands.

"Thank God! Thank God!" She broke into a little hysterical laugh. "Mr. MacLaren timed it just right! He called him just in time!"

Anderson caught her by the arm and shook her.

"Pull yourself together! No nonsense, now! Remember, this is the test."

"Yes—yes! I know. I will!" She was making a fight to retain her self-control.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, yes! O'Brien is waiting in the car

with the engine going. The motor-boat and the yacht are ready."

"Good! Remember it's all a question of nerve. The luck is changing. The Governor's giving you that order showed it!"

Again she had to fight her rising hysteria.

"The Governor gave me no order!"

"Then how did you get it!"

"I stole the paper from his desk at our last interview—a moment when his back was turned. The body of the letter is typewritten. I forged his name! Ha, ha, ha! I'd do it again! I'd do *more* to save him!"

"You're a wonder!" said Anderson in unfeigned admiration.

Two guards, armed with rifles, came in and took their station on the inside of the door. Anderson looked from one to the other.

"What's the idea?"

"We're going to stay here during the talk."

"Oh, are you? Not while I'm in authority. Do you think I'm goin' to have you men stand there and watch a woman sufferin'? Not much! You stand *outside* the door, and don't come in except at my orders. You know me?"

"Yes, Mr. Anderson."

They went out as silently as they had come. The door opened once more, and accompanied by four other guards, also armed, Bill Reid came across the threshold. At the sight of him, so thin, so haggard, with the dreadful prison pallor replacing the glow of health she had always

seen in his face, Ruth staggered as if she were about to fall. She held out her arms with a low moan. Quick as a thought, Anderson got behind him and closed the door in the face of the waiting guards.

“Ruth!” All his heart was in that cry.

In a moment they were in each other’s arms.

“My wife! My little wife!”

“Hold me tight—tighter—so close, darling, that you hurt! I want to feel your arms crushing me!”

“We’ve such a little time, and so much to say, darling!”

“Let me look at you! Oh, my poor sweetheart!” Once more she buried her face on his breast.

“Mrs. Reid! Mrs. Reid! Remember! There’s not an instant to lose!” Anderson reminded her.

“You!” said Reid, recognizing him for the first time. “What right have you here? Aren’t you satisfied with sending me to the chair that you must embitter my last——”

“No, no, dear! He did help convict you. But now he’s here to save you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to!” snapped Anderson. “Get off that coat!”

As Reid began to take off his coat in a dazed fashion, Anderson ripped off his collar and tie and the dicky he was wearing.

“Here! Special for the occasion!”

He pulled Reid behind a screen just as Jennie came softly in at the door leading to the front of the apartment.

“Everything’s quiet,” she whispered. “Where are they?”

Without trusting herself to answer, Ruth jerked her head toward the screen.

In another second Anderson and Reid came out. They had changed clothes even to their shoes.

“I don’t know why you’re doing this for me——”

“I’m not. I’m doin’ it for myself!”

“What next?”

“Go with your wife—that’s all you’ve got to do.”

“There’s a motor waiting, and a boat in the Hudson. We’re going to get out of the country to-night.”

“Here!”

Anderson snatched an overcoat and a slouch hat from behind the screen, and began hustling Reid into the coat.

“Pull the hat down over your eyes, man. She’s fainting after the good-by, an’ you’re takin’ her to the machine. Get the idea? When you get in, the rest is up to you.”

“And you? It’s your job. You’ve thrown that away.”

“Not if you work it right. Here!” He picked a wine bottle from the table.

“Hit me over the head!”

“Why, I couldn’t——”

“Hit, you damn fool! And don’t be all night about it!”

But the blow that Reid gave him, while it cut his head open, was not enough to satisfy him.

“You couldn’t smash a mosquito!” he grumbled. “Here, I’ll bet you can do it!”

He handed another bottle to Ruth. “Remember, it was me that got you in all this mess!”

Ruth struck him with all her strength, and he went reeling to the floor. Womanlike, she covered her face with her hands.

“You’ve no time to be sorry now,” Jennie reminded her. “Take her other arm, Bill.”

As she opened the door, she said in a voice sufficiently loud to be heard in the other rooms:

“Yes, Mr. Anderson, I’ll help you out with her.”

As the door closed behind them, Anderson sat up, put his hand to his head, grinned when he saw the blood, and laid back.

The five minutes being up, the guard came in at the other door. Anderson’s head was turned so that he could not see his face.

“The poor boob’s fainted!” he said, as he kicked at his feet.

“Come on, Reid, get up!”

As the supposed Reid did not move, he bent over him.

