

The Day- Dreamer

Jesse Lynch Williams



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The Day-Dreamer

BOOKS BY JESSE LYNCH WILLIAMS

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The Day-Dreamer

*Being the Full Narrative of
"The Stolen Story"*

By

Jesse Lynch Williams

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To

My Brother

David Riddle Williams

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This is a novelization of a play called "The Stolen Story" — the title and one incident of which were taken from a short tale published nearly a decade ago.

In magazine form "The Day-Dreamer" was called "News and the Man."

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PART I

IN THE BERKSHIRES

I

THE beautiful Miss Cunningham seemed to be causing a commotion in Park Row this afternoon.

To be sure, she was far away at Fernleigh in the Berkshires, graciously making tea on the terrace for her father's guests and quite unconscious of brewing trouble anywhere. Yet, down in a dingy newspaper office many miles from her, with the roar of the teeming streets coming up through the dusty windows, a tall, reserved young man was endeavoring to put down a mutiny

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of which the girl up there was the innocent cause. It was a sort of disturbance no one — she least of all — would expect to see the cynical Billy Woods concerned with. And indeed no one saw it, since the commotion was confined entirely to his own breast.

“Something queer going on at Fernleigh. Take the first train up there and see what you can make out of it.” That had been the command, in the usual incisive tones of the taciturn city editor.

But instead of the usual responsive glow of the dark, listening eyes deep-set under straight brows, the grave young man had blinked as from a sudden blow.

Now, in giving out assignments the city editor had learned to watch these rather remarkable eyes, and when the unconscious signal was not flashed back he knew that this eccentric member of his staff — so brilliant when interested, so worthless when

not — had failed to “see his story in it.” In such cases the editor was likely to try him on something else. But in the present instance it was so obviously the story of the day, and Woods was so obviously the man for it, that this unaccountable whim seemed as perplexing as it was annoying.

The editor began citing reasons for believing in the queerness of the things going on at Fernleigh.

“Oh, I understand all that,” interrupted Woods with a quick gesture. “Course it’s a good story, but you see — I know the Cunninghams personally.”

“All the better — the old man’ll know you can be trusted with the inside story.”

Woods smiled absently. His thoughts were not on “the old man” — not by a whole generation. His recoil from the notion of invading her atmosphere was not merely because the rather young girl on the broad terrace stood for all the grace and dignity

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of life so completely lacking from the news point of view; there was another reason.

The last time he had seen her he had decided that it would be just as well to let it remain the last time. It was not good for him to be there. And as staying away could hardly inconvenience her, he was sailing for England in a fortnight to take the vacant post of London correspondent.

The eyes had undergone another unconscious change at the thought of this resolve. The alert editor noticed it, misread it. "No one could handle this story as you could, Billy," he said coaxingly.

Woods knew that too; he was not impressed. He hardly listened as the editor went on. "It was queer enough when an old aristocrat of General Cunningham's stripe joined Tammany — country isn't over its shock yet — former Cabinet officer and all that — a man who came within an ace of the Presidential nomination, mixing up here

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in municipal politics. But when he invites Jake Shayne, Jerry McCarter, and others of that sort to spend Sunday at his country place! He must be getting dotty, eh? Or else — what's he doing it for, Woods, what's he doing it for! The old fox wouldn't fetch that gang up there for fun. Something will be doing up there this evening, something big. And if you get the facts, you'll have a beat on the whole town."

And still the eyes failed to focus on the story, even though it held out the possibility of exclusive news — the one thing regarded seriously in the newspaper world. Ordinarily the editor was a man of few words. "Oh, well," he broke off abruptly with the impatience of one who had cast pearls before swine, "if you don't want it — plenty of others who will."

"Who said I didn't want it?" returned Woods, sullenly, and impetuously grabbing some copy-paper which he thrust, folded,

into his pocket, he stalked out of the room, cane swinging, head thrown back, glasses sliding down — the manner so well known along Park Row.

“There goes the great Billy Woods, off on a big story.” One of the youngsters nudged the newest cub as the experienced “all ’round man” passed out. “Got the best nose for news in New York.” Even reporters sometimes have their hero-worshippers.

The city editor allowed himself a quiet smile. He thought he had brought Woods around.

It did prove to be a “big story”; as it turned out, the most important in the whole remarkable career of “the great Billy Woods,” but it was neither flattery nor his news sense that led him to it. Certain other instincts were not yet burned out of him. While the editor had talked, one phrase had penetrated the mist of the young man’s abstraction,

gripping his mind: "Must be getting . . .
No one knew those guests at Fernleigh better
than Woods — not even their host. And if
the "old fox's" eyes were becoming dim
with age, God help the old fox among that
flock of vultures. Doubtless the sudden
impulse which turned the young man toward
Fernleigh would have amused the dignified
old statesman. A reporter to the rescue!
But here again the young man was not con-
cerned about the old one, but about his
daughter, who would suffer if he did.

For, not all of the romance and knight-
errantry of youth had been torn from him
by the heartless realities he confronted in
his daily duties. Even reporters sometimes
have their little dreams.

II

DIGNIFIED old gentlemen have their dreams too. General Cunningham's long-cherished project for the benefit of his native city, seemed about to reach realization. The plan for which he had wrestled so persistently with his fellow-commissioners ever since he had accepted the presidency of the board, was at last in the form of a bill, about to be presented at Albany and rushed through both Houses — almost before the newspapers might have a chance to gain their breath for screaming. It was no other than the celebrated Cunningham bill, providing water-front parks halfway around Manhattan Island.

It was partly as a subtle recognition of their worthiness in coming to his broad view of the question, partly to put the finishing

touches upon the bill in uninterrupted seclusion, that General Cunningham, to the horror of his sister, Mrs. Metcalfe, and the amusement of his daughter Frances, had invited his confrères of the board to spend Sunday with him at Fernleigh.

During the progress of the banquet that evening for celebration and mutual admiration, while Woods was still on his way to Fernleigh, Miss Cunningham, becoming bored by dining in the library with her indignant aunt, decided to wander out upon the terrace, the night being warm. Next it pleased her to cross the court to the other wing of the house for the purpose of seeing some of the fun through the dining-room windows. Mrs. Metcalfe, to see that no harm came of it, followed with the resigned expression of an aunt who has long since ceased hoping to control a motherless niece.

Frances was young. She looked especially so this evening, in white. Her de-

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meanor was piquant, unconventional, with far more assurance than a girl of her age was entitled to. Mrs. Metcalfe put it down to ignorance of the world she had so recently entered, being too secure in her position there to be conscious of it, or to look down upon those not so blessed. And the aunt prayed that she might retain the charm of this after she had gained knowledge of many other things — which was not unlike her other hope, that the girl's figure would retain its present slimness after the lines of her neck became more rounded.

The dinner had already reached a hilarious stage. Mrs. Metcalfe, a rather imposing person, tried to take it humorously, but yielded to her natural impulse to be scandalized, which she enjoyed much more.

“But think how nice it is for them, aunty,” commented the girl; “they are being reformed.” She peered down the broad allée toward the lake. A man was

crossing the irregular patches of moonlight and shadows cast by the trees to the east. "Who's coming?" she asked.

"It's Gilbert. I sent for him," said Mrs. Metcalfe in an authoritative tone, intended to veil any possible note of guilt in it.

Frances said Oh, and asked Why.

"To help us," Mrs. Metcalfe replied, and looked toward the dining room as though reproaching its ill-timed silence.

Frances repeated, Oh! and continued to watch the young man approaching with dignified, deliberate strides. The Townsends always took this short cut from their place.

Gilbert Townsend was an intellectual-looking man of thirty, and elected to wear diminutive side-whiskers, about the size of dominoes. A specially blocked, unfashionable hat proclaimed his scorn of ordinary city smartness. But along with a super-refined manner, he was possessed of the observing eye. He was not very tall and

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stood stiffly erect as if to make himself reach higher, though more likely this was merely from feeling the necessity of balancing the weight of wealth and responsibility which had descended upon his head two years ago with the death of his well-known — some would say notorious — father. It was this weight, no doubt, which made him walk and talk with the air of a man to be reckoned with. When talking to women his manner was graceful, even courtly, with an old-world repose not understood by those who laughed at it. With men he was seldom so much at ease. Most of them looked upon him as a harmless millionaire of the less prevalent type, who cherished honest if visionary ideals of bettering the world and spoke rather too frequently of Wealth as a Sacred Trust, and said nothing about the unsacredness of the trust by which his wealth had been acquired.

In his daily life he affected the English

ideal — not because it was English, as his detractors sneered — but because it seemed ideal to him. He seldom used the town house, despised the city and its social strainings, though retaining the inherited box at the opera because he believed in encouraging the arts as well as numerous charities, at which he kept two secretaries busy. Much of his own time he spent abroad or in the country, where he was interested in Jersey cows and an Italian garden.

Mrs. Metcalfe had gone forward to meet him, followed less eagerly by Frances. The former greeted him effusively. “It is so good of you,” she said with an air of relief.

“My time is at your command — always,” returned young Townsend, bowing low. “How do you do, Frances?” he said, advancing toward her with a quizzical smile, and again bowed low, but with a difference, over her extended hand, taking it delicately as though it were an object of rare beauty,

and fragile; whereas it was merely of rare beauty, as she knew.

Frances gripped his fingers like a golf club. "Hello," she said, and tried to pronounce it vulgarly.

"Mother has guests for the week-end," he murmured to her with his fastidiously modulated tones, "but your message said 'Come at once!'"

"Awfully nice of you, Gilbert," said the girl. "But I didn't send any message."

"I knew it would bring him, my dear," Mrs. Metcalfe put in, smiling, "if I said *you* wanted him."

Frances shrugged her shoulders, not ill-naturedly. "But I don't. Do I, Gilbert?" It was **her** recent note with him. He did not fancy it, but overlooked it.

"Here they come!" cried Mrs. Metcalfe, in a sudden panic.

"Stand fast, aunty," whispered Frances, encouragingly.

The three moved into the shadow as the dinner party filed through the open door, voluble and vulgar, all smoking long cigars arrogantly.

“Why is he sending them into the garden?” whispered Gilbert. He, too, was rather scandalized by the general’s recent move.

“To meet you,” suggested Frances.

“He should pack them off to bed,” declared Mrs. Metcalfe.

“Perhaps they need fresh air,” hazarded the girl.

The ladies pointed out to Gilbert the various celebrities descending the steps in the flooding light of the open door. They were by no means of one type. First came Major Shayne, whose profession was Law and whose practice was Politics. “Looks disappointingly meek,” was Gilbert’s whispered comment. With him was Sam Nordheimer, wholesale whiskey, Shayne’s running

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mate and sometimes understudy; a bully but a coward at heart, as Shayne, who used him, knew. Murphy and Munger, black-mustached, frock-coated, more common tribal specimens, one fat and the other thin. Behind them jovial Jerry McCarter, well known and beloved of every one about City Hall.

Shayne and Nordheimer were dressed in evening clothes and seemed to be at ease in them. But Jerry had clung to his accustomed creamy-gray frock coat with a pink carnation in the buttonhole; all seemed in jovial after-dinner mood, but he, like one or two others, had unmistakably taken too much of the general's champagne, and wishing to express his appreciation of everything in sight he waited by the door to join the dignified old gentleman bringing up the rear. McCarter, not being in a listless mood, employed the interval in assisting his fellow-guests down the terrace steps until,

this becoming monotonous, he decided to accelerate their descent instead, which he accomplished with varying success.

Following the other members of the board came their host, General Cunningham. He was obviously concerned over the condition of some of his guests, — this was why he had suggested leaving the table and all that stood thereon, — but still looked his part: aristocratic mien, heavy, dignified presence, urbanely gracious in manner, old-fashioned, at times florid, in expression — a statesman of the old school, surrounded by politicians of the new.

“Say, how about it, gineral?” McCarter exclaimed, considerably pointing out the moonlit landscape that spreads out before one on the terrace at Fernleigh. “Good as Coney, eh?” And, grasping his slow-moving host by the arm, he endeavored to demonstrate his appreciation by showing those in the garden below how well he and

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a former Cabinet officer could do a cakewalk by moonlight.

“Watch papa trying to look democratic!” whispered Frances.

“How can you laugh?” reproved Mrs. Metcalfe.

“What else can I do?” asked her niece. “Gilbert, you are a man; this is where you come in.”

Gilbert hesitated, then achieved an inspiration. Hurrying across to the general he whispered his suggestion. In a moment the entire dinner party was marching ecstatically down the allée to enjoy a launch ride on the lake by moonlight. Gilbert, bringing up the rear, waved his hand to the ladies as he descended the lower steps.

At about this time Woods was changing cars at the junction.

There had been another reason for sending for Gilbert. Dr. Strange, the nerve

specialist, had pronounced the strain of riding the tiger a little too racking for a man of the general's age, and had ordered him abroad for a year; Frances was to go with him.

As the sound of the men's voices died away Mrs. Metcalfe turned and looked quizzically at her young niece. "How long do you propose to keep him dangling?" she asked.

Frances pretended not to understand. But her aunt did not consider this worth noticing and went on, "Don't you think, my dear, that before you sail ——"

"I haven't asked him to dangle."

Mrs. Metcalfe reminded her of the fact that every one thought them engaged already. And Frances reminded her that this was her aunt's fault.

Mrs. Metcalfe took up the old theme of how different was Gilbert from most young men of great wealth. "Instead of selfish dissipation ——" she began.

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“It takes more than that to account for his unpopularity,” put in Frances, wishing to cut it short.

“Think of the good he does.” Her aunt was not to be cut short. “The reading-rooms he establishes ——”

“With his name plastered all over them.”

“It is a good name.”

“I don’t want it. Let him give it to reading-rooms.”

“All the same,” returned her aunt, laughing, “I believe that deep down in your heart you’re still tremendously fond of him.”

“Of course I am,” said Frances.

Mrs. Metcalfe raised her eyebrows, and replied whimsically, “If you only wouldn’t agree so readily!” Then she added in a more serious tone than she intended, “Frances, I sometimes fear you’re becoming fond of — some one else.”

“What nonsense!” That was a sufficient

reply, but the girl went on, "Of course not," and supplemented, "How could you conceive such an absurd idea!"

This time her aunt remarked, "If you only wouldn't *disagree* so readily!"

The girl moved toward the steps.

Mrs. Metcalfe was laughing. "Before you go in, you might tell me who we are talking about."

The girl hesitated a moment, then turned and joined in the laugh. "It was natural, though, for me to think you meant his cousin ——"

"Very natural."

"Don't be tiresome, aunty. I mean because he *is* a cousin, and a contrast." She turned toward the steps again. "Mr. Woods merely interests me."

"Oh, he merely interests you," Mrs. Metcalfe mused aloud. "I hope he does not interest you as much as he alarms your father and me." The time had come to

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speak. "Now, my dear, no doubt this handsome young bohemian ——"

"He abhors the bohemian pose, by the way."

"— seems very romantic and fascinating to a girl of your age ——"

"Do you know," put in Frances, stopping on the steps meditatively, "I never think of him as exactly fascinating."

"Dear, dear," thought Mrs. Metcalfe, "is it as bad as that?" And abandoning her unfinished sentence, she began another in a different tone of voice, approaching her niece tenderly. "I hesitate to interfere, but, my child, you were left motherless at a rather critical age."

"Oh, that's all right," returned the girl, embracing her. "We are delighted to have you at Fernleigh, aunty darling. And I shall be quite broken-hearted if that persistent old Judge Lansing ——"

"How absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Metcalfe,

wondering if he really did seem so old to others.

“But, my child,” continued her niece with gravity, “you were left husbandless at a rather critical age.”

Mrs. Metcalfe laughed. “I must beg you to be serious, Frances.”

“I am. I think it’s scandalous, aunty.”

“Your father and I,” returned Mrs. Metcalfe, no longer smiling, “can’t help feeling much concerned about this interest you manifest in — all sorts of people.” The girl seemed anxious to escape, Mrs. Metcalfe rapidly pursuing with, “When a young man squanders all his patrimony in one year ——”

“Isn’t *that* interesting!” interpolated the girl, teasingly enthusiastic, from the top step.

“— in folly and wickedness ——”

“A dark past!” said the girl, looking down at her aunt, “that makes such a fine background for a brilliant future!”

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Mrs. Metcalfe was interrupted but not diverted; “— who has been cut adrift by his own family ——”

“Makes him so pathetic, doesn’t it, aunty? Good night.”

“Why, the man’s a mere reporter,” pronounced Mrs. Metcalfe with an air of finality. “Gilbert, his own cousin, says so.”

Frances came back again. “A man who has won world-wide fame as a war correspondent,” she said with spirit, “rescued a besieged garrison by his personal daring, and received the public thanks of Parliament for it” — she paused — “I fancy he can stand being called a mere reporter by a mere millionaire whose only achievement is tossing back to the masses a few of the many dollars his unscrupulous father ——”

“Frances!” Mrs. Metcalfe interrupted, “have respect for the dead!”

“Why didn’t he ever respect the living?”

“But surely you know that nearly every

one is directly or indirectly interested in the trusts! Your own father was once Mr. Townsend's attorney."

"And that's the only blot on father's career."

"Besides, Gilbert is not a mere millionaire." Mrs. Metcalfe smiled, frankly worldly. "He's a multi-millionaire." She did not like the vulgar phrase, the use of which she excused with a shrug, but she wanted the meaning to sink in.

"Very commonplace thing nowadays," said the girl. "Know a dozen of 'em."

"Well, I'm thankful to say you don't know dozens of interesting reporters." Mrs. Metcalfe was sparring for time. "Why doesn't this harum-scarum cousin of Gilbert's remain a war correspondent?"

"When the war's over?"

"Then why isn't he an editor or something?"

"Because he says it's more fun to write."

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“But after all, to be a mere reporter——”

“A war correspondent is a mere reporter, with a pith helmet on. He said so.”

“But it is so much more respectable.”

“A historian is a mere reporter surrounded by a library.”

“H'm. He said so?” But Mrs. Metcalfe did not stop to exult. “If he weren't so erratic,” she pronounced, condemningly, “he would keep on writing novels. It's so much nicer.”

“Aunty, I don't suppose I ought to tell you this. But he wrote ‘Avenging City’ as a burlesque on the pseudo-historical romance, with an average of two sudden deaths a chapter, on a bet that it would find a publisher, and it did — and the public took it seriously! Among others, yourself.”

“Then why didn't he do it again?”

“He tried to, but you see this time *he* took it seriously — and failed. But I

don't see why you think it is so much more respectable to scribble lies about the Court of Louis Fourteenth than to unearth the truth about the intriguing rulers of our own city and their court — on Fourteenth street."

She paused and sat down on the bench, somewhat overcome by her own eloquence. No wonder it made him cynical, she thought. William Peyton Woods, the dashing young war correspondent and the author of a book much sought by school-girls, housemaids, and old ladies, was wined and dined, while honest Billy Woods, one of the anonymous writers of the daily history of civilization, was despised and spurned — away with the reporter!

Mrs. Metcalfe looked at her romantic young niece critically. Finally she said, arising to go in, "Frank, there's just one thing I want you to promise your old aunty." She applied her wheedling tone. "In these

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two weeks before I get you safely away on the *Cedric*, you will not let this man make love to you?"

"Let him! Why, I can't make him. I never saw such a man." She looked critical.

Mrs. Metcalfe laughed and threw up her hands in despair. The child was incorrigible. "I wish you could be serious, Frank," she said.

"I can be . . . with Billy Woods. That's one of the nicest things about him." She sat down by the fountain, with chin on hands as if to talk it over. "He treats me as if I really knew something, and listens in that intent, grave manner to everything I have to say — except when I am listening to him, and then I am intent and grave, too. It's lots of fun."

"Suppose he asked you to marry him. Would you listen to that, too?"

This word drove all the banter out of

the girl. "No," she said, jumping up. "I wouldn't. I don't want to marry any of them." She turned her back on her aunty and added, "If you and father really want to marry me off, you'll have to stop talking about it. Didn't your generation ever think of anything but marrying? Did you always sit around this way?" — she resumed her seat on the bench and imitated the pose of an old daguerreotype — "with your hair smacked down over your temples like this, doing fancy work" — she burlesqued a sentimental sigh — "until *he* came to call? Then, when he was announced, you were all in a foolish little flutter on the horse-hair furniture!"

She also burlesqued the flutter and went on patronizingly to the amused Mrs. Metcalfe, "But with us of to-day, you see, men are merely an incident, aunty dear, like horses or golf, or books — one of the necessary parts of the day's programme."

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She stopped and glanced at her aunt. "To be sure," she was frank enough to add, "they are about the best fun of the lot, but — dear me, nothing to get so excited over. Now, for instance, when a man calls on me ——"

"Mr. Woods, ma'am," announced the butler on the terrace.

"Oh, good gracious!" Frances ejaculated, her hands flying to her hair, while she gave a still more convincing portrayal of a young person in the act of fluttering.

III

WOODS came down the steps rather briskly, passed by on the other side of the fountain, and looked about so intently for some one else that the ladies thought at first that he had not seen them at all. His keen glance darted here and there over the garden, through the pergola, down the allée, and finally, with a slight movement of annoyance, swung round to the ladies to whom he now offered a reserved, if deferential bow, and remained uncovered, with eyes down, as if to make amends for his momentary abstraction.

For a reporter he was a rather scholarly-looking person, with a good nose and glasses which slid down persistently. He had a slight stoop, — a becoming one, Frances thought, — was tall and dark, but not in

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the least mysterious, despite his very deep-set eyes and the sometimes lowering brows over them. This was what the girl had referred to — rather disappointedly, by the way — when informing her aunt that he was not exactly “fascinating.” The ever changing quirks about the corners of his mobile mouth were too human and too humorous to let him seem mysterious or impressive very long. Indeed, the note of his personality, when in repose, as he now was or seemed to be, suggested bland, impractical guilelessness. But when once his interest was aroused in anything, he became oblivious of everything else and showed another personality; intense, enthusiastic, full of fire and force, dropping his former absent-minded indifference behind, like the blanket of a fresh half-back called into the game from the side-line.

These changes were sometimes so great that they seemed almost like transforma-

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tions in their suddenness, surprising those who did not know him, with the unexpected dominance and tremendous nervous energy of the real man broken loose. His impractical guilelessness was then seen to be but a shell — some said a deliberately worn veil, but this was not true — which covered a practical knowledge, if not understanding, of men and affairs on two continents, with more intimate personal information obtained at first hand of personages and places worth knowing than was possessed, perhaps, by any other man of his years on either continent. As with most of his profession, his information was chiefly of the outsides of things, though he thought as they all do, that he knew the rest, because he was so often aware of the unprinted “inside story.” But his knowledge was exceedingly broad, if not deep, and was universal in its miscellaneousness. His deductions, so far as he ever consciously

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made any, were youthfully cynical — absurdly so for a man supposed to have the opportunity for observing all sides of life in perspective.

Young Woods could not only talk on every topic under the sun with an intelligent rapidity that made slow-thinking men blink — and with illuminating facial expressions which made women look for them — but, what was far more important to himself and made him more entertaining to others, he could make others talk whether they wanted to or not. It was said that the busiest bank presidents and the most sphinx-like foreign ministers would “open up” for him as readily as a theatrical press-agent. This, of course, was the over-statement of hero-worshippers, the fact being that many would talk to him when they would talk for no other interviewer, and it was not merely because he could be relied upon, as most interviewers with an

established reputation can, to keep out of the paper more than he put in.

“How do you do?” Mrs. Metcalfe had said, with cold distinction. “How do you do?” straightway echoed Frances indifferently. She had assumed the elevated eyebrow poise of the modern young woman and glanced at her aunt to see if she appreciated it, then looked back at him.

At this Woods took a quick step forward and stopped. His movements were impetuous and elastic, giving the effect of flashes that are finished before the mind receives the impression furnished by the eye. “They told me he was out here,” he said with deliberation. His voice was low and well modulated, his enunciation as free from the provincialisms of New York, where he had spent most of his manhood, as it was from those of the South, where he had been born, though he lapsed into the latter when excited. He had been educated in Europe.

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“Father is out in the launch,” said Frances. “He may not be back for two hours. But he doesn’t want to see you, anyway.”

“I know that,” said Woods, and took out his watch. Two hours was a long period at this stage of the newspaper day, especially when it is Saturday. He looked troubled. The paper went to press early Saturday night.

“But if there’s anything I can do in the meanwhile,” the girl threw out tentatively, with a glance at the lake and the moon now glinting it. The young man made no reply.

“Unfortunately,” put in Mrs. Metcalfe, “there is a great deal that I must do. Good night,” she said, not very enthusiastically, and, shaking her head warningly at her niece, she reluctantly left the two young people in the moonlight. She could have managed without going in, but she was a wise enough obstructionist to know that such a policy might only prove a boomerang.

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Woods had bowed mechanically. He was trying to forget both of the ladies, and wondering what to do about this matter of two hours. He had discovered long since that the telephone had been taken out. He knew that the nearest telegraph office was fourteen miles distant by rail. He had bribed the operator to stay open late. The last chance of reaching this means of communication with the night editor, before the paper went to press, was a late train which could be stopped on signal at the semi-private station of Fernleigh.

“What are you going to do about it?” asked the girl, watching his intent face as she sat down upon the bench.

“No, thanks,” he said.

“Oh, one of those absent-minded fits,” she said, waiting patiently for it to pass.

“Is there another launch?—do you know which way he went?—could I borrow a rowboat?—which way did he go?”

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She liked this flashing, rapid-fire manner of talking which made him seem all energy and electricity, but she did not say so.

“Father went up the lake,” she made answer. “You might swim. I beg you not to let me detain you. Good night. I trust you will enjoy the water.” She had turned and was now walking lazily up the steps.

He dashed after her, both hands reaching out, as though he meant to lay hold of her. But when she turned at the top of the steps she found him frowning and businesslike once more. “But I simply must see your father,” he said with a glance toward the lake. The glance did not stay there.

She plucked a leaf from a bay tree. It was with one of the wonderful hands he had written verses about, though she did not know that. The moon, still higher, was also looking at her now.

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“Tremendously busy and important personage, aren’t you?” she mused aloud with mock awe. “I hear you were in Washington again the other day.” Woods made no reply to this. “We were there; why didn’t you come to see me?” Still no reply. “I suppose you were there to give the President some more advice,” the girl went on, looking down at him. “Do you know, I should think you’d find it a bit trying at times, having such a large country on your hands—besides writing books and seeing that foreign kings get their crowns on straight and running over to Japan to manage the affairs of the Eastern hemisphere, and all that.”

“Oh, you don’t mind it when you get used to it,” said Woods, entering into her mood, or pretending to, as an excuse for looking up at her and forgetting that he should not—and this stopped the argument abruptly. He had a very intent way

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of looking. Perhaps he allowed more to come into his gaze than he intended, relying on the shadow to hide it, for she turned her eyes away and he feared he had annoyed her. "Two hours, you think?" he asked her.

She looked back at him, apparently quite unannoyed, as if he had not come far enough into her existence for that. "I suppose I ought to be very proud of myself to know you at all," she went on in her chaffing tone, talking as usual of what he preferred to forget when with her. "Oh, I am. I can say, 'I know him! He frequently lets me speak to him — when he isn't too busy. He consults me on how long I think my father will be gone.' What do you want with my father, Mr. Woods?"

"I want to make him tell me something he doesn't want me to know," the reporter said, as if disinterested.

"What's it about?" she inquired.

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“The reason for all this,” he replied in the same calm, disinterested tone.

“All what?” asked the girl.

“Why, this rather extraordinary house-party.”

“What house-party?”

“Pretty well done for a —” Woods humorously pretended to check himself.

“‘For a girl,’ I suppose you mean?” Frances turned away from him. “Oh, you make me so furious sometimes.” But curiosity got the better of her and she turned back again. “How did you find out about it? I think it’s dreadful the way the newspapers get hold of everything. But it’s wonderful.”

“Not so very,” Woods replied, avoiding her glance. “You see, nearly all your father’s guests have daughters of their own.”

“I never realized before how disagreeable you could be.”

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“I meant that as a compliment,” said the young man, as an afterthought. “You see, Jerry McCarter’s daughter could not help boasting to the next-door neighbors about her father’s coming up here and breaking into society. And the old man next door told some of his fellow-members of the Tammany Hall Club over the corner saloon that the McCarters were putting on lugs. It reached the city editor through one of our office boys, so here I am, you see.” Woods took out a cigarette. “There is nothing wonderful about that.”

“Well, you won’t find out anything more about it.”

“Oh, yes, I will,” he returned imperturbably, striking a match.

Frances came close to him and smiled tauntingly. “I know what it is,” she said, and jeered at him.

“Oh, no, you don’t. I know your father too well.”

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“You think because I’m a girl!” She seemed more vexed and charming, and she added haughtily, “Father appreciates me,” with a significant emphasis upon the first word. But the reporter, smoking in silence, only smiled and shook his head, unconvinced.

“Just to show you I do know,” she proceeded, piqued, “I’ll tell you — if you promise not to tell.”

“Then, for heaven’s sake, don’t!” cried the young man, retreating from her.

“What do you mean?”

“The only reason I want to know is to tell,” he said. “I can’t say I am particularly interested, personally, in what your father does with Tammany, or,” he added significantly, “what Tammany does with your father.” Then he smiled satirically, and said, “The insatiable curiosity of the ubiquitous newspaper reporter,” puffing his cigarette again. “We’re about the ((

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only people in the world who haven't any curiosity left."

That seemed interesting to her, but it was not apropos. "Don't you realize that my father is the hardest man to interview in the United States?" she asked.

Woods nodded calmly. "Everybody in my trade knows that, Miss Cunningham. Foiling interviewers, they say in Park Row, is his favorite recreation, when too busy for outdoor exercise."

"And that he hates all newspaper men?" the girl added to clinch her argument.

"So would I," laughed Woods, "if one of them had cost me the Presidential nomination."

"And the immaterial fact that he does not want you to know ——"

"Makes it rather unpleasant all round, you see," he said, sitting down, perfectly at ease.

"But does not deter you?" She did

not like it, but it fascinated her. It seemed so courageous to the daughter.

“When your father was counsel for the defence in the celebrated Townsend Trust case, he didn’t seem particularly reluctant to cross-examine unwilling witnesses. I reported that trial.”

“Oh, but you see that was in the interest of his clients.”

“This is in the interest of my clients, the public.”

“But that was for — Justice.”

“This is for News — another luxury of civilization which has become a necessity in modern times; a good deal cheaper one than litigation.”

“Suppose I asked you to write nothing about this affair,” said the girl, tentatively, a little appealingly.

Woods looked at her, then out toward the lake again and finally said, weakly, “Suppose you don’t.”

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“But suppose I did?” She liked his vibrant voice in this tone.

“I’m a reporter,” said the man in a tone that showed he considered that the end of the argument.

It was. She paused and began another. “Why are you a reporter, Mr. Woods? Why don’t you leave newspaper work?”

“Why doesn’t your father leave politics?”

“That’s his life.”

“This is mine.”

“But some people, so many people, think newspaper writing unworthy of your talents.”

“Some people think municipal politics unworthy of your father’s. Not only that, Miss Cunningham, but some of us, whose business it is to follow these things” — he abandoned the bantering tone now — “wonder how long it will be before he wishes he had never undertaken to reform a board

of commissioners containing one of the wariest and wickedest reprobates on Manhattan Island.”

“Oh, you needn't worry about father,” she returned with the swagger which amused and charmed him. “Why, with his experience with international diplomats and all that, these ward politicians — pooh! mere child's play for him.”

“Others have made the same mistake,” said Woods, with the characteristic cynicism of his trade. “Politics is not a game with those fellows. They don't play according to rules. It's business with them — ‘for my own pocket all the time.’”

The girl smiled upon him condescendingly. “Do you know what he has done with them?” She stopped herself abruptly. “But I won't tell.”

Woods suddenly pointed his finger at her. “Yes, you will,” he exclaimed, so fiercely that she recoiled in alarm. He

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dropped his hand. "If you don't stop talking about it," he added and laughed. And then they both laughed together, which was rather pleasant while it lasted, and she began her second argument all over again.

"I am so glad your paper is sending you to London," she said with friendly interest.

The reporter asked why.

"Because we —" Again she stopped and added, laughing at herself — "because it must be fine to be a foreign correspondent. You sail on the *Cedric* on the seventh?"

Woods looked at her a moment and then shook his head slowly. "I am afraid I can't go at all."

"Oh," she said, hiding her disappointment, "when did you find that out?"

"This evening."

"Why, what has interfered?"

"The very thing I was going over there to get away from," he replied, springing

up and getting away from it. "Something which holds me in spite of myself." He turned toward the lake as if to remind himself of what he was here for.

Frances was young, but it does not require great age in a girl to suspect the meaning of speeches of that kind from a man. Nor was she too old to pretend otherwise. "There's only one thing that could interest *you* so much," she said sceptically, "and that's a piece of news — what you call a story."

The reporter said nothing, though everything, from the moon and the hills across the lake to the ancient Italian sun-dial, bearing the suggestive, if prosaic, inscription "*Tempus Fugit*," prompted him to say much — including the girl herself, with her piquant face raised provokingly.

"Won't you tell me about it?" she asked lightly, telling herself that she was becoming more sceptical every minute.

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“There are some stories even newspaper reporters do not feel at liberty to tell.”

“Well, you needn’t be so grandstandish about it,” the girl replied. “I’m sure I don’t care to hear about your old story.”

Woods laughed and nodded. “I knew that. That’s why I don’t tell.”

“Oh, you don’t know anything of the sort.”

Woods managed to look gravely interested.

“There it is again,” she said, laughing at him. “That irritating, omniscient air. When you look that way I—I feel like screaming.”

She ran up close to him and repeated in a louder, higher voice, “Screaming! Do you understand?”

The tall reporter looking down on her, as though she were some curious type of

native he had discovered in his rambles over the world, controlled himself and smiled indulgently.

“But you would only laugh at me,” she said, looking up at him rather wistfully, as if aware of her immaturity and ignorance of the great world he knew so much about. “You would only laugh at me, wouldn’t you?”

“You,” he said, as if trying to convince himself, “why, you are only one of those soft, fluffy, fragrant little things called girls. Aren’t you?”

“And you are only one of those great, hulking, smoky-smelling things called men,” she returned defiantly. They stood thus a moment, looking at each other — the moon looking at both of them — the fluffy thing’s chin elevated and eyes upturned; the hulking thing’s mind teeming with many unutterable thoughts. “Aren’t you?” she asked like a challenge.

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“I think,” said the man, still looking down into her eyes and speaking very slowly, “I think I’d better go down to the boat-house to wait for your father.” But he did not move. “Don’t you?”

“He’s coming back this way.”

“It might be too late.”

“Too late?”

“For the story.”

He allowed himself to look an instant longer, then tore himself abruptly away.

“Oh, I believe you’re afraid I’ll find out *your* story,” she jeered.

“Nonsense,” he said, but did not turn.

“Oh, but I’m very good at getting things out of people,” she called after him.

“You!” he shouted back. “You’re nothing but a little fluffy thing.”

“Well, I can’t help that,” she sighed, not meaning him to hear. He did not hear the words, but the night was so still that the note of it reached him, and stopped

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him. He turned and looked. She stood alone in the moonlight, and seemed to be hurt. He rushed back to her, as if to say much.

“I am so sorry. I beg your pardon,” was all he said, and turned quickly away again, Frances following.

“The moonlight is perfectly stunning on the lake by this time,” she said casually.

“Are you coming, too?” he asked, not very enthusiastically, it seemed.

She drew back. “Don’t you want me?”

“Do I want you!” he cried, with a throb of feeling which he straightway strangled. “Yes,” he said gravely. “I should think it would be very nice in you to come, if you care to, Miss Cunningham.”

With chin elevated, Miss Cunningham turned abruptly toward the terrace, Mr. Woods following blindly.

“Ah, don’t run away from me,” he cried, running to catch up with her. “Come!

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Do come with me. Won't you come? Ah, do!"

"That's better," thought the girl as he overtook her. And then, as they turned toward the allée leading to the lake, she looked up at him. "Do you know, I think it's very nice of you to let me tag along," she said; "why is it you never let me know you — the real you?"

He stopped abruptly. "It's what I try to forget when I'm with you," he burst out impulsively, "and never can," he added with a laugh which was not very tragic. "You are the one person in the world who makes me self-conscious."

"That isn't very nice," said the girl. She was inclined to go on; he to stop as though not quite sure whether he wanted her to tag along after all.

"If you knew my real self, as you call it," he began, with the conscious laugh again, and ended there.

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“I hate confessions,” she said. “They’re so juvenile.”

But he had no intention of “confessing” anything. It would have been an impertinence to her, even if it had not been an impossibility to him. Yet it seemed somehow unfair to revel in the trust and belief of one like this. It disturbed him. If it had been any other girl it might not have mattered. It never *had* mattered, unfortunately, and that was one of the disturbing considerations. But this girl—it was different.

He was silent, perhaps offended. She was sorry.

“Have you had a ‘fearful past’?” she asked lightly, her head on one side. “Do tell me all about it,” she added enthusiastically. They had not left the garden, and she sat down upon a bench, expectantly.

He sat down beside her, but made some diverting reply facetiously.

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Since little more than a wondering-eyed boy, by nature a poet perhaps; in any case when far too young to assimilate a quarter of the off-scouring scraps of reality that were crammed into his highly-sensitized consciousness, he had been hunting and handling this stuff called "News": the horrible, the astonishing, the abnormal happenings of the busy world, for the public to devour with breakfast and to curse young reporters for writing. He had had very little to do with even the plain, wholesome worthiness of existence. For why should men in his profession stop to consider the ninety-nine happy couples who do not appear in the divorce courts, the ninety-nine honest Sunday-school superintendents who do not happen to wreck banks? Such are not news, just as healthy humanity is not the stuff on which physicians form their peculiar judgments of mankind with such complacent superiority to ignorant lay minds. A dull

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record of monotonous virtue would be a drug on the market even at a penny a copy.

“Why don’t you talk to me?” asked the girl. She did not want him to make love to her, but she did not want him not to want to.

He said that it was remarkable to be able to sit out of doors so late in the season, and joined in the peal of girlish laughter which followed. Then he thought to inquire whether it were not too cool, however, for her, with such a filmy scarf over her shoulders.

“We can go inside if you prefer,” she said, chin up again.

He shook his head and talked about the stunningness of the moonlight on the lake and asked her questions about her horses. Clearly he was bored, she thought, and began to think she was too. He knew so many clever women at home and abroad. She concluded that she must be to him a stupid little fluffy thing.

As if mere cleverness were the quality to

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charm a man who possessed that himself, who dealt in cleverness, sickened of it as every one does of the smell of one's shop.

Superficial cleverness and the deep disquieting truths beneath its smirking surface had been his daily life, his mental food from year in to year out, with very little time for regular rest and recreation until the paper went to press. And what was there to do then? Every sort of man must have recreation; his sort, something robust, after the nervous strain of writing. In the hours following midnight in a city, when the theatres are dark and most of the busy town has gone to bed, there is not a great variety of diversion to choose from. He had chosen about all there was and had enjoyed it—until recently. His choice was not deliberate, but it filled an organic want to float up and away from haunting reality which haunted him less while lost in his work than when relaxed and reflective. Thus, seeing both

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in his work and in his play, so much of the wrong side of life, it was no wonder that, long ago, when still in what should have been the idealizing period of youth, he began to think that the wrong side was the right side, the prevailing side. He saw little that was worthy of his respect, so few things to believe in, that he lost the knack of believing and respecting; so many things had proved evil or ridiculous, why not all the rest? Then one day this slip of a girl dawned. And, oh, the difference!

She believed in everybody — even in him — and that had made him want to do so, too. It was a new aspiration and he liked it.

He turned and looked at her, his lowering eyebrows casting greater shadows over his deep-set, steady-burning eyes. He seemed to be scowling at her, so she scowled back at him and said “Booh,” which made him laugh with the sheer joy of being near her.

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She shook her head at him. "Ho! I'm not afraid of you," she said, and audaciously added, "Billy," looking up at him as he started and tingled. "Is that terribly fresh of me?" she asked, a little frightened, "to an author!"

Woods was smiling dreamily. "I always thought it a commonplace name," he said. "Now I don't."

"That's very well done," smiled the girl. "You ought to keep it for your new book."

She arose to go. It had not been such a long delay as it seemed. He had done much thinking. "Got it all thought out now?" she asked, as if he had stopped to shake a pebble from his shoe. "Can we go on without any more self-conscious business? I hate it."

"Everything you do and say only makes me more conscious of what I owe to you!" burst from him. "If I could only repay it!"

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There was a pause. "I expect no such luck," he added, smiling.

The notion of her being of benefit to a man like him was almost too absurd to take seriously, she being still too young to understand that it is what they are and not what they do that makes women potent. But he seemed dreadfully serious and so she replied, "Well, you seem to make me conscious that I'm only a great big humbug."

He broke loose now. It came out fast. They forgot the lake.

"You may be a humbug, but you've restored my belief in the goodness of good things, my respect for things respectable, and so — my debt remains. At all hours of the day, down there in the dark vortex of the city, I can picture you to myself, gliding about in the sunlight, doing the delightful commonplace things of life, calling, shopping, walking, driving, all the sweet normality of living."

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She considered it a stupid picture, unworthy of the sweet tones of his low, vibrant voice; but she seemed willing to listen.

“‘Now she’s making her father’s tea,’ I say to myself. ‘Now she’s talking to those lucky little devils at the East Side Settlement.’ And sometimes the longing just to see you, even from a distance, comes so fiercely that — well, that’s the reason I was at Washington, and why I appeared in that country lane while you were at the house-party on the Hudson. One look at your face — perhaps a touch of your hand — and ‘Yes, it is all true,’ I say to myself, and then go back to handling news again, believing once more, though not knowing just how, that there is some kind of intelligence and goodness at the head of this universe, that human nature can’t be so bad, that there is a God in His heaven and all’s well with the world.”

Mrs. Metcalfe, thinking that they had

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been together long enough, and fearing lest it might prove too long, came upon them in time to hear a reporter paraphrasing Browning. "Frances," she called, "I'm afraid it is becoming too cool for you."

"Not cool at all," said the girl.

"Good heavens!" muttered the reporter, "I forgot what I came for," and turned toward the lake again.

Frances called up to her aunt, "I'm going to walk down to the lake with Billy," quite as if she used his name without deliberation.

"You still want to come with me?" he whispered, eagerly. "Are you sure?"

"Maybe I know your real self now better than you do."

"Frances," called Mrs. Metcalfe. There are limits to an aunt's authority. In such cases diplomacy must be employed. "You should wear a heavier wrap, dear."

The reporter, starting back for it, was

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blocked by the aunt who stated that Frances alone could find it.

“I believe you write for the newspapers,” said Mrs. Metcalfe, not unpleasantly, as Frances disappeared. “I have a piece of news for you.”

Woods, amused, bowed gallantly. “You are most kind,” he said.

The man had a way with him, Mrs. Metcalfe noted, but was unconscious of any intended sarcasm. “Miss Cunningham is engaged to your cousin Gilbert,” she said, getting his face in the light as much as possible.

“I had heard a rumor to that effect,” said Woods. “It is true then?” The man had a presence, too, she admitted grudgingly.

“At least she soon will be,” the lady added, smiling. “But don’t put it in the paper till I ask you to.”

The young man said he was honored with her confidence.

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“Do not forget,” Mrs. Metcalfe called after him, significantly, as he started off with her niece.

“I am only here for news — news I can put in the paper,” he called back laughingly, as he disappeared under the trees with Frances.

IV

UNKNOWN to Woods, three other newspaper men had come up on a later train and were entering the estate on one side as he was descending the other with Frances. This would spoil his "beat" provided that the news was obtained at all.

That was hardly the way Mrs. Metcalfe regarded the matter. She looked upon them simply as a nuisance. But she had been associated with public life long enough to know that they were a necessary nuisance, and received them with the smiling courtesy of those who are accustomed to the importance of being at the source of news. Even the shabbiest reporters note the difference in attitude, and perhaps smile in their shiny sleeves at the display various men and women make of familiar human traits.

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She told them that it would be useless to wait, but made them free to do so if they preferred. They explained that they could not leave until the return train at any rate, and expressed a desire to wait in the garden where they might smoke. Mrs. Metcalfe not only gave this permission, but sent a footman out with some of the general's excellent cigars.

"The boat-landing is out this way some place," said Holbein, the oldest of the three, middle-aged, whiskered, and spectacled, a hard worker, a reliable political reporter.

"You mean, catch him on the way back?" asked one of the other two, a well-bred youngster, with a responsive, intellectual face and a few still cherished ideals about the sacred opportunities of his recently adopted calling which he was inclined to term "Journalism."

"Exactly," said the older man, impatiently, "if there's time." And he looked at his

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watch, wearily. He had hoped to spend this night under his own roof in Brooklyn, but in his profession it was hard to tell, when donning one's clothes in the morning, just where one would be when the opportunity came for taking them off again.

“Time enough, I guess, for all we'll get out of old man Cunningham.” This in a loud, lazy voice from Stump, the last member of the trio to come down the steps — a boozy, shabby one, who might be either young or old, in the frayed frock coat he wore at all hours of the day and night.

“My paper,” said the youngster, somewhat amused with his mission, “wants a humorous story — a lot of color about Jerry McCarter sticking his napkin under his chin, and that sort of thing.”

“You can fake all that,” said the boozy one, sitting down luxuriously and elevating his feet to the green tub of a bay tree. “But

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the real reason of this soirée —” He shook his head and puffed appreciatively on one of the general’s cigars to show he did not propose to be broken-hearted about it.

“A burnt child dreads the fire,” remarked the authoritative whiskered man. “If it hadn’t been for a newspaper man, General Cunningham might be sitting in the White House to-day.”

“Say,” put in Stump, more fond of gossip than of work, “did I tell you I saw the man who faked that same famous interview on the Trust question — on the train, coming up? What became of him?”

“That man Lascelles?” asked the cub reporter. His tone showed the interest called forth by a character well known in his profession, and the contempt for a person who had proved a disgrace to it.

Holbein, the dean of the group, shook his head wisely. “Harry Lascelles wouldn’t dare show his face here.”

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“Good evening, gentlemen,” said Lascelles, coming out of the door. He was a big, florid man with an oily black mustache and an oily manner, but very keen black eyes which, when he talked, shifted continuously from one to the other of those of the person’s addressed. Great things had been predicted of him once and some of them had been fulfilled, but his chief celebrity was in fields not predicted, and he was now a worse wreck, morally, than the boozy member of the group he was now approaching. He had begun life as an artist in Paris, became an illustrator for one of the lesser-known of the many Parisian periodicals of frank utterance and un-Puritanical pictures. Later he did some of the frank writing; not wisely but too well, according to his own story — according to some of the Paris correspondents it was a case of holding out for too high a price from the young gentleman of title he attacked. This, the deadliest charge

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that can be made against a newspaper man, was never proved, merely hinted at vaguely. Whatever had been his indiscretion, he did not live in America of his own preference, judging from his freely expressed opinions of everything in it from art and women to cigarettes and writing paper.

Lascelles was followed by another, a harmless young man named Munson, who had nice eyes and a weak mouth.

“We were just saying,” remarked Holbein, pleasantly enough, nodding coldly, like the others, “that we didn’t think you’d care to show your face to Secretary Cunningham.”

“I don’t,” returned Lascelles. “Hence my understudy. Do you fellows know Munson?”

The others nodded at young Munson. “Another innocent victim,” thought steady old Holbein, “to be corrupted down there in their fake foundry.”

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“Where are the rest?” asked Lascelles, looking about.

“Ours seem to be the only papers to get the tip,” Holbein replied. “Somebody, though, had already fixed the operator at the junction when we got there.”

Lascelles continued to look about him, sniffing contemptuously at the self-conscious newness of American formal gardens. “I thought Billy Woods might be ‘among those present.’”

Of late it had been noticed on Park Row that Lascelles had been making assiduous efforts to renew an old friendship with Billy Woods which had lapsed in recent years. “Understand your office has been trying once more to inveigle Billy into joining your staff,” remarked Holbein to Lascelles.

“Woods is a fool,” replied Lascelles. “We offered him a guarantee bigger than the salary of most managing editors.”

“And he told you,” laughed Stump, “to

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give your people his compliments and there wasn't enough money in New York to make him take assignments from them."

Lascelles joined in the laughter which followed, but added, "Oh, give him time. Give him time. I once had that pose myself, when I was on the same staff with Billy." He pronounced it "Bee-lee," though for the most part he spoke Manhattanese.

"I always understood," put in the cub inquiringly, "that the real reason Woods never took any offers to go to any other paper was because it would involve overhauling the drawers of his desk."

The others smiled reflectively. There were many stories about Woods along Park Row. "All the same, he may have to," said the authoritative Holbein, "if he doesn't take a brace."

"Booze again?" inquired Stump, with more interest than he had previously manifested. It was from a fellow-feeling.

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“No. That’s the odd thing about it,” answered Holbein. “Cut whiskey out entirely. But his absent-mindedness — been growing on him lately. The boys tell me that he has a way of disappearing for days at a time, nobody knows where; then turns up at the office again as if nothing had happened; takes off his coat, sits down at his desk and waits for his assignment, knowing perfectly well that he’ll get the story of the day.”

“Remember that time they sent him to cover that big boiler explosion down the Bay? Billy didn’t show up for a week. Meanwhile a good murder in the Bronx and the report of the Superintendent of Insurance had come out and everybody had forgotten all about the boiler explosion. But Woods stalked up to the desk, looking intense and important and said solemnly, ‘Ten men killed in that boiler explosion, Mr. Stone.’”

“Yes. They told him then, that if he

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took another self-assigned vacation, he could keep it.”

“That was two years ago and — he’s still there, I notice.”

“But that was two years nearer his first offence.”

“Remember that time they sent him down to the Cunard Line docks to get an interview with Secretary Cunningham about the chances of war? Billy simply waited around until the other boys all fell down as usual, then quietly sauntered over and made the old fox open up somehow, just before the steamer started, and got the Secretary and himself so interested that he was gliding down the Bay before he knew it.”

“Yes, but he got off with the pilot, signalled to a passing tug, and got his story in just when they were beginning to give him up. It scooped the whole country and all the foreign correspondents cabled quotations from it.”

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“His absent-mindedness is not working just that way nowadays,” said Holbein. “Last week they handed him out an ultimatum.”

The others were of the opinion that this was the usual bluff. “There is only one Billy Woods,” said the boozy Stump, “and only one Eugene Stump, but plenty of newspapers that want us geniuses — so we’re safe as long as we are on deck till the paper goes to press.” Stump had never remained for three successive months on one staff in all his turbulent newspaper career.

“I got that straight from their managing editor,” said Holbein, honestly. “They don’t propose to put up with it, even from Woods. Plays the devil with the morale of the staff and all that.”

The voices of the general’s launch party were heard coming up the allée, still voluble but not so boisterous. The young reporter jumped up eagerly. The others arose with

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more or less interest. Lascelles kept out of sight in the shrubbery.

It appeared that the launch had broken down. "Ah, home at last," the general was saying. "Have you all survived the long walk?" he inquired solicitously.

"Oh, that's all right, general," replied Shayne. "Accidents will happen."

"Gillie, old chap," Jerry McCarter had his arm on the shoulder of young Townsend, "between you and I, the walk was what we were needin'."

"That type of motor boat — always breaking down," said Gilbert, half to himself. "I warned the general against that sort. But he never takes my advice." Gilbert took a final look at the strange company and fled, with a feeling of relief, into the house to find Frances.

Meanwhile the reporters, with the exception of Lascelles, who had remained in the shadow of the shrubbery, had made an

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advance upon the general in good order, and had been repulsed — but not yet routed.

“Not one word, gentlemen,” his voice rose above the others.

“But at least,” temporized Holbein, “may we not take the liberty of inquiring ——”

“Not one word,” repeated the old gentleman, smiling good-naturedly, and straightway began to talk copiously about the prospects of the political situation in New York and the possibility of reconciling the two factions — views that would make interesting reading if expressed by him some months hence, but hardly worth a line to-day.

The young reporter, keen for humor, had approached Jerry McCarter and some of the other Tammanyites, but he was too young at the business to know how to make them open their mouths, and so they only shook their heads and referred him back to the general, who had exacted their promise to say nothing.

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Two members of the party, Shayne and Nordheimer, with the pretext of escaping the reporters, separated themselves from the general and the others on the terrace, and stepped down into the garden, strolling lazily until well out of sight. Then they began to talk eagerly, for it was the first chance they had found since the important events of the afternoon.

“We’ve got to look out for the damned newspapers,” said Nordheimer, heavily.

“It’s such a little thing,” said Shayne. “They’ll never discover it.” He took a document out of his pocket and unfolded it as if to point out a passage, by the dim light from the windows.

“What makes you think the general won’t miss it?” asked Nordheimer nervously.

“Bah! The old man is no proof-reader,” replied Shayne.

“Look out!” whispered Nordheimer.

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“There’s another of them.” Lascelles was also strolling in the garden.

“Yes,” said Shayne, in a little louder tone as he quietly pocketed the document again, “our venerable leader is quite right in this matter. The newspapers should not be allowed to make a premature announcement.” On the terrace the general was saying, “All to be made public in due season, gentlemen,” and smiling good-temperedly.

Shayne and Nordheimer, carelessly turning, sauntered along the path as if to take a view of the moonlight from the pergola. Lascelles, pretending to be oblivious, watched their movements with interest. He had heard enough to want to hear more.

“Sure this is the final version of the bill?” asked Nordheimer in a more careful tone as soon as they were safely out of ear-shot.

“The general’s secretary just finished

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copying it from the original draft in the old man's handwriting."

"And all we've got to do, then, is to get rid of this comma?"

"Simply leave it out of the printed copy of the bill to be presented at Albany" — Shayne nodded — "and then — well, you see the power that section puts in our hands."

"It makes no difference in the sense as you read it," said Nordheimer.

"That's the beauty of it," returned Shayne. "Nobody will miss it. But, think of the difference in the legal significance! By the aid of the perfectly legitimate provisions of the old statute we'll be able — Now what's that fellow coming over this way for?" Lascelles had tried to make a sortie, but was seen as he crossed the moonlight, and heard nothing at all. His sharp eyes detected from their manner that he was discovered, so he straightway made as if he had not observed them.

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“I know that man,” said Nordheimer. “Look out for him.”

In order to avoid suspicion, they turned their footsteps back toward the rest of the party, where the general was still parrying and thrusting against four at once, to his amusement and their frankly expressed admiration.

“Say,” whispered Nordheimer, with a heavy-jowled grin, “everybody’ll think the old man’s mixed up in this, sure. He wrote the bill.”