“Good God! It’s Mr. Anderson! Help!

Help! Ring the bell! Catch him! Reid's escaped!"

He rushed for the door and threw it open. From outside came the honk of an automobile starting away at high speed. McCarthy at the head of some guards, followed by some of the guests, came rushing into the room.

"What is it?"

"Reid: he's knocked out Mr. Anderson and got away in that automobile!"

"Damn you!" With a blow of his fist, McCarthy knocked him down. "That's what comes of trusting a woman!"

He rushed over, grabbed and raised Anderson, who remained limp and unconscious in his arms.

"Get out my machine. Ring the bell. Sound the alarm. Telephone all up and down the road. They can't have got far. We'll catch them. Damn him! He won't be electrocuted! I'll blow his head off myself!"

"There's the car, sir." Again the honk of an automobile was heard.

McCarthy rushed behind the screen.

"The damned murderin' thief! He's gone off with my hat and coat!"

He tore out of the room, followed by the prison guards, to the sound of the clanging bell, the discharge of guns and other sounds of the wildest excitement.

CHAPTER XXI

It was the evening of the next day. Even the rouge which she had put on more heavily than ever before could not hide the haggard look of Grace's face. She was sitting in her boudoir, dressed in a delicate white gown edged and trimmed with fur. From time to time she left her chair to alter the arrangement of the gewgaws on a low table that stood in the window, or to fuss with the flowers in the bowl on the chimney-piece.

She was perfectly aware that she was showing signs of extreme nervousness. But who would not, she asked herself, with Bull Anderson sitting in the same room, putting one through a mild form of "Third Degree"!

There he was, and there he had been for the past hour, seeming to sit even more erect than usual in his chair. And the questions! Sometimes he asked them slowly and distinctly, pondering over her replies so long that she felt that she must scream at the top of her voice if he kept silent another second. Again he fired them at her so rapidly that her brain fairly reeled in the effort to answer without betraying something. For who could tell what seemingly innocent question masked a pitfall of the most fatal kind?

“On my word, Mr. Anderson, I’ve told you everything I know,” she said, more to break an unusually long silence that had fallen between them than with any hope of bringing his visit to an end.

“You’d better tell the truth, Grace Andrews, if you don’t want your father and mother to come here and find out all about you,” he said sternly.

“My God, no! Not that! Not that! They think I have a position here at a good salary. And they’re so proud of my success and the presents I am able to give them. It would break my mother’s heart to know the truth about me. I couldn’t stand it, Mr. Anderson, I just couldn’t!”

“What were you doing at the Cathedral Christmas morning?”

“I’ve already told you, and I tell you again—I went to early Mass.”

“And was it in *front* of the Cathedral that you met Burnett?”

“I tell you I *didn’t* meet him! On my word, I didn’t! By everything I hold sacred, I didn’t!”

“You are positive Burnett was not there.”

“Positive.”

“How can you be sure?”

“I—I—— Well, Mr. Burnett spent the night here. I left him here asleep.”

“While you went to Mass?”

“Yes.”

“And it is Ralph Stuyvesant who supports you?”

She nodded sulkily.

“Where is Burnett now?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea.”

“When did you see him last?”

“Yesterday. But what are you driving at? Surely you don’t connect Mr. Burnett in any way with the murder of that man in front of the Cathedral!”

“I haven’t said what I connect Burnett with. But there are a good many questions he’ll have to answer.”

“Oh, he’ll answer them quickly enough!” And then, suddenly flaring up: “It’s easy to see what’s the matter with you, Bull Anderson! You let that murderer Reid escape, and you’re in bad. So you’re trying to kick up a hulla-baloo over something else to divert attention from your failure. That’s what’s the matter with you! Only, I warn you; you’d better be careful. You’re fooling with a big man when you fool with Tom Burnett. You’re likely to make things worse for yourself instead of better.”

“If Burnett comes here to-night,” said Anderson, rising and paying not the slightest attention to her tirade, “tell him I want to see him.”

“I’ll tell him.” She crossed the room and rang a bell. “Marie,” she said to the maid, “lock the door *after* Mr. Anderson.”

Anderson grinned as he went out.

For a moment after she had seen his broad back disappear, Grace stood rigid. But when the welcome sound of the slamming of the elevator door reached her ears she darted across the room to the door leading to her bedroom.

"Tom! Tom!" she called. "It's all right. He's gone!"

A key turned in the lock and Burnett came into the room. At the sight of him Grace, with an heroic effort, pulled herself together. She saw plainly that the slightest signs of nervousness on her part would shatter his last remnant of self-control. He was in evening dress, but his unusual pallor and the twitching of his face showed that he was near the breaking point. She must be strong for them both.