“Good enough for him,” commented Shayne, half-aloud. “Went into Tammany to reform it, and got reformed himself, as usual, eh? Here comes that damned Lascelles again. Pretend we don’t see him, and throw a bluff.” So they began to talk with interest and amusement of what a poor figure the reporters were cutting with the general. “He’s old, but he knows a thing or two,” said Shayne.

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“That’s right. You can’t fool him,” chuckled Nordheimer.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” Shayne turned to Lascelles as if discovering him for the first time.

“Light,” requested Lascelles, not unconscious of the symbolism. Shayne handed him his cigar. Lascelles lighted his cigarette, returned thanks unctuously, remarked on the beauty of the evening, and passed by.

“Think he’s on?” asked Nordheimer.

“Got his eyes open, but he hasn’t seen anything yet. Don’t worry. We can fix him.” Shayne suddenly stopped in his tracks, touched Nordheimer’s arm and pointed. “Here’s the man who sent Mike to Sing Sing,” he remarked.

Nordheimer turned nervously. There in the bright moonlight, approaching with a girl in white, was the well-known, sometimes feared, Billy Woods.

V

TOWNSEND, unable to find Frances in the house, had strolled out upon the terrace with Mrs. Metcalfe. "Here she comes now," said the latter, pointing to the same pair Shayne had observed approaching.

"One of them seems to be interviewing *her*," remarked Gilbert, facetiously raising his eyebrows.

"Your cousin," said Mrs. Metcalfe.

Gilbert's eyebrows went down abruptly. "Only a distant cousin, Mrs. Metcalfe."

"But on the side from which you get your wit, my dear Gilbert, and your charming manners."

"May I ask what you mean by that?"

"Haven't you wit enough to see the charm of a certain manner?"

"Dear me!" said Gilbert. "Frances has wit enough to see through it."

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“She is very young.” Mrs. Metcalfe gently pushed him forward, shaking her head thoughtfully as she watched him saunter slowly down the steps to meet the pair approaching.

Woods seemed to be gazing adoringly at the girl as they came along with slow, sentimental steps, framed by the dark trees on either hand. If they had been nearer Townsend might have observed that the girl looked piqued. Lascelles was near and he observed this.

“I hope you enjoyed the moon,” said Frances, whimsically, without looking at him.

“Beautiful! Beautiful!” said the man, without removing his gaze from her face.

“But you never once looked at it.”

“I knew it was up there, though,” he said, nodding convincingly.

“And, accordingly, you kept your mind down here — on business.”

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His face showed a struggle — to keep it down. “That’s all I’m here for, you know,” he said quietly.

“I should think I did!” she replied dryly. “You don’t believe in letting anything interfere with business, do you?”

But at that moment Woods discovered her father surrounded by reporters, and his manner changed from that of a sentimental lover to that of a quick-thinking man with something to do in a very short time. “How did they pass us? Must have come by the valley road.” He was talking with great rapidity. “McCarter, Munger, Murphy, but where — Ah, see that!” He pointed out Shayne and Nordheimer to the girl. “Heads together, as usual. That pair will bear watching — close watching, Miss Cunningham.”

The girl did not like it, but she was interested. Gilbert had joined them. Woods

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did not notice it. Gilbert ignored his cousin, but he did not notice even that.

“Holbein, poor old Stump — they aren’t making much headway,” he went on. “Your father’s favorite recreation, Miss Cunningham.” And taking out his watch, he stepped across the intervening space to join the group on the lower terrace, muttering to himself, “No telephone in reach; nearest telegraph office fourteen miles down the line and the train leaves in less than an hour. Whew! Looks doubtful.”

Frances watched him over Gilbert’s shoulder as the latter eagerly led her away; perhaps too eagerly, for she made him stop, saying that she wanted to look on and see the fun.

Gilbert, wishing to humor her, said with an amused, superior air and condescending interest, “I always supposed they carried notebooks. Didn’t you?” Gilbert did not like his unregenerate cousin’s man-

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ner, misunderstood his absorption, and considered it an intended snub. This was impudent, to say the least, in the light of all Gilbert had done, or had been willing to do, for him. There was a time, to be sure, when Cousin William was simply impossible, but Gilbert had not intended to cherish animosity. In fact, he had once suggested getting him employment in a good, conservative Wall Street firm — and William only laughed at the idea, which did not make the relations less strained. Nevertheless, when the harum-scarum cousin returned from the war, Gilbert had arranged a dinner in his honor, and the war correspondent seemed pleased to accept. But a good many things of this sort had been given for him at the time, at home and in England, and he was just then so absorbed in a newspaper controversy with a tactical expert that he quite forgot all about it, as he explained after-

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ward in a penitent note — not a very flattering explanation, nor one likely to help the cause of reëstablishing the cousinly relationship.

Since then Gilbert had naturally not enjoyed it, when people asked with interest, "Oh, are you a cousin of W. P. Woods, the war correspondent?" Moreover, a certain busybody had repeated Billy's reply when some one asked if it were true that Gilbert were his cousin: "Yes, but I can't help that."

In short, Gilbert disapproved him, forgave him, despised him, feared him, and Cousin William seemed only oblivious.

Meanwhile, the absorbed cousin, wishing to avoid the appearance of haste, which sometimes proved fatal, had slackened his pace as he drew near the group on the terrace. They had not yet observed him.

Now, those who used to say that Woods made men talk because of his cleverness

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would have thought that he was studying the old gentleman, to determine how to approach him. Perhaps he was, but he did not do so consciously. He never planned beforehand what to say or how to say it. It was not done with his head at all, but with his sympathy, his temperament, a sort of automatic adjustment to the requirements of another's personality, as influenced by the conditions of the moment.

The general, tired out with the various episodes of the evening, was finding his favorite recreation a burden. "No, gentlemen," he was saying, raising his hand in exasperation as he began to retreat toward the door. "I have nothing to say about that—I must ask you to excuse me for to-night."

"That's final enough, fellows," remarked Woods, coming up the steps behind them; "he doesn't care to talk. Can't you see?" The others turned in surprise. "Good

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night, general. Come on, boys." He made as if to go and then added, perhaps as an afterthought, to the general, "It's unfortunate, from your point of view, sir," smiling quizzically as he spoke, "that you cannot spike the editorial guns as effectively as you have the news department. Good night." He bowed with the deference due the general's years and attainments.

"Eh? What are the editorial writers going to say?" asked the general, dropping the hand he had held out to say good night.

"I don't know, sir," said Woods, frankly. "We gather the news — they comment on it. But of course, a man of your experience can see" — the reporter lowered his voice — "that they aren't going to let a thing like this go by without having a little fun with it." He smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and glanced over toward McCar-

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ter and the others who had joined Shayne. This was perfectly true; the editorial writers would undoubtedly say something. It was their business to do so. The general had not thought of that. It was to his advantage to know it, although he did not see it at once.

The general had winced and now said rather hotly, "I fail to see why the newspapers should feel called upon to comment upon a private gathering in my own house." Which made Gilbert clap his hands softly and say, "Hear! hear!" nodding at Frances.

"I think we all appreciate your feelings in the matter, general," said Woods, respectfully, "but unfortunately the public doesn't look at it in just that way. The goings-in and comings-out of public men are matters of public interest. They think you belong to them, you know." This was followed by a pause, during which

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Gilbert said to Frances, "Rather impertinent, I think."

"I should much prefer," replied the former secretary, in a tone of friendly confidence to Woods, "I should greatly prefer no comment whatever as to the object of this little party."

"If you say so, we'll be glad to telegraph a request to that effect," said Woods.

"Could you manage it?" asked the general, eagerly.

Woods seemed about to go and try it; the others seemed surprised.

"That's a trap," whispered Gilbert to Frances. "You'll see."

"But of course in that case," Woods replied, turning back, "the editorials — supposing they took our suggestion — would merely state without any comment whatever: 'General Cunningham is entertaining for the week-end at Fernleigh, his country-seat in the Berkshires, Jim Nord-

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heimer, Jake Shayne, Jerry McCarter *et al.*' — and let the public make its own comments."

The general interrupted with a sign of annoyance. He saw the point now. So did the other reporters, who were smiling at one another. Woods did not smile. He felt confident of success, but as he looked at the perplexed general, it seemed to him rather pathetic that an enlightened leader of civilization should be so mediæval in his attitude toward the proper function of publicity. It was irritating to see how charlatans understood the art of it, while men of this sort fought it instead of employing it to help their purposes. Of course, Woods looked at the matter from the point of view of an agent of publicity, but he was sincere in believing that a desire for unnecessary secrecy, for patrician exclusiveness, had hindered the old gentleman more than once in his long career, in which he had

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won many of the prizes of life, but still considered himself, in his ripe old age, a failure. The figure he now presented, playing at being one of the people, would have been entertaining if it were not so grotesque. In the eyes of an observer like Woods, who classified all men as either fools or knaves, the general was forced into the former category.

“What did I tell you!” Gilbert was whispering to Frances. “A reporter’s trick!”

“One moment, Mr. Woods,” said the general, in his old-fashioned manner. “Could you not keep all mention of this matter out of the papers? Come, now. I would deem it ——”

“That is beyond our power,” interrupted Woods, who saw there was barely time now to get and to telegraph the story. “News is news. We’ve received our orders and we have to obey them, just as you did

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in the army." The general was thinking. Woods snapped his watch. "They are waiting to hear from us, sir." The general was hesitating. "Very well, sir; you know best. Boys, we may as well start on." And again he made as if to go.

The general was hurriedly whispering to certain of his Tammany colleagues. "Inasmuch as they would publish something in any case ——"

"But, general ——" began Shayne.

"Otherwise our attempt at secrecy might be misconstrued."

"They know you too well, sir," said Shayne.

The general turned abruptly and called to the departing reporters kindly to step into the library. The old gentleman now called them representatives of the press. They did not care what they were called as long as they got the story.

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Young Townsend, with a manner of some importance, now stepped up to the general as the latter was leading the way into the house with Woods: "If you will take my advice ——"

"Probably he will, when he asks it," Woods remarked; and, stepping between them, took the general's arm, saying to the other reporters: "Come on, 'representatives.'" And they all filed into the house, searching their pockets for copy paper or the backs of letters with which to aid their memory in telegraphing the story to the city offices. There would hardly be time after they reached the junction, to get in more than two or three paragraphs, but a "big story" is not necessarily a long one.

VI

YOUNG Munson, the reporter who had accompanied Lascelles, was about to join them, but saw his colleague signalling to him from the garden below, and waited obediently.

“But it’s a big story,” Munson protested.

“I’ve got a bigger one!” Lascelles related what he had overheard.

“What do you make out of it?” asked the boy, flattered at being consulted. He was not being consulted.

“But I tell you that’s all I could hear: ‘Look out for the damned newspapers,’ says Nordheimer. And Shayne replies: ‘It’s such a little thing, they’ll never discover it.’ And also: ‘The old man’s no proof-reader.’ Then they got on to me and wouldn’t let me within a mile of them.”

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“But you think it’s graft?”

“Think! What are they here for?”

“Right under the old man’s nose! What is their game?”

“That’s for us to find out.”

“Hardest thing we ever tackled,” said Munson, feeling the importance of it.

“But, if we land it!” exclaimed Lascelles, looking forward to practical results.

“The biggest exclusive story published this year,” exclaimed the youngster enthusiastically.

With a change of tone, Lascelles remarked, his arm on the other’s shoulder: “Some stories, my boy, are too big — to be published.”

Munson had often heard of the many great inside stories such as every newspaper office knows but cannot or will not publish for reasons of state or for other reasons, sometimes from sheer kindness,

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which would sound surprising to the public. None of these reasons seemed to apply in this case. He sought elucidation.

“Too valuable,” said Lascelles, laconically.

“How do you mean?”

Lascelles smiled at his ignorance. “Sell that story to the city editor for twenty or fifty dollars at the most!” He patted the boy’s arm. “I would call it better business to let Jake Shayne buy it.”

“I would call that blackmail,” said Munson, recoiling.

“Not when it’s worth twenty or fifty *thousand* dollars, my boy.”

“Say, Lascelles,” said Munson, turning away from the other’s basilisk eyes. “I’ve done some queer things, and our sheet may be sensational and all that, but — we’re honest, anyway.”

“Where does the dishonesty come in?” asked Lascelles. “They want the money

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and they're bound to get it out of that big fool city down there — if not this way, some other way. They always do. Who can prevent it? We? We can't prevent it. We might as well have a slice of it."

"Why do you invite me into the deal?" asked Munson, unexpectedly.

"Simply because I couldn't work it alone," replied Lascelles, grinning frankly.

"You're talking as if we had the whole grafting story pat," said Munson. "We haven't any real evidence yet."

"We may be able to get some, now that your eyes are open," returned Lascelles. "Run along and see what the general's giving out." For this was why Munson had been consulted.

Munson ran, as he was told, in a way to make Lascelles, watching him, believe that he could be persuaded. In fact, Lascelles believed that anybody could, if the price were high enough. And, feeling secure

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about this merely incidental obstacle, he paced the garden, puzzling over the meaning of what he had heard, which he considered valuable only as a clue to the discovery of facts far more valuable. He knew a great deal about Shayne and Nordheimer, as he did about all of the well-known men in the despised city of his exile. He knew that Shayne, who had so many "legitimate" sources of graft, would be one of the last to go into a game of this sort unless the stakes were large enough to make it worth while. Therefore Lascelles's probable "commission" would be undoubtedly enough to make it worth his own while. He was thoroughly tired of the newspaper life, considered it beneath his talents, and thought he saw a chance here to retire to the boulevards and the life he loved in the only civilized city. The thing that had kept him away so long had blown over by this time. Here was his great chance.

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Gilbert and Frances, when the "fun" was over with the reporters, had strolled off to the lake to look up at the stars. At least Gilbert had gone for that worthy purpose; Frances went to see what would happen, and also because she could not help being a little sorry for him when the reporters passed by so jeeringly on their way into the house. Gilbert was a peculiar fellow, but he was fine-grained and sensitive, and she knew how ridicule hurt him, for all his pretence at being superior to the vulgar intrusions of the "sordid world."

He appreciated the delicacy of her wordless sympathy — he admired the potential subtlety of the maturing girl — and declared, in the moonlight, that with her it was easy to forget anything — " 'Two soul sides,' " he breathed softly, " 'one to face the world with — one to show a woman when he loves her.' "

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“I seem to be having a run on Browning this evening,” she said to herself.

“I beg your pardon—what did you say?” he asked.

“Nothing that you would like, I fear,” she laughed. “Did I interrupt you? Do go on.”

Gilbert went on, all the way to the lake and back, chiefly about his soul. Also about hers. Down there (under the stars) he called her “soul of my soul.” It was not altogether an uninteresting way of doing it, but there was too much of it. So it fell out that on the way back he sighed and said: “After all, how lonely is each one’s soul.”

“’Fraid I’m not the soulful sort,” said Frances.

“Why have you changed toward me?” the lover pleaded.

“All you say about living for others is noble. But—well, I like men to do things.”

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At this, Gilbert drew himself up, not boastfully, but with an injured air. "I am a member of the Committee on Art and Literature at the Club. I am a vestryman of the church, secretary of the Good Government Club, Number Seven, founder and president of the Townsend Free Ice Guild, a life member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, director of the United Charities Association; will soon be made a trustee of the hospital—they always have a representative of our family——"

Frances interrupted. "That's it, your family—your money. Gilbert, did you ever win anything by your own efforts?"

Gilbert was even more amused than he was disappointed in her. "Surely you would not want me to go down to Wall Street and 'hustle' with the vulgar mob—make more money—the absurd American type of man!"

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“Maybe I’m an absurd American type of girl,” she exclaimed. “Oh, I don’t care whether they make money or not. But I like men to be men, to dash into the thick of things, not to look on from the grandstand — to try for something with all that’s in them, forget everything else — fight for it. That’s what men are for. Oh, I wish I were a man! I’d show you! What have you ever done? Why, you — you’re a mere millionaire!”

“I have loved you all my life. That’s about all,” he said quietly. And then added, with a sudden force that frightened her, “And I will fight to get you.” There seemed to be good stuff in him when he let it loose.

Frances liked this and consequently laughed at him. “Gilbert,” she said, not unkindly, “all your life you’ve had whatever you wanted — and with no greater effort than signing a check. Fortunately,

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you wanted innocent things. The gentle tastes you inherited from your mother are to be thanked for that — not your strong character, as you think. What have you ever done to make any fibre in you? But some day you too, your real character, will have its test. Some day you'll want something you can't have — want it so absorbingly, so tremendously that you will forget yourself and your subtleties — drop your attitudes and your self-consciousness, then your true nature will loom up!"

"That day has arrived," he cried, with a quick step toward her. "I want you as I never wanted anything before! I don't care what you say about me; it only makes me want you more. You — why, you are a woman; I thought you were only a girl. I want you! Not, as I told you, to help me live for others, but because I cannot live without you. I love you, Frank, and I will win you."

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The girl, recoiling, part in fear and part in admiration, said: "Now you look like the Sargent portrait of your father."

"And you look at me as you used to look at me when I came home from college." He advanced to take her. She slipped away from him. "I am your mate and your master," he cried. "You know it."

"Wait till I come home from Europe," she said.

"I'm going abroad with you!" he interjected.

"No!"

"Yes!"

They stood, looking at each other. There was a compelling note in Gilbert's voice which affected her. She seemed about to melt, but suddenly stiffened at hearing the voice of the other approaching, speaking briskly with the ring of an alert man successfully busy.

"A magnificent project, general," Woods

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was saying. "And I think you can be assured of the coöperation of all the newspapers — even mine."

Gilbert, lowering his voice to a whisper said, "Yes?"

The answer was a sighing "No."

Gilbert caught his breath and turning saw that her eyes were fixed on his cousin, the reporter, who, with the general and the rest of those who had been in the library, now came down the steps again, evidently intending to take his short cut to the station.

VII

FRANCES, as she passed by to enter the house, slackened her steps. She would not see the man she had called "Billy" again before she sailed, and this thought had the better of her pride. "Aren't you going to say good-by to me?" She asked it jocularly, but with a note of wistfulness. "I may not see you again before ——"

"Oh," he said, bowing reverently, but interrupting her all the same, "Good night, Miss Cunningham, good night." Then, knowing that there was not a moment to lose, he unwillingly wrenched himself away without even waiting for her to explain that she was bidding him good-by and not good night. He turned his deep-set eyes upon the general once more, taking out his watch as he said in brisk, businesslike tones,

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“But there’s just one more point, sir, if there’s time.”

“All right,” said the general, youthfully. “Only three minutes by the short cut.”

Plunging into business again, with the other reporters gathering about, Woods did not even notice the hurt shrug of the girl’s shoulders as she joined Gilbert by the fountain, nor observe her leaning forward to whisper, nor hear his cousin exclaim aloud, with delight, “Then it’s settled! You mean it?” nor Frances’s reply, “I mean only what I say. Sail with us if father agrees.”

“That’s all I ask,” murmured Gilbert. “All I need,” he added to himself, turning toward her father. “General, oh, general,” he began. But the old gentleman was still occupied in conversation and gesticulation with Woods, and waved the impatient Gilbert aside with the gesture of one saying, “Business first, my lad.”

Frances, watching this pantomime, felt

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her eyes waver back and forth from the mere millionaire to the mere reporter, whose eyes did not waver at all.

Shayne, meanwhile, was holding forth to the other reporters from the top of the steps in his well-known Fourth of July manner. It was part of the toast he had offered at the banquet. "But our venerable leader, by his eloquence, his calm reasoning, his compelling example of disinterested citizenship, dispelling our doubts, soon brought us to his broad view of this important question." He went on while the representatives of the press smiled patiently.

Two of the reporters, meanwhile, had other thoughts to occupy them. Munson had not delayed a moment in finding Lascelles at the close of the statement given out with the aid of the general's secretary in the library. Lascelles had ejaculated, "Enormously valuable real estate — all along the water fronts — all sorts of jobs in that!"

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Just now he was saying, no longer so excited, but much more in earnest, "But I tell you, whatever it is, we can't do anything without General Cunningham's end of it. We've got to work him somehow for inside information."

"But he talked to you," returned young Munson with an impudent grin, "once too often."

"And you," returned Lascelles, with a sniff of contempt, "you don't know enough. Neither do I, for that matter." He clapped his hand on the youngster's shoulder after the manner of the pawing kind, and flashed out, "There's only one man in all New York who could probe to the bottom of this thing!" And with the hand still on Munson's shoulder, he turned him around to get a view of Woods, with whom the old gentleman continued talking in a friendly, confidential manner.

Munson shook his head precociously. "We've bribed bishops and college presi-

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dents to write for our paper, but we can't get Billy Woods."

"But if we got him fired from his own!" returned Lascelles, thinking quickly.

"Fire the great Billy Woods!"

"You heard what Holbein said. Do some thinking. To-night, with this big piece of news! Suppose he were absent-minded to-night!"

"But he never drinks until the paper goes to press — you know that," returned Munson, getting excited. "And he's quit drinking."

"It's worth trying, anyway," returned Lascelles, approaching the terrace as if about to try it forthwith, but still keeping in the shadow. Munson followed.

They heard Shayne concluding a sort of peroration as the newspaper men were turning to go. "And so I say, 'Three cheers for our venerable leader, our generous host, our great-hearted friend!'"

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Woods, folding up his notes, caught the end of this, and put in quietly, for the benefit of the other newspaper men, "Don't worry. You'll get into the papers, Major Shayne. You always do. Come on, fellows. It's the last train out to-night. Best wishes for the bill, sir," he called back to the general, and started off at a brisk pace.

Frances, about to follow Gilbert and her father into the house, had lingered to watch this strange manner of man, whom in all probability she would not see again for a year. She had involuntarily started down the steps, but stopped abruptly at discovering that he had not even noticed her in his intense solicitude for his business. He did not know that she had waited, and he did not know that she was going to Europe.

Lascelles knew and saw most of these things and guessed the rest. "Skip out with your story," he whispered to Munson. "I know how to fix him!" Woods, having

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gained his object, had let go the tension enough to want a cigarette. He was groping for one as Lascelles glided out of the shadow with cigarette-case open.

“Thanks,” said Woods, too preoccupied to recall that he had not seen Lascelles before.

“Say, old man,” remarked the latter, lazily, as Woods paused to strike a match, “incidentally I stumbled upon a ripping bit of society news out here.”

Woods puffed, looked at the cigarette, handed back the box, and started on. “Haven’t fallen low enough to be a society reporter, have you, Harry?” He smiled, chaffing fraternally.

Lascelles took his arm. “But this will interest you.”

“Bah!” Woods sneered, walking faster than Lascelles seemed inclined to walk. “We don’t clutter up our columns with such rot.” And subconsciously feeling the delay,

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he took out his watch as if to look at it by the light of his cigarette.

Before he had a chance to do so, Lascelles whispered, "Miss Cunningham's engagement to Townsend is off."

The watch remained in Billy's left hand, as he exclaimed, "What! How do you know?"

"I saw it done."

"Where? When?"

"Here, while you were in there."

Woods involuntarily, or perhaps because Lascelles had him by the arm, looked back toward the house. There she stood, alone upon the terrace, her white frock gleaming, though the moon was now behind the distant trees. The watch lay ticking unnoticed in his hand.

She dimly descried the movement of the taller of the two figures and waved her hand.

"Good-by," she called, and impulsively

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came down the steps. He, with the same impulse, — an impulse older than the race, — turned back toward her. She was saying as they approached each other in the semi-darkness, “I don’t suppose I shall see you again for — oh, I don’t know how long, so —” and she held out her hand to him.

The man took it, still holding his watch in the other hand; half of his mind was on the train; he could catch it by running. “But I’m not going across, you know,” he whispered hurriedly. “Forgotten that already?”

“But we are,” began the girl, and was interrupted by his quick-breathed “You!”

“— as I tried to tell you on our walk” — she was stepping back from him now — “only you ——”

“Why, the reason I could not go — don’t you know? Don’t you know!” He kept advancing, she retreating as they spoke quickly.

“— only you paid absolutely no attention to me.”

“I did not dare to,” he whispered, trembling palpably. “You know why. For how long? How long shall you be gone?”

“About a year.”

“A year!” The watch had found its way back into its accustomed resting-place by the same subconscious cerebration that had brought it forth. At the same moment the voices of young Townsend and the general came from within the house: “Frank! Oh, Frank! Frances, where are you?” Lascelles heard the general’s well-known voice and fled, gloating. Woods heard nothing but the voice of the girl he loved.

“When do you sail?”

“In two weeks — on the *Cedric*.”

“Why, that was my steamer.”

Again the voices came out to them, unheeded, though nearer now: “Oh, Frank, where are you?”

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“I know,” she said to him, nodding vigorously. “Wouldn’t it have been jolly? Good-by, Billy,” and reaching the steps, held out her hand again.

“Jolly?” he whispered, frantic. “Why, I love you!”

In panic she sought to gain the steps, but found herself swung about, her hand imprisoned by both of his. By the glare of the open door shining down upon his face she saw, with joyous alarm, the immemorial light in his dark eyes. Then Gilbert’s shadow fell upon them from the hall.

“Oh, here she is, sir,” he called behind him, seeing only the girl’s back and his cousin’s face as Woods released the hand.

“What’s this I hear?” laughed the general, approaching. He put a hand on Gilbert’s shoulder and beamed down upon his daughter. “Gilbert says you want him to cross with us — if *I* am willing.” He stopped abruptly at discovering the reporter.

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Both men in the doorway were now looking down upon him.

He, looking back, suddenly heard, as they all did, the whistle of the train approaching the station. His knees stiffened as if paralyzed.

“Cousin William,” said Gilbert, “you seem to be too late.”

Woods had regained his wits and his legs. He was well down the allée before either of the men shouted to him to stop; the train was out of the question. Frances kept calling to him: “Billy — oh, Billy!”

Without answer he disappeared in the distant dark, and her voice was thrown back to her from the silent trees.

PART II

IN PARK ROW

I

IT was now almost two weeks since the mysterious disappearance of the erratic Billy Woods, and his fellow-members of the staff were talking about it.

It was the noon hour, and they were gathering in the dingy old city office for the beginning of their day's work — a long, loftlike place, with tiers of writing tables, like a schoolroom, and smelling of ink and paste like nothing in the world but a newspaper office.

Some of the late arrivals swinging in through the low gate, which barred strangers, were yawning as if just out of bed,

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and sat down morosely to wait for assignments before getting breakfast. Others, taking copies of that morning's fresh-smelling product, were clipping out their space and pasting it, not without a pleasurable reprisal, on their "string," to be turned into the cashier's office on Friday.

All, however, first glanced in the direction of Woods's familiar place, which had gradually become heaped up with an accumulation of dust and unopened mail. Tommy, the favorite office boy, always brought the letters to Woods's desk, because Billy always forgot to look in his mail-box near the door. When Billy first joined the staff as the youngest reporter, there had not been boxes enough to go around, hence the habit. But not even Tommy was permitted to touch anything else there except the inkwell, and Tommy was the only one granted the proud privilege of filling it.

Most of those in the room were surpris-

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ingly young to be the authors of such cynically worldly-wise chapters of New York's history as diurnally appeared in the closely printed pages of the sprightly paper of which they were all so proud. A few only looked old enough for what their work connoted, and their agedness seemed premature. In countenance and bearing, however, most of these older members of the staff suggested a heavy obliviousness to the manifold activities of the teeming town they knew so well. This contrast to the alert faces of the wide-awake youngsters about them was still more incongruous with the light touch and flashing wit of what these elder men wrote.

The latter were inclined to slovenliness in dress and movement — the tendency, it is said, in writers of all kinds, for some reason never explained. Among the former, however, were more than one dapper young person, wearing the extreme variety of the

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prevalent collar, or sporting an insistent waistcoat.

These were the two extremes, for there are men of all sorts, both outwardly and inwardly, in this business of news gathering; as many different sorts as there are in law or business, from the shyster, at the magistrate's court, who shares the earnings of unfortunate women for securing their release by his pull, to the famous corporation lawyer down in Wall Street, who prostitutes his talents to get his share of tainted money for releasing his criminally respectable clients from inconvenient injunctions which seek to deprive them of the rights and privileges due a people born free and equal.

The rank and file of these reporters, however, were of neither extreme, being merely honest, self-respecting, downtown types, such as may be seen crowding the elevated trains and ferry-boats twice a day, except that these more or less industrious

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young citizens were possessed of a more precociously broad outlook on the world, since it was their business to know something about everything in it; and, incidentally, they earned more money than most of the salaried class of the same age. At a later stage in their career they would earn less, supposing they lacked the foresight to get out in time to choose some other career for which, no matter what it might be, they were now acquiring a splendid equipment — even those who blasphemed their work and advised their younger brothers at college never to go into it at all.

Meanwhile the day had begun — and still no Billy Woods. Stone, the inscrutable city editor, had arrived at his large, double table, called “The Desk,” in the corner of the room by the window, long before most of his reporters were out of bed. With a hand on the pulse of the throbbing metropolis, he was now giving out assignments, still

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looking over clippings as he did so. These had been arranged for him in even rank by the young assistant city editor, who sat at his right. Haskill would clip them from the other papers with the wonderful neatness and despatch acquired by long practice; the city editor would glance over them with still more rapidity, preserving some in another little pile, dropping most of them carelessly on the floor, which was already becoming littered, meanwhile continuing, without interruption, to give out assignments to the men summoned one at a time to the desk.

“Tenement mystery in Williamsburg, Mr. Cole,” said Stone, handing him a clipping. “Looks interesting.”

Cole, donning hat and coat, which he had only just removed, went to Williamsburg.

“Russell Sage’s life threatened again,” Stone remarked casually to another. “Probably a fake,” he added discouragingly.

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To a third he said, "The Harkness woman, found; half an hour ago; be arraigned at Jefferson Market." And out went a third after news. A woman accused of murdering her lover is always a good story, and this experienced reporter was not on a salary, but was a "space man." So his day would be happier than that of the woman he watched.

To another veteran, a former clergyman, Stone said, "Presbyterian Confession of Faith — good scrap on to-day," and then permitted his glance to shoot toward a waiting office boy who now stopped chewing gum to say, with a jerk of a dirty thumb, "Man outside wid a story telling how much de ladies in de four hundred spend on hand-made underclose."

"Tell him he came to the wrong newspaper," said the city editor in a languid tone, and turned to another reporter, an antique heirloom handed down, none too gently, from a former era. He had been

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everything in the newspaper business from office boy to editor-in-chief of his own paper in a Western city. At the present moment he was just back from a suburban assignment, given the evening before by the night city editor. "Well, did he die in great agony?" Stone asked, considerately jocular.

"No, damn it!" the ancient newspaper man replied with honest disappointment. It was all very well for Stone to joke, he had his regular salary, thought the old reporter, who had a family to support. In fact, he had two families, having married a second time a few years ago.

"Hard luck," said the editor, almost sympathetically. "Have a talk with the widow?"

"Nope," sighed the dreary old reporter. "Still prostrated."

"Too bad," said Stone, for it would have been good stuff. "Keep it under two sticks,

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please," he added, unconsciously measuring off the space of three inches with thumb and finger.

The ragged-edged reporter, sighing wearily, went back to his desk to write, though there was no hurry to write a story of that length. "Just my luck," he complained to a colleague across the table, speaking in the manner of a contemporary; "third story in succession to fizzle out. My new baby's got pneumonia, his mother is still in bed, and the rent's due next Monday." Then, clearing his throat, "Say, old man, just a 'V,' will you, till the ghost walks?"

"I would," was the reply, "but I met an old friend last night and blew in every cent I had."

The old reporter tried elsewhere, but each, in turn, had some equally good excuse. Others, seeing him first, got out of the way before he reached them. There was hardly a man on the staff to whom he did not already

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owe more than they ever expected to get back, and he shared their expectations in the matter. He was of a different sort from the rest of them, more characteristic of certain other offices than of this one, they said; but he managed to cling to his present humble position on this staff by means of an ancient pull. He and a certain august person in the inner room had once been promising striplings together. The one had gone up, the other down.

While the staff pretended not to watch, he was seen shuffling slowly up to the city editor's desk again, where, pretending to look for something he had left, he enacted the little comedy they had often witnessed before, which Scott called "melting Stone." The old reporter wore the same shamefaced expression he always wore, consciously or otherwise, which Scott called his "touching look." And the city editor, still at work, looked oblivious and preoccupied as usual,

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but put his hand in his pocket as usual, in a careless fashion as if he merely liked to work with a hand in his pocket. Presently he took it out again and let it rest carelessly on the desk a moment. Then presently the old reporter seemed to find what he was looking for, the city editor meanwhile working unintermittently and not once looking up, and all the rest of the staff carefully averting their smiling faces for fear of hurting his feelings. The old reporter put on his hat, walked down to the gate, turned and made a signal to the first man he had struck for a loan, which meant, "Join me downstairs," and pantomimed taking a drink.

The city editor would not have seen this, even if his eyes had not been short-sighted, — one cannot very well have good eyesight and be the best copy-reader in town at the same time, — for the newest reporter had at that moment rushed into the office and up to the desk in a state of important excitement.

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He was unused to the ways of newspapers and knew nothing about Stone, except that he was afraid of him. "Big story," he cried. "Two Italians killed by that boiler explosion. I saw the bodies myself."

Stone, twitching his ugly, black pipe in irritation, cut him off shortly. "Anything worth while?" he asked in a tone that was ominously demure.

The cub reporter was a bit taken aback. "Two men were killed," he repeated. "Two human beings." They were the first dead bodies he had ever seen, and he was still impressed with the awfulness of it.

The city editor hadn't time to look up again. "Ten lines," he said, and the newest reporter learned his first lesson in news values. But he was so very new that his amazement made him wait as if dazed, thereby endangering himself unconsciously to annihilation. Some of the older men, knowing Stone, drifted nearer the desk, casually, as

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if looking for copy paper, in order to enjoy the fun. But they were destined to be surprised and the cub reporter to receive his second lesson in news values. "Anything else?" asked the city editor, restraining himself mercifully.

"N-no," hesitated the cub, unaware of the audience behind him. "By the way," he added, in an informal, conversational tone, quite different from his former official report, "there was a baby sleeping in a baby carriage thirty feet from the explosion. Funny, but it wasn't even touched."

The city editor looked up. "That's worth a dozen Dagos," he said. "Write a half-column."

And still no Billy Woods.

Another member of the staff, who, like the old one, had come in late to report on an assignment given the night before, was making the usual inquiries.

"Oh, say, this thing is getting monoto-

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nous," remarked Scott, a youthful cynic who was acquiring a reputation as a phrase-maker, and knew it. "Every day now for the last two weeks, it's 'Where's Billy Woods?' instead of 'Good morning.'"

"And instead of 'How are you feeling?'" put in Jones, somewhat older but still young enough to be overdressed, "it's 'Has the governor signed the Cunningham bill?'"

"Well, what's the matter with the Cunningham bill?" This came in a loud, Southern drawl, from a big burly man bending over one of the letter-boxes just outside of the entrance-gate. He carried a suit-case and his name was Covington.

"Another!" sighed Jones, wearily, and Scott shouted, guyingly, "Say, you *have* been out of the world!" Covington now came in with the smile of a man who had been away for a fortnight, and was greeted with hellos and handshakes. "Well," they said,

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“you didn’t get shot down there in the mountains?”

“That’s a pity,” put in Scott, who always thought it funny to say things of that sort.

Covington, looking brown and merry, remarked that Tennessee feuds were dead slow compared to crossing Broadway a moment before. Then, being able to wait no longer, added the inevitable, “Say, what did you think of my stuff?” They told him, for the most part frankly, what they thought. Some of it was praise, some of it was not, but it was all given in a friendly, fraternal spirit and was helpful criticism.

They were diverted by the high voice of Haskill, the assistant city editor, who, with the telephone receiver in his hand, announced to Stone, with some excitement: “General Cunningham left Albany for New York five hours ago.”

Stone said, “Huh!”

“Our sleepy correspondent just discovered

it," Haskill added, by way of palliation for his excitement.

Stone, who had glanced at the clock, called, "Linton."

One of the reporters dropped his feet to the floor — they had been resting on his table — and hastened to the desk.

"Cunningham's office and see if he's there. Hurry."

Linton went out quickly.

"What's all this excitement about the Water-front Parks bill?" asked Covington, among the gossiping group of reporters. "Nothing in the papers about it — except political hot air."

"Because nobody can get the inside story," he was informed.

"Louisville papers were all I could get hold of down there," said Covington. "Passed both Houses, didn't it?"

"Right. Without any of the expected opposition."

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“Well, but I thought the governor had pledged his support.”

“Right.”

“Then why doesn’t he sign it?”

“That’s the story!” replied several voices at once.

“Governor jealous of Cunningham’s returning popularity?” Covington asked.

“Risking his own every hour he postpones signing the bill,” was the reply. And one of the older men supplemented, “Got to hurry up then. To-morrow’s the tenth day. According to the Constitution of the State of New York, the bill becomes a law whether the governor signs it or not —” with a look at the clock — “in a little less than twenty-two hours.”

“Can’t Billy Woods clear up the mystery?” asked Covington, innocently, and wondered why his question was greeted with stares and smiles.

“Say, he *has* been out of the world,”

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Scott repeated to himself. And, taking Covington by the shoulders, turned him about and pointed at Woods's desk nearer the front of the room.

“Again?” asked Covington. “Where is he?”

“Where is he!” smiled Jones. “They're telegraphing all over two continents to find out.” Then, his friends had the rare pleasure of telling Covington how on the night of Woods's disappearance two weeks ago, the presses had been held open until the last moment; how crazy the night editor and all the rest had been when they had to go to press without even a word from Billy.

The other part of the incident was also related. Holbein, of one of the rival papers, who had been at Fernleigh that night, had stated frankly that if it had not been for Billy, none of them would have had “a smell” of the story he alone was beaten on; that it was Billy, too, who had arranged

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before the others arrived to keep the nearest telegraph office open. As they hurried to the train for this telegraph office, fourteen miles distant from Fernleigh, Billy had lingered to say something to that man Lascelles. The latter, out of breath, had caught the train just as it started, saying he had waited to warn Billy, who wanted to bid Miss Cunningham good night. Since then, no one had seen or heard of him, not even Lascelles, apparently, who was going about his business as usual, though his employers were threatening to discharge him for his old crime of faking. They had no reason, as yet, to believe any more serious rumors against him, or he would have been kicked out without warning.

II

WHILE the men were still gossiping Miss Daros came in, quite late. She was the only woman reporter employed regularly on the staff — a small, dark Russian Jewess, with a strange, concentrated face, suggesting the characteristic smoldering emotions which blaze up readily. It was one of those faces painters find interesting, but few other men do. She was a recent acquisition.

Though as lacking in breeding as she was in adornment, — the women type-writers stared at her clothes heartlessly, — she showed the refinement of a good education. She did not condescend to sneer at the other women and held herself aloof from them quite as much as they did from her. It was the general opinion of the office that she was an anarchist. It was well known

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that she sent and received mysterious messages, and as she seemed to like the air of mystery, the men, who treated her with impersonal courtesy, let her think they were very much impressed, and thus both sides got harmless diversion out of it.

One of the gum-chewing boys had responded to her grave good morning with patronizing indifference. She pronounced her English words as educated Russians pronounce all languages, more correctly than those whose language it is and who think, because it is theirs, they can do what they like with it. But the boy, who was of the same extraction, had been born in America, and looked upon her as an ignorant foreigner.

She drew close to him and began, with an eager, surreptitious air, to put the usual question with regard to Mr. Woods, but was cut short by the boy's "Naw, he ain't," without so much as shifting his gum.

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“Ah,” said Miss Daros, non-committally, and looked around to see whether she was observed. Then, seeing Tommy standing idle, she decided that he would prove a more trustworthy intermediary. Turning her back so that no possible observer might see, she first gave Tommy a coin, a rather heavy one, which made the lad say, “What’s dis fur?”

“For you,” said Miss Daros, with clear enunciation and without a smile. “And this,” she added, slipping a square envelope into his hands, “is for Mr. Woods.”

Stone, seeing a female and guessing rightly that it was Miss Daros, called her sharply.

“Yes, sir,” she called back, and added to Tommy, “Not on his desk. He might forget to look at it. And do not you forget, for there will be a second one.” She pointed to the other hand, which held the coin and hurried on up to the desk.

“Dat’s easy money,” thought Tommy, reviewing certain recent losses at craps.

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“Late again,” Stone said, not as a criticism, apparently, so much as a comment, though it was not like Stone to make unmeaning comments, nor was it like him to waste time from his work to look at her while he spoke.

Miss Daros suppressed a yawn. “Over-slept,” she said.

Stone, wasting no more time on further comments, handed her two tickets, saying in his quick, jerky way, “This charity performance at the opera this evening — all the society crowd will be there. First chance of the season to size one another up. We want a good story about people in the boxes.”

“Costumes?”

“Don’t run much about their clothes. Tell how they go there to see and be seen. A display of wealth, the flesh and the devil for charity.” The city editor was unusually loquacious to-day, and seemed to be interested in her. “Do it humorously if you can.

Keep your sociology out of it. Apparently take 'em seriously so they won't be offended, but give readers who are amused a chance to smile; those who are envious a chance to jeer — for Charity." Then he called "Jones!" and went on giving assignments without further comments. But it was noticed that he had left off all other work while talking to her in a vein he seldom employed. One might have thought that he was taking the trouble to be satirical about the vanities of fashionable life, which was not like him at all. His attitude toward the whole human spectacle was a Jove-like tolerance as long as it made good copy for his paper. For what was the object of all the manifold human activities except to make news for his staff to write as he directed, and for his copy readers to polish into proper form with adequate heads thereon?

Miss Daros had gone to her writing-table. She hesitated a moment, returned to Tommy

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again, who was jeering the other boy for the chance he had missed, and reminded her emissary that it was a secret mission. She then took her place at her table, throwing off her street-coat, but still wrapped in mystery.

Henderson, the political reporter, a middle-aged man, came into the room from uptown, smoking his perpetual cigar with a puff of importance.

Stone recognized his footsteps, felt the importance, and said, before Henderson reached the desk, "What did you get?"

"Absolutely nothing," growled Henderson, with a gesture of discouragement. "Amen Corner swear they are as much in the dark about it as we are; they say it must be some private quarrel between Cunningham and the governor."

"See Shayne?"

Henderson shook his head.

"Nordheimer?"

"You can't get within a mile of any of

the commissioners. Taking their cue from Cunningham. All agree to say nothing."

"What did you get?" interrupted Stone, irritated.

"Nothing."

"Write a column."

As if to make matters worse, young Linton came back to the office at this point to announce that General Cunningham had not been near his office for a week, and Stone frowned at him as if that were his fault. Linton escaped to the remnant of the group of reporters who were still talking about Billy Woods. Covington was saying, "So that is Lascelles's theory of the mystery, is it?" This made Henderson, writing his column about nothing at a near-by desk, look up with a pitying smile.

"Did you ever catch Lascelles telling the truth?" he asked.

"Say, I saw Lascelles down at the corner," said Linton. "Still there when I came back."

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Henderson smiled again. "It's encouraging to find some of you boys learning to use your eyes," he said. "Another of that crew is hanging around Billy Woods's apartment any time you may be happening to pass there, night or day." With that, he bent to his work again and wrote: "However, on the other hand, the impression is being created in certain influential quarters that while the Water-front Parks would —" and so on.

"Ah, the grand old man has a theory," whispered Scott, audibly.

"Moreover," added Henderson, ignoring the chaff and holding back the creation of the impression, with his pen suspended, "there's something queer going on in this very office."

"Now we'll find out all about it," said Scott, with mock gravity.

Henderson shrugged his shoulders and went on with his creation. "Keep your eyes open," was all he would say.

III

TOMMY, the office boy, hurled a wad of copy paper at an inky other boy with proofs from the composing room, bumped into a passing editorial writer, displacing the latter's dignity, and strolled leisurely up to the desk and waited to get Mr. Stone's attention. Presently Stone nodded.

"Old gent outside to see Mr. Woods ——"

Before the city editor could scowl, the quick youngster added, "Yissir; I told 'im; but I tink dere's a big story into it." Again he tempted fate, but warded it off by adding, "Old gent looks like de pictures of General Cunningham!" and gloated inwardly at having made the city editor straighten up. Haskill also looked at him.

"Why didn't you say so?" Stone snarled. "Ask him if there's anything I can do."

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“Yissir,” said Tommy, going, and added, showing a proper appreciation of the relativity of news values, “Dere’s a young loidy wid ’im. She keeps sayin’, ‘Now don’t excite yourself, fadder.’ De ole man’s sort of up in de air! an’ dere’s a hot Willy-boy, too, and he says ——”

But Stone twitched his pipe and Tommy took the warning sign and hurried on down the room.

“Haskill,” — Stone allowed himself a light smile, — “must be something doing to make him come to us.” For the general had never forgiven them the interview which had cost him the Presidential nomination. He would not believe that they had been as innocent, if not as great, sufferers as himself. They had never forgiven him for not believing it, nor for his public utterances of his belief in the unscrupulousness of their lightning changes in editorial policy. But at one time or another nearly every prominent

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citizen finds it convenient to call upon the newspapers for the purpose of having something put in or kept out of their pages. This is usually called the "coöperation of the fearless press."

Stone went down to meet the distinguished old gentleman now entering the gate. He was accompanied by his daughter and Gilbert Townsend. The girl seemed inclined to come all the way into the room with her father, but he shook his head, and Gilbert persuaded her to be seated outside of the gate. "It's no place for you," said the latter.

"But look at father," she replied. The general seemed to be laboring under considerable excitement, which he was controlling pretty well. Frances thought he had aged during the last two weeks, but hoped it was not so bad as the nerve-specialist let them fear.

Gilbert did not approve of this move and

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had done his best to dissuade the general from coming. Frances had prevailed. She watched her father solicitously as the city editor came forward to meet him, and throughout the interview her eyes remained fixed upon him; quite unconscious, which was remarkable, of the many eyes that indulged in a glance or two at her. They were not all men's eyes. Miss Daros seemed on the point of going down to speak to her once or twice, but took it out in looking at her instead. She had met Miss Cunningham some time ago in an East Side settlement, and they had become interested in each other.

The city editor had tried to start the general talking while leading him apart, but the old gentleman had many preliminary questions to ask about the probable whereabouts of Woods, and it took a long time to get him off the subject.

Stone offered him a chair. "Anything we can do?" he asked.

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“I am just back from Albany.” The editor nodded with respectful patience. “My time is extremely limited, extremely limited. I am sailing for Europe in the morning and there are many matters to arrange. But before I go ——”

It was impossible for Stone to endure this stately deliberation. “Mr. Manning, the managing editor, has not come down yet,” he cut in, with an apology, “but if you want to talk to one of the editorial writers — I take it you want our coöperation to make the governor sign that bill?”

“No. To make him veto it!”

“Veto your own bill!” The general had done better than Tommy; he had made Stone exclaim, something which made all those who were near enough drop their work and take notice, for this was a big story.

“What’s the matter with your bill, sir?” demanded Stone, trying to color his eagerness with respect. “May I ask what you charge?”

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“Nothing.”

“What do you suspect?”

The general smiled grimly. “Everything,” he said, and subsided.

Stone was leaning forward eagerly, all his faculties alert and waiting. He knew it was best for the old man to tell his own story first and to ask questions afterward. But a whole second had gone by. “What has aroused your suspicions, sir?” Stone inquired.

The general hesitated. Stone picked up things from the table and put them down elsewhere. The old man cleared his throat.

“It began — it sounds trivial: My daughter’s attention was directed to the actions of certain members of my board while guests at my house — we need mention no names in this matter — their heads together, or something equally insignificant in itself. That was the beginning. Since then, many things. In fact, their whole attitude in this matter,

since its inception, seems — I am now persuaded — suspicious, convincingly suspicious.”

“Suspicious — any real evidence?” asked Stone.

“Would I stop here with it?” returned the general, haughtily. “If I had succeeded with my lawyers, even detectives, the governor would brave your criticism and veto that now much-lauded measure which bears my name. As it is, it was only by the greatest effort — in fact, I may say that it is entirely due to our ancient friendship, that I succeeded in keeping him from signing it. I stayed his hand almost in the very act. He has now given me what amounts to an ultimatum. Unless some plausible reason is adduced for vetoing the bill, he will be reluctantly compelled ——”

“I see,” said Stone. He saw how very different the real inside story was from the theories his and all the other newspapers

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had been working on. He was looking for threads by which to gather the real story. He saw Manning, the managing editor, stopping at the entrance gate to speak in surprise to Miss Cunningham, who was pointing excitedly at her father.

“As a last resort I have been persuaded,” the old man went on in his courtly manner, “to come to you because you number among the members of your board — I should say your staff — that young man Woods who ferreted out the corruption in the Dock Board and who ——”

“Here comes the managing editor — Mr. Manning. Better talk to him.”

Manning, looking well-fed and imperturbable as usual, approaching gallantly with Frances, and followed enduringly by Gilbert, now called out to the general: “Ah, General Cunningham! An unexpected pleasure.” These two had sat next to each other often at dinners and put up a very good bluff of

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enjoying it. Manning held out his hand effusively. The statesman greeted the editor with the stately politeness that always won so much admiration from women and so little affection from men. Manning started the three callers up the room in the direction of his private office opposite the city-desk, and lingered a moment to whisper hurriedly to Stone, "If Woods *should* come, I want to see him after we finish." Then he hurried after the others and led the way out of the room and through a passage to the insignificant compartment where important things were done.

"My advice, sir," whispered Gilbert, "is to leave this place."

IV

THE coming of Secretary Cunningham had caused a ripple of astonishment that was still splashing around the edges of the city-room. He seemed the last man in the world to be seeking the "coöperation of the fearless press," and this the last paper to ask it from.

"Bad case of nerves," smiled Haskill to his superior, as the latter returned to the desk.

"Nerves or nerve?" asked Stone.

Haskill did not understand.

"What did he go into politics for?" replied Stone. "What do they all go into politics for? Suppose he put a hidden string in his bill. Suppose the newspapers, when the time came, caught him pulling something out with it? Point to this bluff with us and put

it up to the others." Stone returned to his work.

"Say, Mr. Stone," asked Haskill, smiling, "don't you believe in anybody?"

"Haskill, I've been in the newspaper business thirty-five years."

Covington had received an assignment and strolled out of the room with the cheerful whistle of a confirmed New Yorker, delighted to be back on the exhilarating streets of the fascinating city of his adoption. Halfway down the stairs he stopped, turned, and ran back to the city-room. "Say, you-all," he yelled, "yonder comes Billy Woods!" The others began asking questions. Before they could be answered, the cause of the excitement was bending over the latch at the gate, looking grave and concerned, but not as if aware of having been away, or of their excitement over his return.

"Cunningham here?" he asked quietly of Jones, the nearest to the gate.

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“Yes, in Manning’s room,” was the reply.
“Was asking for you.”

“Asking for me?” Woods snapped his fingers in irritation. “I was looking for him. Reached Albany just in time to miss him. Chased him all the way down. What’s the inside story?”

“Doesn’t know himself. Banking on your getting it. Where the devil have you been?” The others had gathered around and began firing questions at him. Woods blinked and looked them all over as if considering them as individuals for the first time, and feeling very glad to see them.

“Where have you been all this time?” they repeated.

“Oh, been away,” he replied.

“Know how long?” asked one of the group.

Woods paused and turned to Tommy, who was grinning beside him in the doorway.
“How long was it, Tommy?”

“Thirteen days, sir, dis evenin’.”

Woods turned to the group. "Thirteen days."

"Dis evenin'," whispered Tommy.

"This evening," said Woods. "Why, hello, Covvy!" he exclaimed suddenly, beaming at his old friend Covington. "When did you get back? *Awfully* glad to see you. Have much fun down there? Great country, isn't it?" He seemed to want to hear all about it from Covington.

Miss Daros, in the background, at last got Tommy's eye. She made an inconspicuous signal which Tommy interpreted by putting the note into Woods's hand.

"But what did you do all this time, Billy?" the others were asking.

Woods, ignoring them as he did the note, which he slipped absent-mindedly into his pocket, drew Tommy aside and whispered, "Who's got the London job, Tommy — to-morrow on the *Cedric*?" He glanced in the direction of Manning's room.

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“Search me,” whispered Tommy. “Dey wanted you bad, Mr. Woods. Chewin’ de rag over how you turned ’em down. Where’d you go, sir?” Tommy was privileged.

Woods looked at the boy and smiled. “Oh, I don’t know. I wanted to get off the earth. Ever want to get off the earth, Tommy?”

“Did I! Say! De sportin’ editor, he was goin’ to take me to see Jeff knock out _____”

“Oh, Woods,” interrupted the city editor, authoritatively, from the other end of the room.

“Yes, sir,” Woods responded briskly, and started up the room, swinging his cane gayly; but on the way he seemed to become more and more fully awake to his iniquity and walked more and more slowly as he drew near, looking at the editor with a whimsical expression as if humor and remorse were both tugging at his countenance at

once. "Doesn't look as if he'd been off on a bat," whispered one of the group, after Billy passed.

Stone, in a grave tone, now said, "Mr. Woods."

The prodigal replied, "Yes, sir," once more, but this time in a different voice.

"He's calling him 'Mr. Woods,'" commented Jones to the other reporters, all of whom had been looking on with more than the usual interest in Woods's return. The only thing invariable about his manner on these occasions was its difference from the last time.

"Absent thirteen days without leave," said Stone, briefly.

"No, sir," replied Woods. "Won't be thirteen days till to-night."

"Not the first time, either," said Stone, as sternly as he could to Woods.

"No, sir; but I imagine it's the last."

This was no time for facetiousness. "We

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needed you," remarked Stone, with eloquent brevity.

"Needn't rub it in," rejoined Woods, looking toward Manning's room uneasily.

"For the Cunningham bill," added Stone, which made Woods start and look back anxiously at the editor.

"There's a big story in it now," said the latter, "and you were the only man for it."

"Were?" interjected Woods, in a low tone.

"Mr. Manning wants to see you," said Stone, and bent over his work again as if that settled it; and usually it did.

"I thought so," muttered Woods, limply, while the other reporters in the background, shaking their heads gravely, spread the news. "He's sending him in to see the old man!" They had all suspended work for the time to watch Woods and Stone. Those who had received assignments were standing

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around waiting with their hats on, anxious to know the worst or the best.

Woods was gazing at the managing editor's door. Stone, without looking up from his work, said to him, "Engaged at present," and Woods turned his gaze upon him and kept it there as if demanding further enlightenment. "Didn't tell me what he wanted with you, Billy."

"Oh, I can guess," laughed Woods. And, with that, he abruptly strode across to his desk and began packing up his possessions, pulling out books and manuscripts, pipes and odds and ends, working most assiduously, and apparently oblivious of the fact that the rest of the staff were looking on in silence.

Miss Daros, taking advantage of their preoccupation, quietly stole toward the telephone booth, but found it occupied at present by one of the boys, so she stood outside and waited dreamily.