"You heard?"

"Every word."

"Well?"

"They're after me! By God, they're after me!" He sank down on the couch and buried his face in his hands.

"They could never convict you. They can't even seriously suspect you of killing a cheap thing like Dutch Joe!"

"That's not it. Don't you see? That's just incidental. They've demanded an accounting of Ruth's money. They've put special accountants on the books at the bank. That means the

game's nearly up. They're working back—working back to Stuyvesant!”

“But Reid's under sentence of death for that. Even if he has escaped, they're after him hot and heavy.”

“You don't suppose a man gets away from the Death House in Sing Sing without police assistance?”

The telephone bell jangled sharply.

“What's that?”

“Just the 'phone.”

“Be careful! It may be some trick.”

Grace nodded reassuringly.

“Yes?” she said, the receiver at her ear. “What? An old man and an old woman asking for this apartment? Want to know if my name is Grace Andrews? Of course not. I never heard of a Grace Andrews.”

“Don't you see? A trick, a police trick. They've got your parents after us. Send them away! Send them away, I tell you!”

“I tell you I don't know any Grace Andrews. Send them away. What's that? They've been here a number of times asking for the same person. Well, I can't help that.”

“You see!”

“Oh, it's terrible! It isn't as if you meant to kill old Stuyvesant!”

“No, but he's dead, and somebody has to pay. I thought I could escape paying by putting it off on Reid. And then Schmidt came—and now he's dead, too. And Reid's escaped. It's just

piling up and piling up, and somebody'll have to pay for the total. God! I won't! I can't!"

His voice rose to a scream. She went over and shook him by the shoulders.

"Pull yourself together, Tom. You mustn't give way. You're all wrong, I tell you. You *can* escape, and—and make a new start."

"Escape? A new start? What chance is there? And suppose I do, what then? To be hounded for the rest of my life. Never to know a moment's peace, never a night's quiet rest. But, waking and sleeping, always waiting for that hand to fall on my shoulder and that voice to say: 'Thomas Burnett, I arrest you for the murder——' No, no! I can't stand it, I tell you. I'd rather——"

"You'd rather what? Give yourself up, or kill yourself? Be a coward and a quitter? And I thought you were a man!"

"What do you mean?"

"I wish I were a man to show you!"

"What would you do?"

"Do? I'd be a man and not a whining coward! I'd fight, that's what I'd do!"

"And how?"

"I'd put on a bold front. I'd act as though nothing had happened. If you are afraid of discovery here, get away. But don't run away. You have interests in many countries. Visit some of them. But take plenty of money with you."

“And be extradited when they want me!”

“Why not Mexico? You couldn't very well be extradited from there, as things are now. And Stuyvesant and Company own valuable mines there, besides their oil properties. There you'd be a little king with your own people to fight for you. And if it comes out you're there, no one could accuse you of running away.”

“Go openly?”

“No. Go secretly, and take all the money you can lay your hands on with you.”

“I see.”

“You can get the money?”

“Yes. I've put two hundred thousand of the bank's where I can get it.”

“Very well, then.”

“I'll do it! I'll get away to-night. You've put new heart into me. I'll make a break for El Paso. There's a man there, a man named Rao. He knows Northern Mexico like a book. I'll be safe with him. I'll write you under the name of Barnes, telling you how you can communicate with me. Then, when I'm safe, I'll send for you.”

“And I'll come. Oh, how gladly I will come, and leave all this—and him!”

She was in his arms, murmuring farewells and terms of endearment, when the door flew open and Ralph, with every mark of having been drinking, lurched into the room.

“So that's the game, is it?” he sneered.

Burnett had so long completely dominated the weaker man that it was second nature to do so now.

“What game? What do you mean?” he demanded indignantly.

“What sort of a fool do you think I am?” retorted Ralph with unwonted spirit. “She’s my girl—mine. She’s been mine for nearly two years! And you! I thought you were my best friend. And now I come and find you in each other’s arms! Damn you, I’ll show you!”

He whipped out a gun and advanced threateningly on Burnett.

It was curious how, at the bare sight of a gun, all of Burnett’s nerve returned, together with the instinct to protect the woman at his side.

“Shoot, if you think it will do you any good!” he bluffed. The muzzle of the gun was cold against his chest. “If she is unfaithful to you—if we both are unfaithful—shooting either or both of us will do a lot of good, won’t it? And being shot is an easy finish compared to yours, if you kill *us!*”

“I’ll kill myself, too!”