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Jones was saying to one of the others: "I thought they'd let him try the Cunningham bill as a final chance to redeem himself." That seemed to be the general impression.

Woods was in something of a daze. When he left Fernleigh on the run, that fatal night, it was partly with a blind hope of Lascelles's or some one's making the train wait. When he saw the red lights of the rear car fading away just out of reach, he first set out to run the fourteen miles to the telegraph office, then stopped at the first farm-house, finally secured a horse, almost killed it, found the telegraph office dark, searched wildly for the operator's house, — though he knew the first edition had gone to press, — and finally sat down on the curb of the dark, deserted village street, and swore. He had let the paper be beaten on the news, and he had lost everything he valued in life.

Aimlessly he took the first train for New York, boarded a tramp steamer, — the first

one he came to, — and tumbled into a bunk, exhausted. It was either that or get drunk, and he decided not to get drunk. When he awoke he was some hundred miles down the coast and found he was bound for Havana. The captain had already informed him of his destination the night before when the request for passage was granted; but Billy had not listened, had not cared; he only wanted to get away from New York and stay away and never look at a newspaper again. Then came the storm. When the slow old tub finally reached Havana harbor, the first thing he did was to ask for all the New York newspapers, as might be expected of a newspaper man. The rest may be guessed.

Borrowing some money, he hurried across to Key West, took the express north, and landed in Albany just too late to be of use. General Cunningham had returned to New York, his informant said, the night before;

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hence Woods came down on the same train as the Cunningham party without knowing it until leaving the Grand Central station, when he saw them starting off in their carriage; he followed in a cab, and waited downstairs as long as he could stand it. The girl had led him away from the office and now she brought him back again.

Woods, sorting out letters, tearing up some of them, preserving others, all in nervous haste, became aware of the many glances in his direction. His colleagues hastily averted their gaze and pretended to be writing or talking of something else. The sentient Henderson, in turning his eyes from Billy, caught a glimpse of something else, — Miss Daros disappearing quietly into the telephone booth. There was something in the expression of her back that arrested his highly cultivated instincts. Hastening over, he said, with his well-known urbanity that had brought in many a column of political

news, "May I not get the number for you, Miss Daros?"

The young woman came out of the telephone booth rather hastily. "Oh, no matter," she said. "It's nothing important." And Henderson rejoined the others, shaking his head wisely. "That's the one," he said.

Scott smiled derisively. "The least likely person on the staff," he commented with assurance. "Don't you know the gossip among the typewriter girls in the next room? Why, she worships Billy Woods, they say. Always has since the first day she came — and before that, too, very likely. Wasn't he the one to discover her, wasting her talents in an East Side sweat-shop?"

Henderson asked the young man if he could finish the well-known quotation beginning, "Hell hath no fury —" And then both turned at hearing Woods calling for Tommy, quite as if he wanted ink or copy paper.

The boy came on the run, as he always did

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for Billy, and seldom for any one else. Woods made a sign to finish packing up the things.

“Yes, sir,” whispered the boy in frightened tones. “Where’ll I take ’em, sir?”

“I don’t know,” said the idol. “Send you word to-morrow.” Then, with one of his sudden movements, he turned abruptly toward the circle of his comrades and caught them in the act of staring at him, quite to their confusion. They all dropped their eyes, but he kept on looking at them, first one and then another, as if while he had a chance he meant to fix in his mind the characteristics of each. Then he stepped toward them slowly, as if he knew he could not avoid saying good-by, and meant to have it over with. There was an awkward silence. They seemed to feel it more than he did. “Covvy,” he said, holding out his hand to the nearest, “there’s one thing I’d like to ask of you as a parting favor.” His voice sounded very grave.

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“All right, Billy,” Covington made answer.

“But I’ve asked you before,” said Woods, shaking his head earnestly. “You won’t do it.”

“I reckon I will this time,” replied Covington, who was a big, burly fellow.

“When referring to children, in your writings, please just once in a while, for my sake, call them something else than ‘little tots.’” Then he turned to another. “Henderson, you’ve been making those poor infinitives of yours do the split again. It’s so vulgar. Say, Scott, you’re a bright boy and some day you may learn to write. But would you mind not being so persistently facetious? It annoys me so. Let go once in a while and be natural. See how it feels. Jones, here’s my knife. You’re always borrowing it, so you must need it a good deal; keep it. Oh, and Lee — my compliments and my paste-pot. There! You can dip your pen in it as much as you like now. See here,

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Berwin," — he picked up the latter's coat and placed it on his own table, — "won't push it off any more." Then, on an impulse, he strode down to where one of the younger reporters, Linton, stood modestly looking on in the background. "Didn't you write this East Side dispossession story?" he demanded abruptly, tapping the copy of the paper in his hand. The cub, somewhat overcome, admitted that he had. "Thought I recognized your fist in it. Well, all I've got to say is that this part about the little girl all alone on the doorstep still hugging her doll — bully! — great! Wish I had written that. I wish —" He abruptly turned away again and called to Tommy. "Oh, never mind the rest. You can have the stuff, all of it." Then he added to the boy, "Don't know just how I'm going to get along without you, Tommy. No one else knows how to fill my ink-well. Always put in too much. Get it all over my fingers."

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Tommy showed signs of whimpering. "You an' me woiked together so slick, Mr. Woods." Then to demonstrate that he wasn't dreaming of crying, he struck the baseball attitude of a catcher and added, "Like Bowerman and Mathewson."

"That's right," Woods nodded. "In our palmy days we've handled some pretty good stories, haven't we, Tommy? Remember the Republican convention, how you had to climb over the shoulders of the delegates to get my copy? But you got it." This was a little too much for the boy, who could bluff off the tears no longer. "That's all right," said the worshipful Mr. Woods, patting him on the back, which dislodged the tears and made place for fresh ones. And his shame being exposed to the world, the boy was now quite shameless and opened his heart with sniffles. "De poiper can't get along," he spluttered, "without you," he gulped, "an' me."

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“You and Mr. Manning will make out somehow,” said Woods, comfortingly.

Tommy shook his head vigorously. “Quittin’ at the end of me week,” he replied, turning away toward the end of the room where he belonged. “I’m goin’ to ask fur me release.”

Woods found himself confronting Miss Daros, whom he admired professionally, despite her unpleasant personality. As usual, he was impersonally gallant in his manner toward her, as he said, “Miss Daros, you don’t show me your verses any more. So sorry.”

Miss Daros said she had ceased writing verses, shot a glance about the room and saw Henderson watching her closely.

“Miss Daros,” Woods went on, “your stuff is one of the features of the paper. Keep it up! We — they — need something serious for ballast.”

“Oh, are you leaving us?” she said with

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averted gaze, and added in low tones, so as not to be overheard, "before you even read your letters?"

Woods bowed absently and turned away toward the men he had worked shoulder to shoulder with so many years, all his newspaper life.

"Don't suppose I'll see much of you fellows any more," he said. "But I'll see your stuff every morning anyway," he added with a quick nod. "That's the next best thing." He found a cigarette, lighted it, threw down the match and nodded again. "Keep on reading the old paper — you can bank on that." Then, with his hands in his pockets, he sauntered up the room, whistling thoughtfully, and turned into the enclosure leading to the managing editor's office.

The door was ajar. He could distinguish the general's voice, more excited than he had ever heard it. Suddenly he heard it more

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strongly, looked up, saw the door open, and Frances hurriedly crossing the passage toward him, followed by the others, walking slowly, talking fast.

V

IT was the first time they had seen each other in the thirteen days during which each had thought of but little else, and that little was what caused them to be brought together at last. But there was no time for greetings. The others were only a little way behind.

“I knew you’d come,” she whispered hastily as they turned toward the main office together. Her eyes were wide, her cheeks flushed. “I brought him here. It was to see you.” Woods stopped. She misunderstood the look on his face. “You don’t want to help me!”

“Want to!” It happened to be his dream of old. “But I’m too late again.”

“Ah!” she whispered, impulsively coming closer to him with sweet confidence, “I knew *you* would not refuse — no matter what you

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might think of *me*," she added, dropping her eyes. "It's not too late. Father will explain."

The general was excited and did not even see Woods. Gilbert did, and hurried to the girl's side. "Then deal with the subject editorially," the old gentleman was demanding angrily, as Manning coolly nodded assent with a quiet smile, "as I have outlined" — at which Manning, still smiling, varied his nod with a shake of the head — "or else write nothing, nothing whatever!" The indignant old gentleman swept away with a gesture of disgust.

"To get his bill signed?" Woods whispered, perplexed.

"No. He'll explain," she replied, as Manning made answer to her father, somewhat emphatically: "We shall write exactly what we see fit, General Cunningham."

The general stopped short. "What!" he exclaimed in amazement. Gilbert was

trying to lead Frances away. "We must avoid a scene," he whispered.

"Suppose," the managing editor replied to the glowing general, "suppose we were to tell the patient public the simple truth of what has taken place here — how ex-Secretary Cunningham, for reasons best known to himself, at the eleventh hour comes to an unadmired and unadmiring paper, makes vague insinuations against his colleagues, when too late for investigation, and," the editor added with significant force, "requests that his own bill, written by his own hand _____"

But at that point the girl intervened. Brushing away from Gilbert, she quickly turned her father about, to prevent an outbreak. "No, father," she said excitedly, "he's come back. Here he is!"

The general turned toward Woods with an eager "Ah!"

Manning, too, was surprised to see him,

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but only said uncomfortably to the general, "I beg your pardon, but —" then turning to Woods and looking still more ill at ease, for he was fond of him, "Left word to see you in private, Billy," he said, and now produced a cablegram from his pocket. He turned to the general again. "The chief has been cabling all week," he said, "to find Woods and put him on this very story. This is his last cable." Mr. Manning handed it to Woods, who read it in silence, nodded, passed it to the general, and turned away from Frances.

The general, in his excitement, read it aloud: "When Woods returns, dismiss him."

"'Fraid that's final," said Manning.

There was an awkward pause. "Don't you think we'd better go?" said Gilbert, gently, taking the old gentleman's arm. "All they want here is a sensation — a 'big story'!" He was too considerate to add, "I told you so."

“You are right,” said the general, turning away, still hot and excited, his voice loud with it. “From former experience I should have had better judgment than to ask a newspaper’s aid — this one’s in particular — to kill my bill!”

Woods, the broken-hearted dreamer with bowed head, heard this and straightened up, suddenly becoming a newspaper man again. “To kill the bill! Your own bill! Is that it?” His voice was strident, authoritative; his words came faster and faster: “Why didn’t you say so! My! What a story! Look at the time! There’ll be a dozen men to see, a score of records to look up. But” — the dreamer shot a glance at Frances — “oh, what a chance!”

They were coming down the aisle, all excited, all oblivious of the gaping reporters.

Frances put in to Billy, “But, if you are no longer ——”

“Not for this paper, for any other paper,

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for no paper," he interrupted. "For you, sir. The proof is all you want. The governor will do the rest. Just give me the chance. Aren't you going to give me a chance?"

The general walked on down the room. Gilbert was holding the gate open for him. The old man turned and looked at Woods. "No," he said.

Woods rushed through after him. His voice came still higher now and his words poured out more rapidly. "But I tell you there's no one in all New York who knows that gang as I do — I'll dig to the bottom of their deviltry — I'll work as I never worked before if you'll let me work for you, sir — I'll block your bill — I'll land those crooks in Sing Sing where I put their pals — I'll keep your name clear and clean — only just let me try!"

As he spoke, he saw Frances urging her father to give heed, and Gilbert at the door urging him to come. The general now spoke

for himself. He was still greatly overwrought. "Absent from duty when his employers needed him most, Frances. Hardly the one to trust in such an emergency." He went on out of the door, Woods following frantically. The girl was still insistent. "No!" repeated the old man with finality. "I never believed in the newspapers." He made for the stairs, all the more furious for having given way to his fury.

Frances lingered near the doorway to hold out her hand to Woods. "I believe in you, Billy," she whispered. Then Gilbert, sent back by the general for his daughter, bore the girl away with the manner of one having the right to do so, and a reserved air of disdaining to express in words his opinion of the disgraceful scene for which he held his cousin responsible, and against which he had done all in his power to warn the general.

In the body of the room the others had

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already got down to work, almost, if not quite, as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Stone, with a faint smile at Haskill's previous guilelessness about the string and the general, said "How about it, eh?" and called for Henderson.

"Looks very much like it," admitted Haskill.

But Woods, forgetting all else, was still gazing out into the hall where Frances had disappeared with Gilbert. "He's got it all!" — the dreamer spoke aloud in his bitter abstraction — "And I — I can't even work for her!"

"Oh, yes, you can." He heard the low voice of Miss Daros passing close by him on the way out. "Look in your pocket."

"What!" asked Woods, still dazed, till he found the note. He read it while Stone, in his matter-of-fact manner, droned on to Henderson: "We've sent Berwin up to Albany to try the governor; Scott to see

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property holders; so, with what Manning and I got out of him, we may be able to piece the thing together. Henderson, you've got to hustle, but it's a chance to make your reputation — a regular Billy Woods story."

The note said: —

DEAR WOODS: The gang is trying to do old man Cunningham dirt. You are the only man who can help him out, I guess. I'll give you the tip upon condition you handle the story *for our paper*, and promise not to put the old man wise — he might give it away and spoil *our beat* — keep quiet about this, in any case. You'll find me at Andy's.

Yours,

H. A. LASCELLES.

Woods had bolted down the stairs two steps at a time.

Ten minutes later, refusing Lascelles's pressing invitation to join him in a drink, at Andy's, Billy was studying, in the light of Lascelles's meagre information, every word and letter of a printed copy of the Cunningham bill.

PART III

AT THE OPERA

I

ONE of the brown-and-red uniformed ushers was pacing back and forth along the promenade outside the lower tier of boxes, with his usual bored expression. As he turned, he stopped and spread his arms to obtain the full benefit of the yawn he was about to indulge in. But before he had quite finished, he was interrupted by the sudden burst of muffled applause and orchestration which followed the high finishing notes of the soprano and tenor. This meant the end of the first act, and it meant that he must get busy. So, postponing his yawn for another time, he marched resolutely

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to his duty, which was to stand by the grand stairway and look indifferent.

With the opening of the box doors, the applause and the orchestration issued stronger, almost drowning out the conversation in the boxes. A glimpse of the brightly lighted anterooms of the boxes was given outsiders; here and there a table with flowers on it; ladies' wraps; men's coats; and in some cases the people themselves were coming out to make inter-box visits.

The promenade was now filled with people passing and repassing, chattering, bowing, smiling, looking at one another and in some instances even talking about the music.

"Wasn't Jean just heavenly!" exclaimed a young girl.

"Ach! more musig in my liddle finger," returned her Teutonic escort, with long hair and glittering glasses shaking in emphasis.

"Mommer, can you stick it out?" queried an anxious daughter. And the fat mother

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answered desperately, "I'll try to, my dear, for your sake," but was not backed up by the father, who put in, "I'm damned if I will," and started for the stairway so abruptly that he bumped into another group of promenaders, who smoothed their ruffled feathers haughtily.

"Commuters," remarked one of these forgivingly. "Poor things! Must catch their train."

"Did you hear that!" exclaimed the indignant daughter. "Popper, come back! Mommer, you've got to stand your headache." The daughter had her way, as in many of our households, the parents being rewarded for their dutifulness in this case by a distant view of a visiting countess, arriving late and resplendent from a dinner. Nobody looked at her escort or the rest of her party, and yet they swelled with greater pride than the countess, who was perhaps more used to herself.

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Like the unfortunate pater-familias who had brought upon his house the reproach of "commuter," there were others who had come here, not for music nor even for conversation. Some were here strictly for business.

"That's a Paquin model," whispered one dressmaker to another.

"Why didn't she buy hips that would fit?" was the reply. They did not even pretend to be interested in the little stage. All through the first act their opera-glasses were pointed down at the boxes, quite as if they had social aspirations.

Prima donnas and ushers are not the only ones who toil at the opera. Moving in and out among the slow-sauntering opera crowd were some of the same reporters who had paid a professional visit at Fernleigh, and a half-dozen others besides.

Shayne and Nordheimer were here, too, presumably not for the fun of it, though they

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looked serene and social. Shayne, in passing one of the boxes, made a gesture which attracted Nordheimer's attention to it. They passed on, unconscious that Murphy and Munger were a little way behind, watching them interestedly.

Jerry McCarter was also present, with his wife, a serious person in a remarkable costume, who thought she was walking like a woman of fashion. He was humorously conscious of his new dress suit, and humorously unconscious that it did not fit in the back. He, too, pointed out the same box, in passing, and Mrs. Jerry nodded and walked a little more like a woman of fashion, while her good man strutted and laughed at her.

Nearly all the reporters in turn applied at the door of this same interesting box. They were answered by a footman, who only shook his head and closed the door again, each time a little more emphatically.

Sauntering along from opposite directions,

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Lascelles and Miss Daros met, as it happened, not far from this door, each, as it chanced, idly glancing at it as they approached. He bowed and joined her in a casual manner.

“Everything all right?” she whispered to him, looking elsewhere.

“No! Billy’s still out on the story, tearing all over town, working against time. Hasn’t landed the general yet. Munson says he tried in every way this afternoon, — telephone, telegraph, bribed the servants at the house, sent in messengers — no go! He’s got to see the general to-night, or ——”

“The general’s in there.”

“In the Townsend box?” Lascelles had just arrived. “The afternoon papers said the old man was sick in bed — has nervous prostration.”

“But he has a daughter. He wants a son-in-law.”

“Don’t you worry about that,” smiled

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Lascalles. "To-morrow you'll have Billy and her both in a hole — different holes."

"Look out!" she whispered, and turned away quickly. For Henderson, the political reporter, who suspected her at the office, was approaching the Townsend box. Lascalles made a sign for her to follow.

His daring plan was, as he had suggested to Munson, his assistant that night at Fernleigh, to obtain by means of Woods's cleverness the complete evidence of Shayne's plot; then, instead of turning it in to the paper, to sell it to Shayne and skip out with the proceeds.

As Lascalles and Miss Daros walked down the stairs, Munson joined them.

"Where's Woods?" Lascalles demanded when they reached a secluded spot away from the crowded foyer.

"Told me to get to the devil out of his way — find me at the opera if he wanted me to run any more errands; several big guns

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here he's still got to bag. Say! you ought to 've seen him with the others! — bluffs 'em, jollies 'em, scares 'em — never saw such a man! Lawyers and everybody been opening up for him."

"Say, Munson," asked Lascelles, "what are all the commissioners doing here, anyway?"

"That's the beauty of it! Don't you catch on to what he's done? Saw he could never round up the whole bunch in half a day — none of 'em anxious to meet him, anyway — what did he do? Started an underground rumor that threw a scare into Shayne and Nordheimer; they've come here to keep an eye on the general; Murphy and Munger to watch *them* — so he has everybody here watching everybody else! Isn't it lovely?"

"Nobody but Billy could have done that," commented Miss Daros.

"Huh! But if he can't clinch the story by means of the general's side of it," put in

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Lascelles, less enthusiastically, "where do we stand with Shayne?"

Munson said, "Well, anyhow, you can at least threaten to print what you overheard that night up at Fernleigh."

"And how much did I overhear?" asked Lascelles, sarcastically.

"It's such a little thing — they'll never discover it," repeated Munson, glibly, "and 'the old man's no proof-reader!' Just say that to 'em and see 'em jump!"

"But what does *that* mean?"

"It might mean — anything!"

"Yes — or nothing," put in Miss Daros.

"And that's exactly what they told me," remarked Lascelles, grinning, to the young woman.

"You tried it!" Munson exclaimed.

"Yesterday, when we gave up Woods for lost — and got kicked out of the place for it, threatened with a suit for blackmail. There's no evidence in that."

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“Only bluffing,” said Munson, sententiously. “They’ll pay a good, stiff price all right, to keep what evidence Woods has got by this time out of the paper.”

“But, can’t you see,” exclaimed Lascelles, querulously, “they’ll pay a hundred times more to keep themselves out of Sing Sing! Don’t you understand, if Billy can only get *proof* of criminal intent, and we hold it up before their eyes — in black and white! Why, man alive, we’ve got ’em where we can get anything, anything!”

“*Billy* may be able to work the *general*,” put in Miss Daros, “but how are you going to work *him*? When he gets back to your office with the story, I mean. Remember, he is as quick as a steel trap to catch on to anything crooked!”

“Not when he’s writing a big story.”

“He’s dead to the world then,” concurred Munson. “You’ve seen him yourself, Miss Daros.”

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“But there’s your night editor,” objected Miss Daros, “one of the keenest and straightest men in New York.”

Lascelles laughed. “Doesn’t even know Woods has joined us! Billy was so anxious to get busy, he didn’t stop to come up to the office, didn’t even mention salary. And I’ve arranged for him to write his story in my private office. What did I rent a private office for, anyway!”

“And afterward?” asked the girl.

“That’s a cinch,” said Munson, smiling oddly to Lascelles.

“But how are you going to work it?” Miss Daros was insistent.

“Oh, there are a dozen ways,” said Lascelles, easily. “Something unpleasant, if necessary.”

Miss Daros was startled.

“Only until to-morrow when the bill gets through, you understand,” Munson put in.

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Miss Daros was thinking about it. "But, when he wakes up?" she asked.

"We'll be sailing down the Bay on the *Cedric*."

"And Billy?"

Lascalles misunderstood her hesitation. "Do you think anybody's going to believe his explanation?" he demanded impatiently. "Everything will be dead against him."

"If I know Woods," remarked Munson, "he'll disappear from New York again and never peep!"

"What difference does it make to us," said Lascalles, who was less speculative. "We'll be out of reach — if we only get the whole story to-night!" He broke off impatiently. "Now, then," he said to Miss Daros, "it's up to me to connect with Shayne. You keep your eye on the Townsend box. Munson, get in touch with Woods." They separated. Lascalles was the only one of the three playing coldly for money. Munson

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had succumbed to him, but could not forget the romance of the adventure. And the woman in the case was there with what brings women into most cases, sometimes to the upsetting of well-laid plans.

The bell had rung, the passing crowd had disappeared, the box doors had slammed, the music had begun again, and the usher had his yawn.

II

MEANWHILE Henderson, who was approaching the Townsend box when Miss Daros spied him, had turned away at seeing one of the other reporters there handing in a note which was straightway handed back, unopened. This rebuff, by the way, struck the young reporter who made the attempt as so eminently right and reasonable that he fled the place, flushing with shame and hating himself and everybody in sight. That night he wrote home that he had decided to give up his literary ambitions and would study law, as his father wanted him to do.

That was not the way Henderson looked at the matter. He had been in the business many years. When such disagreeable con-

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tingencies arose — which, it must be confessed, were less frequent than the opposite attitude of trying to “get into the papers” — he met them quite impersonally.

Now, Henderson had in his pocket the proof of an editorial which it was very important to bring to the attention of General Cunningham. It was impersonally important from the point of view of a dealer in news. It was still more important personally, from the point of view of General Cunningham, whose political moves had more than once been questioned. Henderson proposed to give the irascible old gentleman a chance to state his side of the present question.

So he turned away, planning how to work it, and presently came back with an inspiration and the brown-and-red uniformed usher. The latter was aroused into wakefulness by no greater noise than the crinkling sound of a new dollar bill. Henderson also handed him the long proof-sheet,

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folded and superscribed with a brief request for instructions as to the general's pleasure in the matter. The usher went in and Henderson awaited results. They came quickly.

The door was opened by the fast-fatiguing footman, and Gilbert Townsend appeared. He was furious and showed it by hurling the proof doubled up into a wad, at Henderson's feet. Then, threatening the usher with the loss of his position, Gilbert retired without another glance at the reporter, and the door closed and clicked with quiet eloquence.

While this was going on, still another reporter appeared, walking in a hurry. It was Woods, looking preoccupied. He seemed as little aware of his incongruity with the slow-pacing opera crowd as he was oblivious of not being dressed in evening clothes. He caught a view of Henderson in the act of sending in the proof-sheet by the usher.

It made him stop abruptly, with a gesture

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of annoyance, for he knew it would not work and would only make his own task more difficult. So, without stopping to see it fail, he dashed on after a tall, ascetic-looking man, with a bald head, catching him just as he was about to enter another box.

“Judge Lansing,” he said, disarming hostility with a smile, a shrug, and a shake of the head, “it’s simply criminal to bother you here, but I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to talk shop a moment — about a certain decision of yours in ’92.” Woods knew, or rather felt, that the judge was the sort who responded best to what Billy’s friends termed his “refined, ingénue manner.” It was hardly premeditated, however; there was not time for premeditation. Pacing to the end of the promenade and the back, Billy got some, if not all, of what he wanted, and thanking the scholarly personage at the latter’s box door — he went on.

The important part of the work was still to

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be performed, and there was not much time left for it. He had been obliged to consume two valuable hours of his time at the start, in finding a starting-point. All he had to go on was not a very definitely suggestive sentence or two from an overheard conversation — plus the conviction, which he had already formed, that there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. He might never have stumbled upon the theory that he was now working on confidently, though blindly, if there had not flashed into his mind a “story” telegraphed to the papers some time before, from a Western state capital. It was to the effect that a murderer’s life had been spared owing to a typographical error. A little investigation and his layman’s knowledge of the law showed him what he was hunting for in the general’s bill. But it was one thing to be morally certain, and another to adduce proof, and the evening was no longer young.

Woods had just arrived and Judge Lansing

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was but one of those he had to see at the opera. He hurried out upon the street and around the block to the stage entrance, familiarly saluted his old friend, the door-keeper, and soon found his way past drops and properties, through a bevy of gossiping chorus women, under the stage, with its many ropes, wires, cogwheels, trap-doors and trolleys, to where the electrician sat on a high stool like a bicycle seat. It was in a place like a rifle pit, with a switchboard bigger than a grand piano.

There was another man there, at first, and several minutes had to be wasted in talk about things Woods was not interested in, though pretending to be—so often necessary. “We think we know something about making gauzes in this country—bah! Can’t touch Germany. Every good gauze on this stage is from Germany,” and so on.

“Well, Mr. Woods,” said the electrician on his stool, “what can I do for you?”

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“Only want to see how the audience looks from here,” said Billy, adjusting a pair of binoculars, borrowed on the way. He located the various faces in half the time it would have taken to find them otherwise. He saw that his audacious ruse, born of desperation, had succeeded in what he had hoped for, namely, in bringing most of them together where he could get at them; but whether or not it would be of any avail was another question. He went back to the foyer once more.

III

THE venerable ex-secretary was in no mood for enjoying the music or the other noises of the opera, but he scarcely heard them. Everything outside of his troubled mind was like the unimportant buzzing of persistent flies to a fever patient. Indeed, it was contrary to his physician's first advice that the engagement to attend this benefit with the Townsends was not broken. When the nerve-specialist saw how determined the old gentleman was to carry out the plan, however, he humored him, saying that the music and the people might divert his mind from worry, knowing that his patient would not be able, in any case, to take the rest prescribed for him until sea air and change of scene had produced their effect; if, that is, the general could be persuaded to sail at

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all, for he now seemed inclined to postpone his start indefinitely. This, Dr. Strange declared to Mrs. Metcalfe and the general's daughter, might produce results of the most serious nature.

All the afternoon, contrary to newspaper reports, the harassed old gentleman had been in consultation with his lawyers and advisers. He had held long-distance conversations by telephone with the governor. He had sought telegraphic advice from certain high authorities at Washington. All to no purpose. And now he was sitting bolt upright in the Townsend box, staring straight ahead of him at nothing, while his daughter, who would not leave his side, watched his face anxiously. This only worried him the more, for it was not what he had brought her there for, when she declared her intention of giving up the opera to stay home with him.