“No, you won’t, Ralph. You’re not that kind!”

“I——”

“I’ve been your best friend. But for me, you’d be in prison for forgery. But if you think I’ve wronged you, shoot me. I won’t defend myself!”

"I wouldn't have believed it," said Ralph whimperingly. The gun wavered in his hand.

"Why shouldn't you believe it?" demanded Grace with sudden rage. "You don't suppose I can care for you when——"

"When you've misjudged her so cruelly, so shamefully!" put in Burnett hastily.

"Misjudged her! Haven't I eyes!"

"You saw me telling her good-by. I'm going away—for a long time, maybe—to-night."

"Do you expect me to believe *that*?"

"Believe it or not. I'm going."

"That's true, Ralph, Gospel truth. I was so sorry to see Tom go. That was all. He's been our best friend."

"You're going? You mean you're running away?"

"Yes. I'm running to cover. And if you aren't a damned fool you'll take some means to protect yourself, too. Or they'll get us both for trying to railroad an innocent man to the chair!"

"I never knew he was innocent!" said Ralph in wonder.

"No?"

"I didn't. I tell you I didn't. I believed all along he was guilty."

"Well, I knew all the time he was innocent. I tried to railroad him, and I failed."

"You — knew — it — all—the—time?" said Ralph slowly. "How did you know it? *You*

were in the room just before—— Then *you*——” He reached for the gun again, which was lying on the table.

“No, no, no! Not that, Ralph! I swear before God, not that! Dutch Joe was the man who did it. And now he’s dead.”

“You’ve sworn to too many lies already,” screamed Ralph, roused to a real rage at the thought that he might be in the presence of his father’s murderer.

“Oh, your shooting bluff!” sneered Burnett.

“Shoot you? No. I’m going to take you and turn you over to the police.”

“Very well, do. But the minute I’m arrested, there will be a counter charge against you. For forgery, for perjury and for embezzlement. Come on!”

“Don’t!” said Ralph, sinking into a chair.

“If I murdered your father, why did I do it? That’s what the court will ask. And where will *you* stand? A son who forged his father’s name, who stole nearly a million dollars from him, and then, when that father was dead, perjured himself on the witness stand to fasten the crime on an innocent man, and that man his sister’s husband! Come on! Let’s go to the police. We’ll see who’s locked up!”

“I can’t! I can’t!” sobbed Ralph. “I can’t face the shame and disgrace! I loathe myself, but I can’t face it all!”

For a long time Burnett stood looking down

on him, with a smile of contempt. Then he laid his hand on the bowed head.

“There’s no danger to you, Ralph, if you keep quiet. All this will blow over. MacLaren will help you, for your father’s sake, and I’ll be back when the excitement is over. Good-by!”

“Good-by!” said Ralph huskily, without looking up.

“Go out through my bedroom and the servant’s entrance,” whispered Grace. “It will be safer.”

They exchanged a last, lingering look of farewell. For a moment she turned away. She heard the door close, without looking around. He was gone. When would she see him again! On one thing her mind was made up: she would break with Ralph here and now. She had plenty of money to tide her over until Burnett should send for her.

“Grace!” Ralph raised his head and looked at her appealingly. “Grace, I was wrong, but I was half mad. Won’t you forgive me and tell me you still love me?”

“No!”

“Then you haven’t really ever loved me!”

“Do you think that any woman could love you! A coward, a thing like you!”

“Then you *do* love him!”

“Yes. What are you going to do about it?” she asked insolently.

“Do! I’m going to kick you out of this! Throw you back into the street!”

She drew herself up to her full height and laughed at him.

“And do you really think I’d have to stay long in the street? Look at me! Why, you little fool, I hated you from the beginning. I’ll be only too glad to go!”

“You will, damn you!”

He threw himself upon her, and catching her by the throat, hurled her down on the couch, still keeping his strangling clutch.

“Help! Help! Help!”

In response to her cry, the door burst open, and Tom Andrews, followed by Nora, rushed in. With a bound he had caught Ralph by the back of the neck, and, shaking him like a rat, threw him half across the room.

“You were a cowardly little rat at college, and you haven’t changed. Fighting women is about all you’re fit for! I think the best thing I can do is——”

“The best thing you can do,” snarled Ralph, struggling to his feet, “is to get out of my house. And take your wife and that trollop, your daughter, with you.”

“Your house!”