More than once he begged her to join the others in the front of the box and enjoy the

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evening as young people should. But even Mrs. Metcalfe's adroit manœuvring could not effect this. At last, soon after the beginning of the second act, the anxious aunt, in desperation, simulated the symptoms of giddiness and beckoned Frances and Gilbert to accompany her out into the promenade for a breath of fresh air, which she said would refresh her in a moment.

Despatching Gilbert to the nearest drug-store for a certain powder that would cure her headache, she put the case plainly to her young unworldly niece. There was no time now to mince matters, and she tried, as kindly as she could, to make the thoughtless girl see the danger of her persistently inconsiderate treatment of Gilbert.

"Don't ask me to think about Gilbert now," begged Frances, "with father in there looking like that."

"My dear child, why is he here?" Mrs. Metcalfe exclaimed. "Why did he make

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you read that last telegram from the governor? Don't you understand? Can't you see! When this dreadful bill goes through it may be too late. Your father's name may be smirched. Think of it! Think of the uproar! Think of the effect upon Gilbert! To put it plainly, my little niece, unless your engagement is announced this evening, as your father and I had arranged — don't you see?"

"But there's nothing to announce!"

"Your father believes it's only a lover's quarrel — didn't you ask Gilbert to sail with you to-morrow?"

"But during the past two awful weeks — how could I burden his mind with my little troubles?" Then, impetuously turning to the box, she exclaimed: "Oh, I'll explain the whole thing now and have it over with."

Mrs. Metcalfe restrained her. "Wait," she said warningly. "Remember what Dr.

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Strange said about his heart. Any sudden shock to-night—Frances, it would never do!”

“Then tell me what I *can* do,” cried the girl.

“Be nice to Gilbert. Here he comes.” And, turning to him, she said in her normal tone: “Thank you, dear Gilbert. I’m quite myself again.” And added significantly: “So is Frances. Aren’t you, my dear? We’ve both been *so* distressed about the general.” Which reminded her that it was time to go back to him. And, slipping quickly into the box, she left the two young people together.

They were not very much at ease in each other’s presence. Gilbert had done all in his power to be of aid and sympathy to her father, and she had treated him hardly civilly. He had given up most of his time during the past two weeks and many important engagements in order to be with the general,

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even when unaccompanied by his daughter. And, for thanks, she was making a fool of him. He was willing to sacrifice much for her sake; for instance, he had no thought of withdrawing from the field now that scandal was impending, — as, it seemed to him, many men would do, — but he was wounded that she should take it all so complacently, and express her appreciation by snubbing him publicly.

Of course, he spurned the thought of reproaching her with this, but if anything were to be said to break the awkward silence as they hesitated by the door, it was clearly not his part to make the first advance. For, if he were to do so, would it not be received with the same heartless inconsiderateness which had marked her attitude all through the afternoon since saying good-by with such unnecessary effusiveness to his cousin at the conclusion of that unpleasant scene which he had done all in his power to pre-

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vent? Gilbert maintained a polite reserve, smiling at her, not unkindly.

Frances, feeling the silence, and seeing that nothing was coming of her resolution to be nice, turned with a sudden impulse to the door of the box.

“May I ask why you are going?” submitted Gilbert, urbanely.

“To join the others,” she replied with matter-of-factness.

He bowed and held the door open for her. Then, without following, he bowed once more and said quietly: “I shall ‘join the others’ later.”

“Where are *you* going?” she inquired, smiling to soften the stiffness of their mutual attitude, which impressed her as being rather absurd.

“Oh, I’m merely going to cancel my state-room. It will take only a moment by telephone.”

Frances came out of the anteroom quickly.

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“No, no, no!” she cried excitedly. “Don’t, Gilbert. Please don’t do that.” She caught him by the arm.

The eager change in her manner misled him. She was very young and she hardly knew her own mind. But perhaps her heart knew its desires, even when she did not. The imminence of that year without him, betrayed her true feelings. He ventured to inquire, with delicate circumlocution, whether he might flatter himself that such was the case.

It would have been an easy thing to say, “Come and see.” If it had been merely the duel of sex, with the desire to bring another man to her feet, she might have been tempted to try something of the sort. But, in this case, it was so different that the thought revolted her. “I’m afraid it isn’t that exactly, Gilbert,” she said, with more embarrassment than he had ever seen in her manner before. “Father thinks so, though,” she added, with a little laugh to hide her nervous-

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ness, which her twisting fingers uncovered. "I was just thinking, couldn't we — just for a little longer — let him keep on thinking so? — till this nightmare is over. Would that be asking too much, Gilbert?"

Gilbert only stared at her in astonishment. "Dear old father," she went on, in distress, "you know how harassed he is already. Only till he's rested, on the steamer? Would you mind very much?"

Gilbert's jaw was set. "Oh, I know it isn't fair to you," she went on. "I don't know what you will think of me for asking it. But don't you see — oh, I'm in a dreadful fix!" she broke out girlishly. "You see, I gave father a wrong impression about us up at Fernleigh. I'm afraid you helped do it yourself, Gilbert, unintentionally. And now, you see, Dr. Strange said this afternoon that any sudden shock — oh, Gilbert, do help me out! Just be generous and sail with us to-morrow."

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No one could accuse him of lacking in generosity. But though he daily received demands upon it, of many varieties, this was a kind of generosity he had never been obliged to consider. And, he thought, any man would hesitate to accede to such an unreasonable request under the peculiar circumstances, and coming as it did upon the sudden toppling of high hope. The thoughtless beauty clearly did not recognize what she was asking. But Gilbert did not refuse point blank, as some men might have done.

“That,” he replied, temporizing, “would be equivalent to announcing we’re engaged. All our friends think so, you know.”

“But if you come back alone,” began the girl, naïvely, and Gilbert interrupted, “To announcing that I am thrown over.”

“Well, you’d do even that for father — and me, wouldn’t you?” she asked, with girlish faith. For had he not declared again

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and again that he would make any sacrifice for her sake?

Gilbert had a vision of what people would say — how some men and women he hated would laugh at him behind his back; how certain scurrilous journals would comment upon the futility of his infatuation, somewhat as they had impudently done before in regard to his movements in other matters. He was a personage, a man prominent in the public gaze. He had more dignity to maintain than most men of his age.

She was pleading with him, holding out the beautiful hands in her unconscious earnestness. “Oh, Gilbert — please! I can’t promise anything. That wouldn’t be right. You wouldn’t want me to until I care for you enough, would you? But, if you will only come —” Something made her stop abruptly and she added, modulating the new tone in her voice, unsuccessfully: “Perhaps you’re right, after all, Gilbert. It is a good deal to

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ask of you — to ask of any man,” she added, as if fearing she had accented the pronoun. “Go and cancel your steamer.”

Gilbert, who had been scowling at the floor, looked up quickly at her sudden change, and, following the direction of her gaze, he saw approaching from the stairway his cousin, the reporter, in jovial conversation with Jerry McCarter.

“No!” Gilbert exclaimed resolutely. “I will do what you really wish! — I will sail with you in the morning.” As he spoke, he opened the box door, and there was nothing for her to do but to pass in as he bowed with courtly grace.

IV

WOODS, adapting himself as usual to the person in hand, was saying in a laughing voice, as if without a care in the world, and as if he had all the evening to gossip in: "Well, those were great old days, Jerry. Remember when you got that first saloon of your own over on Avenue A? Used to pull off fights in the room upstairs."

"Called it an athletic club, Billy," chuckled McCarter, with a dig in his young friend's ribs, who, he did not notice, was glancing here and there, and looked perplexed as they approached the Townsend box. "Athletic club! Didn't cut much ice when we got pulled by the Reform administration!" The jovial McCarter laughed heartily at the recollection. "Say! Wouldn't it jar these real

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things here if they knew!" he added, with a humorous glance at his clothes.

"What do you think you're doing here anyway?" inquired Woods, banteringlly.

McCarter made answer: "The auld woman — she's after buttin' into sassiety — wants me to inthroduce her to me mash, Mrs. Metcalfe." He pointed at the Townsend box, interrupting himself with a snort of laughter. "A foine woman, that, Billy, for all she's so hoity-toity; though Oi'm thinkin' Oi loike the young one better. And so do you, eh? Oh, Oi had me eye on ye up there at our sworay. Say, what d'ye think of me dress suit, Billy?"

"Beauty," said Woods, glancing at his watch. "Why don't you buy one?"

"Ah, g'wan!" laughed McCarter, and gave his smiling companion a playful push. "Don't ye be puttin' that in the paper now, moind."

"Huh!" interjected Woods, suddenly

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serious. "That shows I was right. I *thought* they hadn't let you in on it."

"In on what?" McCarter was impressed by his young friend's tone, and stopped.

"Well," said Woods, smiling thoughtfully, "there is something I *am* going to put in the paper, Jerry." He looked at McCarter frankly. "Something those higher up won't like."

"Ain't they been on the level wid me?" Jerry exclaimed. "What's doin', Billy? What's doin'?"

"Suppose you tell me first, what made you and Murphy so hot for the Cunningham bill."

McCarter hesitated. "Say, me bye, ye nivver went back on a frind yit."

"What's in it for you fellows?" said Woods.

"Well now, it was loike this," Jerry began as they walked on. "One day, Jake Shayne he says to me one day, 'Jerry,' says he, 'you want that bye of yours on the po-lice,' says

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he. 'Sure,' says I; 'it's the way ye began yerself,' I says. 'Well,' says he, 'I guess I can fix it for ye if ye back th' giniral an' his bill,' he says."

Once started, McCarter talked freely, for he knew it was the safest thing to do with Woods.

Meanwhile there were others in the great building who were neglecting their musical opportunities. Shayne and Nordheimer, to escape the reporters, had slipped across the street for a quiet talk in one of the back rooms of Kid McCoy's café. They had been followed there by Lascelles, and now, having rid themselves of his unwelcome company, came back to the opera somewhat excitedly.

"Don't worry about him — he's a loafer," said Shayne, relapsing into the vernacular in his excitement.

"But he says ——"

"Tell him if he opens his head again he'll be up against a suit for blackmail."

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“Don’t you think he knows anything?” asked Nordheimer.

“Nothing he can make any use of,” returned Shayne, with confidence. “Simplicity of the thing is what blinds ’em all.” They had stopped and were hovering near the Townsend box — perhaps because of the hint they had received during the afternoon that something would be “doing” this evening; perhaps because of a similar fascination to that which murderers are said to feel.

In any case, Nordheimer, less experienced than his pal, and less courageous by nature, was frightened.

Shayne laughed at him. “Brace up,” he said, slapping him on the back. “Only a few hours more, old man.”

“Hours!” returned Nordheimer. “Seems more like years. Haven’t slept for a week.”

Shayne, staring straight ahead of him, stopped abruptly and ejaculated: “Hell!”

“What?” asked Nordheimer.

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“Woods!” whispered Shayne.

Nordheimer was for turning in the opposite direction. Shayne restrained him. “Don’t give yourself away,” he sneered. “Bluff it out! You’re not afraid of a reporter.” And they sauntered on casually.

Woods, walking briskly, came forward toward them, with his head down as if not aware of their presence until quite near them, when, suddenly shooting an accusing finger into Nordheimer’s face, he cried in a voice that seemed horribly loud to them: “Who took out that comma?”

Both men made reply at once. “Sh! What comma?” said Shayne. “General Cunningham!” said Nordheimer, while Shayne was adding, “What are you talking about, anyway?”

“Too late,” said Woods, laughing at Shayne and pointing at Nordheimer, who in panic had stepped back from his strident accuser. Shayne, with the quick instincts of bluffing,

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stepped forward boldly, saying, "If there has been a typographical error ——"

"Thank you, Mr. Nordheimer," remarked Woods, stepping between them. "That proves my theory, Mr. Shayne. Been working on it rather blindly heretofore."

With contemptuous indignation, Shayne demanded the meaning of all this nonsense, making signs to Nordheimer, meanwhile, to brace up. Nordheimer, emulating his chief's manner, not very successfully, bel-
lowed: "What in hell are you talking about?"

"About an old forgotten statute," returned Woods, again, with such sudden fierceness that Nordheimer once more showed signs of wilting. "See?" said Woods, smiling at Shayne, "even Nordheimer knows, and he's only an ignorant whiskey dealer." As he spoke, the young man took out pencil and paper. "Now then," he said in a brisk, businesslike manner, "I'll give you fellows

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a fair shake. Write down verbatim any statement you ——”

“It’s no use,” said Shayne to Nordheimer, in a confidential manner. “Can’t shield the old gentleman any longer.”

Woods smiled. “So that’s it, eh? All right. Go on. That makes it all the more interesting.” He pretended to take notes. Nordheimer looked at Shayne.

“General Cunningham wrote that bill,” said Shayne.

Woods, still calmly taking notes, remarked quietly, “Um hum. And you kindly attended to the printing for him.”

“He O.K.’d it as it stands to-day,” returned Shayne, with still more force. And Nordheimer put in excitedly: “We’ve got his own signature to the proof-sheets.”

“A clever precaution,” said the reporter.

“See here, young man,” returned Shayne, who had done much quick thinking, and now spoke in the superior manner of a lawyer:

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“We can get affidavits from the printer showing ——”

“All right. All right,” interrupted Woods, wearily, waving his lead pencil. “I know. I’ve seen the printers, of course. Quigley set up the job — had a talk with him this afternoon. But,” Woods went on, mocking Shayne’s legal manner, “you cannot get affidavits to show that General Cunningham wrote that bill with the comma omitted from the third sentence of the second paragraph of Section VII!”

“And we don’t have to!” returned Shayne, triumphantly. “Let him prove he didn’t!” And with that the lawyer calmly turned away, Nordheimer following, somewhat dazed by the sudden reversal of the situation.

Woods saw the significance of the remark at once, and for an instant was too staggered to pursue. He stood staring at their retreating backs, cursing himself for showing how weak in trumps his hand was.

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He let the two commissioners go on. The only thing to do now was to get the original draft. Unless that had been preserved, no power on earth could clear the name of General Cunningham.

Even if Woods refused to write a word of the evidence he had secured, matters had proceeded too far by this time to be stopped. His talk with Judge Lansing, his interview with the mayor about the various hearings in that official's office, his examination into various records, his telegraphed and telephoned inquiries at Albany — it would all seem, after the facts came out, as if he had suppressed the evidence out of consideration for the general, which would only incriminate the latter more deeply. All depended on the original draft, and that he must now get at any cost.

V

As he paced up and down before the Townsend box, wasting a few precious seconds in indecision as to the best means of going about the delicate undertaking, it happened that Shayne was applying his sharp wits to the accomplishment of the same end. "We've got to get that original draft!" he whispered to Nordheimer, as they started down the stairs. "If we don't, where are we?"

They had tried to "borrow" it a dozen times from the old gentleman, but had succeeded only in discovering that he kept it locked in his private safe.

There was no time for formalities now. "Nordheimer," whispered Shayne, "go put Slim Burke on the job, quick! If he don't get it in my hands to-night, tell him I'll show him up. Tell him it'll mean twenty

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years' hard labor for him this time. Wait a minute, Nordheimer. Do you realize that if we don't get it — it means twenty years for us?"

Nordheimer, fleeing in terror, passed on the staircase the man Lascelles, followed at a little distance by Miss Daros; Lascelles made for Shayne. "Don't you think you'd like to have a little talk with me, after all?" he asked, with his insinuating smile. Miss Daros, who had been hovering near the Townsend box all evening, had witnessed the encounter with Woods, and had hurried after Lascelles.

"That man on your paper?" Shayne asked, seeing a sudden ray of hope.

Lascelles nodded, impudently calm.

"But I know Woods," added Shayne, shaking his head and feeling inward alarm once more.

Lascelles raised his eyebrows. "Every man has his price," he said in his oily way.

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“Woods is a high-priced man, I admit, but ——”

“You’re a liar,” interrupted Shayne. “I’ve tried to fix him before.”

As they talked, they had drawn near the subject of their conversation, who was shaking his head abstractedly as he tore up a visiting-card on which he had scribbled a few words. He knew the futility of that.

“Oh, Billy,” inquired Lascelles, calmly, “are you working for us or not?”

Woods waved him aside impatiently. “Yes, yes. Don’t bother me now.”

Lascelles whispered to Shayne: “Wants me to take care of this end of the job, you see.”

For answer, Shayne took Lascelles by the arm. “Let’s go across to the Kid’s,” he said.

And now Woods, with a sudden resolution, biting his lip, quietly opened the door of the box and called in a low, earnest tone:

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“General Cunningham, quick! I can block the bill for you.”

At first there was no reply except the incongruous one of the music and the low babble of voices pouring out through the open door. He had not been heard except by the footman, who turned, scandalized, as if to put the intruder out. Woods called again. This time it was loud enough to be heard by all in the box. Some of those in neighboring boxes turned and looked. Gilbert flew out, blazing with indignation. “Say, Gilbert, quick! tell him — Oh, I’m awfully sorry, of course. But, quick! I’ve solved the mystery!”

“Shs! Don’t you realize where you are?”

“Can’t you realize why? Quick! I tell you, call him out.”

“General Cunningham is already a very sick man ——”

“But I can cure him!”

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“—— all because you damned reporters ——”

“Bah!” interrupted Billy, furious. But he controlled himself. “See here, Gilbert,” he said firmly, “I can’t waste much more time with you, but if you want to save the old boy’s reputation ——”

“Shs! Will you leave quietly,” whispered Gilbert, taking hold of the door, “or must I put you out?”

“Either you bring him to me,” cried Woods, taking a step forward, “or I go in!”

Gilbert, with sudden rage, shoved his cousin back and slammed the door. Woods had been taken unawares. He now threw himself against the door with all his force. Gilbert hadn’t time to turn the latch. The door burst open. Gilbert, assisted by the footman, pushed it back again. Woods blocked it with his foot. Now he was desperate. He shouted through the crack in a

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loud tone: "General, quick! I've discovered the whole plot!"

Those in the near-by boxes thought it must be a crank or an intoxicated person, but they saw the general disappear quickly into the anteroom. "What's this? What's this?" he whispered excitedly.

"A trick to get you out," returned Gilbert, still struggling at the door. "Go back, sir."

"The original draft! Where is it?" came in Woods's voice through the crack.

"Come on, father," said another voice within. Frances had followed. "Will you let us pass?" Gilbert gave way reluctantly.

All three now joined the reporter in the promenade, Gilbert closing the door to prevent further disgraceful disturbance. It would be hard enough to explain what had already happened.

VI

“YOUNG man, what’s all this ado about a plot?” asked the general, half suspicious.

“Where is the draft, sir?”

They were all excited, Gilbert the most so. “He says he can block the bill already. Why don’t you go and do it, then? Frances, this is no place for you.” But the girl declined to go in.

“Because,” answered Woods, “until I clinch my evidence with that draft ——”

“Told you so — a trick! Come on back, sir.”

“What is the plot, Billy?” This from Frances.

“Make haste, sir!” from the general.

“I can’t tell you that — at least not now. But if you’ll only let me have that draft until to-morrow ——”

“Can’t tell me!”

“Can’t tell the author of the bill, eh?”
Gilbert joined in.

“Why not, Billy?” added the one sympathetic voice.

Woods was panting. “But I only got the tip by promising——” He stopped. It would never do to mention Lascelles’s name to the general.

“Yes?”

“—— by a promise that I wouldn’t tell you, sir.”

“Rot!” sneered Gilbert.

“Why not, Billy? Explain!”

“Because, don’t you see, in his excitement he might let the cat out of the bag — telephone the whole story up to the governor, and then ——”

“Well! wouldn’t that kill the bill?” demanded Gilbert, ironically.

“But can’t you see, it would also kill the story!”

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“Oh, we see that,” said Gilbert. “A ‘big story’! The news of course is more important.”

“News, as it happens,” returned the reporter, “is the commodity in which newspapers deal. Astonishing fact, isn’t it?” Then, turning from Gilbert to the general, with simple earnestness: “I offered you my services to-day. You declined the offer. I’m working for a newspaper now. It’s the only way I could do it. If you’ll give me that draft I’ll kill your bill. You’ve got to trust somebody. Why not trust me?”

Again the girl put in to her father, who was hesitating: “Yes, father. Do take my advice.”

“He did once to-day,” muttered Gilbert.

“I can’t wait here all night, sir,” cried Woods, in desperation. “For the last time, do you want me to show up those rascals, smash that bill, save your name? Or ——”

“The last chance!” whispered Frances.

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Gilbert took the general's arm. "Why is he so anxious to save your name? — panting with excitement to save your name?"

The tortured reporter could stand it no longer. He was in a state where the ordinary reserves are transcended. "Because, if you must know my reasons," he burst out impetuously to the general, "if you can't believe in me otherwise" — he turned his excited eyes toward Frances; but the girl, who was looking at him imploringly, put her finger to her lips and shook her head. Woods bowed to her behest. "Because, as I was saying, this is the legitimate pursuit of my profession."

The general turned abruptly toward the box door. "There is nothing legitimate about the profession you pursue," he said with contempt, and then started at beholding other members of the same illegitimate profession drawing near, a half-dozen of them.

"Billy's got him," one of these was saying. Perhaps the news of the flutter in the Town-

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send box had spread, or certain observant eyes had detected the absence of the general's silvery head. At any rate, here they were, swooping down upon him like vultures.

"Come in, sir, quick!" whispered Gilbert.

But the general had conceived another plan. "We'd better telephone to the governor about this," he said.

Henderson, in the vanguard of the reporters, was taking out his much-folded, smudgy proof. "All I want to know, sir," he began considerately, and they surrounded the venerable gentleman, despite his silent gesticulations.

Gilbert had started with him, but stopped at seeing his cousin draw near Frances. "Go with father," she whispered to Gilbert; "I can't."

"Go back to the box. You must!" he returned, as though he meant to make a bargain of it. She opened the door, but as she stepped in she heard Billy, passing by

apparently intent on something in the other direction: "As you value your father's life, let me see you."

"Can't you take 'no' for an answer?" Gilbert was demanding of the rapacious reporters.

"But, general," Henderson was persisting, "if you don't deny ——"

"Nothing to say. Nothing to say," repeated the general, until Gilbert got him safely into an automobile and whisked him off to the Bar Association near by, where the old man could telephone to his heart's content, out of reach of the reporters.

VII

FRANCES had gone only as far as the anteroom of the box and as soon as she knew Gilbert was out of sight, reappeared alone in the promenade, as Billy had believed she would. He was more intense than ever now, because the time was shorter and his case more desperate. There were no preliminaries. He almost sprang at her. "The draft — where is it?"

"In his pocket."

"Good work."

"A mysterious note this afternoon ——"

"I know ——"

"— warning him ——"

"Yes, yes — I wrote it. Now, then ——"

"You!" He was too intent to notice the recoil.

"To make him bring the draft here," Woods threw in. "Now listen ——"

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“An anonymous note?”

Billy gave her a different look now.

“Great heavens! Do you think this is much fun for me? prying in where I’m not wanted, writing anonymous notes, getting insulted, treated like a dog! Why do you think I’m doing it, anyway!”

She had no reply to make to that. He had no time to wait for an answer. “And now — worst of all — I’ve got to drag you in.” He paused and then said, more slowly, “Will you get me that draft?”

She looked up at him. “You wouldn’t ask me to take it, Billy?”

“I don’t know how you’ll get it. But get it! We’ve simply got to save your father in spite of himself. Will you get me that draft?”

She hesitated. He looked at his watch again, then at her quivering face. “Don’t!” he cried, with a throb in his voice. “Don’t look at me like that! You’ll make me

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give up, on the brink of success! What's that piece of paper to me? What do I care about the public's opinion of your father!" Billy snapped his fingers. "But your opinion of me!" There was something like reverence in his tone, which made her heart swell. "Don't you know why I'm doing all this?" he went on, the love note in his voice ringing and rushing out to her. "Can't you see why I'm working as I never worked before? Oh, Frances, Frances, you must at least believe in me! That much I demand. You must! You must! Why, for the woman I love I would lie, I would steal, I would kill, and go through hell, with only the reward of knowing it was 'for her dear sake.' That, nobody could take from me. That — it would be mine for ever and ever! Will you believe in me? Will you trust me? Will you do as I ask?"

She was suffusingly conscious of being swept from her moorings, carried up and

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away on the wave of his wonderful words. Impulsively she put both her girlish hands in his. "Yes," she whispered — "even if I have to take it."

"Then you *do* understand the importance of ——"

"No. But I love you, Billy."

The box door opened. Mrs. Metcalfe had become anxious at the long absence of those she was already so concerned about.

"I wondered what had become of you," she began, and then caught sight of the reporter. Her sudden presence, like her normal conventional voice, was as jarring as a collision in mid-ocean. The man was the first to recover his balance.

"It all rests with you now," he muttered, and walked away.

Mrs. Metcalfe turned to her niece. "Reporting at the opera!" was all she said, but not all she thought.

Frances sought to divert her by a flood of

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sentences, telling what had become of her father and Gilbert. But, as she began, Gilbert returned, alone. "Why, where's father?" she asked.

Gilbert had passed Woods on the stairway, and guessed where he came from. "Something to tell you about that fellow," he said, with a gesture toward the stairway.

"Where's father?"

"Still telephoning — my car's waiting for him."

"Why didn't you stay with him?"

"You need protection a great deal more."

Miss Daros, having been sent again by Lascelles to see how the land lay, had stopped by a pillar at a safe distance on seeing Frances and Woods together. Fearing discovery, she had not dared approach near enough to hear their words, but she had witnessed the climax of their interview. She now drew near, following Gilbert, as

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if her destination lay farther around the horseshoe.

She was observed of Mrs. Metcalfe, and gave that lady an inspiration. Some of Frances's East Side excursions had included her aunt, and so Miss Daros was not unknown to her. "May I speak to you a moment?" asked Mrs. Metcalfe, leading her apart. The time had come for decisive action.

Gilbert, meanwhile, was talking earnestly with Frances. "You think he's working for your father. I wouldn't poison your mind against an innocent person for the world, no matter who or what he might be." Gilbert was overwrought. "But I consider it no more than my duty to tell you that this man, who you have informed me is so nobly desirous of helping your father out of all this, without any hope of reward of any kind — I think I quote your words correctly — this man is in the employ of one Lascelles!"

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“The man who killed father’s political career? Nonsense! I don’t believe you.”

“Ask any of the reporters. You seem given to believing reporters. It’s all they’re talking about this evening.”

Frances smiled, confidently, which impelled him to say more than he had perhaps intended. “He has been off on a drunk for two weeks, they say; ever since that night at Fernleigh.”

The girl spurned the thought of vouchsafing any reply further than the same confident smile, now becoming scornful.

“He’s been drinking this evening, too. Your father and I wondered what was the matter with him. That explains it.”

This produced a shrug of girlish shoulders. The disgust was not for the subject of the tale, but the bearer of it. In a silence which proclaimed to his delicate sensibilities how she regarded him, — more forcibly than any words she might have employed, — the girl

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moved over toward the other pair, as if unable to endure his proximity longer.

“Frank!” he cried, running after her, “you don’t understand. It was only because I considered it my duty to show you that fellow’s real character!”

“You have shown me yours!” She said it with the mature dignity that had astounded and fascinated him that night at Fernleigh.

Mrs. Metcalfe was handing back to the young woman reporter a pencil and a slip of paper. “There!” Frances heard her say; “put it that way.”

“When shall I say the wedding takes place?” asked Miss Daros.