“Yes! *My* house. And take the woman I’m through with. I took her when she had nothing. I gave her everything she wanted—motors and sables, an apartment and servants, and money. But she couldn’t be faithful even when



"WE WILL NEVER SEE A SUNRISE THAT MEANS WHAT
THIS HAS MEANT TO US!"

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she was paid for it! So I'm kicking her out! Take her back to the kitchen I took her from!"

With a furious gesture Andrews started for him.

"Tom! Stop!" Nora threw herself between them.

The door slammed. Ralph was gone.

At the sound of the slamming door, all of the fight seemed to go out of the old man. Without so much as a look in his daughter's direction, he turned to his wife.

"Come, Mother. I guess that's all we can do here!"

"Tom! She's our daughter, our Gracie. You ain't goin' to leave her here!"

"I guess she's showed she's able to take care of herself. She don't want us!"

"Tom!"

He didn't seem to hear her. He was fumbling with the watch and chain in his waistcoat.

"I didn't know where the money came from that bought it. I couldn't wear it now!" He laid the watch and chain on the table. "Mother, give me that gold-handled umbrella!" He threw it on the table beside the watch. "We're clean people, your mother and me, and we don't want things that were bought with money made that way! Come, Mother!"

A deep shudder shook Grace from head to foot as she heard the umbrella strike the table. But she had a last flash of defiance.

"Made that way! You were glad enough to

take the things, I notice! Your own common sense must have told you that a girl couldn't make presents like that out of a beggarly salary! But now that I'm found out, exposed——”

Both doors were thrown open. From the one leading to her bedroom came Anderson and Burnett, handcuffed to a policeman. From the other came Ralph, an officer holding him by the arm, and two men she had never seen. With staring eyes she looked from one to the other.

“Can you identify this man?” demanded Anderson of one of the strange men.

“I can, sir. On Christmas morning, my friend and I were on our way home, after—after a rather jolly night. We were going down Fifty-second Street, when that man came running along. He cursed us because we were in his way. He knocked my friend down. I was so angry that I ran part of the way after him. I saw him get into the runabout whose number I gave you. A woman was waiting for him. I saw her lean out of the window.”

“Is that woman here?”

“Yes, sir. There she is.”

He pointed an accusing finger at Grace.

“That is all, thank you. I have traced the number of the runabout to you, Grace Andrews. Have *you* anything to say?”

Grace essayed to speak, but no sound came from her parched lips.

“I'll break you for this outrage!” blustered

Burnett with a last desperate effort. "What do you expect to charge me with, even if that drunken fool's word is to be believed!"

"For the moment," said Anderson, "I expect to charge you with the murder of Dutch Joe Schmidt. And unless I am mistaken in my man, by the time I have examined that sniveling little shrimp over there"—pointing to Ralph—"I expect to charge you with the murder of William Van Rennselaer Stuyvesant! Officer, take both these men to the station house. And watch them both carefully. They must not be allowed to communicate with each other."

At a sign from him, the officers hustled their prisoners out of the room, and Grace and her parents were once more alone.

"Grace!" Nora held out her motherly arms.

With a cry, Grace tottered forward and sank sobbing at her mother's feet.

CHAPTER XXII

THEY had been riding since before dawn, and they paused on a little rise of land to see the sunrise—the wonderful sunrise of Mexico.

He had been tormenting himself, as he sometimes did, with the thought of all she was depriving herself of, living this fugitive life with him, far from the haunts of men, away from all the luxuries that she had always known. And she, for the thousandth time, was repeating that never before had she known what happiness meant.

As they sat their horses, side by side, watching for the first glow, there came a voice hallooming from the valley below, and the sound of horses' hoofs ringing on the road they themselves had just climbed.

“Hel-lo! Hel-lo! Hel-lo! Bill Reid, hel-lo!”

For a moment all the warm color left Ruth's face.

“Darling! It sounds like——”

“Like Dennis' voice!” he finished for her.

Trembling, fearing, hoping they scarcely knew what, they waited, her arm protectingly over his shoulder.

Straining their eyes, they peered down the winding road. Presently two figures came in sight. As they appeared around the turn of

the road, one of them snatched off his hat and waved it over his head. It *was* O'Brien, and with him a Mexican guide whom they had several times employed.

"Hel-lo, Bill Reid! Good news! A pardon from the Governor!"

A pardon from the Governor! Ruth burst into a passion of tears.

A half hour later, when O'Brien had told them all the news, and how Mr. MacLaren had sent him down after them, they rode off a little way together, their arms entwined.

Ruth sat looking off into the East, still glorious with the light of the new day.

"Never, beloved, if we live to be very, very old, will we see a sunrise that means what this has meant to us!"

THE END

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