“There is to be no wedding!” Frances snatched the paper out of Miss Daros’s hand. “The report is unfounded.” She tore it to shreds.

The girl shot a look of indignation at Gilbert, who shrugged his shoulders as if saying, “It was not my doing.” But he

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refrained from saying so, out of consideration for Mrs. Metcalfe, now quite speechless in her consternation. Withal, Gilbert could not help feeling sorry for the girl's pride when in days to come she might have occasion to seek his forgiveness for this. He would grant it.

There was a momentary silence, all four busy with their different emotions. Smoldering hate and jealousy had blazed up in the dark face of the Russian Jewess, unseen by the others. Frances had turned her back upon them to hide her struggle to hold back the tears. Mrs. Metcalfe, the first to recover poise, laid hold of Gilbert. He seemed inclined to return to the box. His absence could not be indefinitely accounted for on the score of the general's condition. Catastrophe was impending.

"Mere girlish caprice," the old campaigner whispered cajolingly. "She will come to her senses once you get her safely away.

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These strange fascinations! Remember Helen Truesdale and her handsome riding-master?" She continued in this vein.

Miss Daros, meanwhile, stole near Frances, hesitated a moment, looking at the pretty, quaking shoulders, and wondering at the strange ways of strong men who chose to risk all for the smile of brainless little dolls, and ignore the existence of those intellectually capable of appreciating them.

The rather noble beauty of the exquisite child, standing eloquently erect and making such pathetically futile attempts to stay the tears, helped to madden the other woman. This slender hothouse product of civilization already possessed everything the other lacked, — beauty, wealth, home, family, position in the world; it was intolerable that she should also take, with the complacent arrogance of youthful prettiness, the heart of the man she herself had waited for so long. Class hatred only fanned the flame of con-

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suming fury; elemental passion brought it to the white heat which blinded her to actions which would seem unnatural to those with less passionate natures.

“You will pardon me, I know, Miss Cunningham,” she whispered, simulating deprecatory friendliness, “but you have always been so good to me.”

Frances tried to wave her aside. “Please — I can’t talk to you just now.”

Miss Daros persisted: “This newspaper man, Mr. Woods —”

Frances shook her head and moved away. Miss Daros pursued. “I owe it to you to tell you — Oh, it is so hard to tell.”

“I do not care to hear, Miss Daros.”

“You must not believe what he says to you —”

“Miss Daros! Stop!”

“He says the same things to me!”

“To you! It’s a lie! You know it!”

Frances had always admired Miss Daros.

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She had ideas. The scorn was for the imputation of Billy's duplicity. Miss Daros took it as scorn for one in a humbler position, and she felt the impotent rage of a plain woman in the presence of beauty preferred.

The dignity of the younger girl mocked her lack of it. The implicit trust made her desperate and degraded.

"Why did he take me out of the sweat-shop?" she sneered, pursuing the girl, who ran toward the others, calling for protection. "Why did he have me advanced in the office?" she kept on. "You thought it was because you asked him to do so!"

"Gilbert, can't you send her away!"

Townsend, nonplussed, was trying to.

"You're too easy!" The woman laughed back at Frances. "It was for your sake he gave me this, I suppose, and this!" She indicated a ring and pin at her throat. And before Gilbert could get her out of hearing, she added repulsively, almost shouting the

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words back at Frances: "I don't suppose you believe he's drinking this evening, either. You're too easy!"

The general returning, well-nigh in a state of collapse, absorbed the attention of all three.

"The governor cut off the connection," was all he would vouchsafe them. Gilbert had run to his support. The ladies were beseeching him to think no more about the matter at present, which was easy to say. They calmed him as best they could, and now, at last, they returned to the box.

"Father, you still have the draft safe?" the girl asked, as they passed in.

The general, nodding abstractedly as he took off his overcoat, pointed to the precious document protruding from the inside pocket of the garment.

"May I see it?" she asked, holding out her hand.

The general summoned a paternal smile.

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“Why trouble your little head over it?” he said in refusal. Then the door closed and they joined the others with such excuses as seemed fit. Frances remained in the back part of the box, to hide the signs of her recent agitation, so Gilbert supposed, who was doing his best among the others to smooth over the unusual incident by smiles and whispered comments on the music.

VIII

WOODS, by the street entrance, had witnessed the general's return, keeping carefully out of sight, and restraining, with greater difficulty, his nervous impatience. Inaction was the only thing that he could not stand at such times. It almost unnerved him.

He now drew near the box door, glancing once more at his watch, and hoping against hope that in some way the one lacking, all-important link would yet be placed in his hands. The whole weight of his carefully dug-up mass of evidence would fall to the ground without it. For lacking proof no newspaper would dare risk a libel suit of such dimensions. But, if he obtained the draft now, there would be time, by writing at the furious speed of

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which he was capable, to rush the completed story through before the paper went to press.

Would she find it possible? Would she dare? Was she ever coming out? Valuable seconds were passing, while he waited, tortured by suspense. He heard a voice speaking his name. He turned, saw Miss Daros, and became vaguely conscious that she had been watching him for some time.

“Have you seen Miss Cunningham?” he demanded, without salutation.

“What do you want with her?”

“Has she come out?” Receiving no reply, Woods, in his extreme nervous tension, turned away.

“You forget my existence,” he now heard the young woman murmuring. “You always did.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” he said, jerking about with nervous haste, arousing himself to show regret, to bow politely.

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“I forgot I had been out of town. How have you been? Haven’t shown me any of your verses lately. Why is that?” Again he glanced at the box door. His watch was ticking off the seconds.

“For the same reason as when you asked me to-day at the office,” Miss Daros returned, a little wistfully.

“I see, I see,” he replied, not realizing what she said. “You say you haven’t noticed Miss Cunningham come out? You don’t think Miss Cunningham has come out?” He glanced at her and was arrested by a look on her face. “I beg your pardon. What did you say?” Again, not awaiting her reply, he turned away, intent on that box door.

Miss Daros followed. “Miss Cunningham’s engagement to Mr. Townsend has just been announced,” she whispered.

To her amazement Woods manifested no surprise. “I see,” he said. “Good

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story for you, isn't it? Better catch the earlier edition with that."

It was clear that he wanted to be rid of her. Miss Daros drew near, her eyes narrowing vindictively. "She is only working you, Billy Woods!" she whispered warningly. "That silly little girl, that rich man's daughter" — even employing the familiar cant phrases of her cult, in her overwrought state — "she doesn't care a snap of her fingers for you!"

But Woods had turned expectantly toward the box again. "You won't forget to let me see your verses," he said.

This was too much for the woman. She turned to go. This, too, was unnoticed by him. But as she left she looked back, as other women have done since the days of Lot's wife. There was a fierce struggle between love and hate. She came back to him, love triumphant.

"I don't care what they think," she

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said to herself desperately, and then to him, with sudden tenderness: "I don't want them to hurt you, Billy! I can't stand it! I won't let them! Come! This is your last chance! Quick!"

Woods became aware that she had ceased speaking, and seeing the hand she held out to him, took it. "Oh! — good night," he said pleasantly.

"Good-by!" the woman burst out with sudden passion. "You've forgotten me once too often. After to-night you'll remember me as long as you live." She did not let go of his hand, for, behind him, as she spoke, she had seen, as he did not, the young girl she hated, stealing softly out from the box, with a paper in her hand, noiselessly closing the door. Woods, seeing none of this, only felt his hand suddenly gripped by both of hers. "Why, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed.

"Let me go, I tell you!" cried Miss

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Daros, aloud, pretending to struggle to be free. "I don't want your love! I hate you! I hate you!" With a final jerk she threw his hand from hers, and ran away moaning, "Gone, your chance is gone forever!"

Woods watched her until she disappeared. Then, turning, he confronted Frances, who stood motionless before him.

Her countenance was expressionless, but he took no note of that. He saw the precious draft at last, and supposing, if he stopped to think about it at all, that she had only just appeared, everything else was hurled out of his mind, as he came toward her with tremendous eagerness. "Just in time!" he exclaimed joyously, "just in time!" and then was stopped by a strange, questioning look on the girl's face as she stepped back from him.

"Oh, that?" he asked, with a jerk of his head in the direction Miss Daros had

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taken. "Ever see such a thing? Must be crazy!"

"I believe in you, Billy," pronounced the girl, tremulously. "Just tell me the truth."

"Give me — But there's nothing to tell. We go to press at ——"

"The truth!"

"Why, I don't know what she meant — truly I don't." He was nearer now, reaching for the draft. "Come, there's no time to-night ——"

Their faces were close together.

"Billy!" she cried, putting the draft behind her back, as she recoiled from him. "You've been drinking!"

"Of course I have," he answered, exasperated. "Can't work all day and night on nothing. No time to eat since this morning. No time to explain now. Why worry about me? No time for that, either. Frances!" She had slipped away from

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him, and was gasping in horror. "What is the matter? What does this mean? Frances! If you love me ——"

"I hate you!"

He wilted for an instant. "Then it *is* so, about Gilbert? But I'll save you all the same!" He was up again. "Quick! the draft — they'll all be out here in a moment ——"

She was edging away toward the box door. The muffled music was drawing to the climax of the second act.

"You won't believe in me?" he moaned. "You're going to take away even my right to work for you!"

"For me! You are working for the man who ruined my father!" It was Woods's turn to recoil. "You don't deny it? You can't! Then all they said is true!"

"No — no — no!" he cried, frantically searching his pockets; "a note here, some

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place, explains — can't find it. Quick! Here they come! Explain to-morrow — For the last time! or I'll have to take it."

He stepped between her and the door.

She clenched the draft behind her back.

The latch clicked — his arms closed about her.

"Don't make me call for help!" she whispered, struggling. "Oh, please don't!" Her breath was on his cheek. "It'll break my heart, Billy!"

"You've broken mine already," — he gasped with horror at what he was doing, — "but all the same —" her quivering fingers gave way — "you can't prevent my saving you now!" he cried, and was off with the crumpled draft, startling Mrs. Metcalfe as he flashed past the box door, out of which Gilbert and the general followed.

PART IV

PARK ROW AGAIN

I

IT was getting late and the reporters were rounding up from their night assignments, coming in with dripping raincoats or wet umbrellas. Others had already reported at the desk and were now writing rapidly, with green-shaded electric lamps flooding each table with light and reflecting objectionably from the writers' copy paper into the writers' eyes.

There wasn't much time for gossip now, and the atmosphere of the room was more tense, just as the floor was covered more thickly with discarded sheets of copy paper and "flimsy," as they called the news-

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bureau stories manifoldly typewritten on tissue-paper. Rumpled afternoon editions of other newspapers, published several hours since, and therefore stale and unprofitable, helped the effect.

The room was more crowded now, too, for the copy-readers had arrived long ago, and each was slashing away with a large pencil at a little pile of manuscript before him, blowing much smoke at it by way of expressing his opinion.

Stone and Haskill were still at the desk, which was exceptional — both reading copy industriously. Stone, in the case of the more important stories, was building humorous heads. It seemed to cause him considerable melancholy, which he bore patiently. Copy-boxes were whistling and shooting up through the ceiling. A telephone bell was ringing. Electric fans were buzzing excitedly. Down by the gate the office boys were playing horse, as usual.

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"Dinner to the prince," muttered one of the reporters, who had been writing in shirt-sleeves. He stuck his manuscript on the file in front of Stone, who nodded imperceptibly and tapped his bell.

"Scrap in the Board of Education," said another reporter, doing likewise.

"The Confession of Faith fight," remarked another, wearily.

Stone touched his bell again, more emphatically this time, and called, "Boy, copy!" But the boys were too busy with their own devices to hear.

"Why is Stone keeping the desk tonight?" asked the inquiring Covington, who hadn't had time to inquire before writing his story. "White hasn't got another baby already?"

"Cunningham bill," replied Jones. "Expects something big. Too big for the new night man to handle."

Stone meanwhile had struck the bell

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four times in rapid succession with the open palm of his hand, each stroke coming down harder until the last ended in a dull, ringless thump. Two scared boys now came on the run. “ ’F you boys can’t learn to answer this bell,” he screamed at the two who did answer it, “fired! Here — run!”

Both boys grabbed at the bunch of copy, Tommy got it, and ran — until out of the editor’s sight; then turned and put his thumb to his nose without doubling up his fingers. So, feeling better, he stuck the copy into the box alongside of the wall, which straightway whistled and shot up through the ceiling.

Jones, stretching his arms with relief after writing, said, referring to Stone’s temper, “That’s the way he’s been ever since this afternoon.” Unconsciously he turned to look at Woods’s former writing-table, which, in contrast to the other tables, was quite bare and clean.

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“Doesn’t seem natural,” smiled Covington, who had followed the other’s glance.

“Sort of stark and staring, eh?” put in young Linton, who had also finished his work.

Covington arose and, sauntering down to the overclean table, sprinkled some copy paper over it, mussed it up a little, and then, picking up somebody’s coat, dropped it on top. “How’s that?” he said, returning to the others, who laughed.

“London correspondent!” muttered Sampson, one of the older men, who was conscientious, sober, industrious, and nearly everything else that is said by some to bring success, but it would never come to him. “My, what wouldn’t I give for such a chance to pull out of this slavery!”

“It’s time Woods was getting out of New York,” put in one of the near-by copy-readers, twirling his eye-shade while waiting for a fresh batch of copy to come his way.

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“How do you mean?” asked Linton, who was young and curious.

“Been here too much,” replied his senior, relighting his pipe. “Ought to break away and stay away and learn something new. He’s reached the turning-point, though, of course, he doesn’t know it. They never do. He will now go forward and do brilliant things, or — backward and sink out of sight, like old Harvey Newcomb and Austin Smith, or a dozen other ‘horrible examples.’”

“Just like old Billy, though,” smiled young Linton, who was still romantic, “to forget about London and his future and everything else on account of a pretty face.”

“The best thing that could happen to Woods,” replied the older man, who took a more practical view of such matters, “would be to get married and become normalized. It might prove his salvation.” Then the boy brought more of the writings

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of others to be scanned for sins of omission and commission. These ranged from the omission of commas to the commission of libellous statements; and included ever so many other lacks of conformity unto, or transgression of, the laws of the office and the latest policy of the paper. This latter meant the opinions or preferences of the financial interests in control.

Meanwhile the person they were still talking so much about was flying downtown from the opera, so intent on the outlining of his story that he did not hear the guard call out the stations. It was an astounding story, one calculated to make the whole town put down its coffee cups and pick up the paper with both hands. But he was not thinking of that now, nor of the motive which had made him get it in the face of tremendous obstacles. It was the master craftsman busy with his craft, who arose automatically as the train

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drew near his station, pressed to the door, and was the first to get out upon the platform. He crossed a slice of City Hall Park, planning his introduction. He did not hear a few belated newsboys calling the late editions, or see the indigent and sleepy refuse of the city shivering and dripping on the benches. He raced across the street to beat a clanging cable-car, mechanically dodged a hurrying mail-wagon, and smiled as a telling opening sentence flashed into his mind.

Then, like a homing pigeon, he darted in at the old familiar doorway, just as he had always done, ran up the stairs two steps at a time, hurried in to his old desk, swore at the coat lying there, brushed it off upon the floor, sat down and plunged into writing like nothing in the world but a born reporter with a tremendous beat, who realizes that he has barely time to finish his story before the paper goes to press.

II

THE police headquarters man had telephoned in a bunch of precinct returns, arrests, accidents, and so on. Stone turned his glittering eye-glasses down along the even rows of reporters' desks to pick out the most available men for such of these late stories as seemed worth covering.

It was at this point that Woods came hurrying into the room, with his head thrown back, passing, on the way, Sampson, Linton, and Jones, who gazed at him in surprise. "What the devil!" they whispered, looking at one another, puzzled.

"Haskill," said Stone, languidly, "what's Woods doing in this office?"

"Going to leave a note for some one, I suppose," returned Haskill, running his pencil through a half-page of some poor

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space-grabber's copy. "Spreadhead for this?"

"Not worth it," Stone answered, and called upon Sampson to cover a two-alarm fire in Hester Street — a tenement house with women and children screaming on the fire-escapes. He handed a fire-badge to Sampson, who, glancing inquiringly in Woods's direction, went on out to get the news.

"Shouldn't think Billy was the sort to drop in here so soon," Stone added, as he bent over his work again.

"'Tis sort of queer," Haskill admitted. For Woods was known as something of a stickler for Park Row etiquette. Meanwhile, the interest in the room was approaching excitement.

Scott hurried in through the gate, somewhat late, and marched briskly up to the desk without seeing Woods. "Say! Cunningham's going to get it all around," he

announced with relish. "Other papers on to his coming to us."

"Who gave it away?" put in Stone.

"Don't know, but ——"

"What did you get out of the property-holders?"

"Well, there's some sort of 'con' game on, sure, and if Cunningham's not the main guy ——"

"Up to him to prove it. Write all you've got. Detailed story."

Scott, taking off his coat, hurried down to his table near the gate, feeling so important that he did not look across at Woods, who was busily writing.

Stone, however, happened to glance in that direction again. "Still here, Haskill."

"Must be writing letters to the whole staff," remarked Haskill, handing copy to a boy, who gazed wonderingly at Woods in passing.

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But Stone kept on scowling. "Office rules, Haskill — better remind him."

"Oh, say, Mr. Stone, think how he would feel! Wait till he's through writing."

The telephone bell interrupted. Haskill picked up the receiver and listened. Then he said to Stone: "Berwin at Albany — says the governor's going to bed."

Stone took the telephone out of Haskill's hand and gave him a less welcome duty: "Just ask Woods if — there's anything we can do for him."

Haskill approached Billy very slowly. The idle reporters stopped talking and watched. It was now so quiet that they could hear Stone saying to Berwin at Albany — though doubtless they did not: "Nothing doing, eh? Well, keep your eyes open. Big story to-morrow when the bill goes through."

Haskill, having stared at Woods from

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one side, now went around and stared at him from the other. The latter meanwhile kept on writing, as unconscious of the interest he was exciting as a baby at its baptism. Haskill came nearer, looking at his old friend's intent face, and cleared his throat as if to speak. Then, quite from editorial habit, he glanced over the writer's shoulder. Those looking on saw his head suddenly duck as his eye rapidly flew down the page of manuscript. He fairly ran all the way back to Stone, with a scared look on his face, and whispered a few quick, excited words.

The editor sprang out of his seat as if it had been an electric chair, saying all in one breath: "A ten-million-dollar steal if it's a cent. Who are they? How did he get it?"

"I tell you I only saw that one page," returned Haskill, excitedly, starting toward Woods again. Stone grabbed and held him.

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“Wait a minute. What’s he doing here? Why does he bring this to us —? Gad! That’s it!” Stone had suddenly realized what had happened, and also realizing how easily it might be undone, he instinctively started toward Woods, then stopped abruptly, clapping his hand to his mouth. Haskill, following blindly, bumped into him. “Quick!” whispered Stone, grasping him fiercely. “How’ll we work it? Quick!”

“Work what?”

“As soon as he realizes where he is ——”

“Oh!” gasped Haskill. He, too, suddenly got it, started toward Woods, was stopped by Stone, whirled about, and pushed violently into a chair. At that point Henderson, the political reporter, arrived from the opera, bursting with news and importance. Smoking thoughtfully, he walked straight to Stone and Haskill. “Well, caught Cunningham up there all right,”

he began, taking off his coat; "tried to make him read that proof. No go!"

Stone's back was turned, but Henderson, familiar with the editor's custom of attending to several things at once, did not dream that for the first time in his newspaper life Stone was so rattled he did not hear a reporter telling "what he got." Stone and Haskill were clinging to each other's arms like a pair of frightened girls in the surf. "How'll we work it!" they were beseeching each other. "Think, man! You've got to think!"

"But all the same," Henderson went on cheerfully, as he laid down his coat and turned to them again, "I've got a story that'll make 'em look up. Somebody's stolen the old man's original draft of the bill! Now, what do you think of that?"

And still they paid no attention.

"Couldn't we lock him in?" Haskill was whispering.

“But we couldn’t force him to write.” Stone was recovering the use of his mind. Heretofore instincts only had guided him.

Henderson began to think they were taking his story rather calmly. “Now, young Townsend,” he continued, — with an air of saying, “Bet I wake you up this time!” — “young Townsend says that Billy Woods stole it; but ——”

Stone whirled around. “Who?”

Haskill jumped up. “What’s that?”

“Billy Woods,” repeated Henderson, with smiling satisfaction. “And a couple of the papers are going to print the interview! But Miss Cunningham, she swears that she lent it to Billy till to-morrow morning. Going to print that, too.”

“Lent what?”

“Stole what?”

Both barrels were discharged at once in Henderson’s face, who blinked in annoyance, and replied testily, “The *draft*, I said.

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Anyhow, it's gone and the old man's throwing fits all over town."

"What's this about Billy? Quick!"
This shot from Stone — in a whisper.

"Well, at the present moment, they're all in young Gilbert's auto, scouring the town for him. Ha, ha!"

Henderson's laugh stopped short at beholding a most extraordinary sight, namely, a momentary glimpse of the interior of Stone's mouth. "Oh, you haven't heard of Billy's latest move!" Henderson guffawed again at their slowness. "Why, Billy's gone over to the enemy — you needn't look at me that way; it's a fact! Lascelles got him. I always said he would, you know. Saw the little anarchist up there with him, by the way — why, what's the matter?"

Haskill, aghast, was whispering to his superior, as if it were a sentence of death. "Then, that's their story!"

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But by this time Stone was himself again, and he did not look at it in that way. He had taken a mental survey of the whole situation, past, present, and about to be — as they now learned, while he talked with a rapidity even he seldom attained. “That beat for those people! Not on your life!” As he spoke, he turned Henderson about for a view of Woods, writing abstractedly. “That story doesn’t leave this office except in type. Restrain yourself, Henderson. This is the exposure Cunningham meant us to have in the first place. Suppose he’d want *them* to touch it? Not with a ten-foot pole! Don’t interrupt me, Henderson. One of Lascelles’s tricks again. Scott! Scott!! Scott!!!” For Scott had discovered Billy’s presence and had been caught just in time, approaching the busy writer with an expression of amazement. Stone was backing away still farther from Billy’s part of the room, as if to lead Scott more

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rapidly from him. "Quick! come here, Scott. Henderson, will you keep still?" Stone dashed the idea at the approaching Scott as if throwing cold water into his face. "Rewrite your story accordingly," he added, giving the young man a shove back toward his desk again. "Henderson, your stuff's no good now," snatching Henderson's notes out of his hands. "Your assignment for the rest of this night is to guard Billy Woods," dropping the notes on the floor. "Watch the reporters. Watch the desk-men. Watch everybody. Don't let any one but me speak to him — get within ten feet of him. Jones! see here, Jones, want you to put the fellows on as they come in. Understand? Henderson, for heaven's sake, shut up and do as I tell you before it's too late! Haskill, go, put all the desk-men on. Now get busy. We've got a chance here — a fighting chance."

"But when Cunningham finds Woods

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isn't there!" put in the persistent Henderson, at last.

"He'll drive like hell to the next paper," interrupted Stone.

"But when he's gone to all the others ——?"

"Yes; he'll try this office. What of it?"

"But he'll suspect ——"

"Let him suspect. Throw him downstairs and save his life."

"Heavens!" broke in Haskill.

Woods had arisen from his chair and was looking straight up at them. They all looked back at him, fascinated. He suddenly turned and walked rapidly down the room toward the gate. Stone, Haskill, and Henderson bolted down on tiptoe after him. But he wheeled off to the right, past the newspaper files, stepped up to the water-cooler, and filled a glass.

"Why, of course, you ass," whispered Henderson to Haskill. "Don't you remem-

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ber, he always looks around the room before getting a drink?" One of them began turning over the files of an afternoon paper, as if in a great hurry for something. The other was trying to look as if he'd never heard of Billy Woods.

"What's Stone doing?" Henderson whispered.

The city editor had calmly turned back and walked over to Billy's desk, while the latter was busy with the faucet. There lay some pages of finely written copy. His experienced eye skimmed over a paragraph. It made him lust for the rest. It was risky, but he reached over, whisked up the closely written sheets, all except the last one, and hurried up to the desk with the raped manuscript, just as Woods put down the glass, emitting a wet-lipped "Ah," and started back, wiping his hands on his trousers. As he passed Haskill, he was humming a little tuneless tune. He sat down, ran his hand

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through his hair, then leaning over, began to write rapidly again, putting the next finished sheet on the top of the one left, as unquestioningly as a hen goes to laying over one nest-egg.

Meanwhile, Stone, reading the copy as rapidly as he alone could, hastily scrawled, "*Nonp., Double lead—RUSH!*" across the top of the first page and sent it up to the composing-room, where the foreman, dividing it into several "takes," gave them to several compositors, who put them in type as fast as the keys of the linotypes could respond to their experienced touch. In a few minutes the galley proofs were down on the night editor's hook, with a dozen men bending over them, murmuring excitedly: "Beautiful! Beautiful!"

Stone suddenly called out, "Miss Daros."

She had returned at last. Now, though Stone could not see her gazing in amazement at Woods, at so great a distance, he knew

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that she must have been warned by Jones at the door. Yet she was heading directly toward the man who must not be interrupted.

Henderson, pretending to lounge near Woods, motioned her politely toward the city editor, who spoke her name a second time, more sharply. Then, feigning surprise, she approached the city-desk.

“Get your opera story?” Stone elected not to look at her as he spoke.

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Will you write it?”

“Yes, sir.” She started for her table, but turned in a careless manner over toward Woods.

“At once!” Stone’s sarcastic lips were within a foot of her ear, for he had followed her. “You’re late enough, as it is.”

She was not in the least startled, apparently, and replied, “Certainly. Only I wanted to tell you I got another story up there

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——” She raised her voice, hoping to gain the absorbed writer’s attention: “General Cunningham has announced his daughter’s engagement to Gilbert Townsend” — her voice kept growing louder — “and the best thing about it is ——”

“Good story,” interrupted Stone. “Write that one first.”

Woods had not budged. She spoke louder. “I thought it a good story, because, you see ——”

“Never mind what you think. Sit down and write. We’ll play it up on the first page,” he went on, drowning her out as she kept trying to begin again. “Cunningham’s in the public eye. Write a half-column. Here’s your desk. Here’s some copy paper. Get busy. No time to talk.”

She was seated now. But as he turned his back, she quietly arose and quickly made for the gate.

“Miss Daros!” Stone had turned just

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in time. She slackened her pace. "Where're you going?"

"Home."

"Why?"

"Write my stuff there and send it down by messenger."

"Why?"

"Headache. Awful air at the opera."

Stone only looked at her.

"But up in my room I can wrap a wet towel around my head, and ——"

"Tommy, get a towel and wet it."

"Oh, no — they'd all laugh at me."

"Tommy, never mind the towel."

"It'll be so late when I get through, and — you men don't realize how unpleasant it is for a girl ——"

"Send you home in a cab at our expense."

Miss Daros, at bay, went to her table to write. "Such awful air at the opera," she repeated, very loud. Then, as Stone

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went on up the room, she started toward the gate again.

“Where’re you going this time?” He had turned around on signal from Henderson.

“Only to get some bromo-caffeine,” she said calmly.

“Tommy, run downstairs and get some bromo-caffeine for Miss Daros.” The city editor handed the boy some money and went back to the desk at last.

Miss Daros meanwhile deliberately walked up the room toward Woods again until stopped by Stone’s glance, like a question-mark of cold steel. “Mr. Woods always has some,” she said calmly. Stone kept on looking at her. “But the boy won’t know what kind I want,” she replied.

Stone, without taking his eyes off her, handed another boy some more money. “Get all the kinds,” he said.

“You are very good,” said Miss Daros, and edged away toward the telephone, but

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seeing it occupied, she upset a chair, which made no more impression on Woods, writing furiously, than the distant clanging of the cable-cars. "So awkward of me," she said, laughing louder than was her wont. Henderson picked up the chair for her, and congratulated himself that he was the one to have suspected her in the first place.

Miss Daros, at her table, wrote with head down. The boy brought the caffeine. She was sulky and paid no attention to it. Stone, passing near, said to her, as he listened at the same time to one of the late returning reporters: "Don't you want your caffeine, Miss Daros?" She flaunted down to the water-cooler, mixed a dose, came back stirring it, gulped it down, and then choked and coughed violently. Woods kept on working obliviously. Stone, still listening to Lee, looked at her. She resumed writing. It was a note she was writing.

Meanwhile Lee had been following Stone

about like a busy, barking dog. "And then I asked her, 'Won't you say anything about the will contest at all?' and she said ——"

"How about her divorce, Lee?" put in Stone, watching Woods, still busily writing, and glancing once more at Miss Daros, who, as soon as he had turned his back, approached the telephone booth again, but found it occupied by some one else. Once more she returned reluctantly to her desk; then leaned over to Henderson, who seemed assiduously attentive to her this evening, and began laughing heartily, jarringly loud. Every one looked around at her and scowled.

"I can't help laughing every time I think of it," she said, dipping her pen again. "It was the funniest thing. Mr. Lascelles told me — Harry Lascelles — you know Lascelles of the ——"

"Tell me the story, Miss Daros," said Stone, hurrying across to her, followed by Lee, still talking.

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Miss Daros cowered sulkily. "You're so sarcastic, Mr. Stone," she said. And, thinking she was unobserved, now that he had turned his back once more, she was about to hand a note to a passing boy; but again Stone stopped her, turning suddenly. "Boys all too busy to-night to leave this office till after the paper goes to press."

Stone went on down to the gate. "Boys, come here," he said; "all you boys." They gathered about him. Their faces were awestruck. It was so horrifyingly unusual to be recognized by Mr. Stone, except as he recognized the bell he punched or the floor he dropped paper upon. "You're all to be discharged unless we beat the town on this story. Go on talking, Lee."

Two other reporters had joined Lee by this time, so that there was quite a procession following Stone's many moves about the room, waiting for a chance to tell what they had, and for instructions as to the treatment

thereof. Stone had returned to the desk, followed by them.

Miss Daros, unobserved, started the district-messenger call buzzing. Stone heard it and turned too late to catch her in the act. "That's no good, Lee. You needn't write anything." So Lee, after all his long, peripatetic report, retired crestfallen. To the other reporters Stone cried desperately, "Oh, talk to Haskill. Haskill, you take the desk for the rest of this night; Woods is enough for me."

"What's the matter with him now?" whispered Haskill. For Woods showed symptoms of uneasiness.

"Leave him to me," returned Stone, who saw that Billy had run out of copy paper. And, grabbing a handful, he carried it himself to Woods, who growled, "Thanks, Tommy," without lifting his head.

Stone hurried back to Haskill. "Room's too full of people all thinking about the same

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thing — telepathize him, sure. Send 'em out on assignments — To see if Brooklyn Bridge has fallen down. To see how high the tide rises — anything. No! Don't let 'em out! What are you thinking about? All excited — sure to talk — might be overheard. Tell Fatty Smith to start up a poker game in the back room. Get 'em out! Get 'em out! Who rang for this messenger?" For a uniformed boy had shuffled in shouting "Call!"

"Our mistake," said Stone to the boy, waving him out with a glance at Miss Daros, who kept on writing busily.

Haskill meanwhile was urging the men to get out of the room. But it was hard to make them stay out. One of the editorial writers who had not yet gone home poked his head in from one of the farther rooms. An inky-armed pressman wandered up from the basement. Even the water-bugs and cockroaches were scurrying unusually.

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Stone stepped over to where Woods sat, tapping with his fingers on the desk, as if waiting for the word. As the editor came near the writer looked up and smiled amiably. It was a gentle, childlike smile, and those watching never forgot it. Stone looked straight back at him and smiled too. It was the only thing to do. The mere lowering of his eyes might kill the most remarkable beat of years.

For that was all it meant to them. They were not in a position to see the mightier issues at stake. Here was a conflict between civic decency and the slimy powers of evil. The outcome spelled, for the well-liked comrade before them, love and happiness or else ruin and disgrace — trembling in the balance, while he sat there smiling in his accustomed place; brought back by what had been used for luring him away.

But even though they could not see all that, the whole staff held its breath as it saw

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Stone open his mouth to speak to Woods. Its heart ceased beating as it heard him ask, "Much more of this, Billy?" his languid voice sounding strangely normal.

"Yes. Lot more." Woods's voice sounded abnormally normal too. "But I'll round it all up in time — if you just let me alone," he added with a touch of petulance.

"Hurry it along," said Stone, rather kindly. And then he had the audacity to hold out his hand.

"Yes, sir," said Billy, obediently, and abstractedly handing the editor the written sheets of copy paper, he leaned over and plunged into his work again while the staff thanked heaven. Those who had arisen sank into their seats with a gasp of relief. One man was seen to fan himself. Two others went out into the hall, where they could laugh hysterically together over Billy's "if you just let me alone."

When Stone reached the desk Haskill

stared at him admiringly. "My, you've got nerve!"

"Safe as a man without a memory — long as we can keep him on the jump," said Stone, reading the new batch of copy. But the fingers that wielded his famous pencil were seen to tremble. "Hasn't forgotten how to write," he said, puffing his ugly pipe appreciatively.

"Do you think this will last much longer?" asked Haskill. "Can't possibly get it all."

"Got to. This is no good otherwise."

"Why, he outlined the whole story in the first batch!"

"But didn't substantiate a word of it. This doesn't, either." Stone's manner was ominously quiet.

"That's so!" exclaimed Haskill, in sudden alarm. "He says here, speaking of his interview with Lansing, 'By the mere omission of a comma,' but does not explain where or

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how — whew! And there wouldn't be time for us to look up the legal end of it now."

Stone made no reply. "Here, boy," he growled, and the new instalment was despatched to the composing-room.

Typewriters were clicking, electric fans were buzzing, the copy-editors were reading, and Billy kept on writing and smoking voluminously. There was one of those silences that sometimes settle down on the noisiest newspaper offices.

Stone was scowling. "Got to 'nihilate that Nihilist," he said to Haskill. She was seen speaking to one of the office boys.

"Send her home in a cab now?" suggested the assistant.

"Give any one the slip."

"Why don't you call her up here and accuse her point blank?"

Stone looked sorry for his subordinate. "Can't you see?" he said, relighting his pipe. "Only make her desperate — could easily

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wake him before we could choke her off. Miss Daros!" he called, "you've written enough. Short of space to-night."

"But the opera story?"

"Hang the opera! Bring me your copy."

The woman reporter finished the sentence she was writing, made a double X-mark beneath it, to show the composers that no more was to follow, brought her copy to the desk, slapped it down in front of Stone, returned to her table, picked up her coat and umbrella, and started for home. Jones, at the gate, barred the way, looking uncomfortable but determined.

"The idea!" exclaimed Miss Daros. "I never heard of such a thing." She turned to Stone, who had sauntered down after her, puffing his pipe vigorously. "Says he's under orders from you not to let me go home until the paper goes to press."

"That's right."

"I won't submit to it. It's outrageous."

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“Most unpleasant, as you were saying, so late at night. Wait till we go to press and I’ll take you home.”

“I’ll call for a messenger to take me home.”

Stone shook his head.

“I’ll telephone for a cab at my own expense.”

She turned to the telephone eagerly. They were standing near the booth.

Stone shook his head again.

“I won’t be kept here against my will. Mr. Stone, I resign right here and now!”

“Accepted. Take effect after we go to press.”

“My room-mate will be scared to death — in this storm, too!”

“Where’s that telephone boy? Some one come here and call up Miss Daros’s apartment-house and notify her room-mate ——”

“Never mind; Charlie’s busy helping Dan,” put in Miss Daros. “I can explain to her so much better.” She had been

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bribing Charlie all the evening for such an opportunity.

She was stepping into the telephone booth at last. Yet Stone had made no protest. Instead, he waited with his back turned until she closed the sound-proof door, then wheeled suddenly around to the switchboard just outside of the booth and fixed the plugs so that she could talk to no one outside the building, and imitating with surprising skill the Central's high, feminine voice, he squeaked into the transmitter, "Number, please?" and repeated her answer with the usual incoherent haste. Then, covering the transmitter with his hand, he said to Haskill: "Thought so. Their number. Now, Henderson, watch Woods closely. Miss Daros and I are going to have a heart-to-heart talk."

A number of the staff had gathered about. Haskill ordered them away frantically, for fear Miss Daros might see them through the glass door of the booth. Stone, meanwhile,

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said, again imitating Central's voice, "Go ahead."

He now assumed a strange, masculine tone. "Hello! . . . Yes. . . . What? . . . Oh, you're Miss — . . . No, don't worry, I won't speak your name. . . . Yes. . . . But this *is* the city-room. . . . No, Lascelles is not in his office just now. . . . Yes, it *is* funny." Stone looked up to wink at Haskill, and went on: "You don't recognize my voice? You've heard it often enough. . . . Oh, don't be so mysterious. I know all about the story. . . . Then what can I say to make you believe me? Listen: your initials are K. D., and you want to talk about B. W. and our great story. . . . Well, but Mr. Munson is out, too. . . . Yep, both out looking for Billy Woods. . . . Hum? . . . Well, that shows I know about it, anyway. . . . Yes, they had to tell *somebody*. . . . In a great hurry, eh? Well, say it, then. . . . What's that

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about a horrid brute? . . . Oh, that devil Stone, eh? What's the matter with him?"

Stone put his hand over the transmitter to say, "Henderson, stop grinning like an idiot, and watch Woods!" then assumed Central's voice, saying: "Finished?" and instantly returned to the disguised male voice, thundering, "Can't you keep out, Central! No, *not* finished! Go on, Miss D. . . . Um-m! . . . Repeat that last."

There was a pause, and as he listened, he waved his free hand in the air with amazement and delight. "Jake Shayne!— Oh, yes, I know. . . . How soon did Mr. Lascelles say the gentlemen were expected?" Presently Stone raised his eyebrows. Covering the transmitter, but still holding the receiver to his listening ear, he reported to the silent room: "She wants my advice about waking up Billy. . . . Says she can't do it without giving herself away. . . . Well!

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she's threatening to do it anyway — Scott, quick! — you and Covington stand by the telephone door — grab her the minute she comes out! Haskill, line up some of those loafers as a screen between Billy and the booth. Now then, I'll scare some of that yell out of her!" Into the transmitter he shouted, "My advice is, keep quiet — then you won't get hurt!" adding in his own familiar voice, "you're talking to Mr. Stone! Now, boys, quick!"

Miss Daros burst out of the telephone booth, crying, "You're a traitor, Mr. Woo—" but got no further. Kicking and struggling, she was borne off to Manning's room by Scott and Covington, who had almost failed at their job because they hated it so.

Woods had sprung out of his seat. "What the devil!" he cried. "I can't write with all this infernal noise going on." The other men, lined up as a shield to the unpleasant performance, hid his view of it.

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Stone, anticipating trouble, had reached his side. "All right, Billy. All right. Woman came in here and had a fit. That's all — epileptic. Poor thing!"

"Well, how do you expect me to write," returned Woods, petulantly, "when women come in here and have fits all the time?"

"Course not. Course not. Such nerve! Coming in here to have a fit. Ought to be ashamed of herself." Stone pushed him back into his chair. "Old man, hurry your story along."

But Woods still felt imposed upon. "What do they take this place for, anyway?" he demanded.

"Took it for a hospital. Look at the time, Billy. This place a hospital! Most absurd! You haven't run in that quotation from the bill. Look at the clock! I tell you the whole story depends on that quotation."

"Going to save that until the last,"

Woods replied, brightening up and letting bygones be bygones. "Thought I'd run it in under a separate head, eh?"

"All right. Hurry along."

Woods bent over to write and then stopped, looking at Stone with a sudden gleam in his eye that set the whole room gasping afresh. "Say!" he demanded. "*I'll* tell you what I'll do, when I get to it: the two versions of the thing in parallel columns — the deadly parallel! Eh? — always effective." He was writing again. "More artistic. Less ostentatious," he muttered, half-aloud, wagging his head with a self-complacency that was somehow pathetic.

Stone was still bending over him. "Much more artistic, Billy," he said. "Plug ahead. Less ostentatious, too. Keep your eye on the time." But Woods, writing like mad once more, only nodded absently.

"A born newspaper man," remarked the old copy-reader, in a low, solemn tone, while

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all sighed with relief and Stone mopped his brow.

But there was no rest for Stone. "Haskill, wake up!" he cried. "Publishing a newspaper in this office — nothing more heard from that fire for an hour. Send a boy to find Sampson — send two boys so they'll watch each other."

Tommy and Dan were selected. As they went out, the stout managing editor came in, dressed in evening clothes, looking cool and imperturbable. He had attended that dinner to the prince, the toasts of which had been set up in type long since.

"Why, here's the old man," said Haskill, in surprise.

"Thought we might need him," replied Stone, who made a dive for his superior.

"How's it coming on?" asked Manning, smiling.

The city editor had twice summoned him, but Manning was obliged to stay and recite

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one of those already set-up speeches. "Mr. Manning, in five minutes Shayne and Nordheimer are due to meet that man Lascelles — in a private room! — to take a look at Woods's story."

The stout managing editor showed no astonishment, for the reason that nothing ever astonished him, but he flicked ashes from his *perfecto* and asked, "How do you know they are?"

"Telephone."

"By *telephone*?" He was almost astonished.

"Oh, never mind — but don't you see what that means?"

"It looks like ——"

"Looks like what it *is*, a big black-mailing job."

Manning looked at the absorbed writer and smiled. "Say, Stone, perhaps I'd better hide in the closet. Woods might look up and wonder at my dress suit."

But instead, he threw off both his coat and

waistcoat and plunged into the thick of the fight, as he had often done before on a moment's notice. "Hello, what's this?" he asked. The two office boys, hurriedly returning already, marched through the gate with an air of tremendous gravity, breaking boyishly into a run on the way toward Stone.

"I found dis on de sidewalk," began Dan, in a whisper.

"Naw, I found it," interrupted Tommy, snatching an envelope out of Dan's hand.

"Fluttered down from someplace upstairs."

"Hit Dan on de head."

"Right here."

"No, right dere."

While they were fighting it out, Stone read the address aloud: "Five dollars will be given to the person delivering this into the hands of H. A. Lascelles, city office of ——"

"On *our* office envelope," interrupted Manning.

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“Haskill, watch Woods,” groaned Stone, running in the direction of Manning’s office, where Miss Daros was incarcerated.

“Boys,” said Manning, patting their proud heads, “you’ll each get five dollars for not doing it.”

Since it was a letter from his own private office, he took the liberty of opening it. The note was brief: —

“W. is turning in the story here. No time to lose.”

There was no signature. The recipient was supposed to recognize the chirography, and, as it happened, did.

Haskill was explaining the Daros incident. The two boys, meanwhile, were exchanging looks, as if uncertain whether to rejoice at the prospect of reward, or to feel insulted, professionally.

“You don’t tink we’d go back on de poiper!” Tommy exclaimed, self-righteously.

“Dere ain’t money enough in Noo Yoik,” chimed in Dan.

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But their *esprit de corps* was unheeded, for Woods had ceased writing. He was staring straight ahead of him, rubbing his cheek, his nose, alternating now and then with his hair.

He looked as completely conscious as any of them. At this rate, in any case, he soon would be, they all thought, fairly dancing in silent consternation. Henderson had difficulty in keeping some of the more nervous men back, though what they proposed to do, if he hadn't, they themselves probably did not know. Stone was needed. Haskill flew toward Manning's room. His voice was heard calling through the passage: "Stone, Stone, where are you?"

"Here. Stop your racket ——"

"Something the matter with Billy," Haskill whispered. "Come quick!"

"Wait till I lock this door, can't you!"

They came back together, Haskill drag-

ging Stone by the arm, as if he were a surgeon for an emergency case.

“Huh!” diagnosed the specialist, who straightway snatched a box of cigarettes out of some one’s surprised hand and tossed them upon Woods’s desk, beckoning Haskill to strike a light for him as he did so.

Woods inhaled a great lungful, breathed it forth thoughtfully, then bent over his desk again. “Ah, I have it,” he said in an undertone, and this time some of his relaxing colleagues merely closed their eyes, as if in need of rest.

Stone now had a chance to tell about Miss Daros. “Throwing another letter out of the window when I tiptoed in. Only three sheets of paper left on your desk, Mr. Manning. Some of ’em must have got there by this time and ——”

“W. P. Woods?” asked a strange boy who had penetrated as far as the gate, exhibiting a letter. “Immediate,” he added, pronounc-

ing the word with a correctness that suggested recent coaching.

"Where's this from?" asked Stone, down by the gate by this time.

"Party told me not to say."

"Leave it here till Mr. Woods calls for it."

"Party told me I mustn't."

"Scat!"

The boy ran. Jones kicked at him. Manning raised his imperturbable eyebrows.

"Yes, Lascelles has discovered his whereabouts somehow," said the latter, "so it looks as if the real fun were only just beginning."

"Hasn't run in his deadly parallel yet," remarked Haskill, in a whisper.

"The whole story hangs on that," said Manning, shifting his cigar.

"Let him alone," growled Stone.

"How much longer can they hold open that form?" asked Haskill. They were all looking at the clock.

“Everything else is ready for casting,” said Stone. He was near the open window, and suddenly pointed to the street. “Notice that devil-wagon whiz by?”

“A Mercedes,” nodded Manning.

“Townsend, with Cunningham and his daughter, breaking the speed limit,” said Stone.

“They must have checked off most of our ‘esteemed contemporaries’ by this time,” remarked Manning. “By the way,” he added, smiling, “I telephoned Berwin to wake up the governor a few minutes ago. While about it I cabled the whole situation to the chief—thought it might amuse him.”

“Catch him at *déjeuner* by Paris time,” said Stone.

The city editor was about to add something else when he, and all the rest of the office, with the possible exception of Manning, were lifted into the air by the loud report of a revolver shot in the hallway, which filled

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their ears with the ominous reverberation always caused by firearms discharged indoors.

Woods was out of his seat. Stone was at his side. Scott and Covington rushed out into the hall. Others went after them. Manning remarked, "They seem to want that story pretty bad."

"All right, old man," Stone was saying as he patted Billy on the back. The man trembled like a high-spirited thoroughbred. "Nothing but a suicide — one of the pressmen — persecuted by the foreman. You'd better lead up to your deadly parallel now. Getting late." He pointed at the clock, and Woods, again resembling a thoroughbred, responded to the lash.

Covington and Scott came back, dragging in an Italian organ-grinder and organ. "Can't make him tell who put him up to it," Scott whispered to the city editor.

"Lock him up some place till we go to press," directed Manning.

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Stone turned to Sampson, just back from the tenement fire, now under better control than Stone's temper. "Don't write any more," he snapped out before Sampson could open his mouth, or even the gate. The main story, sent in by telephone, was already set up.

"Lascelles and Munson," said Sampson, with a jerk of the head — "disappearing around the corner as I came along."

"Oh, they'll come back," said Manning, chuckling.

Stone sought Billy. "How's the parallel coming?"

The writer made a gesture which meant, "Don't bother me!"

Stone obeyed.

"Only a few minutes longer," Haskill kept repeating to everybody, with a forced smile. No one paid any attention to him.

Tommy's shrill treble came in through

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the hall door. Every one listened. "There ain't *nobody* go'n'ter see him till he's trew writin', I tell you."

"Here they come!" thrilled Haskill.

"Lascelles's voice all right," said Henderson.

"Come on, fellows," urged Covington. With several others he was for rushing out and bowling the enemy down the stairs.

Stone restrained them. "Only make 'em desperate — yell in to Billy — spoil the whole thing."

"We haven't landed the story yet, by any means," Manning added, smoking faster.

It was now unmistakably Lascelles's voice, and it sounded as if he were tiring of argument. "Then I'll tell him myself."

"Tell nothin'," Tommy shrilled back defiantly, "not till he's trew writin', I said."

"For God's sake, try to keep your heads, like Tommy!" besought Stone of the excited

PARK ROW AGAIN

ones. "We'll land this thing yet, I tell you." He, too, was feeling the strain, but he did not show it. As he spoke, he disrespectfully backed Manning, his superior, up the room, almost to Woods's chair, sprang up on a desk, turned the hands of the clock ten minutes ahead, and jumped down again. "Now you can move, Mr. Manning," he said, and ran to Billy. "Heaven's sake, man, haven't you finished yet? Look at the time!"

Woods looked at the clock, gasped in astonishment, and spurted for the finish.

With the sounds of a scuffle at the door, Tommy, still struggling, was suddenly pushed in, tumbled over, and there stood Lascelles and Munson.

They stopped short before reaching the gate, however. For, just inside of it, they beheld nearly the whole staff lined up in close rank. It was merely another human screen which had been marshalled by Manning, who stood at the back of it, whispering,

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“Keep cool. Play for time.” Three more seconds had already been gained.

During this period of time, Stone, grabbing another page of Billy’s copy before he had reached the bottom of it, ran over to the copy-slide, and said, “Rush!” through the speaking-tube; “the rest as fast as he writes it.”

Manning, in an unimpassioned tone, was asking in his dignified manner, “What does that excited person want here?”

“Our story!” shouted Lascelles. He looked right and left for Woods, but could not see him.

“All right,” replied Stone, approaching with a proof. “Here you are!”

What Lascelles saw on that proof stopped him, thunderstruck.

More valuable seconds.

Stone had already run back to Billy, whispered, “Wind it up quick!” grabbed another sheet, and rushed to the slide again.

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Lascelles was now waving the proof. "Our story," he cried. "You've stolen our story!"

"Yep," said Haskill, lighting a cigar, and addressing nobody in particular; "long as they didn't care to print it — thought we would." Jeering laughter followed, which took time.

Lascelles was at bay now. "Nordheimer! Shayne! Quick! He's in here — they won't let me see him."

The notorious two now bolted in.

Lascelles had observed Stone's movements, and now jumping up in the air to see over the heads of those before him, he discovered Woods. "There he is! We've got him!" And he sprang up on a chair, calling: "Woods! Oh, Woods! Come here!"

"That will do!" thundered Manning.

Lascelles shouted again and awaited an answer.

Woods, still writing, nodded. "Wait a

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second, can't you!" He seemed to be irritated — not to say, provoked.

"Make a noise," growled Manning, for most of them were listening stupidly.

In the hubbub which followed, no one's words could be distinguished for a moment. But Stone could be seen patting Woods on the back with one hand; with the other pointing to the clock. Now he secured one more sheet of copy, and shot across the room with it. Lascelles saw this and became desperate. He made a dash at the gate. Scott crashed it shut in his face. Lascelles began screaming for Woods. There was shouting, expostulation, confusion. Through and above it all now arose the wheezy notes of the hand-organ, playing, "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night" — Covington's inspiration. Woods kept on writing.

Shayne was waving his hands wildly to gain a hearing. "Gentlemen, this is all a mistake, a misunderstanding!"

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Manning bent over to listen. "All about the mistake," he put in, whisking the proof out of Lascelles's hands. Shayne stopped, as if fascinated by what he saw. To him it spelled Sing Sing.

Nordheimer was also shouting, it appeared: "If you dare print that ——"

"Look it over!" Nordheimer now found the proof in his hands. He collapsed.

There came a sudden silence. Woods had finished his day's work, and was striding down to see what all the confounded row was about, looking as though he considered it a disgrace to the office.

All turned and gazed at him, as he came toward them with hands in his pockets, his brows knit, his eyes wondering.

The silence was so intense that Stone's jubilant voice was heard speaking through the tube: "Yes, that winds it up, thank God! Jam it through!" and this touched off Lascelles.

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His voice was shrill as an animal's in a trap: "Billy Woods! You damned sneak! What have you done with our story!"

Woods stopped abruptly. His hands remained in his pockets.

It is said that certain of the men turned their eyes away. But what was especially inconsiderate in those who stared, fascinated, was that not one of them said a word to him as the thing flickered across his horror-stricken face in quick flashes of intelligence. It was all over in a moment. He grasped the whole situation and sank down exhausted, at the nearest desk. Manning put an arm about him like a father.

Lascelles slapped the gate post. "We'll expose this whole trick to-morrow!" he shrieked.

Stone appeared leading Miss Daros. "Which trick?" he asked. Lascelles wilted, silent at last.

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“A put-up job — the whole thing!” cried Shayne to everybody.

“Tell Cunningham so,” smiled Stone, whose quick ears had detected approaching footsteps.

Townsend burst in, followed by the general and Frances, all of them out of breath.

Gilbert, with finger pointing at Woods, cried to Frances, “What did I tell you!” then called upon Manning, “What’s that man doing in your office?”

“Here’s the answer.” Once more the limp proof played its part. Frances snatched it eagerly. All three bent over it.

“Father! Father!” cried the girl, pointing, “‘Thanks to General Cunningham’s shrewdness —’ Oh!” She let him have the printed words; she turned to the author of them, who had arisen to meet her.

At that moment the gong rang, the floor began to shake, and there came up from far below, the deep, heavy rumbling of the

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mighty presses which would soon spread the news all over the civilized world.

And now all the room was in sudden, jubilant commotion, everybody trying to explain to everybody else, all trying to shake Billy's hand at the same time, the office boys cheering, dancing, whistling, throwing hats and coats in the air.

The rest happened quickly. Even before Lascelles and his crumpled crew had reached the street, to the tune of Covington's hand-organ following them out into the hall, a boy had burst out of the telephone booth, butted his way through the dancing, shouting reporters to Mr. Manning's side. The fat managing editor, red and perspiring, bent over while the boy shouted in his ear, then straightened up quickly, shouting above the tumult, "General, your bill is vetoed!"

Then, amid more excitement and more shouting, with the general grasping Woods's hand, Billy trying to rise, the secretary re-

PARK ROW AGAIN

straining him, Frances fanning him, Gilbert looking on from the doorway, another boy came running to Mr. Manning. The managing editor was seen to mount a desk.

He waved a cablegram in his hand: "‘Reappoint Woods to London.’ Boys, three cheers for Billy and the general!"

The tidal wave of jubilation swept the sombre old room of most of its occupants. The hand-organ was dying away in the distance.

Gilbert, standing by the gate, was holding it open for Frances and her father to pass out. At last he caught her eye. She shook her head and remained beside the reporter. Gilbert, watching intently, understood. He hesitated a moment, as if paralyzed by the conflict within. Then he drew near, rather shyly, took his cousin’s hand, shook it heartily, and quickly left the room.

The general turned to Billy. "If you feel quite recovered," he began solicitously, and

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started on ahead. Woods arose slowly, as if adjusting himself to reality. He looked at the slender girl beside him. It was the dingy, deserted old newspaper office. He and she were alone in it.

“Gilbert is not coming on the *Cedric*,” said the girl. “Will you join us?”

“Of course this is all a dream,” he whispered, gazing at her across the desk that stood between them. “How long do you think it will last?”

“How long do you want it to last?” she asked.

He leaned closer, trembling. Before the eager longing of his tired eyes, her eyes fluttered and fell.

It had all come true, at last.

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